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KANNAPOLIS — As interest surges in biotechnology careers and "green" jobs, which field would the state's top labor official recommend to her children if they were young again?

Neither.

Cherie Berry, commissioner of the N.C. Department of Labor, said she would tell her four kids to become bricklayers, carpenters, electricians or plumbers.

"There will always be a need for these skills, and you cannot ever ship those jobs overseas," said Berry, who met Monday with Rowan-Cabarrus Community College leaders.

Berry toured the new RCCC building at the N.C. Research Campus. The college will train people to work at the \$1.5 billion biotech hub, which also includes branches of eight universities.

"We are guiding people toward where we think the jobs of the future will be," RCCC President Dr. Carol Spalding said. "Biotech is one of the areas we want to excel in."

While Berry, who attended community college classes herself, congratulated RCCC on the \$26 million building, she talked mostly about the need for manufacturing and trade jobs during her "labor forecast" presentation.

"We need the trades," she said. "A lot of parents don't want their kids in the trades, they want them to go to a university."

"We need to change the mindset of parents to show them that those are jobs are professional."

Once skilled in a trade, a worker eventually can own the business and become an entrepreneur, Berry said.

Recently, she encouraged a group of students to consider a trade instead of a white collar job.

"I told them I just wrote a bigger check to my plumber per hour than to my lawyer," Berry said. "Now which one do you want to be?"

Chip Short, a Salisbury attorney who serves on the RCCC Board of Trustees, earned a laugh when he said, "I hear you."

Ray Paradowski, board chairman, questioned directing students to the trades during a recession, citing a lack of construction.

The RCCC building is the only construction underway at the Research Campus, where several other major projects are hold due to the economy.

Berry lauded her department's labor apprenticeship program, which has certified 27,916 people. Workers who started as an apprentice earn an average of \$18 per hour, she said.

"Not everybody needs to go to college out of high school," she said. "We are so desperate for the trades," including welding, carpentry, heating and air and electrical.

The apprenticeship program includes 924 occupations, including a certification through Wayne Brothers Construction in Kannapolis, Berry said.

When Gov. Beverly Perdue wanted to give the apprenticeship program to the N.C. Community College System, Berry "threw my body over it" to keep the program in the labor department, she said.

Berry said she sees no long-term strategy to create jobs or help attract business, and she worries that people are training for jobs that don't exist.

Spalding said RCCC is training the future workforce for the Research Campus.

"With this building, we are making the first step, making a commitment," she said. "Everybody in Kannapolis will be at the apex for that."

The Research Campus stands on the former Pillowtex textile manufacturing plant.

Berry said the labor department recently settled the final cases on behalf of former Pillowtex employees who had not received their wages after the mill closed in 2004, the largest layoff in state history.