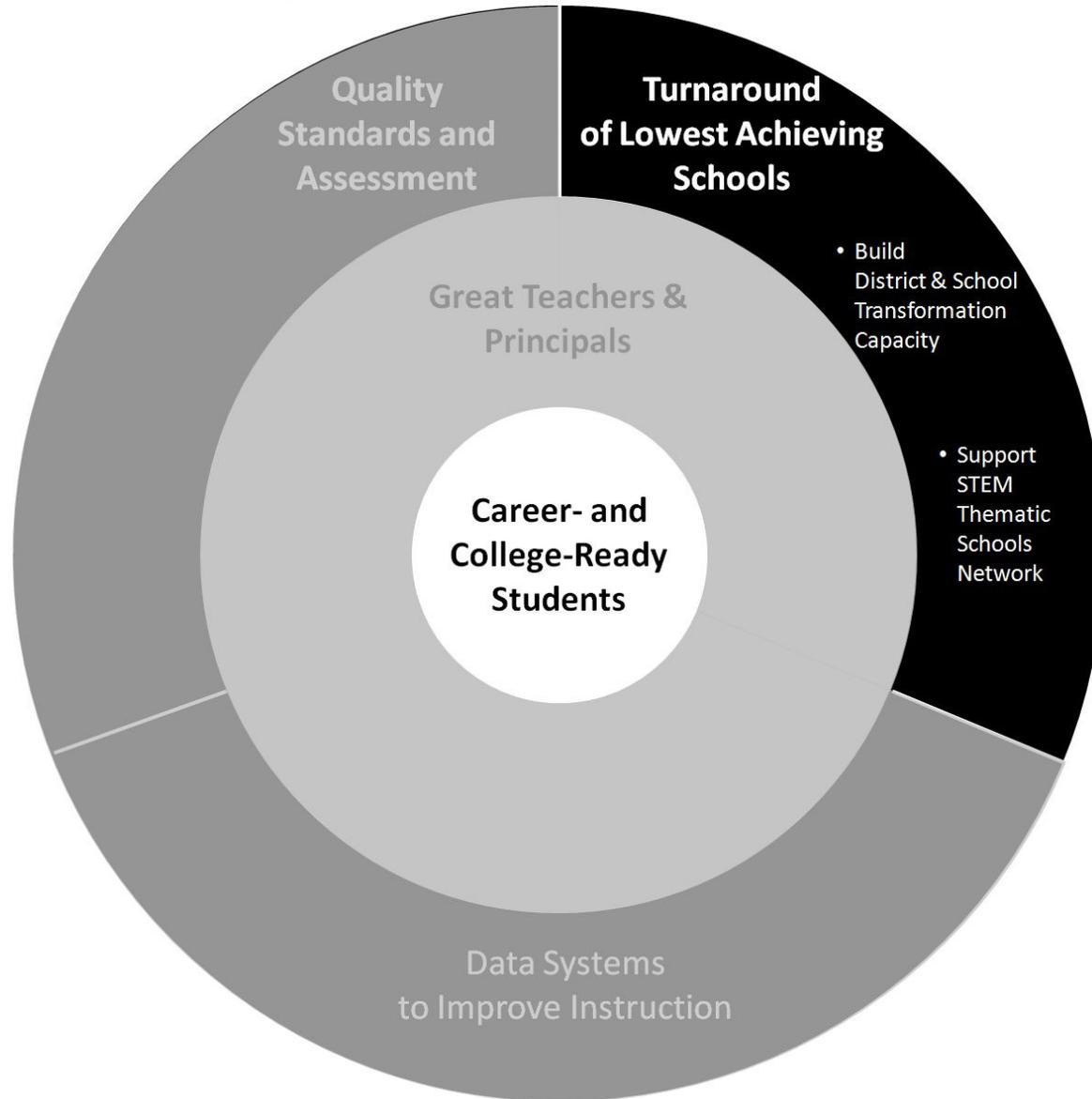


(E) Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools (50 total points)



State Reform Conditions Criteria

(E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs(10 points)

The extent to which the State has the legal, statutory, or regulatory authority to intervene directly in the State’s persistently lowest-achieving schools (as defined in this notice) and in LEAs that are in improvement or corrective action status.

