

Chairman Bean, Ranking Member Bonamici, esteemed committee members...

It's an honor and a pleasure to be with you all today, and I certainly appreciate the opportunity to share the great work being done at Appalachian State University and in colleges of education as we recruit, retain, and equip educators to make meaningful contributions both inside and outside of the classroom.

I would also like to extend a special appreciation to Dr. Virginia Foxx. We are so proud to have you represent App State, and we appreciate all the support you have provided to educators, schools, and classrooms not only in North Carolina, but across the nation.

My name is Dr. Melba Spooner, and I have the honor of serving as the dean of Appalachian State University's Reich College of Education since 2016. I began my career in education as a teacher assistant and had opportunities to serve as a classroom teacher and assistant principal in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District in North Carolina. I transitioned to a career in higher education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, serving in various roles including faculty member; assistant dean; chair of the Department of Middle, Secondary, and K-12 Education; and senior associate dean of the Cato College of Education.

As a nationwide leader in professional education accreditation efforts, I have served in leadership capacities at the national and state levels on issues related to accreditation and policy. I am active and engaged across the state in matters of policy and education initiatives. I provided service on the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Commission and am currently serving a second term on the North Carolina Principal Fellows Commission. In 2019, I also served on the State Board of Education Pre-K-12 Literacy Instruction and Teacher Preparation Task Force.

It's important to note, at least for me, as I stand before you, how very grateful I am for this moment. As a product of the P-12 public education system and the public university system, I am proud to say that I am a North Carolina public school educator.

I appreciate the opportunity to share some insights into the enduring legacy of how we are preparing educators at App State. That said, we are also constantly growing and changing how we do this important work of recruiting, retaining, and supporting educators and schools across the country.

As a premier public institution, Appalachian State University prepares students to lead purposeful lives. App State is one of 17 campuses in the University of North Carolina System, with a national reputation for innovative teaching and opening access to high-quality, affordable education for all. The university enrolls more than 21,000 students, has a low student-to-faculty ratio, and offers more than 150 undergraduate and 80 graduate majors at its Boone and Hickory campuses and through App State Online.

For one hundred and twenty-five years, our university has been focused on ensuring that anyone who had the desire to learn, and the willingness to work hard, could have access to a

great education. Access, student success, and a high-quality education have been our key pillars since our founders created a bold and ambitious vision for the future of our region, and we remain focused on these founding principles today.

Preparing quality educators was App State's founding mission since its inception as a teacher's college ... and it is still in our DNA today. Our graduates become leaders in their fields and in their communities, inspiring the next generation of educators. One-third of App State students are from rural areas, and one-third are first-generation college students. And a quarter of them graduate with absolutely no college debt. Given the regional and statewide needs within rural settings, high-need areas, and underrepresented populations, App State graduates are primed to serve schools throughout the region, state, and nation.

With more than 10,000 graduates working in over 21 hundred schools in North Carolina, the influence of App State's educator preparation program is strong in every corner of the state. App State graduates work in nearly every one of North Carolina's 100 counties. We are proud that most of our alumni stay in North Carolina, contributing to their communities through their leadership and service well after graduation.

App State is first and foremost attentive to the needs of the state in terms of the need for great teachers. Investing in the work and preparation of teachers is what we do, and we know that it takes strong and rigorous academic programming, and it takes an intentional focus on all aspects of what educators do for their growth and development as teachers and leaders. Let me share just a few key highlights about the university and things that set us apart so that you might have a better understanding of the work that we do...have done...and will continue to do:

We utilize research-based content and curriculum to prepare candidates for the classroom. Coursework and aligned field experiences focus on the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards of Leadership, Content Knowledge, Classroom Environment, Facilitation of Learning, and Reflection. Candidates learn and apply these standards through a rigorous series of Professional Education courses. There are also multiple opportunities to develop and implement instructional practices while maintaining a safe and orderly environment, which translates into classroom management of time and behavior.

Metrics are used to evaluate candidate effectiveness. These metrics include multiple assessment points and instruments, which are ultimately compared to graduate and employer survey data, as well as state effectiveness measures. Results from these intensive assessment protocols are used to set program goals for annual program planning and continuous improvement.

In recent years, and more than ever, the examination of the teaching of reading has become more and more important. App State's teacher education students are immersed in a curriculum that is aligned with the Science of Reading, and before they graduate, they are required to be proficient in teaching literacy. To ensure their full preparation, they are required to complete extensive coursework with authentic field experiences. The fidelity of instruction of the Science

of Reading is continuously reviewed and evaluated by a Literacy Framework Team consisting of literacy faculty and college leadership.

