

**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
North Carolina Education Cabinet**

January 14, 2005

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**Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee
On the North Carolina New Schools Project**

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INTRODUCTION

Governor Mike Easley and the North Carolina Education Cabinet established the NC New Schools Project (NSP) in August 2003 with an \$11 million challenge grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The NSP was launched to create smaller high schools with deeper connections to college and the workforce in order to increase the high school graduation and college-going rates and ensure students are graduating from high schools ready for college and ready for work. The NSP, with the support of the Governor and Education Cabinet, aims to create over 100 new high schools.

In order to meet these goals, the NSP has focused on two major efforts:

1. Establish redesigned high schools across the state that will serve as demonstration sites for meaningful and sustainable change. These schools will be expected to achieve measurable improvement in student achievement and student preparation for college and work, as well as parent/teacher satisfaction. By summer 2005, over 50 new schools will be either in the planning or implementation stages.
2. Advocate for a consensus approach to high school reform.

This report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee provides detail on the NSP's work on each of these efforts. The report also provides a timeline of activities from 2004 and a historical timeline starting in the spring of 2003.

CREATING NEW SCHOOLS: HIGH SCHOOL INNOVATION PROJECTS

Below is a summary of steps that the NSP has taken to establish new schools:

Cohort I: Health Themed High Schools

- Eight (8) sites selected for planning grants in February 2004, including Asheville, Durham, Cumberland, Durham, Granville, Newton-Conover, Scotland and Wake Counties;
- Pitt County has been awarded a grant to provide training for other counties in the development of health focused curriculum;
- Each site is expected to design small, autonomous and academically rigorous schools using health sciences as a theme to focus the core curriculum and to add relevance to learning;

- Each site received tools for high school redesign and participated in three separate retreats and conferences to assist their planning;
- Each site was awarded a coach to assist with planning and problem solving;
- Request for proposals for implementation grants will be released in December 2004;
- Implementation grants of up to \$1,000 per student will be awarded in early 2005 based on a three-year projection of total student enrollment;
- Each site is given the option for whole school conversion, that is “converting” a comprehensive high school into a series of small, autonomous schools that operate on the same campus; and
- A rolling deadline for response to the Request for Proposals for implementation grants will enable each community to move at their own pace.

Cohort II: Learn & Earn (Early/Middle College High Schools)

- Governor Easley worked with the General Assembly to secure \$2.2 million in recurring funding to establish Learn and Earn high schools in the 2004 legislative session.
- Five (5) Learn and Earn implementation sites selected to accelerate the development of existing early/middle college programs including Buncombe, Catawba, Newton-Conover, Hickory, Alexander, Guilford, Durham and Nash-Rocky Mount.
- Ten (10) planning sites were selected to design new early/middle college high schools including Anson, Chatham, Iredell-Statesville, Cumberland, Davidson, Edgecombe, Robeson, Rutherford, Sampson and New Hanover;
- All 15 sites participated in fall conference and training with national experts and each provided with tools for planning and data analyses;
- Coaches assigned to assist with planning and goal setting; and
- New NC Consortium for Early College that was launched September 2004 will provide networking and professional development for current and future Learn and Earn early college schools.

Cohort III: Northeastern North Carolina

- Request for Proposals (RFP) issued during a conference August 31-September 1 hosted at Elizabeth City State University in cooperation with the State Board of Education;
- RFP targeted 16 counties and 17 districts in the northeast including Beaufort, Bertie, Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Halifax, Weldon City, Hertford, Hyde, Martin, Northampton, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Tyrrell and Washington;
- RFP included options for both Gates supported “replication” schools and unique local designs;
- Additional technical assistance seminar hosted September 30th in Washington County;

- NSP is leading the development of Information Technology (IT) themed schools based on New Tech High in Napa Valley with the first such school planned for the northeast;
- Up to 10 proposals are expected in the northeast; and
- Golden Leaf Foundation awarded \$100,000 to the NSP to expand support for high school innovation and economic development in the northeast.

Cohort IV: General Innovation Statewide

- Request for Proposals was issued December 2, 2004;
- NSP staff continue to meet with district staff and school administrators to consider local needs and options;
- More than 50 districts have been visited to date and all 115 districts are contacted on a regular bases with invitations to meetings and seminars;
- Bidders conference will be hosted in January to review the details of the RFP;
- Planning grant awards will be announced by late April;
- NSP convening partners to create a network of international high schools, including the Asia Society, Center for International Understanding and Research Triangle Institute.

Cohort V: Learn and Earn (Early/Middle College High Schools)

- RFP for planning grants will be released by April 2005
- Up to fifteen (15) new early college planning sites are expected;
- Ten (10) current planning sites will be invited to submit proposals for implementation by April 2005

Plans for future cohorts of RFPs for high school innovation will be determined by summer 2005. The final number of schools supported by the NSP will be determined by the availability of additional funds provided by the NC General Assembly, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other supporters.

