

## Rockingham CC Leverages Aviation Sector Jobs to Launch Career Pathway

Rockingham Community College (RCC) embarked on a journey this fall that will benefit area employers and students for years to come. Funded in part by an NCWorks Career Pathways grant, RCC's new Aviation Machinist Pathway program of study was launched in partnership with Rockingham County Schools, Junior Achievement, East Carolina University (ECU), HAECO Aviation, and Machine Specialties, Inc., and the first cohort of students is on its way to preparing for careers in the region's high-growth aviation industry. Initiated after conversations with the region's employers revealed a high need for machinists, the new career pathway program offers students the potential to earn their high school diploma and an RCC certificate by the end of their senior year in high school. The students will be prepared to enter the workforce or continue at RCC with the goal of earning an A.A.S. in Computer Integrated Machining, and the opportunity to complete a B.S. in Industrial Technology at ECU.

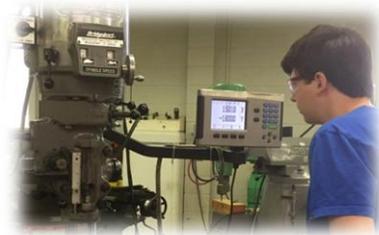
The lure of the aviation industry coupled with the accelerated pathway to stackable credentials and a degree

has been "the hook" to recruit students and parents. "Once we invited potential students to participate in a tour of Northstate Aviation, they were ready to sign-up," agrees Joy Toms, RCC outreach coordinator, and Laura Coffee, RCC Dean of Workforce Development. But it's not just education credentials students will be gaining. They'll benefit from valuable work-based learning including four days spent onsite at a local manufacturing facility paired with a worksite



mentor. Lunch-and-learn seminars hosted by Junior Achievement will offer soft skills training to round out this immersive experience in corporate culture.

While high school students can begin participating in any grade, the pathway curriculum is designed for entry in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. As they complete the certificate program, students will have the opportunity to earn industry-recognized credentials such as North Carolina's Career Readiness Certificate, OSHA-10, and the National Institute of Metalworking Skills (NIMS) Machining



Level I certification.

Project coordinator Courtney Harris admits there have been

challenges along the way to implementation, particularly with logistics and transportation. Because RCC and Rockingham Schools don't have an identical semester calendar, program and bus scheduling can prove to be an exercise in creativity and patience. Recruiting efforts also demand extra attention, as the perception of manufacturing in the eyes of the general public does not yet match the reality of today's high-tech, spotless manufacturing facilities. Beginning the student recruitment process in middle school, offering a parent night, and helping high school counselors better understand the program's benefits are all on this spring's to-do list.

Enthusiasm for the program's potential among area educators, employers, and elected officials is evident in a locally-produced video titled "Why Not Us?" Check it [out](#) on YouTube.

To learn more about RCC'S aviation machining pathway, [email](#) Courtney Harris.

To learn about the work of other Career Pathways grantees, read [Creating the Talent Pipeline of the Future: Regional Alliances Yield Education-to-Career Pathways](#).