In the text box below, the State shall describe its current status in meeting the criterion. The narrative or attachments shall also include, at a minimum, the evidence listed below, and how each piece of evidence demonstrates the State’s success in meeting the criterion. The narrative and attachments may also include any additional information the State believes will be helpful to peer reviewers. For attachments included in the Appendix, note in the narrative the location where the attachments can be found.

Evidence for (E1):

- A description of the State’s applicable laws, statutes, regulations, or other relevant legal documents.

Recommended maximum response length: One page

E.1. Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs

As a result of the State Supreme Court's *Leandro* decision and subsequent Superior Court rulings, NC has legal, statutory, and regulatory authority to intervene directly in the lowest-achieving schools and in LEAs that are in improvement or corrective action status.

The NC State Board of Education has both legal authority and legal responsibility to intervene directly in NC's lowest-achieving schools and in LEAs that are in improvement or corrective action status. The authority and responsibility are defined in the North Carolina Constitution, legislation, and the North Carolina Supreme Court's decisions in *Leandro v. State*, 346 N.C. 336, 348, 488 S.E.2d 249, 255 (1997) and *Hoke Cty. Bd. of Educ. v. State*, 358 N.C. 605, 599 S.E.2d 365 (2004) (*Leandro*), and related superior court actions. A summary of some of the key points of these laws and decisions is provided below.

NC statutes 115C-105.37 through 115C-105.41, originally passed in 1995 and revised in 2001, provide the legal basis for State intervention in the lowest-achieving schools and districts. These statutes require the State Board to design and implement a procedure to identify schools that fall below a criterion of student achievement and provide assistance and intervention strategies designed to improve student achievement. The statutes require an evaluation of the principal in each of the identified schools and specify that the principal must have a remediation plan or be removed if he or she had been in that position for more than two years before the school was identified as low-performing. The statutes also provide the State Board with the authority to assign a team to do the following:

1. Review and investigate all facets of school operations and assist in developing recommendations for improving student performance;
2. Collaborate with school staff, central offices, and local boards of education in the design, implementation, and monitoring of a plan to alleviate problems and improve student performance;
3. Make recommendations as the school develops and implements this plan; and
4. Report to the local board of education, the community, and the State Board on the school's progress. Furthermore, if the school and local board fail to take appropriate steps to improve student performance, the statutes specify that:

The State Board shall assume all powers and duties previously conferred upon that local board and that school and shall have general control and supervision of all matters pertaining to that school until student performance at the school meets or exceeds the standards set for the school. These actions can include the appointment of an interim superintendent selected by the State Board.

The State Board's constitutional authority and responsibility to intervene in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs was strengthened by the North Carolina Supreme Court in the *Leandro* decisions. In these decisions, the North Carolina Supreme Court held that:

1. The State has the constitutional responsibility to provide every student with the equal opportunity to obtain a sound basic education in the North Carolina public schools;
2. Student achievement as measured on standardized tests is a significant indicator of whether the opportunity to obtain a sound basic education exists within a school; and
3. It is the State's responsibility to see that:
 - a. Every classroom is staffed with a competent, certified, well-trained teacher;
 - b. Every school is led by a well-trained, competent principal; and
 - c. Every school is provided, in the most cost-effective manner, the resources necessary to support the effective instructional program within that school so that all children, including at-risk children, have equal opportunity to obtain a sound basic education.

