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K-64 ANNOUNCES STAFF, BOARD APPOINTMENTS

HICKORY, NC – K-64 Chief Executive Officer Mark Story announced the hiring of Dr. Heather Benfield to Catawba Valley Community College's (CVCC) newly-created position of Executive Director, Student Career Services and Business Community Engagement. Benfield will work with Story at CVCC as part of the K-64 staff starting in February.

In this new role, Benfield will provide strategic direction for Catawba Valley Community College's Student Career Services and Business Engagement programs and assure coordination among these programs with other CVCC programs, K-12 school systems, departments, and outside agencies.

"This position was created to help connect students with future employers and enhance relationships among our local businesses and schools, both of which are at the heart of K-64," said Story. "While these connections are already happening to some extent throughout our community, Heather brings the experience, leadership and focus needed to effectively streamline these efforts and drive their growth."

Benfield joins K-64 from Challenger Early College, where she has served as principal for the past seven years and was named Catawba County Schools' Principal of the Year in 2014. She began her career teaching secondary science and served as director for a statewide initiative of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that led schools and districts through instructional and cultural redesign. Benfield earned a bachelor's degree from Bellarmine University, a master's degree in Executive Leadership from Gardner-Webb University and a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership from Gardner-Webb University.

"As part of the early college movement, I knew that my career and life's work would be part of the state's vision in educational innovation," said Benfield. "The last twelve years serving the early college system have been truly rewarding. The K-64 initiative is one of the most innovative in our nation because it fosters partnerships among local school districts, higher education and local businesses to increase pathways to future careers for students and adults. I have sincerely enjoyed my time at Challenger Early College and am looking forward to serving the community in a new way."

Additionally, the K-64 Board welcomed Lenoir-Rhyne University President Dr. Fred Whitt as a new non-voting board member during its December 7 meeting. Whitt was appointed as Lenoir-Rhyne University's ex-officio representative on the K-64 Board by the Catawba County Board of Commissioners November 20.

Whitt joins seven other ex-officio board members who currently represent K-64's founding partners and provide staff support to the K-64 initiative. These members include Hickory Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Robbie Adell; Catawba County Manager Mick Berry; Catawba Valley Community College President Dr. Garret Hinshaw; Catawba County Chamber of Commerce President & CEO Lindsay Keisler; Catawba County Economic Development Corporation President Scott Millar; Newton-Conover City Schools Superintendent Dr. David Stegall; and Catawba County Schools Superintendent Dr. Matt Stover.

K-64 connects students and employers through local educational programs that help shape future careers and meet workforce demands. K-64 increases access to school-based programs that are proven best practices for preparing a qualified workforce by identifying and expanding programs that are effectively collaborating with local employers to align courses of study with workforce needs; exposing students to real-world careers and related curriculum choices from earlier on; and enabling adults to update their skills and enhance their employability in a dynamic work environment.

K-64 is a public/private sector initiative managed by Catawba Valley Community College. For more information, visit www.k-64learning.com.

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