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**State Board of Community Colleges Announces 2021 Award Winners**

RALEIGH – The State Board of Community Colleges has bestowed its highest honor, the I.E. Ready Award, to Wayne Community College trustee Veda McNair. The board has also named the 2021 winners of the President of the Year, Excellence in Teaching, Staff of the Year and Distinguished Partners in Excellence awards.

The I.E. Ready Award was created in 1983 to recognize those who make significant contributions to the establishment, development or enhancement of the community college system. It is named for Isaac Epps Ready, the first state director of the North Carolina Community College System

Veda McNair is a crusader for community college education. She has served on the Wayne Community College Board of Trustees for 15 years, has chaired the Board, and has played a role in the installation of two presidents. She currently chairs the Board’s Curriculum Committee. In addition, McNair has spent 10 years on the Executive Board of the North Carolina Association of Community College Trustees (NCACCT), and co-chairs its Quality Training/Seminars Committee. A frequent panelist at statewide meetings, McNair spoke at the 2019 Leadership Seminar, “Stopping Community College Stigma,” which was turned into a nationally-broadcast podcast.

“Like Dr. Ready, Mrs. McNair is a ‘steady influence’,” said Wayne Community College President Dr. Thomas Walker, “not just for me, as I benefit from her myriad of education experiences and insight, but also for this college’s Board of Trustees, trustees at other colleges, and other educational organizations of which she is an active member.”

McNair is a retired K-12 educator who served in public schools for more than 40 years. She is a former Wayne County Principal of the Year and a regular presenter at the Department of Public Instruction’s Closing the Achievement Gap Conference. She continues to offer her time and talents as a high school success coach.

In addition to McNair, the following people and institutions received awards:

**President of the Year: Dr. Jason Hurst, Cleveland Community College.** Dr. Hurst came to Cleveland Community College with extensive experience in workforce education and economic development in several states. His career includes leadership roles at community colleges in Florida and Alabama, most recently Senior Director for Workforce Development for the Alabama Community College System. As president of Cleveland Community College, Dr. Hurst has championed strong relationships with industry and community partners. His accomplishments include expanding the Electrical Lineworkers program to include CDL truck driver training, and renovating BLET and Criminal Justice classrooms to include a defensive tactics training space and an interactive firearms simulator. He is currently overseeing the construction of an Advanced Technology Center to address local workforce training needs. Dr. Hurst also worked with the college’s Chief Financial Officer to purchase simulation software for virtual instruction and software for virtual advising to help keep students and staff safe during the pandemic.

**Excellence in Teaching Award: Karen Bochnovic, Chair of Academic Success, Carteret Community College. Karen Bochnovic started at Carteret Community College as lead instructor for developmental math, and redesigned the ACA 122 course to meet the needs of all students, regardless of program of study. One former student in development math calls her “the greatest of all time.” As chair of Academic Success, Karen has played a key role in the development of the new RISE policy for student placement. She led a statewide workshop on RISE and worked to bring faculty from across NC to Carteret Community College for the North Carolina Mathematical Association of Two Year Colleges (NCMATYC). She has served as chair of the Faculty Executive Committee and is a recipient of the college’s Meritorious Service Award.**

**Staff of the Year Award: Farrah Rodriguez, Haywood Community College. Farrah Rodriguez is an advisor who believes in building relationships with the students she serves. Her job as a Success Coach impacts hundreds of students across 14 programs of study. She brings empathy to the role, having graduated from HCC with honors in 2016. She was offered a job after impressing HCC staff as a work-study student. She went on to graduate from Gardner-Webb University at the age of 44, completing her degree while working full time and caring for her family. Ms. Rodriguez meets students where they are and is able to put herself in their shoes. Outside the classroom, she has helped to streamline the admissions process, mentored students, created informational emails about HCC programs, and been a driving force in the college’s food pantry program. During the pandemic, she has continued to keep in touch with and support students. “I love our students and what I do,” she says. “If I can help just one person achieve their goals, I feel complete.”**

**Distinguished Partners in Excellence: Central Piedmont Community College, Year Up and Bank of America. This partnership serves as a model for preparing low-income minority students for economically mobile careers. Launched in 2019, the program offers first-semester students the opportunity to take credit-bearing technical courses taught by CPCC faculty along with professional skills classes taught by staff of the national non-profit Year Up. In the next semester, students enter a full-time, credit-bearing internship financed by Bank of America. There is no cost for students. When the pandemic hit, CPCC and Year Up provided laptops and personal WIFI so students could continue their instruction virtually. Bank of America provided the interns with the same technology their employees use so that they could work remotely. Of the partnership’s first cohort, 70% of graduates are now working at Bank of America full-time; 10% are enrolled in school full-time.**