

Shaping our Students for the Future

On September 13, 2021, I had the pleasure of attending the grand opening of the manufacturing center located on the campus of Halifax Community College. The tour was amazing. As I walked through this state-of-the-art facility, I began to dream of our students from HCS attending the program. I listened actively to see how I could make sure our students fully participated and obtain much-needed certifications. The Honorable GK Butterfield was the guest speaker, and he shared an update on the infrastructure bill being discussed in Congress. He made sure to let us know that some of the money would be coming to this region. As I closed my eyes, all I could see were jobs, jobs, and more jobs. I don't mean minimum wage jobs but high-skilled jobs that start at \$15.00 per hour.

We have entered the 4th industrial revolution. This period is marked by the blending of artificial intelligence and human activity. In other words, we see the growing emergence of automation. Look around; when you check out at the grocery store, you can now go and do it yourself. You no longer need to go to a cashier. A robot is replacing the position. Automation is the creation and application of technologies to produce and deliver goods and services with little human intervention. In other words, new technologies are replacing jobs once held by people. Automation is all around us. When you call the cable company to report an issue, the system will prompt you to correct the problem. When you complete an application, the autofill function keeps you from having to fill out every area.

One question that comes to mind for me is, will the future of education rise to meet the demands of future work? As a school system, we have to stay ahead of the curve by providing learning experiences for our students that allow them to create. I support the expanding movement to build a future-oriented workforce founded on stable employment. However, more work needs to be done for this goal to be accomplished. America will need to charter a new course of education and adopt a commitment to approaching education flexibly. We need to devote ourselves to our educational system while simultaneously embracing a continuous and lifelong learning culture as a country.

As manual tasks become more robotic and humans shift to embrace more profound roles, educators and business leaders need to constantly ask: what skills will define success in a workplace that is becoming increasingly virtual and increasingly driven by technology? Halifax County Schools has noticed this change, and we want to make sure that our students can compete after graduating. This August, we opened two Maker Spaces in HCS. One at Enfield Middle STEAM Academy and the other at William R. Davie Middle STEM Academy. Financial support for both Maker Spaces, designated for hands-on learning, comes from the Golden Leaf Foundation. Enfield Middle STEAM Academy also received an Innovative Partnership Grant from the state in 2020.

The Maker Spaces were designed for making, learning, exploring, sharing and offers individualized learning opportunities for students. Artificial intelligence may be increasing in the workforce but still cannot meet one hundred percent of the human demands. Furthermore, automation has slight disadvantages. We have all experienced a time when a device or a system has "gone out." That equipment had to be repaired by a human. At Halifax County Schools, we

are preparing our students to create, maintain, and improve these devices. We are shaping our students for the future.