

BC3's "A Clear Path Forward" builds on strengths, successes

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(Butler, PA) Butler County Community College was, in many ways, "still trying to prove itself" at the outset of a five-year road map that preceded its 2017-2022 strategic plan, according to BC3 President Dr. Nick Neupauer.

Since the launch of its 2010-2015 plan, BC3 has twice been named the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania by Schools.com. It has opened instructional sites or additional off-campus locations in Ford City and in Brockway. It raised \$6.85 million in a three-year Pioneer Proud Campaign, received three \$1 million commitments and opened the \$6.4 million state-of-the-art Heaton Family Learning Commons. And in June BC3 was re-accredited through 2025 by the Middle State's Commission on Higher Education.



A crowd of 80-plus listens as Dr. Nick Neupauer, president of Butler County Community College, discusses "A Clear Path Forward" during a City of Butler revitalization convenor meeting in BC3's Founders Hall on Dec. 20, 2017.

"With our successes," Neupauer said, "all those different accolades, the money that we are raising, the great academic programs, the excellence in accreditation, we are in a greater position of strength than we were previously."

Four employee-led committees were convened in January to deduce objectives that would augment those achievements and author additional goals in what would become "A Clear Path Forward," a five-year strategic plan approved June 21 by BC3's board of trustees and the subject of presentations to BC3 staff at administrative sharing days on Aug. 7-8, at convocation Aug. 24, and to community members Oct. 11 and Dec. 20.

"BC3," said Butler County Commissioner Kevin Boozel, a 1991 BC3 graduate, "is one of the community pieces that is not going away. It is a fixture. And it has gotten stronger."

Strategic plan "buzz of the town"

Neupauer, in his 11th year as BC3 president, said objectives to enhance BC3's role in economic development in the communities it serves, and to enhance BC3's community engagement with a

town and gown strategy to increase BC3's presence in the community and to bring community members on campus, "have been the buzz of the town."

That was evidenced by crowds exceeding 50 regional chief executive officers in October and 80 public and private stakeholders in December in Founders Hall, where Neupauer presented "A Clear Path Forward" and discussed BC3's role as a convener and educator.

BC3, he said, has studied differing economic models, in Altoona, Pennsylvania; Indiana, Pennsylvania; Montgomery, Maryland; Walla Walla, Washington; and Lorain, Ohio.

"The key to all of those was a relationship with an institution of higher education and more specifically, in most of those cases, a community college," he said. As a convener and educator, BC3's goal is not to rescue a municipality such as downtown Butler, Neupauer said.

"I cannot emphasize that enough," he said. "Our role is that of convener and educator."

It is an opportunity, Butler County Commissioner Leslie Osche said, "to have the college and its main campus as a convening place, a physical place for the heart of potential collaboration. I think of BC3 as providing that sort of hub."

Added Stan Kosciuszko, president of the Butler County Chamber of Commerce: "BC3 is the perfect convener because it does not have any self-interest. It is not a property owner or a business owner that is going to directly benefit from development. It will ultimately benefit because what is good for the county is going to be good for BC3. There may be more employees. There may be more people taking classes. BC3 may be able to offer more continuing education courses, workforce development. BC3 can see the overall picture, but people don't look at it as if BC3 is going to directly be the beneficiary."

Butler County is a beneficiary of hosting BC3, said Joseph Taylor, a BC3 trustee.

"BC3 reaches all corners of the county in terms of making available educational resources and assisting in workforce development," Taylor said. "The programs that the college has in focusing on training for first responders, firemen, that impacts the entire county. BC3 is one of the key institutions in the county that helps to provide leadership."

"A Clear Path Forward" may also benefit Butler County in that "if you look through BC3's employee roster, they serve on downtown committees, on our chamber board, as chairs of our board," Kosciuszko said. "Every year Leadership Butler County is partnered with BC3. BC3 employees are extremely involved in their communities."

And in creating the four-part "A Clear Path Forward."

Students, communities, resources and excellence embody plan

Dr. Belinda Richardson, vice president for academic affairs, and Dr. Case Willoughby, vice president for student affairs and enrollment management, served as chairs of Pathway 1: Students, whose focus was improved learning, success and completion.

Ruth Purcell, executive director of the BC3 Education Foundation Inc., served as chair of Pathway 2: Communities, whose focus was to build relationships to advance economic development and quality of life.

James Hrabosky, vice president for administration and finance, served as chair of Pathway 3: Resources, whose focus was to optimize the use of financial resources and improve infrastructure and operations.

Tina Fleeger, interim executive director of human resources/equal opportunity compliance officer, served as chair of Pathway 4: Excellence, whose focus was to provide enhancement opportunities to better BC3 and the individual.

Student success and learning define Pathway 1: Students, according to Richardson, who said that the pathway links those goals “into a series of efforts that bring students into the college, support their learning and growth, and propel them toward a better future. The objectives are designed to help students clarify and realize their personal, intellectual and career goals. The pathway seeks to improve the entire student experience throughout their academic journey.”

Accomplishing the objectives, Willoughby said, “will improve the learning environment inside and outside the classroom. With such a strong emphasis on diversity and inclusion, Pathway 1: Students reinforces our designing and continually implementing supports that increase the likelihood that students will graduate, and helps us maintain and improve our services to students and the high quality of our teaching and academic programs.”

Communication and community engagement are focal points of Pathway 2: Communities, Purcell said.

“As the community’s college, BC3 is a key driver in the economic and cultural climate of the communities we serve,” Purcell said. “Pathway 2 builds on our strengths in these areas with specific goals to further enhance this role. It reflects a commitment to strengthen our town and gown relationships – particularly with downtown Butler – and increasing opportunities for leadership development. “

College environment and fiscal stewardship are at the heart of Pathway 3: Resources, Hrabosky said.

“A common thread ... is the critical role that strong leadership plays in ensuring BC3 stays financially adaptable enough to maintain a high impact on the communities we serve,” Hrabosky said. “Effective stewardship of BC3’s financial resources, with appropriate checks and balances, is crucial to BC3’s ability to achieve its core mission.”

Employee development and continuous development highlight Pathway 4: Excellence, Fleeger said.

Staff members, she said, “will be better prepared to do their job and will receive training that will provide them with the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to better understand their role as a BC3 employee.

“With new training opportunities,” Fleeger said, “employees will gain additional knowledge that will allow them to assist students, colleagues and members of the community with a new perspective.”

“We are in this together”

Boozel was among those attending the October and December meetings in which BC3’s 2017-2022 strategic plan was presented to a total of 130 or more public and private stakeholders.

The message, Boozel said, is that “A Clear Path Forward” represents “a new chapter. And we are writing it as we go sometimes. But I think that there is a full sense that we are in this together, that this is really a collaborative, a partnership.

“BC3 is a partner to the solution. It takes private partnerships. It takes government legislative ability. It takes BC3 and the teachers at BC3. Private industry has a lot to gain from BC3’s ability to coordinate. And so they are willing to fund that. They are willing to invest. But they definitely want a return on their investment. And so far, the community college has returned every bit of their investment. There is no question about it. That is the strength. That is what BC3 is building on.”