

**PROGRESS REPORT ON THE ASSET
PROJECT**

**SUBMITTED TO THE NORTH CAROLINA
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION, THE JOINT
LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION OVERSIGHT
COMMITTEE, THE SPEAKER OF THE
NORTH CAROLINA HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES, AND THE PRESIDENT
PRO TEMPORE OF THE NORTH CAROLINA
SENATE**

**BY THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January, 2002, the State Board of Education directed the UNC Center for School Leadership Development (CSLD) to commit itself to a two-year project, dubbed ASSET (All Students Succeed through Excellent Teaching), designed to close the achievement gap in selected schools and LEAs. A Steering Committee of the Department of Public Instruction subsequently selected eighteen schools in four counties to participate in the project.

In March CSLD personnel began making assessments of the selected schools. In June CSLD personnel began delivering services to those schools.

This report details the ASSET process to date, listing the services CSLD has provided, explaining the lessons the CSLD has learned thus far, and outlining the programs and instructional modules CSLD is currently developing to help the ASSET schools close their achievement gaps.

Introduction

In 2001 the General Assembly instructed the State Board of Education, via G.S. 115C-12(26), to (1) identify state and local professional development needs based on the state's priorities for improving student achievement and (2) recommend strategies for addressing those needs. These strategies, according to the statute, must be "research-based, proven in practice, and designed for data-driven evaluation." In January 2002 the SBE announced its first priority under this legislation: to close "achievement gaps" in specific school systems. (See Background, below, for details).

Four schools - East Montgomery High School in Montgomery County, Wallace-Rose High School in Duplin County, Lexington High School in Lexington, and Swain High School in Swain County, along with their "feeder" elementary and middle schools (eighteen schools in all) - were chosen as targets of a new project, dubbed ASSET (All Students Succeed through Excellent Teaching) to be conducted by the UNC Center for School Leadership Development (CSLD), which officially comprises the NC Mathematics and Science Education Network, the NC Model Teacher Education Consortium, the NC Center for the Advancement of Teaching (NCCAT), the Principals' Executive Program, the NC Principal Fellows Program, and the NC Teacher Academy, and includes, as administrative affiliates, NC TEACH (Teachers of Excellence for all Children) and NC RISE, (Restructuring Initiatives for Special Education), which are federally funded programs.

The CSLD's mandate under ASSET is to (1) ensure that educators in the target schools are already taking advantage of existing professional development programs; (2) design customized programs that address achievement gap issues in the individual target schools and define programs that other agencies might create; and (3) develop fully documented, generalized instructional modules based on the customized programs that may be delivered in a variety of ways, including electronically, to other schools with similar needs across the state.

In April and May 2002, CSLD delegations visited each of the target schools to attempt to gain the cooperation of educators at those schools. Because all of the selected schools have strong traditions of local control, the ASSET project was offered to the schools' administrators on a "good will" basis. Principals and superintendents were assured they could accept or reject the CSLD's offer of assistance according to their own assessments of their own needs. The leaders of all of the schools volunteered to join the project.

Immediately upon securing the cooperation of the four target school districts and eighteen schools, the CSLD employed a number of strategies to help raise student achievement and close the achievement gap at those sites. The remainder of this report chronicles those efforts and explains plans for future initiatives to help these schools and the state meet these two important objectives.

Center Activities Completed or In Progress

The CSLD's first goals were to gain a general familiarity with the districts and the schools and to determine the schools' and districts' specific needs with regard to closing the achievement gap. CSLD personnel established communications with administrators and teachers at the sites, gathered critical data (EOC and EOG test scores, etc.), noted conditions and circumstances unique to each site, and completed initial site-assessments. CSLD personnel reviewed and consolidated the initial assessments and began delivering services in June 2002.

The following is a summary of CSLD's summer 2002 activities.

Services Provided for Duplin County Schools

- Wallace-Rose Hill High School: assistance in using newspapers in classrooms to promote better reading comprehension (services provided by the Principals' Executive Program and the UNC-CH School of Journalism).
- Wallace-Rose Hill High School: NC Teacher Academy's "Making the Connections" workshop, delivered on site.
- Duplin County Central Office: NC Center for the Advancement of Teaching workshop for beginning teachers, delivered on site.

