May 21, 2015

Elevating Educators through Engagement

The Institute for Emerging Issues (IEI) and the Hunt Library played host last month to 50 educators from Lee and Pitt counties who were participating in their first County-to-County Collaborative Day. The teachers, all in their first through fifth year in the profession, spent time learning about education policy, the North Carolina General Assembly and their elected officials, as well as effective channels of communication and engagement. They followed up their discussions with a visit to the NC General Assembly for the opportunity to experience cross-over week firsthand.

Featured Educators

This month’s Featured Educator is Mallory Nickel. This rising star is an inspiration to her students and all who meet her. Learn more here.

Featured Youth Engagement

As you plan summer activities for youth, I encourage you to add Summer in the Commons to your agenda. Click here to learn more.

Featured Data

Click here to visit the Emerging Issues Commons and data on Teacher Turnover rates across North Carolina.
County-to-County Collaborative Day participants visit the General Assembly.

These events were the culmination of Lee County’s six-month beginning teacher program entitled Take the Lead. One of the three funded Community Action Plans resulting from the 2014 Emerging Issues Forum, Take the Lead was designed to provide opportunities to develop leadership, networking, and mentoring skills. Pitt County, also having applied for a Community Action Plan focused on beginning teachers, participated as a way to build networking and support opportunities across the districts.

Once at the General Assembly, both Lee and Pitt County educators had the opportunity to engage several members of the fiscal research staff, as well as a number of legislators, including Senator Louis Pate, and Representatives Jean Farmer-Butterfield, Brad Salmon, D. Craig Horn, Brian Brown, Robert T. Reives II, and Susan Martin.

Legislators shared their background, districts, the committees they sit on, and their priorities, including several bills of interest to the educators in the room. Looking for feedback, the legislators posed several questions to the educators regarding the feasibility and effectiveness of the proposed bills.

Between phone calls back to their schools to check in on their students, there were many meaningful exchanges among the teachers about the event. Feeling like equals at the table with their legislators, and seeing themselves as part of the process for the first time, these educators, early in their careers, described the day as one that “lit a spark in them.”

The day concluded with a photo on the NCGA steps with Rep. Farmer-Butterfield and recognition at the start of the House Session. To say this was an experience these teachers will never forget is an understatement. For one day, they said, they were the students. The educators approached each session with open minds and left for home with chests full of pride!
Educators from Lee and Pitt counties pause for a group photo.

Many of the teachers commented that this Collaborative Day and their Beginning Teacher Support Program over the last six months have been instrumental in shaping their thinking on these issues, and their ability to understand education policy and their part in the process. “This was an amazing representation of IEI’s impact on North Carolina and its future leaders, and showed one way to reach teachers and increase retention of highly qualified educators,” shared Take the Lead coordinator Patricia Coldren.

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Do you know a teacher who is working hard to help students succeed? Let us know, and s/he could be featured in the next education issue!