

**Report on Cooperative Efforts Between Secondary Schools and
Institutions of Higher Education: The North Carolina New
Schools Project**

**Submitted to the
Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee**

**by the
Education Cabinet**

January 15, 2004

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On the North Carolina New Schools Project**

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Adoption of the Innovative Education Initiatives Act in June 2003 demonstrated the state's commitment to authentic change in the structure and outcomes of secondary education. In part as a result of this legislation, in August 2003 the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announced an \$11 million grant to catalyze reform in North Carolina's high schools by establishing the New Schools Project (NSP). This prestigious award resulted from the state's successful track record to define strategies to overcome the failure of secondary education in the state to meet the needs of many students or to strengthen economic development in hard-pressed communities.

The need for this change is urgent. For example, according to the National Center for Education Statistics of 100 students enrolled in 9th grade in North Carolina, only 59 of them will graduate 4 years later. Of that 100, only 28 will enroll in higher education and remain there through their 2nd year. Our large comprehensive high schools fail the majority of students and teachers as well.

Building upon the Innovative Education Initiatives Act and the Governor's Education First Task Force, the NSP is charged with two over-arching goals: First, create a series of model small high schools that will demonstrate improved results with students and with supporting economic development in high needs areas; and second, seek consensus with policy makers and others for policy changes required to foster change and innovation in all of the state's high schools.

The NSP will take an entrepreneurial approach to redesigning high schools through two strategies: First, creating up to 45 new small, personalized schools that will be models for mission-driven schools of choice; and second, engaging business, higher education, the public schools and elected officials in shaping a consensus for action to redesign all North Carolina high schools. This ambitious agenda will be realized through the collaboration of many stakeholders, public and private.

The NSP model schools, High School Innovation Projects, will ensure that students, teachers and parents are engaged in highly personalized approaches to education that also build upon the economic strengths of communities. For example, our first round of High School Innovation Projects will create seven health sciences academies that will enroll up to four hundred students each in highly focused and academically rigorous programs designed to prepare all students for college and work. The health sciences focus will provide curriculum that explores not only the scientific aspects of medically related industries but also the business and community development components as well.

The High School Innovation Projects will serve as models for small schools that will provide greater choice for families and teachers. The NSP will work with school districts, in partnership with community colleges, public and private colleges and universities, nonprofit and business partners, to create new schools. The NSP will focus on innovative schools, especially in rural areas; science, math, and technology-focused schools; Early College schools; and other models that offer accelerated learning and tie

education to workplace knowledge and skills. The NSP is overseen by the North Carolina Education Cabinet and is managed by the Public School Forum, a business-education nonprofit.

Goals:

The overall goals and objectives for the New Schools Project emerged from recommendations by the Governor's Education First Task Force, many of which were also included in the Innovative Education Initiatives Act.

- **Provide New Options.** Create 40-45 new high school models across the state that provides choices beyond the one-size-fits all comprehensive high school. These schools will serve as demonstration sites for new approaches to instruction, school organization and community and parental involvement.
- **Boost High School Graduation Rate.** Achieve four-year graduation rates of 75% for students in NSP schools. The current state average is 59%.
- **Cut Remediation Rates.** Decrease math remediation rates for participating students to 25% in the community college system (currently 38%).
- **Increase College-going Rates.** Achieve college-going rates for participating students of 75%. The current rate is 65% (for two and four-year institutions).
- **Ensure all participating students graduate “work-ready” and “college-ready.”**
- **Build Momentum to Sustain and Expand NSP.** The NSP will advocate for implementing this approach in districts across the state beyond the term of the Gates grant by securing support from state and local policymakers and public and private partners. In addition, the NSP will engage key policymakers to tackle policy issues that will remove barriers and provide incentives for innovation and increased cooperation.

Early Activities:

Attached to this report is a timeline which details the activities of the NSP to date. A priority in the early stages is involving key stakeholders in shaping a strategic plan which builds upon the expectations and experiences of leaders representing all sectors: higher education, public schools, business, parents, teachers, advocacy groups and others. In November 2003 the NSP launched a series of roundtable sessions to secure written recommendations for the development of its strategic plan. To date, public schools superintendents, senior leaders in the Department of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education have met to issue recommendations. Future sessions will include business and economic development leaders, teachers, parents, students, representatives of higher education and others. Results from these input sessions will define future strategies to shape collaboration and a shared commitment to plans for change in the state's high schools.

High School Innovation Projects: The top priority for the NSP is awarding planning grants to a small group of school districts to establish High School Innovation Projects. These districts will serve as the pilots to enable the NSP to refine its structure and procedures to assist Project Teams in addressing issues that are central to the success of

new schools: governance, curriculum, instructional strategies, private sector and community partnerships and many others. Each district selected as a partner in the development of the High School Innovation Projects will benefit from: 1) grants for planning ranging from \$15,000 to \$40,000; 2) assignment of a highly trained coach to serve as an expert facilitator and mentor; 3) enrollment in Learning Networks to share best practices and challenges across the sites; and 4) exposure to highly successful small model schools across the country.