Services Provided for Lexington City Schools

- Pickett Primary, South Lexington Elementary, Southwest Lexington Elementary, and Charles England Intermediate Schools: NC Teacher Academy "Learning Styles" workshop, delivered on site.
- Lexington City Schools Central Office: NC Mathematics and Science Network "Closing the Gap" seminar, delivered on site.
- Lexington Elementary, Intermediate, Middle, and High Schools: Test Score Analysis and Review, delivered on site by the building principals.

Services Provided for Montgomery County Schools

- Candor Elementary and Star-Bisco Elementary: NC Teacher Academy "Balanced Literacy" workshop, delivered on site.
- East Montgomery Middle School, Candor Elementary, Star-Bisco Elementary, and East Montgomery High School: NC Teacher Academy workshops on meeting the needs of English language learners, delivered on site.
- Montgomery County Central Office: NC Center for the Advancement of Teaching workshop for beginning teachers, delivered on site.

Services Provided for Swain County Schools

- East Swain Elementary: NC Center for the Advancement of Teaching school planning improvement workshop, delivered at NCCAT.
- Swain County Middle School: NC Center for the Advancement of Teaching “Curriculum Integration” workshop, delivered on site.
- Swain County Middle School: Facilitation of a series of faculty meetings on “Revisiting the Middle School Philosophy,” delivered on site by NC Center for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Swain County High School: NC Center for the Advancement of Teaching “Learning Styles and Multi-Cultural Understandings” workshop, delivered on site.
- Swain County Elementary, Middle, and High Schools: Test Score Analysis and Review, delivered on site by the building principals.
- Swain County Central Office: NC Center for the Advancement of Teaching workshop for beginning teachers, delivered on site.
- Swain County Central Office: training for principals and central office administrators in instructional leadership based on data analysis, delivered on site by the Principals’ Executive Program.

Other Services Provided by CSLD

- NCCAT reserved places in its regularly scheduled seminars for participants from ASSET schools and waived certain qualifying requirements for participants from ASSET schools.
- The Principals’ Executive Program conducted seminars on data analysis for *No Child Left Behind* requirements for all four school districts.

The standards promulgated by the National Staff Development Council inform both the organization and the delivery of all services, workshops, seminars, etc. provided by CSLD.

Transition in Center Leadership

It is important to note that in the midst of the ASSET process, which marked significant changes in the professional direction of CSLD constituent programs – for example, prior to ASSET, the Principals’ Executive Program’s focus was on school leaders; ASSET, however, requires a specific focus on students – CSLD experienced a change of leadership. Dr. Charles Coble, UNC Vice President for University-School Programs, had oversight of CSLD until he resigned effective June 30, 2002. His successor, Dr. Richard Thompson, did not arrive full-time at CSLD until August 19, 2002. As soon as possible after he arrived, Dr. Thompson consulted with members of the Steering Committee established by the Department of Public Instruction to oversee the ASSET project (see Background, below), and convened a two-day meeting with the directors of CSLD’s programs and other members of the ASSET team. (The data presented at that meeting are summarized in Appendices F, G, H, and I.)

What the Center Has Learned

Generally speaking,

1. a significant change in student demographics (a sudden influx to the area of large numbers of children of diverse ethnicities) significantly affects the school's ability to meet the needs of all children;
2. high teacher turnover rates reduce the school's ability to meet the academic and cultural needs of diverse student populations;
3. significant achievement gaps develop during transition years (e.g., grades 6 and 9) and, as a result, much academic energy during subsequent years is expended re-establishing earlier achievement levels;
4. a large number of teachers in ASSET project schools are not fully certified;
5. many teachers of mathematics and science in ASSET project high schools are not certified in those content areas;
6. increases in proficiency in mathematics as students age and mature are higher than increases in proficiency in the language arts;
7. achievement gaps are narrowing in some schools/districts not because underachieving students are improving, but rather because the proficiency of higher achieving groups is declining;
8. large high schools, because of their complexity, tend to be less able than smaller elementary and middle schools to meet the academic needs of all children;
9. achievement gap issues are not addressed in school improvement plans;
10. principals and leadership teams need training in linking the lessons of professional development to learning and teaching priorities;
11. teachers need training in how to teach students to employ higher order thinking skills;
12. teachers and administrators in many of the schools involved in the ASSET project *have explicitly expressed the desire* to gain better reading, writing, and mathematics instructional skills;
13. principals both need and want training in instructional leadership, how to use data effectively, and how to improve classroom assessment;
14. the requirements and consequences of *No Child Left Behind* are not well understood by either teachers or administrators;
15. beginning and lateral-entry teachers lack proper training and support due to shortages of central office staff and/or trained mentors;
16. the performance of a small number of students may skew test results (data must be closely analyzed to determine whether whole-school results are disproportionately affected by the performance of a minority of students);
17. a positive correlation exists between how well teachers know and follow the NC Standard Course of Study and how well students perform on accountability tests.

