



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **For Immediate Release**

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### **Senator Phil Berger Visits Surry County Schools**

Senator Phil Berger recently visited Surry County Schools and spent some time touring East Surry High School while gaining insight into the learning opportunities available to students. Senator Berger's visit began with a presentation by Superintendent, Dr. Travis L. Reeves that highlighted Surry County Schools. Superintendent Reeves explained why Surry County Schools is a great value due to the consistently high performance of the district, "Surry County Schools serves a student population with 64% of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, yet the district has ranked in the top 20 out of 115 school systems for the last four years." Dr. Reeves further emphasized, "This type of consistent performance doesn't happen by chance. We don't have the funding some larger districts have. In fact, we rank 90 out of 115 school systems in overall funding but we are providing students with a world-class education. Through next generation high schools with a commitment to flexible, personalized, and customized scheduling, optional pathways, work-based learning opportunities, and choice, Surry County Schools creates opportunities for all students to obtain college credits or career skills. The new norm for high school is a blending of college and work-based hands-on learning on and off the high school campus, beyond the brick and mortar buildings. Because K-12 education is a catalyst for economic development in our community and county, we believe students should understand and see education as relevant to a successful life beyond Surry County Schools, a life that starts with a pathway to success for each and every student."

Dr. DeAnne Danley, Director of Elementary Education and AIG, shared information about Surry County Schools' success with North Carolina's *Read to Achieve* legislation. *Read to Achieve* mandates that all third-grade students must be on grade level or be retained. Senator Berger was one of the biggest supporters of this legislation. "Under these guidelines, Surry County Schools has been very successful with 94% of 3rd graders passing the reading gateway," stated Mrs.

Danley. When Senator Berger asked how many students have been retained, Dr. Danley reported, “Zero students have been retained. We have had a few students to be assigned to a third/fourth-grade transition class but we have been very successful due to a continuous focus on knowing every child’s strengths and weaknesses so every child has the best chance to learn to read so they can read to learn in upper grades.” *Read to Achieve* requires students not proficient by the end of third-grade to attend six weeks of summer remediation or be retained. If students still do not pass the gateway after summer school, they are enrolled in a third/fourth-grade transition class where they are taught fourth-grade content but are still remediated in reading. Superintendent Reeves pointed out, “Many districts across the state have not had the success with *Read to Achieve* we have experienced but it is about our people and not programs that make the difference.”

One of the many highlights of the day was hearing from the student panel of interns who are completing paid internships through the Next Generation Career Academy (NGCA), under the leadership of Career Coach, Crystal Folger-Hawks. East Surry interns who addressed the group included, Abby Key, a senior, interning in Human Resources at Altec; senior, Nathaniel McCraw, interning in Human Resources at Insteel Wire Products; Nathan Sheets, a senior, interning in the Quality Lab at Willow Tex; and junior, Quincy Smith, a marketing intern at Leonard Buildings and Truck Accessories. Each of the student interns gave compelling reasons why NGCA has been so beneficial to them, and each explained how the opportunity has expanded their career options and their perceptions about the world of work.

NGCA was established through a partnership with Surry Community College and funded by a generous grant from the Golden Leaf Foundation. Mrs. Folger-Hawks explained her role as a matchmaker of sorts. “I match students with businesses where the students’ skill sets match the needs of the business or industry partner. We know that there is a talent pipeline of 550 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) positions that will be needed in the next five years. We are proud we can help students be contributing members of society and gain valuable career skills in the process,” Mrs. Folger-Hawks explained.

The NGCA program is one of the first of its kind in the state and is highly successful with business partners coming back for the second year of hosting interns and some interns returning for a second year at their internship site or pursuing college as a result of their internship experience. Quincy Smith commented, “Before this opportunity, I didn’t know much about working because I had never worked. I am a triathlete and I haven’t had the time to work but this opportunity has truly been a blessing, and I am very grateful for the opportunity to be working at Leonard.” Representatives from Leonard were also present to show support for their intern and NGCA.

Mrs. Lindsey Kennedy, College Liaison, shared the importance of CCP (Career and College Promise), and what that means for Surry County School system students. Mrs. Kennedy elaborated, “Through CCP, high school students have the opportunity to take college courses for credit, pursue a certificate, or industry credentials, all tuition-free. Students can take part in CCP whether they attend Surry Early College or one of our traditional high schools. Furthermore, the Surry County Board of Education is so committed to CCP that the Board pays the cost of textbooks as well.” Dr. Reeves reported, “The savings to students and families in 2017-2018 alone totaled over \$298,480. That is a tremendous cost saving to students and families, a burden they don’t have to bear.”

Dr. David Shockley, President of Surry Community College, and partner in NGCA, shared, “Rural communities are in the fight for our lives. We face changes in the needs of business and industry, who tell us they need a highly skilled technical workforce, while there is an interest gap in highly technical and advanced manufacturing fields. I believe, however, we are a national model on doing it right. We remove barriers to success by putting aside issues that prevent students from having real-world learning experiences. Dr. Reeves and I communicate sometimes on a daily basis. Understanding the needs of the public school systems we support at Surry Community College helps us meet the needs of all students we serve while meeting the workforce needs in Surry County. Surry Community College is proud to partner with Surry County Schools on this endeavor.”

Mr. Neil Atkins, Director of Secondary Education/Surry Virtual Academy and CTE (Career and Technical Education), informed the Senator about the Surry Virtual Academy and the 28 courses that are taught by Surry County School system teachers. Mr. Atkins shared, “We have over 400 enrollments annually, 200 students each semester.” Dr. Reeves added, “Yes, and we can do it much cheaper than any other virtual option with much better results because our local educators take ownership of our students’ results.”

Surry County Board of Education members got a chance to share some of the challenges facing public schools and advocated for teachers and students by requesting Senator Berger support legislation that would allow county commissioners to increase local sales tax which would be dedicated to school funding. Board members also addressed the need to balance school performance grades with more of a focus on student growth. Currently, schools are measured based on an 80/20 split. 80% of school performance grades are based on student proficiency, while only 20% is based on student growth. This would be a significant change because parents expect a year’s worth of growth from a year’s worth of teaching. School performance grades that reflect student growth would be a more accurate representation of a school’s effectiveness. Also discussed were the disparities in principal and assistant principal salaries, and a need for changes concerning licensure. Currently, North Carolina does not honor all state’s teaching licenses but expanding reciprocity would enable teachers who come to North Carolina from

surrounding states an opportunity to teach in North Carolina with their existing credentials, which is particularly important given the current teacher shortage in North Carolina.

After a brief question and answer period, Senator Berger, along with the student panel members, and educators, set off on a tour of the campus. The Senator visited the Digital Media Lab, the Project Lead the Way (PLTW) classroom, the Animal Science Lab, East Surry's Career and College Corner, Math, and American History classes. The group even caught the JROTC in the middle of a timed One Rope Bridge drill, under the direction of First Sergeant Ronald Montgomery.

At the conclusion of the visit, students from the East Surry Digital Media class interviewed Senator Berger in the district's Digital Media Mobile Studio RV. Senator Berger stated, "I am very impressed by what I have seen and heard today, and congratulate you on the work you are doing to educate students. I have really enjoyed my time with you today."



