



NORTH CAROLINA  
NEW SCHOOLS

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# **Report to the North Carolina General Assembly**

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**North Carolina's Rural Innovative High Schools:  
Investing in Innovation Report**  
Session Law 2014-100, section 8.27

## INVESTING IN INNOVATION GRANT

Session Law 2014-100, section 8.27

SECTION 8.25.(b) Section 8.25 of S.L. 2013-360 reads as rewritten:

SECTION 8.25.(b) The federal Investing in Innovation Fund Grant: Validating Early College Strategies for Traditional Comprehensive High Schools awarded to the North Carolina New Schools Project for 2012-2017 requires students to enroll in a community college course in the 10th grade. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, specified local school administrative units may offer one community college course to participating sophomore (10th grade) students. Participating local school administrative units are Alleghany, Beaufort, Bladen, Hertford, Jones, Madison, Martin, Richmond, Rutherford, Surry, Warren, and Yancey County Schools.

SECTION 8.25.(c) Grant funds shall be used to pay for all costs incurred by the local school administrative units and the community college partners to implement the grant, including community college FTE. Community colleges shall not earn budget FTE for student course enrollments supported with this grant.

SECTION 8.25.(d) Research for the project shall address the effects of early college strategies in preparing students for college completion. The North Carolina New Schools Project shall report on the implementation of the grant to the State Board of Education, State Board of Community Colleges, Office of the Governor, and the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee no later than March 15, 2014, and annually thereafter until the end of the grant period.

# **NORTH CAROLINA'S RURAL INNOVATIVE HIGH SCHOOLS**

## **YEAR 3 EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT**

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Disclaimer:

The opinions expressed in this report are reflective of the authors and do not represent the views or opinions of other individuals within the SERVE Center, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, or North Carolina New Schools.

## **Background Information about the SERVE Center**

The SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) is a university-based research, development, dissemination, evaluation, and technical assistance center. Its mission is to support and promote teaching and learning excellence in the K-12 education community.

Since its inception in 1990, SERVE has been awarded over \$200 million in contracts and grants. It has successfully managed 14 major awards including four consecutive contracts for the Regional Educational Laboratory for the Southeast (REL-SE) funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) at the US Department of Education (USED) and four awards from USED for the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE). In addition, past SERVE awards include a five-year Technology Grant for Coordinating Teaching and Learning in Migrant Communities, three consecutive contracts as the Eisenhower Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education for the Southeast, and two consecutive Regional Technology in Education Consortium grants.

At the national level, SERVE operates the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE), USED's technical assistance and information dissemination center in the area of homeless education. NCHE uses state-of-the-art technology for web communication and online professional development and for supporting state coordinators of homeless education, local program coordinators, educators, parents, and advocates in all 50 states and in 15,000 school districts.

In addition to national-level NCHE activities, SERVE currently conducts research studies and evaluations under grants and contracts with federal, state, and local education agencies. Examples of SERVE's grant-funded research work include two federally funded studies of the impact of early college high schools. Contract work includes evaluations of four Investing in Innovation (i3) projects, the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Magnet Program in North Carolina, the Guilford County Schools teacher incentive program (Mission Possible), the USED-funded Bridges to Early Learning Project in South Carolina, and North Carolina's Race to the Top Initiative.

# North Carolina's Rural Innovative High Schools: Year 3 Baseline External Evaluation Report

## **Executive Summary**

North Carolina's Rural Innovative High Schools project (previously known as NC iRIS) is designed to increase the number of students who graduate from high school and are prepared for enrollment and success in postsecondary education. The project seeks to blend high school and college by applying strategies from the successful early college high school model to a total of 18 traditional high schools located in rural, low-wealth districts.

The Rural Innovative High Schools project is managed by the North Carolina New Schools, which also supports the early college model. According to North Carolina New Schools, the critical components of the Rural Innovative High Schools project include a set of services that are intended to support implementation of a whole-school reform model emphasizing the creation of a college-preparatory school environment through six Design Principles. The program services, or Key Components, include 1.) an Integrated System of Support that includes professional development and coaching activities; 2.) Support for College Credit Courses, including funding for college courses, a college liaison, and assistance in developing postsecondary partnerships; and 3.) Activities to Influence the Context, including work with the districts and local communities. As a result of these services, each school is expected to implement six Design Principles that represent characteristics of an effective high school. These Design Principles, as articulated by North Carolina New Schools, are as follows: 1.) ensuring that students are ready for college; 2.) instilling powerful teaching and learning in schools; 3.) providing high student/staff personalization; 4.) redefining professionalism; 5.) creating leadership that develops a collective vision; and 6.) implementing a purposeful design in which school structures support all of the above principles. A primary emphasis of the program will be increasing the number of students who participate in college credit-bearing courses while in high school.