In March 2006, the superior court overseeing implementation of the *Leandro* decisions informed the State Board that the court would not allow a high school that had a performance composite of 55% or less for five years to remain open beyond the 2005-06 school year unless:

1. The management team was replaced by a team approved by the State Board;
2. The school adopted an instructional redesign for a 21st Century High School approved by the State Board; and

3. The staff was committed to implementing the redesigned instructional program.

In addition, the State Board has adopted policies that authorize it to intervene in districts that fail to meet adequate yearly progress under NCLB (GCS-C-025).

Since 2004, the State Board has exercised its legal authority to intervene in over 700 public schools and more than 40 LEAs to improve student performance. Of particular note, in May 2009, the State Board sought and the Court approved a Consent Order, which authorizes the State Board to oversee decisions in personnel, finance, and curriculum and instruction in Halifax County Schools.

North Carolina's response to E2 below contains a more complete history of State Board interventions to improve student achievement in the lowest-performing North Carolina public schools and LEAs.

Reform Plan Criteria

(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools (40 points)

The extent to which the State has a high-quality plan and ambitious yet achievable annual targets to—

- (i) Identify the persistently lowest-achieving schools (as defined in this notice) and, at its discretion, any non-Title I eligible secondary schools that would be considered persistently lowest-achieving schools (as defined in this notice) if they were eligible to receive Title I funds; and (5 points)
- (ii) Support its LEAs in turning around these schools by implementing one of the four school intervention models (as described in Appendix C): turnaround model, restart model, school closure, or transformation model (provided that an LEA with more than nine persistently lowest-achieving schools may not use the transformation model for more than 50 percent of its schools). (35 points)

The State shall provide its detailed plan for this criterion in the text box below. The plan should include, at a minimum, the goals, activities, timelines, and responsible parties (see Reform Plan Criteria elements in Application Instructions or Section XII, Application Requirements (e), for further detail). In the text box below, the State shall describe its current status in meeting the criterion. The narrative or attachments shall also include, at a minimum, the evidence listed below, and how each piece of evidence demonstrates the State's success in meeting the criterion. The narrative and attachments may also include any additional information the State believes will be helpful to peer reviewers. For attachments included in the Appendix, note in the narrative the location where the attachments can be found.

Evidence for (E2) (please fill in table below):

- The State's historic performance on school turnaround, as evidenced by the total number of persistently lowest-achieving schools (as defined in this notice) that States or LEAs attempted to turn around in the last five years, the approach used, and the results and lessons learned to date.

Recommended maximum response length: Eight pages

E.2.i. Identifying the Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools

Since 2006, the Department of Public Instruction's District and School Transformation division has identified and intervened in the state's lowest-achieving schools, regardless of Title I status.

In NC, the *performance composite score* for a school is the proportion of students' scores on state end-of-course and end-of-grade assessments that are at or above the proficient level (see Section D2). From 2006 through 2009, all high schools with a performance composite of less than 60% were classified as being low-achieving, were placed in turnaround status, and received NC intervention and monitoring, as described below. The performance composite is a more stringent measure of assessing school success than simply using math and reading measures alone. For example, a high school performance composite includes a student's performance in multiple subjects, including English, Algebra I and II, Biology, US History, and Civics/Economics. Therefore, the performance composite provides a measure of the overall ability of all students in a school to apply reading and math skills across subject areas.

For the NC RttT plan and related work moving forward, NC has revised the criteria for intervening in the lowest-achieving schools to ensure that the lowest-achieving 5% of all schools are eligible. Eligibility criteria are as follows:

- Any school in NC with a performance composite under 50%;
- Any high school in NC with a graduation rate below 60% in the prior year and one of two previous years; or
- The lowest 5% of Title I schools currently in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring status (as defined by the School Improvement Grant criteria).

In 2008-09, 132 schools, with approximately 69,000 students, were classified as lowest-achieving. These 64 elementary, 22 middle, and 46 high schools constitute the bottom 5% of the conventional public schools in NC. The students in these schools are overwhelmingly minority and low-income. Table 26 compares core demographic data for the bottom 5% with the top 5%, and Appendix 38 provides the full list of these lowest-achieving schools in NC and data about each one.

