NORTH CAROLINA
State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction

Report to the North Carolina General Assembly

Schools that Lead Pilot Program (Impact of Program)
Section 7.25.(c)

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION MISSION
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NC DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
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INTRODUCTION

Session Law 2021-180, Section 7.11(c), requires the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to submit to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee and the Fiscal Research Division an annual report on the impacts of the Schools That Lead program beginning October 1, 2023, and continuing each year thereafter until October 1, 2027. The program was piloted from 2018 through 2022,and then awarded an additional round of funding to support a third cohort of schools and educators through the 2026-2027 school year.

The program focuses on providing professional development to teachers and principals in up to 75 schools, beginning with the 2022-2023 school year and ending in the 2026-2027school year. The selected schools shall be charter schools or schools under the authority of a local school administrative unit. The professional development uses an Improvement Science framework within a Networked Improvement Community model to test the efficacy of small–scale changes which can then be rapidly scaled with the improvement communities. Improvement strategies are data-driven and tailored due to the use of "watch lists" and fall within one of three Early Warning Indicator categories: absences, behavior, and course performance. The PD services shall be offered to teachers and principals in kindergarten through grade 12. The North Carolina Superintendent of Public Instruction, in consultation with Schools That Lead, Inc., shall determine which schools are eligible to participate in the program.

At a minimum, the program shall offer services to three cohorts of schools, as follows:
1) high schools working to increase on-time graduation rates;
2) middle schools working to prepare students to succeed in high school by reducing the likelihood of retention in the ninth grade for multiple school years; and
3) elementary schools working to reduce the number of students with early warning indicators of course failures, absences, and discipline.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction contracted with the Education Policy Initiative at Carolina (EPIC) to conduct an external evaluation that measures the impacts of the Program on student outcomes. EPIC's evaluation objective is to measure the impacts of the Program on student outcomes, including, but not limited to, (i) on-time graduation in high school, (ii) ninth grade retention rates, and (iii) course failures, absences, and discipline in elementary school. EPIC shall report its interim findings to the Department no later than June 30th starting in 2023 and shall submit a final report no later than June 30, 2027.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction collected and analyzed internal data most relevant to requirements in Session Law 2021-180, Section 7.11 (c): an accounting of expenditures, school performance data, principal performance data, teacher performance data, and student outcome data, beginning October 1, 2023. The independent evaluation team also calculated and reported on some of these metrics. These were added under evaluation reporting, beginning on page 6.

This report analyzes program outcomes from three sources: internal data from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, information submitted from Schools that Lead,

Inc, and an external evaluation conducted by the Education Policy Initiative at Carolina (EPIC).

PROGRAM EXPENDITURES

STATE FUNDING

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction distributes $350,000 quarterly to Schools that Lead. Funds are withheld to cover the evaluation process that is outlined in Session Law 2021-180, Section 7.11. A net amount of $316,666.67 is distributed on a quarterly basis. Table 1 shows an accounting of expenditures beginning with the 2023-2024 school year as reported by Schools that Lead, Inc.

TABLE 1

	Salary	Health Insurance	Payroll Taxes	Travel/Lodging Staff	Total
2021-22	240,000	42,000	21,115	13,552	$316,667
2022-23	240,000	65,000	11,667		$316,667
2023-24	240,000	65,000	11,667		$316,667
2024-25*					

*to reflect expenditures for the fiscal year

ESSER FUNDING

Session Law 2021-180, section 7.27 (a)(19) distributes $970,000 to contract with Schools That Lead, Inc., to develop or purchase a statewide, online platform that allows teachers to (i) share student performance improvement methods across the State in response to learning loss resulting from the COVID-19 Pandemic and (ii) support the Schools That Lead Program set forth in Section 7.11 of this act. ESSER III payments totaled $805,479.30, with the funds encumbered by September 30, 2024, and liquidated by January 2025.

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

In 2023-24, there were 6 schools enrolled in Cohorts 3 and 4 of the Schools that Lead Networked Improvement Communities. Each school has an Improvement Team, comprised of a principal and 2-3 teacher leaders, one of whom serves as the Implementation Facilitator. As schools set goals for this school year to reflect the percentage by which they plan to reduce the number of students on their watch lists. The schools progress toward these goals will be available by June 30, 2024. It is noted that one school (Scotts Elementary School) experienced principal turnover with their assistant principal being named as principal. This may impact their goal attainment.

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS				
COHORTS 3 & 4				
School Name	School Code	Grade Span	Type of School	City/County
Foothills Community School	590393	6-8	Traditional	McDowell County Schools
McDowell Early College	590328	9-13	Traditional	McDowell County Schools
McDowell Academy for Innovation	590326	9-13	Traditional	McDowell County Schools
West Marion Elementary School	590352	PK-5	Traditional	McDowell County Schools
South Newton Elementary	182324	PK-5	Traditional	Newton Conover City Schools
East Garner Middle	920404	6-8	Traditional	Wake County Public School System

ONLINE PLATFORM

The data platform, The Accelerator, has been built, tested, approved, and the funds to pay the provider for use of it received (October 10, 2023). The platform has been presented to the schools in Cohort 3 and 4 of Schools That Lead Networked Improvement Communities, which constitutes approximately 40 users.

