

North Carolina Central University Chancellor Nomination Statement
by UNC System President Peter Hans
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For more than a century, North Carolina Central University has stood as a testament to hope and ambition. Through times of growth and times of struggle, this institution has kept faith with its mission of creating opportunity for Black North Carolinians and showing our state a vision of progress that includes all of our citizens. That uplifting work remains central to NCCU's identity today, and vital to North Carolina's future.

I want to offer my deep thanks to Chancellor Johnson Akinleye for all he's done to strengthen North Carolina Central over these past eight years. To stand in the middle of that campus today is to see an institution transformed, and the patient work of Dr. Akinleye and his team will benefit students for generations to come. You're leaving your successor a strong foundation and a great reputation, and that's a genuine gift to this university.

As the Eagles take flight into a new era, preparing students for a world that needs their talent and ambition more than ever, this university deserves a leader who respects its history, recognizes its potential, and relishes the challenges ahead. It needs a chancellor who can strengthen a longtime commitment to the liberal arts and embrace the shifting demands of a dynamic economy. It must have a leader who can cast a wide net for talent and support without losing sight of the deep roots and local commitment that define this institution. It deserves a champion who can carry Eagle Pride far and wide across our state and across the country, bringing this place all the respect and acclaim it has earned.

I am confident we've found a leader who can do all of that. Today, it's my privilege to nominate one of the finest academic leaders our state has produced in a long time; someone with a sterling record of service to North Carolina's public universities and a well-earned reputation for taking on some of the most challenging and rewarding work in all of higher education; someone who knows the UNC System inside and out, who understands this state and its needs at the deepest level; someone who has demonstrated time and again her talent for forging alliances to accomplish great things on behalf of great institutions. It is my pleasure to nominate Dr. Karrie Dixon as the next chancellor of North Carolina Central University.

As most of you know well, Chancellor Dixon has rendered some of the most valuable, most effective, and most needed service in the recent history of this university. The remarkable renaissance of Elizabeth City State University — an institution that was in dire straits when Chancellor Dixon arrived in 2018 — has been a joy to witness, and a demonstration of how much leadership matters in sustaining our institutions. Chancellor Dixon's ability to see potential even in a moment of deep uncertainty; her confidence in articulating a long-range vision; and her tireless work to strengthen oversight and earn renewed investment are the mark of a clear-eyed and steady leader. The Chronicle of Higher Education called her a "game-changer" for ECSU, and that gets it exactly right.

Chancellor Dixon built up those game-changing capacities over a devoted, two-decade career in higher education, most of it right here in the UNC System. She has been a professor, an academic advisor, a highly capable System Office administrator, and an ACE fellow. She has experienced our public universities as an undergraduate, a master's student and instructor, a doctoral student, a vice provost, and a chancellor.

She has worked at our state's largest land-grant institution and our smallest HBCU. She has served generations of student leaders through the Association of Student Governments and done more than anyone to build up the UNC System's oversight and support of student success initiatives. I cannot think of any academic leader in this state with a deeper, more comprehensive knowledge of our public universities than Karrie Dixon.

For as long as I've been serving this university — as president and before that as a member of the Board of Governors — Dr. Dixon has been the person you call when there's a complicated challenge with student success. She brings to that work not only a deep understanding of public policy and academic culture, but also a profound empathy for students of all backgrounds and a deep belief in the capacity of every student to thrive when offered the right resources and high expectations. She is herself a first-generation college student, someone who knows the power of public higher education to change lives and uplift communities.

And she knows that community is key to success at an institution like NC Central. Chancellor Dixon is among the best, most honest relationship builders I've ever met. As a System Office leader, she was known as a go-to contact for campus administrators looking to talk through a hard problem, test drive new ideas, or navigate a moment of careful diplomacy. She's great at building high-functioning teams and winning the confidence of students, colleagues, and alumni. The people who work around Chancellor Dixon are devoted to her and to the sense of mission she instills, and that's a powerful driver of effective work and an excellent workplace culture. She took the morale of the faculty and staff at ECSU from the lowest in our system to the highest.

She also rebuilt the university's relationship with the local community. One of her first actions as chancellor was to visit with local officials and meet with the leaders of neighboring community colleges and universities to make clear that ECSU would be a team player in addressing the shared challenges of the region. Anyone who dives right into revamping articulation agreements has my undying confidence, and that's exactly what Chancellor Dixon did. She re-energized long-dormant partnerships, created joint events that bring the whole community to campus, and made sure that Elizabeth City, indeed all of northeastern North Carolina, feels a sense of pride in its hometown university.

That spirit of productive collaboration has extended to the state level, where Chancellor Dixon has proven adept at forging strong alliances to benefit her institution. Policymakers from both sides of the aisle sing her praises and appreciate her straightforward, pragmatic approach to addressing North Carolina's needs. At a time of rising skepticism about higher education, Chancellor Dixon has won bipartisan trust and admiration by staying focused on the core mission of our public universities and holding herself and her team accountable for delivering results.

I have said many times that it should be a source of pride for every North Carolinian that we have more public four-year HBCUs than any other state, each of them with a storied history and a unique identity. One of Chancellor Dixon's great strengths is her understanding of how valuable that sense of pride is to an institution, how much a strong and inspiring narrative matters in forging an inspiring culture. A chancellor isn't just an administrator; she is an advocate, a storyteller, an ambassador to the wider world on behalf of the entire university. That demands a rare blend of humility and self-possession, the confidence and compassion to channel the aspirations of others. I have seen Chancellor Dixon do that brilliantly over many years, and I know that she will wear the mantle of Eagle Pride with all the joy and respect it deserves.

It's been wonderful to see the North Carolina Central community come together over these last several months, offering ideas, ambitions, and broad support for the next chapter in this university's history. It's an exciting time for the nation's first liberal arts institution for African-American students. North Carolina is growing bigger and more diverse. Durham and the Triangle are among the most vibrant, most dynamic places in the country to live and learn. And the mission of offering life-changing opportunity remains as vital as ever. The Eagle Promise — the pledge to champion student success and prepare graduates for a fast-changing world — captures the very best of what public higher education must be, the commitment we must offer to the people of this state and beyond.

I want to commend the search advisory committee for keeping those values front and center as we conducted a hopeful, professional, and wonderfully successful search for NCCU's next leader. A proud Central alumnus himself, committee chair Dr. Jim Johnson led us with grace and good humor, as he does with all of his many endeavors on behalf of our University System and the Durham community. I was deeply impressed with the wealth of talent drawn to North Carolina Central from across the country in a pool of over 50 strong candidates, and it was exciting to hear such optimistic visions for this institution. We are beyond fortunate that the right leader for the right time is among those eager to serve this place, to help the Eagles soar into a new era.

Dr. Dixon, it has been an honor to work alongside you these many years, and I am so grateful our University System and North Carolina will benefit from many more years of your steady leadership.