Table 26: Core Demographic Data Comparisons

	% MINORITY STUDENTS	% ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS	% STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES	% LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS
Bottom 5%	85%	89%	15%	5%
Top 5%	25%	21%	9%	3%

(Note: School Improvement Grant (SIG)-eligible schools not directly served through the District and School Transformation process (i.e., alternative, special education, charter, and un-graded schools) are supported by the NCDPI Federal Program Monitoring Division.

Our analysis of patterns of lowest-achieving schools also has led us to define criteria for *lowest-achieving districts*. These districts have a district-wide performance composite of less than 60% and limited support capacity (as measured by eligibility for Low-Wealth District and Disadvantaged Student Supplemental funding; see Section F1), primarily due to their location in low-wealth communities and the fact that they serve a large proportion of students from low-income families. Sixteen of NC’s 115 LEAs fall into this category, 15 of which are in rural areas. The 16 lowest-achieving districts contain 48 of the 132 lowest-achieving schools. Eight of these lowest-achieving districts are clustered in NC’s rural northeast region, which has struggled economically with the decline of the region’s agrarian and manufacturing industries. Appendix 39 provides a list of these districts and baseline data about each one. Our RttT plan identifies these districts as “Transformation Districts.” We will utilize our existing district transformation plan (already in place in five LEAs; see below) to address the needs of these districts not only by reforming the cluster of low-achieving schools within the district but also by supporting the development of the district’s capacity to sustain high student achievement across all of the district’s schools.

E.2.ii Turning Around the Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools in NC

NCDPI's District and School Transformation division, along with other change partners, has been engaged in turnaround efforts that closely resemble the four RttT models. As part of the State's RttT plan, District and School Transformation will transition to implementing the four school intervention models outlined by the USED, limiting the use of the transformation model to no more than 50% of schools in LEAs with more than 9 schools identified for intervention. The NC General Assembly recently passed a *Reform of Low Performing Schools Act* (see Appendix 40) that authorizes LEAs to apply any of the four models in their plans to turnaround lowest-achieving schools.

Background

In 2005, in response to judicial and executive mandates, NC began a high school turnaround initiative to restructure and improve 44 low-achieving high schools. In 2006, additional high schools were added to this effort, to bring the total number engaged in a turnaround process to 66. Between 2005 and 2007, turnaround efforts focused on high schools because performance historically has been lowest at this level, but also because resources were not available at the time to include elementary or middle schools in the effort. Intensive work with a selected set of lowest-achieving middle schools that are feeder schools to lowest-achieving high schools began in 2007-08.

In 2007, NCDPI worked with the Boston Consulting Group, supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to refine and extend the turnaround support process, which led to the creation of the District and School Transformation division within NCDPI. The Transformation division currently has a team of 70 full-time, primarily field-based staff who are proven school instructional leaders. Team members have been engaged directly at district and school levels, and provide NC with a strong nucleus of individuals who are well-prepared to lead the scale-up and expansion of NC's ongoing school reform effort.

As described in the preceding section, many of the lowest-achieving schools in NC are in economically distressed rural areas. In 2008, the Transformation division began partnerships with five of the lowest-achieving rural districts to develop LEA capacity to increase achievement district-wide. These partnerships include work in each district's elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as the

district's central office (schools in these districts are listed in Appendix 41). The comprehensive level of engagement has provided us with additional information about the specific needs of economically distressed rural districts.

Previous Approaches and Results

Since 2005, NC has employed multiple approaches to turning around the lowest-achieving schools: High School Turnaround, *NC Restart*, and *NC New Schools* models, all of which have been applied at the high school level; Elementary and Middle School Turnaround; District Turnaround; and Direct Intervention under Consent Order. Each is detailed below.