PLATFORM UTILIZATION

An analysis of usage from October to November 2023 shows that there were 63 users with a total of 1,380 views. Each user had an average of 7.92 views with a total average engagement time of 8 minutes and 23 seconds. The analysis shows the platform was accessed by users outside of the network, approximately 20 users. Preliminary engagement with the platform is promising. The five most popular improvement ideas accessed by users were:

- Sharing the Watch List School Wide and Inviting Staff to Adopt Students
- Positive Phone Calls Home
- Creating an Attendance Success Plan
- Reframing Attendance Letters
- Biweekly Student Communications

PROGRAM OUTPUTS

The program focuses on high schools working to increase on-time graduation, middle schools working to prepare students to succeed in high school by reducing the likelihood of retention in the ninth grade for multiple school years, and elementary schools working to reduce the number of students with early warning indicators of course failures, absences, and discipline. This report analyzes program outcomes based on data available in consultation with Schools That Lead, Inc. beginning October 1, 2023, and continuing each year thereafter until October 1, 2027, when a summary and copy of the final report provided by the independent research organization, prepared by the Education Policy Initiative at Carolina (EPIC). The following tables compare program outputs and evaluation outcomes between baseline and year one.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE GRADES

Since 2013-14, student performance data have been used to assign letter grades to North Carolina public schools as required by North Carolina General Statute 115C-83.15. The grades are based on each school's achievement score (weight of 80%) as well as students' academic growth (weight of 20%). The total school performance score is converted to a 100-point scale and then used to determine a school performance grade of A, B, C, D or F. The final grade is based on a 15-point scale: A: 85-100 B: 70-84 C: 55-69 D: 40-54 F: Less than 40. The indicators for elementary and middle schools differ from the indicators for high schools as presented in the chart and explanation below:

Elementary/Middle School Indicators			High School Indicators	
			ASSESSMENTS	**OTHER MEASURES**
· 3rd Grade Reading	· 3rd Grade Math	· 5th Grade Science	· NC Math 1/Math 3	· 4-year Graduation Rates
· 4th Grade Reading	· 4th Grade Math	· 8th Grade Science	· English II	· Successful completion of high-level
· 5th Grade Reading	· 5th Grade Math	· NC Math 1	· Biology	math courses
· 6th Grade Reading	· 6th Grade Math	· Growth	· The ACT	· Growth (NC Math 1/NC Math 3 and English II)
· 7th Grade Reading	· 7th Grade Math	· English Learner	· ACT WorkKeys	· English Learner Progress
· 8th Grade Reading	· 8th Grade Math	Progress		

SCHOOLS THAT LEAD (STL) PROGRAM OUTCOMES: INDEPENDENT IMPACT EVALUATION

I. CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

- Administrative data reflected the substantial improvements reported by case study schools who focused their improvement testing on reducing absences
- Between 2021-2022 and 2023-2024:
    - Absenteeism rates for the case study elementary school was reduced by half, from 29% to 14%
    - Absenteeism rates for the case study middle school was reduced by a third from 29% to 20%.
    - Another elementary school saw absenteeism decrease almost in half from 53% to 28%.
- For the three remaining schools:
    - one maintained absenteeism rates below 5% across all three years
    - two had trends where absenteeism increased from 2022-23 to 2023-24. '
- An important consideration when interpreting these latter results is that, by design, the improvement science model requires schools to select a single area where they would like to pilot improvement ideas. It follows then, especially for non-academic metrics, that not all outcomes will be impacted for every school, or during the same point in time.

STL Cohort 3 School Chronic Absenteeism

	% Chronic Absenteeism 2021-22	% Chronic Absenteeism 2022-23	% Chronic Absenteeism 2023-24
West Marion Elementary School	53.1	32.5	28.8
East Garner Middle	23.5	18.1	28.0
Foothills Community School	29.1	21.6	20.9
South Newton Elementary	29.6	17.2	14.2
McDowell Early College	2.3	2.2	3.5
McDowell Academy of Innovation	10.4	3.6	11.0
State Average	31.7	26.5	25.0

II. SHORT-TERM SUSPENSIONS (STS)

- Short-term suspension data lacked any clear patterns
- This is consistent with findings from prior phases of the evaluation, likely reflecting that the STS measure is not sensitive to the types of changes in discipline or behavior being targeted by improvement efforts
- The evaluation team proposes collecting primary data through surveys, focus groups, and interviews before drawing any generalizable conclusions around impacts on discipline.