Implementation Evaluation: The project is on-track relative to all of its goals for implementation of the program's Key Components. Findings relative to implementation include:

- *Professional development.* In 2013-2014 school year, all but one of the Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools had participated in the targeted number of professional development activities. Staff generally valued the professional development activities, especially those that allowed them to see other, similar schools implementing strategies.
- *Instructional Coaching.* All Cohort 1 and 2 schools received the targeted number of instructional coaching days in 2013-2014. The work of the coaches was generally well received; staff were particularly appreciative of recent changes that focus the school-based professional development on fewer topics in more depth.
- *Leadership coaching.* All Cohort 1 and 2 schools received the targeted number of days in 2013-2014. Leadership coaches have changed their work to focus more on the impact plans.

- *Cohort 3 schools.* None of the Cohort 3 schools received the targeted amount of services in the spring of 2014; however, they were on track with all services in the fall of 2014.
- *Participants' Feedback on Coaching.* All groups interviewed expressed concerns over the level of turnover among the coaches and saw that as negatively affecting implementation in the schools. Teachers also expressed the desire for more explicit feedback from coaches.
- *New Schools' staff support.* New Schools' staff provided at least two days of on-site support to all but one of the Cohort 1 and 2 schools during the 2013-2014 school year. They have recently expanded their support to include coaching for the college liaisons and are exceeding their goals for the 2014-2015 school year.
- *Access to college courses.* All 11 districts have completed formal MoUs with at least one of their higher education partners. All schools have the services of a college liaison. According to school reports, 1,700 students were taking college courses in the fall of 2014, an estimated 15% of the total student population. Participation levels range from a low of 4.4% of their enrollment in a Cohort 3 school to a high of 37.7% in a Cohort 2 school.
- *Support for the context.* The community development coordinator is working in 10 out of the 11 districts (including all of the Cohort 1 and 2 schools), engaging stakeholders in efforts to support the i3 work. In the 2014-2015 school year, project staff have increased their emphasis on providing professional development opportunities to district staff. North Carolina New Schools has contracted with a retired educator to document implementation of the Rural Innovative High Schools project and communicate lessons learned to practitioners and policymakers.

The table below presents an overall assessment of the Fidelity of Implementation of the project. The shaded rows represent the overall assessment of the three primary Key Components: Integrated Systems of Support; Support for College Credit Courses; and Activities to Influence the Context. Those score are calculated from the individual indicators that appear under each Key Component in the non-shaded rows.

### Fidelity of Implementation Summary

Key Components	Definition of High Implementation	% of Schools with High Implementation	Definition of "With Fidelity" at the Program Level	Considered "With Fidelity" for 2013-2014 Year at Program Level
Integrated Systems of Support	Calculated based on 4 indicators (score of 4)	<b>83%</b> <sup>a</sup>	At least 80% of schools with full implementation (i.e., at least 80% schools have a score of 4)	<b>Yes</b>
Instructional Coaching	90% of the targeted # of days of coaching=1	<b>100%</b>	At least 80% of schools with full implementation	<b>Yes</b>
Professional Development	At least 18 days of participation=1	<b>92%</b>	At least 80% of schools with full implementation	<b>Yes</b>
Leadership coaching	90% of the targeted # of days of coaching=1	<b>100%</b>	At least 80% of schools with full implementation	<b>Yes</b>