1. High Schools

A. NC High School Turnaround. Appendix 42 provides a list of the 66 lowest-achieving high schools that the Transformation division has assisted between 2006 and 2009, along with student achievement performance composites, graduation rates, and changes in both measures during the three-year intervention period.

In the turnaround approach that the Transformation division has applied previously, once a school is identified as low-performing under State statute, State personnel initiate a *comprehensive needs assessment* process. The resulting diagnosis is used to inform the process of developing a turnaround plans targeted to local needs and built upon local strengths.

The next component of the Transformation division process is to work with school and district leaders to develop and implement a school-specific turnaround plan. Each plan is developed in conjunction with one or more change partners, as outlined in Appendix 43. In 52 of the 66 high schools, the primary change partner was the Transformation division itself. In these cases, a transformation model was applied, with a focus on changing the professional practices of school leaders and teachers in ways that lead to changes in many aspects of the culture of the school, such as the following:

- Setting high expectations for all students,
- Focusing all efforts on improving student learning,
- Using data to inform instructional and managerial decisions,

- Furthering collaborations among teachers, and
- Increasing parental and community engagement in the school.

This process centers on professional development and coaching, with instructional coaches for teachers, school transformation coaches for principals, and, in the lowest-achieving districts, district transformation coaches for superintendents and central office instructional staff. A major emphasis is placed on providing high-quality, job-embedded professional development. This model may involve changes in school leadership and multiple teacher replacements, and it can involve incentive strategies, increased learning time, and other strategies that are part of turnaround or transformation models.

In 8 of the 52 *Turnaround* high schools, the Transformation division collaborated with the NC New Schools Project to also implement the *NC Restart* model. The result of this partnership was the development of independent STEM-centered “new schools” – small, independent, tightly-focused learning communities – which were created by carving out a school of up to 400 students from each parent school. The parent school, in addition to spinning off a “new school,” implemented the transformation model to change the instructional opportunities for the remaining students. More details about the *NC Restart* model are provided below.

Of the 14 other high schools, ten chose to work with both the Transformation division and other change partners. These partners have included: the McREL Success in Sight program; America’s Choice; Talent Development, LLC; Creating Great Classrooms; Solution Tree; Focused Leadership Solutions; and the Southern Regional Education Board’s High Schools that Work. Three high schools chose to work exclusively with New Schools Project, with two closing and then implementing the *NC Restart* model and one closing and converting into multiple “new schools.” The final high school chose to work with the Coalition of Essential Schools and was closed and converted into multiple “new schools.”

The final component of the Transformation division approach has been to monitor progress, both to determine the effectiveness of the supports on improving student achievement and to determine whether NC needs to assume increased authority and require more

extensive interventions. This monitoring takes place whether the school works directly with the Transformation division or another organization as the change partner.

The Transformation division support process, in collaboration with district supports, school efforts, and the other change partners, already has shown significant success in only three years. Based on the 2008-09 statewide assessments, 30 of the 66 high schools involved (45%) have met the target goal of increasing their student achievement performance composites to above 60% and are therefore exiting Transformation status. Of the remaining 36 high schools, 22 showed a performance composite increase of at least 5% (individual school data are provided in Appendix 42). Therefore, we have evidence that the approach is a viable one for a substantial number of the lowest-achieving schools in NC. The Transformation division will continue to work with the 36 high schools that have not reached the 60% criterion. The turnaround plan for the 12 schools making little or no progress has been redesigned with the direct involvement of the State Superintendent, the director of the Transformation division, and the superintendent of the LEA in which each school is located. The supports have been intensified in each of these schools.

