

Press Release – May 4, 2021

## **Wilkes County Invests \$1 Million to Increase Students' Access to College**

### ***Donation Supports New Wilkes Community College Education Promise***

**May 4, 2021** – Wilkes County Board of Commissioners provided a \$1 million check to Wilkes Community College Foundation to invest in the new Wilkes Community College (WCC) Education Promise. The Education Promise is a last-dollar scholarship to Wilkes Community College designed to ensure all graduating seniors in Wilkes County can attend WCC tuition-free for two years.

“The Wilkes County Board of Commissioners is proud to invest in this critical initiative,” said Chairman Eddie Settle. “The data shows that access to higher education can improve the lives of our residents in many ways, including options for better jobs that lead to higher incomes, better health and higher job satisfaction.”

The WCC Education Promise covers net tuition costs and fees remaining after an eligible student receives other grants and scholarships. Students will receive the scholarship for one year with the opportunity to renew it for an additional year, as long as they follow eligibility requirements. The \$1 million from Wilkes County will be earmarked for Wilkes County students, and is part of the fund's \$2.5 million needed in seed money to jump-start the self-sustaining scholarship program.

Vice Chairman Brian S. Minton stated “the Wilkes County Commissioners are proud to investment in our students and our region. The WCC Education Promise program will make a college education more attainable for hundreds more students each year.”

Community college opens the door to a living wage. According to the Georgetown University Public Policy Institute's Center on Education, the data shows 75% of people with an associate degree earn more than \$20 an hour.

Commissioner Keith Elmore said “this will help build a better, more attractive workforce. This will be one of the very best things we can do for economic development in Wilkes County ”

“Supporting the WCC Education Promise is a win-win for the community,” said Commissioner David Gambill. “We all benefit when more residents have college degrees, including lower poverty rates, lower crime rates, and less reliance on public assistance.”

Wilkes Community College also supports local businesses and industries by creating programs to support their specific workforce needs, which allows local residents to remain in the area and still earn a living wage. Greater access to a higher education is also a critical selling point when attracting new industry to the area.

Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson stated “this is a great opportunity for all students who live in Wilkes. Whether they attend public school, private, or home school everyone is eligible to take advantage of this program with meeting a few reasonable and attainable requirements.”

Community colleges are also a great value; a two-year degree at Wilkes Community College costs about \$5,100. We feel going forward this will brighten our kids’ future, and make our workforce competitive. This is another reason Wilkes is a great place to live, work, and go to school.

Find out more about the Wilkes Community College and the WCC Education Promise [here](https://www.wilkescc.edu/promise/), including degree options and how to apply. (link: <https://www.wilkescc.edu/promise/>)