Cohort	Schools	
I. January 2004	Health themed high schools	9
II. August 2004	Learn and Earn (early/middle college high schools)	15
III. August 2004	Northeastern NC (16 counties including 17 school districts)	10
IV. February 2005	Statewide general innovation	15
V. April 2005	Learn and Earn (early/middle college high schools)	15
Estimated total*		64

Number of new schools projected in either planning or implementation stages by summer 2005

CREATING CONSENSUS FOR HIGH SCHOOL REFORM

In August the State Board of Education, at the request of NC Department of Public Instruction and the New Schools Project, endorsed the development of the first-ever statewide plan for high school reform. The NC Action Plan for High School Innovation was released at two statewide meetings on December 2, 2004 in Raleigh and on December 3, 2004 in Charlotte. Ninety-seven of 115 school districts participated in the release of the Action Plan.

The Plan includes: 1) a workbook for use in understanding the urgency for change and short- and long-term strategies to advance reform; and 2) A DVD/video of policy makers and students addressing the need for change and specific recommendations for action. Wachovia, Cisco Systems, Duke Power, Nortel Networks and GlaxoSmithKline have each made significant contributions to off set the cost of producing 75,000 workbooks and 10,000 DVDs for the effort.

The Action Plan issues a call for every community to convene teams to address conditions in their current high schools and to create a local plan for change including the development of small, autonomous and academically rigorous schools. Over the next six months the Plan will be presented to County Commissioners, Boards of Education, Chambers of Commerce, parents, teachers and others.

2004 TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES

What follows is a summary of significant activities related to the implementation of the grant between January and December 2004.

January	<p>Governor Easley, the State Board of Education and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) join the New Schools Project (NSP) to announce first eight High School Innovation Projects: four rural and four urban/suburban, health and life science themed high schools.</p> <p>Coaches are screened and trained as expert facilitators to assist High School Innovation Project teams.</p> <p>School change frameworks and manuals created and presented to first High School Innovation Project teams and their superintendents.</p>
February	<p>Input session hosted with NC Community College presidents and system administrators to guide NSP program of work and priorities.</p> <p>Representatives of DPI and Scotland, Asheville, Cumberland, Wake, Newton-Conover and Durham counties visit three successful small schools in New York.</p> <p>DPI works with NSP to form leadership team for statewide high school redesign.</p> <p>NSP presents overview of work to Joint Education Oversight Committee, NC General Assembly.</p>
March	<p>DPI, Community College System and NSP host College Tech Prep Conference.</p> <p>NSP releases first RFP for early/middle college high schools at www.NewSchoolsProject.org on March 17, 2004.</p> <p>DPI leadership team for high school redesign and NSP co-hosts the first of a series of retreats to review research and best practices.</p> <p>DPI leadership team participates in session to identify major barriers to high school reform.</p> <p>NC Education Research Council, at the request of the NSP, and the federal southeastern lab (SERVE) begins gathering reports on 1) policy barriers to the development of early and middle college high schools; and 2) teacher effectiveness in small learning communities.</p>
April	<p>SERVE secures part-time researcher to assist NSP and DPI with high school redesign issues.</p> <p>NSP Board of Advisors gathers for spring retreat to refine strategic and operating plans.</p> <p>University of North Carolina system administrators hosts a study session with</p>

	<p>NSP to identify action steps and partnership parameters to establish early college high schools.</p> <p>NSP hosts training session about early/middle college high schools for those interested in submitting proposals, April 16, Guilford County Schools.</p> <p>Representatives from State Board of Education, the University System and DPI visit successful small high schools in New York.</p> <p>Deadline for proposals to establish early/middle college high schools, April 30.</p>
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May	<p>Second cohort of NSP High School Innovation Project Team coaches begins training.</p> <p>Independent team scores/rates proposals to be selected for early/middle college high schools.</p> <p>Board of Advisors meets to refine strategic and operating plan for 2004-05.</p>
June	<p>Researchers from DPI, SERVE and NC Education Research Council meet to determine research priorities, June 1.</p> <p>NSP (in cooperation with DPI, the UNC Center for School Leadership and the NCSMTEC) hosts summer institute for first nine High School Innovation Project teams, June 15-17.</p> <p>Planning grants selected for the creation of early/middle college high schools.</p> <p>Convened the first full meeting of the New Schools Project Research Committee to review research requirements associated with the effort including issues that need further study. Issues to study included: autonomy and school effectiveness; lessons learned from the failure of school reform; and high school innovation in rural communities. Committee members agreed to revise the data and reporting framework being used by the New Schools Project with each site to focus on rigor, relevance and relationships.</p> <p>Participated in a series of meetings with Governor Mike Easley's staff, leaders from the NC Department of Public Instruction, representatives of the State Board of Education and the NC Community College and University systems regarding the creation of a new initiative to accelerate the development of early college high schools in the state, the "Learn and Earn" program.</p> <p>Hosted training for all coaches on strategies and parameters in the development of new small, rigorous high schools and on the creation of high quality early college high schools. Reviewed the parameters of the "Learn and Earn" program and design principles of early/middle college.</p> <p>Presented to the Board of Directors of the NC School Boards Association to define the need for change in the state's high schools and the promise of small, focused and flexible high schools.</p> <p>Reviewed coaches reports on each of the 8 health science themed high schools and shared barriers encountered in the planning phase.</p> <p>Hosted Summer Leadership Institute for High School Innovation Project planning teams from eight health science themed schools in cooperation with:</p>

