

K-64: Transforming Local Education through Shared Success
By Randy Isenhower, Chair, Catawba County Board of Commissioners

As the Catawba County Board of Commissioners continues to move our strategic planning process forward, we've already taken definitive action in a critical area for community growth: education.

Along with our local education systems, we have always been committed to preparing students for success in dynamic and increasingly competitive work environments. As we look to our future, we recognize that Catawba County's economic growth and competitiveness are dependent on providing even more exceptional educational opportunities that will retain and attract working age adults and families. That's where K-64 comes in.

K-64 is a game-changing education initiative designed to equip students of all ages with the skills for viable and sustainable careers, from their entry into school through retirement. It's about taking what's already working in our schools and multiplying it across our entire education system, as well as identifying new, leading-edge strategies that will help take those successful programs to the next level.

To accomplish this, K-64 is focused on six priority areas:

- 1-to-world technology that connects students with the technology they need to optimize learning inside and outside the classroom;
- Character and soft skills development, which ensures students are prepared to engage in work and in life by learning skills such as goal setting, interpersonal communication and team building;
- Tech-savvy educators who receive the continual professional development needed to incorporate emerging technologies into lesson plans;
- Work-based learning programs that expose students to potential careers and help guide educational choices through job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, and other opportunities with local businesses;
- Encouraging local employers to take an active role in developing a well-prepared and highly engaged future workforce; and
- Ensuring career adaptability for adults by offering the training and resources needed for career longevity in a dynamic work environment.

If these priorities sound familiar, it's probably because they are already happening in our schools in various ways. K-64 aims to unify goals across all three systems and share what works as broadly as possible. As a result, K-64 has brought together local businesses, community partners, all three school systems, Catawba Valley Community College (CVCC), the Catawba County Chamber of Commerce, the Catawba County Economic Development Corporation (EDC), and local government to make this initiative a reality.

The good news is that we are already on our way. A few weeks ago, we adopted a resolution to establish a 12-member governing board for K-64. This board, which is currently being formed, will work to operationalize K-64 in collaboration with a wide array of community partners.

CVCC President Garrett Hinshaw calls K-64 a "bold talent building initiative" for our community. Catawba EDC President Scott Millar says that at its heart, K-64 is also an economic development initiative. We Commissioners agree. If ensuring Catawba County's future prosperity means winning the talent war, we need to do everything we can, together, to advance and attract great talent right here in Catawba County and prepare students of all ages to achieve their desired goals. That's what K-64 is all about.

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