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For Immediate Release: Mount Airy City Schools Utilizes Early Release to Empower Teachers

With five early release days scheduled in the 2018-2019 school year, teachers used their first one to grow professionally. The Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) Institute was held at Mount Airy High School and educators from across the district signed up to learn from their peers. In the three hours allotted, 18 sessions were offered by teachers and instructional support staff around topics such as student engagement, technology tools for student creation, service learning, social and emotional learning, and engineering.

Surry Community College President Dr. David Shockley kicked off the afternoon of learning as the keynote speaker. Dr. Shockley shared the success of the college, history of growth, and the college's work with business and industry. Surry Community College leads the state in workforce development and Mount Airy High School continues to be one of the top high schools in North Carolina, graduating students ready for career and college. Dr. Shockley touted the success that the city school district has accomplished with getting students prepared for life after high school and affirmed the vision the district has for the future success of all graduates.

Director of Grants Penny Willard organized the afternoon of professional development and noted, "Professional development is a must for educators. In order to successfully teach others, we must commit to lifelong learning within ourselves. One of the best assets a school district has is the ability to build capacity through the people serving our students every day; their experience and knowledge is key and deserves to be highlighted. Our MACS STEAM Institute provides an in-house platform to empower and inspire our teachers as learning leaders, while promoting growth and providing everyone with relevant professional learning experiences."

Mount Airy High School Teacher of the Year Courtney Howlett stated, "The STEAM Institute is a great way for teachers across our district to come together and learn from each other. I personally like that I can go to a K-2 session and take new ideas and implement them in my high school math classroom. This year in particular I loved the different sessions that were offered. I learned about racing, tools I can use in my classroom, and the awesome drone class that is going to be offered."

The most powerful way to positively impact student achievement is through professional development of teachers. The 2018-2019 district calendar has four additional early release days scheduled for the year. One is the day before winter break, one is the last day of school, and the final two are planned professional development opportunities. A second STEAM Institute is planned for the spring on the March early release day. Often times early release days in the spring semester as well as scheduled staff development days are lost to snow and used as make-up days. The flexible calendar for the 2019-2020 school year will allow more flexibility for make-up days missed for inclement weather which will allow more time for staff development.

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