Next Steps

Based on what we have learned, CSLD is in the process of

1. scheduling as many workshops, seminars, etc. as possible into ASSET schools' existing professional development plans;
2. strengthening the partnerships between CSLD and the ASSET schools and refining the roles and responsibilities of the partners;
3. establishing communication networks with the new principals of ASSET schools,
4. analyzing student achievement data, especially 2001-2002 ABC results;
5. securing appropriate technical assistance from other education providers (e.g., universities) when ASSET schools demonstrate the need for expertise not available within CSLD;
6. developing means to warehouse data gathered by CSLD, the ASSET schools, the Department of Public Instruction, etc., in order to establish "baseline" information from which to determine ASSET project progress;
7. creating partnerships - both within CSLD and between CSLD and other agencies – to design and deliver the varieties of content-specific professional development that will be required to close the achievement gap;
8. developing the customized instructional modules "that may be delivered in a variety of ways, including electronically, to other schools with similar needs across the state" that are mandated by the DPI's January 7, 2002, report titled "Professional Development Needs of Public School Employees." Sample modules are
 - Differentiated Instruction – Principals' Executive Program and NC Teacher Academy
 - Improving Supervision of Instruction in Mathematics – Principals' Executive Program and NC Mathematics and Science Network
 - Improving Instructional Decisions through Effective Use of Data – Principals' Executive Program and NC Teacher Academy.

These and other modules will incorporate and refine elements of existing CSLD instructional units, including

- a. teacher preparation units created by NC TEACH:
 - i. The Professional Role of the Teacher
 - ii. Learning Theory and Cognitive Development in Students
 - iii. Diversity
 - iv. Special Education;
- b. school leadership training units created by the Principals' Executive Program:
 - i. Principals as Technology Leaders
 - ii. The Assistant Principals Leadership Program
 - iii. The Leadership Program for New Principals

- iv. The Higher School Performance Program
- v. Improving NC High Schools;
- c. teacher training units created by the NC Teacher Academy:
 - i. Meeting the Needs of English Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom
 - ii. Site-based Management and Continual School Improvement
 - iii. Literacy
 - iv. Motivating Nontraditional Students;
- d. mathematics- and science-specific units created by the NC Mathematics and Science Education Network:
 - i. Inquiry-based Science
 - ii. Incorporating Technology into Mathematics and Science Instruction
 - iii. Science and Mathematics in a Multicultural Environment
 - iv. Numbers and Algebra, Statistics and Data Analysis, and Geometry and Measurement - three courses for middle school teachers originally developed by the National Science Foundation's Middle Math Project;
- e. classroom-based units created by the NC Center for the Advancement of Teaching:
 - i. Beginning Teacher-Mentor Training
 - ii. Program on Inclusive Classrooms
 - iii. Our New Neighbors (addressing issues related to the Latino population)
 - iv. Young, Black, and Male.

Conclusion

Everyone at CSLD understands the importance and significance of the ASSET project and the legislative mandate on which it is based. In cooperation and collaboration with teachers, school administrators, district superintendents, and members of other education agencies, including North Carolina's universities, we will endeavor to close the achievement gap in our public schools by doing what we do best – providing top-quality professional learning to educators throughout the state.

Background

In 1997 the UNC Board of Governors created the UNC Center for School Leadership Development (CSLD), bringing under one organizational umbrella a number of education agencies – some mandated by state legislation, some operating under federal grants – that provided professional development to educators in North Carolina. Each of these agencies operated autonomously, reported to its own board of advisors or directors, and controlled its own budget. All were created at different times and for different specific purposes.

Now united with a common purpose, CSLD's leaders devised a strategic plan, which includes the following mission statement:

The Center for School Leadership Development's mission, in alignment with the strategic priorities of the University and the public schools, is to promote a community of individual and collective learners who meet the leadership challenges of advancing student and school success in North Carolina. We do this through the design and delivery of premier professional development for public school educators and contribute to school-based research providing evidence of best practices.