Recently, App State was selected as one of five institutions across the UNC System to participate in a Literacy Innovation Leaders initiative, which aligned educator preparation, teacher professional development, and continuing education requirements with the Science of Reading. In this endeavor, students in the elementary and special education preparation programs were selected to participate as literacy scholars. They completed the state-adopted Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling program, participated in literacy-focused professional development alongside practicing in-service educators, participated in a mentoring program, and informed the college's redesign of literacy coursework and field experiences. These Literacy Innovation Leaders served as a model for the rest of the state.

Additionally, literacy education faculty also completed the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling program, demonstrating how we engage together to make the "student to educator" transition more seamless. Participation in this program has also greatly informed our curriculum.

Appalachian State teacher candidates are expected to be classroom and building-level leaders in the effective and ethical use of digital technologies. This is emphasized not only in coursework but in a wide range of opportunities for co-curricular professional development, including the inclusion of micro-credentials specific to digital learning. The college is engaged with other educator preparation programs at the national level on strategies to help candidates utilize technologies to these ends.

Because we know that it is important to have a deep understanding of what the "real world" of teaching is all about, we provide intentional and authentic experiences that we know candidates will encounter when going into their schools and classrooms.

To successfully recruit, prepare, graduate and support exemplary teaching professionals, we invest time in building partnerships and collaborations with public schools across the entire state we are so proud to serve. App State invests in partnerships with 71 public school units across North Carolina. This allows us to provide a wide variety of experiences for candidates in schools with student populations that are representative of the citizens of North Carolina.

Teacher candidates have multiple field experiences throughout their program. This continuum ensures candidates have these experiences early and often. Throughout their early field experiences, approximately 1,000 candidates are engaged in North Carolina public schools each semester.

An important aspect of the curriculum and associated field experiences to note is the inclusion of a focus on classroom management throughout the educator preparation program. During the course of the candidates' preparation to become an educator, they are heavily involved in

classroom instruction and field experiences that allow them to observe, learn, and practice a variety of classroom management techniques. Each program has a specific focus on selecting, planning, and utilizing materials, strategies, classroom management techniques, and experiences based on the developmental and behavioral needs of students.

Additionally, we require all of our teacher education students to complete a series of 20 professional development activities, each building on the one prior to it. This requirement not only enhances their classroom learning and field experiences, it also ensures our students understand the value and commitment to lifelong learning and continuous professional development.

The pre-graduation requirements and post-graduation support we provide have real significance nationwide. I'm proud to report that, for the eighth consecutive year, App State leads the nation in the number of alumni who hold National Board for Professional Teaching Standards credentials. Currently, 2,321 App State alumni nationwide have earned this outstanding credential, which is the most respected professional certification available in education.

By providing these authentic experiences and professional development opportunities, our candidates are not just sitting in the classroom and learning about teaching; they are going out and practicing it. As one of our alums noted, "Why Appalachian? Because it provides rich academic experiences and preparation for all education majors early on in our programs."

At App State, we understand that making teacher preparation programs more flexible, accessible, and affordable is key to recruiting and retaining great teachers for North Carolina and beyond.

Scholar programs, like the North Carolina Teaching Fellows and App State's Appalachian Community of Education Scholars, are another facet of our curriculum. Not only do these programs help offset the financial burden for students, they also help recruit educators in high-need and high-demand areas.

The North Carolina Teaching Fellows program invests in North Carolina students, teachers, and communities by providing affordable and rigorous professional development alongside a teacher preparation program. This program is known for producing and supporting high-quality teacher leaders without student debt, which we all know is an epidemic across our country and a massive concern among families across the state.

App State has more than 150,000 alumni nationwide. Seventy-five percent of them live in and contribute to North Carolina's economy. Our most recent economic impact study shows that App State contributed more than two point-two billion dollars to the statewide economy, with \$573 million of that directly benefiting the economies of Watauga, Ashe, Avery, Caldwell and Wilkes counties. We continue to increase access to higher education by offering academic programs through traditional, hybrid and online delivery modes to meet the needs of today's learners. We

have aligned our programs with the needs and critical workforce shortages of Western North Carolina with the creation of multiple pathways to enter the profession.