Cohort 3 Short-term Suspensions*

	Short-term Suspension Rates 2021-22	Short-term Suspension Rates 2022-23	Short-term Suspension Rates 2023-24
West Marion Elementary	2.84	0.00	84.47
East Garner Middle	229.93	287.05	242.42
Foothills Community School	11.17	42.33	62.18
South Newton Elementary	211.77	86.05	33.11
McDowell Early College	0.00	0.00	26.43
McDowell Academy of Innovation	77.67	9.01	24.00
State Average	146.57	164.57	162.34

Short-term suspension rates are per 1000 students

III. HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE

- The two high schools in NC NIC Cohort 3 had 2023-24 four-year graduation rates over 95%, which exceeds the statewide graduation rate of 87%.
- NCDPI stopped reporting precise statistics above 95% or below 5%, so we were only able to compare *change* in graduation rates for one of the two schools, which had at least double the state's graduation rate increase of 2.2%

Cohort 3 High School Graduation Rates

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
High Schools	**4-year Graduation Rate (%)**	**4-year Graduation Rate (%)**	**4-year Graduation Rate (%)**
McDowell Early College	98.5	>95*	>95

McDowell Academy of Innovation	89.4	>95	>95
NC Average Graduation Rate	**84.3**	**86.5**	**87.0**

*NCDPI is no longer reporting specific graduation rates above 95% or below 5%

IV. SCHOOL GROWTH STATUS

- Three of the six NC NIC Cohort 3 schools improved their growth status to either Met or Exceeded expectations.
- The single school that dropped in growth from Met to Not Met, was the same school whose school performance grade decreased from a B to a C.
- The other two schools that did not improve their growth status held constant at f Exceeded or Met expectations.
- It's worth noting that improvements in school growth status can have a compounded benefit of potentially increasing principal pay between \$10k - \$20K[2] depending on whether their school meets or exceeds growth.
- Given solid evidence base correlating educator pay with increased retention, those dividends could continue to accrue in the form of decreased rates of principal turnover and improved school climate
- While an experimental or quasi-experimental study would be needed to estimate causal impacts, this is a promising trajectory.

Cohort 3 School Growth Status

	School Growth Status 2022-23	**School Growth Status 2023-24**
West Marion Elementary School	Met	Not Met
East Garner Middle	Not Met	Met
Foothills Community School (MS)	Met	Not Met
South Newton Elementary	Not Met	Met
McDowell Early College (HS)	Exceeded	Exceeded
McDowell Academy of Innovation (HS)	Exceeded	Exceeded
State Average	Met	Met

V. STL COHORT 3 SCHOOL PERFORMANCE GRADES

- Three of the six NC NIC Cohort 3 schools have improved their School Performance Grades (SPG) since the 2021-22 school year
- Two schools remained static with performance grades of A and C

- One school's SPG dropped from a B to a C, though still staying out of low-performing school status.
- Encouragingly, the single school with a "D" grade has improved that from an "F" over the past two years.
- Perhaps most notably, two of the six schools no longer meet the SPG criteria to be labeled as a low-performing school

Cohort 3 School Performance Grades

	School Performance Grade 2022-23	School Performance Grade 2023-24
West Marion (HS)	C	C
East Garner Middle	F	D
Foothills Community School (MS)	B	C
South Newton Elementary	D	C
McDowell Early College (HS)	A	A
McDowell Academy of Innovation (HS)	A	A
State Average	C	C

VI. STL COHORT 3 STUDENT PROFICIENCY

- All but one of the six NC NIC Cohort 3 schools showed increased proficiency in at least one of the three tested subjects, including three schools that increased student proficiency across *all* three tested areas (Math, ELA, and Science).
- Of the five schools who showed improved proficiency, all but one school demonstrated greater increases than the state.
- Worth noting that increasing student proficiency may reap additional dividends as some teachers will get pay bonuses based on their students' performance in math and reading[1].
- The next phase of the evaluation will conduct a qualitative investigation of barriers, facilitators, and contextual factors to better understand why some schools do not see the same level of improvement as their peers

Cohort 3 Student proficiency

	% Proficient Math 2022-23	% Proficient Math 2023-24	% Proficient ELA 2022-23	% Proficient ELA 2023-24	% Proficient Science 2022-23	% Proficient Science 2023-24
West Marion	49.5	50.3	32.9	33.3	66.0	73.3
East Garner Middle	24.4	32.0	29.3	31.5	58.7	52.5

Foothills Community School	64.3	61.8	63.8	58.9	89.5	86.3
South Newton Elementary	42.1	49.4	27.0	31.6	44.6	54.4
McDowell Early College	95.8	87.5	90.4	92.3	89.8	74.0
McDowell Academy of Innovation	86.6	95.1	88.2	92.3	84.6	100
Statewide	**48.2**	**49.3**	**42.7**	**42.9**	**60.7**	**60.2**