To accomplish this mission CSLD's leaders articulated the following strategic goals:

1. To strengthen cross program collaboration and partnerships and the use of technology to increase the efficiency, effectiveness, and service capacity of programs.
2. To continue to provide research-based professional development and create new programs designed to improve the achievement of all students and contribute to closing the achievement gap.
3. To increase access of North Carolina's teachers and administrators to CSLD-sponsored leadership development programs that promote school improvement and student success.
4. To increase and improve the recruitment, preparation, development, and retention of fully qualified and licensed teachers and administrators.

These same four goals also form the core of CSLD's Strategic Plan (see Appendix A).

As noted in the introduction to this document, the State Board of Education in January 2002 directed CSLD to devote its collective energies to a project designed to close the achievement gap in selected schools and LEAs. As recommended by a teacher in Montgomery County, the project was dubbed ASSET (All Students Succeed through Excellent Teaching). Specifically, CSLD's duties in the ASSET project are to

1. Develop and implement the professional development plan as directed by the NC General Assembly for specific schools in collaboration with the State Board of Education, the NC Department of Public Instruction, institutions of higher education, local education agencies, and other partners while seeking additional resources.
2. Develop a timeline and strategy for disseminating best practices and lessons learned from working with the selected schools involved in the ASSET project.
3. Provide leadership and support for professional development that focuses on the diverse learning needs of all students.
4. Develop and serve as the repository/clearinghouse for research-based professional development programs and practices that focus on closing the achievement gap and enhancing the performance of all students.

CSLD accepts the responsibility to help the State Board of Education close the achievement gap in North Carolina's public schools. ASSET may significantly affect the state's ability to meet the student performance requirements delineated under both *No Child Left Behind* and *Leandro v. State*.

The Legislative Mandate

According to G.S. 115C-12(26) (2001) (see Appendix C),

1. The State Board of Education ("Board" or "State Board") is to identify State and local needs regarding professional development based upon the State's educational priorities for improving student achievement. The Board is to recommend research-based strategies that are proven in practice, and designed for data-driven evaluation to address those needs.
2. The Board shall submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee ("Education Oversight Committee"), the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, and the UNC Board of Governors ("BOG") prior to January 15th of each year.
3. The Board shall evaluate reports submitted by the BOG under G.S. 116-11(12a) [see below] to determine whether the programs for professional development provided by the Center for School Leadership Development ("Center") address the State and local needs identified by the State Board and whether the programs are using Board-recommended strategies.

According to G.S. 116-11(12a) (See Appendix C),

1. The BOG shall implement, administer, and revise programs for meaningful professional development for professional public school employees in accordance with the evaluations and recommendations made by the State Board under G.S. 115C-12(26) [see above].
2. The programs shall be aligned with State education goals and directed toward improving student academic achievement.
3. The BOG shall submit to the State Board an annual written report that uses data to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development programs offered by the Center. The report shall clearly document how the programs address the State needs identified by the State Board and whether the programs are utilizing the strategies recommended by the State Board.
4. The BOG also shall submit this report to the Education Oversight Committee, the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House prior to September 15 of each year.

The Professional Development Plan

As noted elsewhere in this document, in January 2002, the State Board, in a report titled "Professional Development Needs of Public School Employees" announced its first goal under this legislation: to close "achievement gaps" in specific school systems (See Appendix B). The report emphasizes two priorities.

PRIORITY I: The decision to focus on closing the achievement gap was predicated in part on ten recommendations made by an Advisory Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps. One of its ten recommendations addressed the need for the State Board to provide professional development to help teachers successfully teach a diverse population of students.

As a result, CSLD is directed to

1. develop and implement a comprehensive school-level program designed to close the achievement gap while raising the achievement of all students, and,
2. work with DPI and other appropriate partners to design and develop a series of instructional modules for teachers, administrators, and instructional support staff focused on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions essential to closing the achievement gap while raising the achievement of all students.

The plan directs CSLD to work with fifteen to twenty schools identified by DPI as having various types of achievement gaps. The plan specifies that the work include all of the "feeder" schools that supply students to the selected high schools, and requires that successful interventions must be applicable to other schools statewide.