Across the nation, there is a workforce deficit in the high-needs areas of special education and STEM education, and northwest North Carolina is no exception. The geographic limitations of the region in which App State sits have prompted schools and districts to regularly request STEM and special education graduates from App State; further, the deficit has resulted in a myriad of initiatives and articulations to fill the workforce gaps. The college collaborates with the Foundation for Public School Children's Teacher Cadet Program and the state's Department of Public Instruction's Teaching as a Profession Career and Technical Education Program to support partners in developing programs to fill the persistent teacher shortage throughout the state and region. Appalachian State has trained and partnered with almost 30 Teacher Cadet instructors in northwest North Carolina, and the college provides mentors, college access resources, and hosts Future Educator Days.

We are constantly examining our recruitment efforts and ways of retaining individuals in our respective programs, as well as offering flexible, alternative (and traditional) pathways to meet the needs of individuals who are preparing to be educators and to keep them in the "pipeline" and progressing toward a degree and/or teaching credential. We have and continue to develop programs to address educators' continuing education needs and non-traditional enrollment pathways, including partnerships with community colleges and P-12 school districts.

We are constantly responding to the needs of the market, adapting and refining our recruitment and retention efforts and ensuring we offer our students the flexibility they need to graduate on time, with some of the lowest college debt in the nation. One-third of App State students are from rural areas, and one-third are first-generation college students. And a quarter of them graduate with absolutely no college debt.

An example of this is a collaborative partnership with Caldwell County Schools and Caldwell Community College as part of the North Carolina Educator Pipeline Collaborative. The four main goals of the Collaborative are to (1) Identify and understand the work of successful partnerships and programs; (2) Develop a framework for effective teacher preparation partnerships across K-12, higher education, and workforce development that work to recruit, prepare, support and retain a diverse, high-quality educator pipeline; (3) Support a cohort of teacher preparation partnerships in developing programs that meet their context and community needs; and (4) Share findings and recommendations with school districts, institutions of higher education, and state leaders to promote best practices and advocate for policies and programs that will have a lasting impact on the teacher pipeline.

This initiative can help to remove barriers and enhance and extend efforts to recruit, prepare, and retain highly qualified teachers. Additionally, they incentivize and support candidates to take advantage of the Associates Degree in Teacher Preparation at the community college and transfer to a four-year institution to complete their bachelor's degree with an initial teacher

license credential. Further collaborations with districts and community colleges to develop similar pathways are ongoing.

Through the Aspire Appalachian co-admission program, we provide a seamless pathway for students enrolled at partner community colleges to leverage their associate's degrees into bachelor's degrees at App State, receiving dedicated academic and financial aid advising assistance from both their community college and App State. We continue expanding this program and are on track to have agreements in place with nearly 30 community colleges by the end of this year.

Also, College Access Partnerships, or CAP, enhances relationships with rural schools, including recruitment efforts and engagement with diverse and underserved communities. CAP is made up of several large federal and private grant programs which include: GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), Upward Bound, Young Eisner Scholars, College Advising Corps, and Empowering Teacher Learning. Its core mission is to build strategic partnerships to strengthen local communities through college access and success. The support that CAP and the college's Public School Partnerships provide to western North Carolina works to reduce barriers and access to higher education. Thus, solidifying a pathway for future educators.

Educator preparation programs are working diligently to respond to the recruitment and replacement needs of schools by increasing opportunities for non-traditional candidates through residency licensure and graduate certificate programs. For example, we offer seven programs for graduate certificate and residency licensure candidates that lead to an initial license, which include STEM areas, special education, and elementary education.

Recently, the college expanded its undergraduate program at the new App State at Hickory campus to include an initial licensure program in elementary education. This will provide opportunities for first-year and transfer teacher education candidates. With six community college campuses within one hour of the Hickory campus, transfers in that region will have greater options to complete their bachelor's degrees and initial teaching license.

Partnerships and collaboration are imperative in recruiting and ultimately supporting and graduating strong teachers to engage in the teaching and learning processes in classrooms. A very strong focal point and aspect of teacher development and support at App State is the intentionality of our partnerships at many levels and with multiple constituents — we cannot and do not just stay on the mountain.

Candidates in educator preparation programs have the option to return to their home district in which there are MOUs for student teaching, allowing them to give back to their local communities. This also supports district partners' recruitment efforts, including "grow your own" initiatives.

In 2016, the North Carolina General Assembly passed a law requiring the UNC Board of Governors to establish laboratory schools aimed at improving student performance in low-performing schools and to provide demonstration sites for the preparation of future teachers and school administrators.

Universities within the UNC System that operate a laboratory school partner directly with local school districts to promote evidence-based teaching and school leadership, while offering real-world experience to the next generation of teachers and principals. UNC System Laboratory Schools serve every part of the UNC System mission — teaching, research, and public service.

