

# NC Rural Educators Get Support for Remote Learning: *Leadership conference shares best practices and tools to tackle teaching remotely due to COVID-19*

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More than 1,300 educators from rural North Carolina participated in a virtual conference focused on remote learning to help them be better prepared to teach throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Governor Cooper opened the REAL(Remote Education and Leadership) Conference, and gave the welcoming remarks via video message.

“When we had to close schools for in person learning in March, you were quick to adapt, staying connected to your students and making sure they continued to get the best education possible,” Governor Cooper told the participating educators. “I appreciate your efforts to help address the challenges to remote learning and help students get connected to stay on track in their studies.”

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic schools across North Carolina switched to remote learning in the spring and many students will continue to learn remotely as the new school year begins. Remote learning can be especially challenging in rural communities due to a lack of internet access and other technology resources and funding challenges.

The REAL Conference offered a professional development opportunity for rural educators designed by rural educators. At the conference, rural educators got the opportunity to learn best practices in remote learning and discuss how to addressing unique challenges faced by rural educators.

Participating educators chose from over 40 sessions throughout the day covering all grade levels. Sessions provided first-hand experience of remote learning tools and best practices. Topics included: Virtual STEAM: Hands-On Learning at Home; Digital Tools to Support Distance Learning; Accessible Remote Learning for Exceptional Learners; Connecting with Disconnected Students; Mindfulness-Based Social Emotional Learning; How to Assess Learning Games; Ed Puzzle: Actively Engaging Students with Videos; Bitmoji Interactive Lessons in Google Slides; Museum Learning Opportunities; and multiple topics on Google Classroom. Dr. Mary Hemphill, former superintendent of Scotland County Public Schools and current director of K-12 Computer Science at the NC Department of Public Instruction, gave the keynote address.

Educators and parents can view the recording of the REAL Conference [HERE](#).

Conference hosts included the North Carolina Business Committee on Education (NCBCE), a nonprofit housed in the Governor’s Office, along with Governor Cooper’s Hometown Strong initiative for rural North Carolina, the Department of Public Instruction and the NC Virtual Public Schools.

When schools transitioned to remote learning, NCBCE partnered with Hometown Strong to launch the Remote Learning Working Group) to help improve remote learning in rural counties by getting more

students connected to the internet and helping educators adapt to teaching remotely. The Working Group includes experts in education and technology from the public and private sectors.

Content for the REAL Conference was developed by the Remote Learning Working Group as well as a team of educators from rural North Carolina: Joseph Hayes from Edgecombe County Schools, Sonia Boone from Halifax County Schools, Kristy Marslander from Hyde County Schools, Heather Herron from Swain County Schools and Wendy Harrell and Phyllis King from Robeson County Schools.

Thanks to Google, Smithfield Foods, AT&T, Fidelity Investments, Dell, American Tower and Tony Brown of Public Consulting Group for their sponsorship of the REAL Conference through NCBCE.

Quote from members of the Remote Learning Working Group:

"Google is excited to help facilitate this important conversation between educators, the business community and state leaders regarding remote learning—a challenge that is top of mind for nearly everyone as we approach a new school year," said Lilyn Hester, Head of External Affairs - Southeast, Google and leader of the Remote Learning Working Group. "We look forward to discussing solutions to ensure our children have the connectivity required to keep their education on track."

Dr. Eric Cunningham, Superintendent of Halifax County Schools said, "The REAL Conference, the remote learning conference focused on supporting North Carolina's rural educators provides a much-needed benefit for rural school systems. Halifax County Schools will benefit greatly. Our teachers are excited and ready to participate."

Dr. Steve Basnight, Superintendent of Hyde County Public Schools said, "I want to thank all the fantastic educators who worked to make the REAL Conference a reality. This will provide a tremendous opportunity for our staff to receive professional development on remote learning and collaborate with other educators right before we begin our teacher workdays to open the new school year!"

About the North Carolina Business Committee for Education:

The North Carolina Business Committee for Education (NCBCE) is a business-led, education non-profit (501-c3) that operates out of the Office of the Governor. Since 1983, NCBCE has provided a critical link between North Carolina business leaders and the state's education decision makers, helping to create connections between the education curriculum and the overall work readiness of citizens across the state. Learn more at [ncbce.org](http://ncbce.org).

About Hometown Strong:

Governor Cooper created Hometown Strong to build partnerships between state agencies and local leaders to champion rural communities. The effort leverages state and local resources, identifies ongoing projects and community needs and implements focused plans to boost the economy, improve infrastructure and strengthen North Carolina's hometowns.

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