	<p>NC Science, Mathematics Technology Education Center; University of North Carolina Center for School Leadership; NC Department of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education.</p> <p>Assisted with advocating for policy changes that were adopted during the current session of the NC General Assembly to waive minimum age requirements for early college students to enroll in college courses.</p> <p>Assisted NC State Board of Education in adoption of policy change related to address minimum seat time requirements for postsecondary courses.</p>
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July	<p>Finalized details of the “Learn and Earn” initiative, conducted interviews via telephone and site visits. Intervened in local partnerships to strengthen the commitment to early/middle college and to allay fears about the requirements of “Learn and Earn”.</p> <p>Hosted meeting with NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Community College System, University of NC System for the 5 “acceleration” Learn and Earn sites to review requirements and additional staff provided to assist with the conversion to a 9-12/13 high school that serves a diverse student population on a college campus.</p> <p>Issued letters of notification to 15 new “Learn and Earn” early college high school sites: 5 for acceleration from middle college to early college and 10 for a planning year to either create new early college or to transition from middle to early college using design principles prepared by the National Middle College Consortium.</p> <p>Began development of the NC Consortium for Early College High Schools in cooperation with NC Department of Public Instruction and others.</p> <p>Secured professional staff to lead the NC Consortium for Early College High Schools.</p>
August	<p>Provided a recommendation to the State Board of Education that was officially adopted during their August meeting to endorse a new statewide action plan on high school innovation. Convened public and private partners (mostly members of the NSP Board of Advisors) to craft an action plan and associated toolkit (DVD) that will be launched statewide on December 2-3, 2004.</p> <p>Hosted, in cooperation with the State Board of Education and more than a dozen partners, a conference on high school reform for 17 counties in northeast NC. The Conference, titled “Project R3”, focused on replication schools being supported by the Gates Foundation and provided the setting in which to issue a special Request for Proposals for planning grants limited to these 17 counties. The counties were targeted for this RFP due to pervasive poverty and the poor results being realized by their public schools.</p> <p>Hosted the regular quarterly meeting of the New Schools Project Board of Advisors at the IBM decision support center in Research Triangle Park. During the session, Advisors worked at computer terminals to identify content and communications strategies for the NC Action Plan on High School Innovation. Students and teachers from early college high schools also participated in a panel presentation.</p> <p>Began exploration with Office of Finance and Budgeting in the NC Department of Public Instruction procedural and policy barriers to the creation of small</p>

	<p>(fewer than 400 students) high schools and the assignment of new school numbers to conversion sites.</p> <p>Facilitated a retreat for 40 staff members of the NC Department of Public Instruction in Mid Pines NC to: study a series of model small high schools across the country; identify support required of these schools in NC; and to recommend the content of the NC Action Plan for High School Innovation.</p>
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September	<p>Hosted first-ever statewide early college high school conference.</p> <p>Governor Mike Easley launched the Learn and Earn program and announced the initial 15 sites supported to create early college high schools: Acceleration Sites:</p> <p>Buncombe County Middle College (Buncombe County Schools, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College), Catawba Valley MagnIT (Catawba County Schools, Newton-Conover Schools, Hickory City Schools, Alexander County Schools, Catawba Valley Community College),</p> <p>Entertainment and Technology Early/Middle College at GTCC (Guilford County Schools, Guilford Technical Community College) Josephine Dobbs Clement Early College High School (Durham Public Schools, North Carolina Central University), Nash-Rocky Mount Middle College High School (Nash-Rocky Mount Schools, Nash Community College), Anson County Early College High School (Anson County Schools, South Piedmont Community College), Chatham Middle College (Chatham County Schools, Central Carolina Community College), Collaborative College for Technology and Leadership (Iredell-Statesville Schools, Mooresville Graded School District, Mitchell Community College), Cumberland County Middle College (Cumberland County Schools, Fayetteville State University), Davidson County Middle College (Davidson County Schools, Lexington City Schools, Thomasville City Schools, Davidson Community College), Edgecombe County Early/Middle College High School (Edgecombe County Public Schools, Edgecombe Community College), Robeson County Early College High School (Robeson County Schools, Robeson Community College, University of North Carolina Pembroke), Rutherford Career Academy (Rutherford County Schools, Isothermal Community College), Sampson County Early College High School (Sampson County Schools, Clinton City Schools, Sampson Community College), and New Hanover County Early College High School (New Hanover County Schools, University of North Carolina Wilmington).</p>
October	<p>Established extensive data collection process to create benchmark measures for performance by new schools being supported through both the Gates Foundation and the Governor's Learn and Earn early college program.</p> <p>Assisted communities in collecting, organizing and reporting data.</p> <p>Hosted fall leadership retreat in Asheville for planning teams working to establish health-themed high schools in eight NC communities. Retreat hosted in cooperation with the University of Washington Small Schools Project.</p> <p>Hosted planning session with NC Department of Public Instruction about "conversion high schools" and the costs associated with breaking large, comprehensive high schools into small, autonomous and highly accountable new schools.</p>