Key Components	Definition of High Implementation	% of Schools with High Implementation	Definition of “With Fidelity” at the Program Level	Considered “With Fidelity” for 2013-2014 Year at Program Level
New Schools Staff Support	At least two days of on-site support=1	<b>92%</b>	At least 80% of schools with full implementation	<b>Yes</b>
Support for College Credit Courses	Calculated based on 3 indicators (score of 3)	<b>100%</b>	All schools at full implementation (i.e., all schools have score of 3)	<b>Yes</b>
Higher education partnership	MoU in place=1	<b>100%</b>	All schools at full implementation	<b>Yes</b>
Funding for college courses	Funding provided=1	<b>100%</b>	All schools at full implementation	<b>Yes</b>
College liaison	Liaison provided=1	<b>100%</b>	All schools at full implementation	<b>Yes</b>
Activities to Influence Context	Calculated based on 3 indicators (score of 3)	<b>86%</b>	At least 80% of districts at full implementation (i.e., at least 80% of districts have a score of 3)	<b>Yes</b>
Community Development	Community development work provided=1	<b>100%</b>	At least 80% of districts at full implementation	<b>Yes</b>
District professional development	At least one day provided=1	<b>86%</b>	At least 80% of districts at full implementation	<b>Yes</b>
Dissemination to policy makers	Results disseminated =1	<b>On-track</b>	State-wide dissemination work occurring	<b>Yes</b>

10 of the 12 schools had scores of 4. Two schools had scores of 3 (one school did not participate in the targeted number of professional development days and a different school did not received the targeted number of on-site staff support days).

**Results:**

- Very early outcome data from the first year of Cohort 1 schools show treatment schools with higher percentages of students taking college credit-bearing courses by the end of 11<sup>th</sup> grade compared to the control schools (20% vs. 12%). There were no significant differences on other outcomes, such as attendance, dropout rates, or graduation rates.
- Schools are increasing their college-going culture, a finding supported by survey analyses comparing Cohort 1 schools and control schools at the end of Year 2. This was also seen in the site visits. For example, one liaison said, “I’ve learned that students can take college classes...If you put that out there, if you help them be successful, if you support them – that you can bring the college going mentality to any student and it doesn't just have to be your top 5% - 10% of the class.”
- There are higher levels of professional learning and collaboration in treatment schools than in control schools according to the survey. More staff in treatment schools reported a common vision than in control schools.
- Survey results showed little difference between treatment and comparison schools in reported instructional practices or in level of academic/affective supports.



- Site visits suggested that some teachers are making changes in their instruction but that these changes may not necessarily be that widespread.
- School staff reported that the partnerships between their schools and the postsecondary partners have improved as a result of the grant.
- School staff reported that the college liaison plays a key role in implementation at the school level.

### Lessons Learned, Conclusions and Recommendations

Results from the evaluation show that the Rural Innovative Schools project is making progress toward creating schools with a much stronger college-oriented culture. Data from the site visits, surveys, and from the outcome analyses provide evidence that schools are changing the level of expectations around college-going. They are providing more students with access to college courses. Students reported that they perceived changes in school culture relative to the emphasis on college.

School and project staff reported several lessons learned from the program. These included:

- *Challenges starting mid-year.* There were challenges in starting the Cohort 3 schools mid-year. The program staff now believe that only planning work should occur mid-year and services should begin in the summer between school years.
- *The critical role of the liaisons and counselors.* School staff, particularly the leadership, generally reported relying on the college liaisons to assist them in implementing the program in their school. Program staff also recognized that increased attention needed to be given to the counselors.
- *Need to reduce turnover among coaches.* There was significant turnover in instructional and leadership coaches in the past two years, which most individuals interviewed believed had a negative effect on implementation.
- *Leadership matters, both at the school and district levels.* Project staff recognized that they needed to pay increased attention to district leadership. School leadership was also seen as vital to project implementation.
- *The need to focus coaching efforts.* Coaches and staff reported that the coaching had become more effective as it had become more focused on either the impact plan or on fewer instructional strategies.
- *The need to focus on sustainability.* Program and school staff recognized that the grant will be ending in two years and they are seeking approaches to continue the project after the federal funding ends.

Recommendations for project staff to consider in moving forward include:

- Making it a priority to minimize turnover among coaching staff as much as possible. In situations where turnover cannot be avoided, there should be a clear transition plan in place so that new coaches understand the work that has been accomplished to date and can appropriately build upon it.
- Reconceptualizing the instructional coaches' role to allow them to provide explicit feedback and suggestions to teachers if requested.
- Considering ways to have leadership and instructional coaches coordinate their work with each other.
- Supporting the use of qualified high school staff as adjunct college instructors.
- Supporting the development of sustainability plans.