PRIORITY II: Instructional modules, which comprise another aspect of the CSLD's mandate, must

1. be designed for independent use by teachers, administrators, and instructional support staff (i.e., they should allow for self-directed, self-paced learning);
2. be focused on the knowledge and skills inherent in the Core Standards for Teachers articulated by the NC Professional Teaching Standards Commission and adopted by the State Board (see Appendix D); and
3. include an assessment component that requires the individual to demonstrate application of the skills in the classroom and/or school setting.

Module topics include the following: (1) assessing the impact of diversity on learning; (2) establishing differentiated instruction; (3) grouping strategies; (4) assessing student progress; (5) analyzing data as a basis for planning instruction; (6) developing higher order thinking skills in students; (7) teaching basic reading and writing skills; (8) integrating reading and writing across the curriculum; and, (9) updating content/subject matter.

While performing functions related to both priorities, CSLD will adhere to the standards articulated by the National Staff Development Council (see Appendix E), as specified in the DPI's Professional Development Plan.

The CSLD's effectiveness will be determined by student performance results on standardized EOGs and EOCs, as well as by other indicators of school success, including drop out rates, suspension data, and participation by students in extracurricular events.

To facilitate implementation of this plan, a steering committee was formed. Its current members are

- Dr. Brad Sneeden, Deputy State Superintendent (co-chair)
- Dr. Richard Thompson, Vice President for University-School Programs (co-chair)
- Dr. Dwight Pearson, Section Chief, Closing the Gap, DPI
- Ms. Jackie Colbert, Section Chief, School Improvement, DPI
- Dr. Elsie Leak, Associate State Superintendent for Curriculum and School Reform
- Mr. Tom Blanford, Executive Director, Teaching Standards Commission
- Dr. Kathy Sullivan, Director of Human Resources Management, DPI
- Ms. Carolyn McKinney, President, NCAE
- Ms. Ann McArthur, Teacher Advisor, Office of the Governor
- All Program Directors in the Center for School Leadership Development

(Note: Due to a new professional development initiative announced by DPI on August 19, 2002, reorganization of this committee is probable.)

Steering Committee Actions

The Steering Committee considered thirteen North Carolina high schools (and their feeder schools) for inclusion in the ASSET project. According to 2000-2001 composites, all thirteen schools demonstrated a widening achievement gap. After some discussion, the committee chose four: (1) Wallace-Rose Hill High School (Duplin County); (2) East Montgomery High School (Montgomery County), (3) Swain County High School (Swain County); and (4) Lexington High School (Lexington City).

Wallace-Rose Hill High School was selected because it had the largest achievement gap growth in the state. East Montgomery High School was selected because it also showed high gap increases and because it was located in the Piedmont area of the state.

Lexington High School was selected because it and its feeder systems comprised an entire LEA. Swain County was selected because it was in the western part of the state and because the achievement gap was between Caucasian students and American Indian students.

In its selection process, the Steering Committee operated unilaterally. None of the school administrators in the districts under consideration knew the ASSET project was being developed.

Deputy State Superintendent Sneeden made personal contact with each of the district superintendents in February 2002 and secured each superintendent's permission to contact school leaders (the principals of the 18 schools, teacher leaders, central office staff, and, in some cases, school board members) in each district. In March the co-chairs of the Steering Committee, other Steering Committee members, and representatives from CSLD traveled to each of the four school districts to explain why districts would benefit from participating in the ASSET project.

All four schools/districts agreed to participate, providing that (1) CSLD aligned its efforts with the school/district needs and strategic plans, (2) CSLD refrain from assigning additional work to the school/district's teachers and administrators, (3) CSLD refrain from placing extraordinary data-collection demands on school/district personnel, and (4) CSLD align its efforts with other school improvement initiatives already in place.

CSLD personnel were then assigned to specific sites and, during April and May, site visits were made. Principals called special faculty meetings or School Improvement Team meetings at which CSLD representatives explained the anticipated benefits to be derived from the ASSET project, assured the school personnel that their additional obligations would be minimal, answered questions about the partnerships, and asked for cooperation.

To the delight and satisfaction of CSLD personnel, teachers and administrators in the ASSET schools - almost without exception and even when extra work was required of them - welcomed CSLD's efforts. Their good will is palpable and their desire to help the children in their schools close the achievement gap is extraordinary.