	<p>Conducted training for coaches assigned to by the New Schools Project to assist high school redesign teams.</p> <p>Conducted orientation and training for representatives from 60 communities and school partnerships about high school redesign (Meet in the Middle Conference).</p> <p>Assisted budget staff representing the Governor, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Community Colleges and the UNC System to anticipate costs and policy barriers in the establishment of Learn and Earn early college high schools.</p> <p>Conducted school “redesign toolkit” training for 8 schools planning to develop health and life sciences themed schools.</p>
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November	<p>Project evaluators conducted school site visits.</p> <p>Facilitated planning sessions to launch a network of Information Technology-themed high schools in cooperation with business partners.</p> <p>Facilitated planning sessions in cooperation with the Asia Society to launch a network of International Studies High Schools</p> <p>Presented plans for high school redesign and innovation to the NC Education Cabinet to solicit K-12 higher education collaboration.</p> <p>Received and scored proposals from communities in northeastern NC seeking to conduct a planning year to redesign high schools.</p>
December	<p>Presented the urgency for school redesign to members of the NC General Assembly to the legislative retreat hosted by the Hunt Institute.</p> <p>Launched a statewide Action Plan for High School Innovation concurrently in Raleigh and Charlotte (workbook and companion video) in cooperation with key partners (State Board of Education, Department of Public Instruction, Public School Forum, etc.). 96 of 115 LEAs participated.</p> <p>Released implementation RFP for health and life sciences themed high schools.</p> <p>Assisted leaders from NC Department of Public Instruction to identify policy and procedural barriers and disincentives to high school innovation.</p> <p>Negotiated partnership with Napa New Tech Foundation to establish six Information Technology-themed high schools in NC with long term plans to expand this network.</p> <p>Negotiated partnership with the Asia Society to establish five International Studies-themed high schools.</p> <p>Hosted initial work session with legal counsel from K-12 and higher education to form a “Memorandum of Understanding” template for the creation of Learn and Earn early college high schools.</p> <p>Hosted training session for superintendents in districts planning to establish health and life sciences themed high schools.</p> <p>Issued a statewide Request for Proposals for districts seeking to redesign high schools.</p>

2003 TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES

Spring 2003	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.
June 18, 2003	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.
July 23, 2003	Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announces \$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.
August 12, 2003	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.
September 12, 2003	Governor Easley, NC Education Cabinet and Public School Forum announce selection of project Executive Director.
October 16, 2003	Briefing hosted in cooperation with Department of Public Instruction for superintendents to review preliminary goals and timetable for the New Schools Project.
October 17, 2003	Invitational Request for Proposals (RFPs) for planning grants issued to nine districts considered to be advanced in their preparations to establish Health Sciences Academies.
November 3, 2003	New Schools Project (NSP) offices open and strategic and business planning begin.
December 8, 2003	Senior staff at the Department of Public Instruction participate 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.

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| 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. |

CONCLUSION

North Carolina has created a model approach to reforming high schools consistent with the intent of Senate Bill 656. The state has attracted private funding and appropriated public funding to address the need to better prepare high school graduates for college and a changing North Carolina economy. With this support, the New Schools Project is on target to create over 100 new, smaller, and successful high schools across the state.

The challenge of creating and supporting innovative high schools is not purely fiscal. Policy barriers exist that could hamper these efforts if unaddressed. The New Schools Project and Office of the Governor have been convening representatives from the state's K-12 and higher education communities to address these issues. In February, the Joint Education Governing Boards will make high school reform the topic of their annual meeting and the Education Cabinet will hear a preliminary report on suggested policy changes to remove barriers to creating and implementing innovative high school models. The Education Cabinet will in turn work with the Legislature and their constituent governing boards to take appropriate action to remove barriers to innovation and student success.