Soon the NSP will launch the second phase of High School Innovation Projects, the creation of small schools that blend relationships between community colleges and universities and the public schools. These Middle/Early college models will increase graduation rates while also improving the college-going rate of students. Students at all points on the learning spectrum will achieve at higher levels in these schools as teaching and learning will be tailored to the individual needs of each student.

Future High School Innovation Projects will include small schools that focus on biotechnology, entrepreneurship, travel and tourism and other unique models. Creative ideas will be solicited from all 100 North Carolina counties and the most promising will be provided with planning grants to transform raw concepts into viable and sustainable model high schools. Special emphasis will be placed on those communities that may lack the resources to succeed without the investment of expertise and funds available through the NSP.

A brief overview of activities in support of the High School Innovation Projects includes:

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| January 2004 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Identify up to seven districts to establish health sciences academies;● Award planning grants;● Secure, train and assign coaches to assist Project teams. |
| February 2004 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Conduct site visits to successful model small schools with representatives of High School Innovation Projects;● Establish Health Sciences Learning Network with NC Center for Science, Mathematics and Technology Education Center. |
| March 2004 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Host, in cooperation with DPI, the Community College and Independent Colleges and University Systems, a statewide conference on Early/Middle College programs;● Issue white paper about challenges and opportunities associated with Early/Middle College programs● Issue a Request for Proposals for districts seeking to establish Early/Middle College programs. |

Challenges:

The Gates Foundation grant offers both an opportunity and a challenge. Leadership by the governor and our state's successful track record in producing measurable gains in student achievement positioned North Carolina well to secure this prestigious grant. North Carolina must, however, secure an additional \$10 million from public and private sources if it is to receive an additional \$10 million grant from the Gates Foundation. This additional grant will determine how many communities can be supported with the establishment of High School Innovation Projects and how extensive the NSP can address the formation of stronger ties between the public schools and higher education.

Additional challenges include the identification of specific policy changes required to strengthen ties between the public schools and higher education in the formation of early/middle College models and to lend greater flexibility to the creation of small, self-governing schools that can more flexibly meet the needs of students and communities.



Historical Timetable

As of January, 2004

	<p>Governor Easley's Blue Ribbon Task Force issues recommendations to ensure that every student entering North Carolina schools graduate prepared for work and college.</p>
Spring 2003	<p>North Carolina Education Cabinet forms a team to develop a proposal for consideration by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to establish the New Schools Project.</p>
June 18, 2003	<p>Innovative Education Initiatives (High School Innovation) Act ratified by the General Assembly to provide a catalyst for high school innovation and to address key measures of progress (graduation rates, achievement gaps, etc.) and to expedite models to blend offerings between the public schools and higher education.</p>
August 12, 2003	<p>North Carolina Education Cabinet meets to consider the establishment of the New Schools Project and to address policy issues surrounding the creation of Middle and Early College models to integrate and align offerings among public schools and colleges/universities.</p>
July 23, 2003	<p>Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announce \$11 million North Carolina grant to reform the state's high schools (New Schools Project). Public School Forum identified to manage the initiative in cooperation with the Education Cabinet.</p>
September 12, 2003	<p>Governor Easley, NC Education Cabinet and Public School Forum announce selection of project Executive Director.</p>
October 16, 2003	<p>Briefing hosted in cooperation with Department of Public Instruction for superintendents to review preliminary goals and timetable for the New Schools Project.</p>
October 17, 2003	<p>Invitational Request for Proposals (RFPs) for planning grants issued to nine districts considered to be advanced in their preparations to establish Health Sciences Academies.</p>
November 3, 2003	<p>New Schools Project (NSP) offices open and strategic and business planning begin.</p>
December 8, 2003	<p>Senior staff at the Department of Public Instruction participate</p>

in roundtable discussions intended to guide the development of the NSP.

December 10, 2003 Superintendents and the NC Association of School Administrators participate in roundtable discussions intended to guide the development of the NSP.

December 11, 2003 NSP Board of Advisors conducts organizational meeting to:
1) refine its strategic and business plan; 2) consider launching a statewide engagement strategy to seek consensus for change in the state's high schools and plans to implement new small high schools; 3) identify key partners and collaborators from all sectors to assist with plans and implementation; and 4) address strategies to seek \$10 million to match Gates grant.

January 7, 2004 State Board of Education and key advisors participate in roundtable discussions intended to guide the development of the NSP.

January 23, 2004 Planning grants awarded to the first cohort of New Schools projects for the establishment of Health Sciences Academies. Each site is: 1) assigned a highly trained coach to assist with planning, professional development and brokering partnerships; 2) enrolled in a Health Sciences Academy Network facilitated by the NC Science, Mathematics, and Technology Education Center in cooperation with the Department of Public Instruction and the NSP.