Currently, at App State, we are developing an apprenticeship program at the university's laboratory school, which will attract and support non-traditional students to the profession. By targeting transfer students from community colleges who have completed an associate's degree in Teacher Education, we will provide the opportunity for them to stay in their local communities to finish their bachelor's degree. The paid apprenticeship program will provide hands-on experience to candidates in real classroom settings at the laboratory school. Apprentices will work alongside experienced educators to observe, assist, and gradually take on increasing responsibilities in teaching all while completing teacher preparation coursework. The goal is to provide flexible and accessible opportunities for transfer and non-traditional students.

Equally important is leading the way to be innovators in reimagining education. One example in which we are doing this is through the work that is happening at the laboratory school, which is operated by App State. Our school, which is a public kindergarten through fifth-grade elementary school, has implemented a strategic staffing model that is reimagining the roles and responsibilities of educators. Moving away from the one-teacher, one-classroom model, the lab school is challenging the status quo and rethinking what school can and should look like for students and teachers. This has included restructuring teaching positions with a focus on workforce design and moving to a model that embraces co-teaching and team-based, distributed expertise.

We have also redesigned the school's master schedule to protect and increase the amount of time for instructional blocks. This led the lab school to implement a four-day instructional week. Teachers and students report to school five days a week, but each Friday is an Enrichment Day for students. Students are engaged in tutoring, interventions, and personalized and exploration-based learning to support their academic needs and growth. They also attend clubs and choice activities allowing them to explore their curiosities and interests. The Enrichment Days are facilitated by App State and local community members. Teachers do not have instructional responsibilities on the Enrichment Days, but they are heavily engaged in co-planning, analyzing student learning data, and their own professional learning and growth.

The laboratory schools are places where we can imagine possibilities and turn them into realities both in terms of curriculum development and enhancement for teacher education preparation and for practicing teachers and children. But we must not keep it to ourselves or

limit it to just our laboratory school students and educators. We are in the process of establishing a Center for Re-Imagining Education. The work of this office will initially focus on scaling and replicating the innovative work that is currently happening in the App State laboratory school. This is hard work. We are asking teachers and school leaders to fundamentally think differently about what teaching and school should look like. But this work is necessary if we want to meet the needs of today's students and their families. Serving as an incubator for making changes in schools and educator preparation programs alike, the Office for Reimagining Education will add value by fostering a culture of innovation, empowering educators, enhancing student learning experiences, and contributing to the overall advancement of education in a rapidly changing world. Laboratory schools inform the work of our educator preparation programs, and our educator preparation programs inform the work that is happening in laboratory schools. As we reimagine schools, we are also reimaging how we prepare future teachers and administrators at App State.

Recruiting is important. Equally important is retaining teachers. This is accomplished through supporting individuals throughout their programs of study as well as upon their completion as they enter the classroom as beginning teachers. As you know, supporting and engaging with new and beginning teachers is essential. It is important to make the transition from pre-service to in-service as seamless as possible. An example of this is the New Teacher Support Program, which provides coaching and professional development for beginning teachers in their first three years. The goal of the program is to improve beginning teacher effectiveness and promote teacher retention, both of which contribute to student achievement.

Through the work that has been described from the examples shared with you today, you can see App State is intentionally focused on eliminating barriers to preparing highly qualified and effective educators.

From its start as a regional teacher's college to its present-day status as one of North Carolina and the nation's leading teacher education programs, App State is committed to recruiting, preparing, supporting, and placing highly qualified teachers in schools.

Our alumni embody the spirit of determination. They strive to make every classroom not just better — but the best it can be for the students they teach and work with each day.

As one alum noted, "The Reich College of Education supported my academic growth and development as a pre-service teacher while nurturing a passion for teacher leadership through the plethora of student engagement opportunities. They provide the infrastructure for more than student success, but also for teacher success, which is the epitome of what a teacher preparation program should do."

As Dean of App State's College of Education, I am immensely proud to be part of continuing App State's legacy of preparing extraordinary teachers. Of course, none of our accomplishments would be possible without the support we receive from the North Carolina General Assembly and UNC System Board of Governors. I am grateful to our state legislators

and the taxpayers of North Carolina who help ensure that the UNC System remains the crown jewel of our state, the economic engine of our workforce, and an exemplar for the nation.

Thank you so much for allowing me to share with you today all the great work being done at App State (and specifically how to enhance and increase the number of teachers in today's schools and classrooms) as we prepare tomorrow's education leaders to make meaningful contributions inside and outside the classroom. Thank you!

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