B. The NC High School Restart and NC New School Models. In addition to turning around or replacing schools, NC also has pursued the strategy of creating new high schools specifically designed to better prepare students, especially high-need students, to be career- and college-ready. While independent from the Transformation division, this effort has functioned in close partnership and collaboration with the Transformation division efforts. Both the *NC Restart* model and the *NC New School* models originated in NC Senate Bill 656, The 2003 Innovative Education Initiatives Act (Appendix 44). This bill was passed to establish cooperative efforts between secondary schools and institutions of higher education in the establishment of new schools to improve pre-college student achievement. It also called for the establishment of “redesigned” (*i.e.*, *Restart*) schools and the creation of a virtual high school (as described in Section D3). This Act specifically called for targeting high school students who are at risk of dropping out, along with those who would benefit from accelerated academic instruction. The Act was framed by its legislative advocates as establishing *charter-like schools without charters* (Lt. Gov. Walter Dalton, personal comm.) and provided those schools with most of the flexibility

typically associated with charter schools. Governor Perdue, then President of the NC Senate, was one of the advocates and signatories of this bill.

Also in 2003, the NC New Schools Project, a non-profit organization, was created by the Office of the Governor and the NC Education Cabinet, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to develop models for these redesigned and new high schools and to support their successful implementation. The result since then has been the development of 105 small, innovative high schools in 64 (of the 115) LEAs, which enrolled more than 21,000 students during the 2009-10 school year. These schools are located primarily in NC's economically depressed areas and serve high percentages of minority, low-income, and "first-generation college-going" populations. Twenty-one of these schools are located in the 16 districts classified as lowest-achieving.

The *NC Restart* model engages an LEA in the process of converting part or all of a traditional high school into one or more smaller, academically nimble schools that can serve students better, with guidance from the NCNSP. In the process, school conditions are redesigned to permit more effective teaching and learning. Thirty-six of the innovative high schools developed since 2003 are *NC Restart* high schools. Ten of these were STEM-focused schools that were opened in 2007-08 as *Restart* schools for low-performing schools (as discussed above) as part of the response to Judge Manning's 2006 order that persistently low-performing high schools be redesigned with new leadership, staff, and instructional programs.

The *NC New School* model involves creating new schools that extend the schooling options available to students. The focus of this model in NC has been in the development of Early College High Schools, which are situated on college campuses. One innovative component of these schools is that the students can take courses at the affiliated college and the curriculum is designed so that, over five years, students can earn their high school degree and either an associate's degree or two years of college credit, all without paying tuition, since they are enrolled in public high schools. Seventy Early College High Schools have been created in NC since 2004, with two more scheduled to open in 2011 – far more than in any other state and about one-third the total of all such schools in the US. Partnering with the community college system has been a significant strategy in increasing student achievement in rural areas.

The *NC Restart* schools and the *NC New Schools* created through partnerships between NCNSP, LEAs, and (in the case of new schools) local colleges share a number of core strategies. Both types of schools build upon a set of design principles that include: 1) a common set of high standards to ensure that all students are prepared for college and work; 2) powerful teaching and learning, providing rigorous instruction to ensure the development of critical thinking, application, and problem-solving skills; 3) personalization, ensuring that adults in the school know students well and leverage this knowledge to improve student learning; 4) redefined professionalism, with a shared vision, a shared responsibility for the success of every student, and collaborative, creative, and learning roles for all staff; and 5) purposeful design, with an organization of time and space and the allocation of resources that are focused on creating conditions to ensure the successful implementation of the other four principles. While the school designs are such that all students are served well and at high levels of rigor, the designs focus particularly on those students who traditionally have been underserved by mainstream public schools: children of poverty, children of color, English language learners, and first-generation college-goers.

Highly qualified school leaders and faculty were recruited for these innovative schools, and hiring packages and bonus incentives were established in some districts for increased student performance. All staff received direct support through professional development and coaching in the effective use of research-based professional practices and change strategies. Some of these schools have a thematic focus in areas that are vital to the future of NC's economy, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Some have a strong technology component, with every student and teacher utilizing a laptop computer.

The strategies for the *NC Restart* and *New School* models that correspond with strategies of the RttT turnaround models include the following:

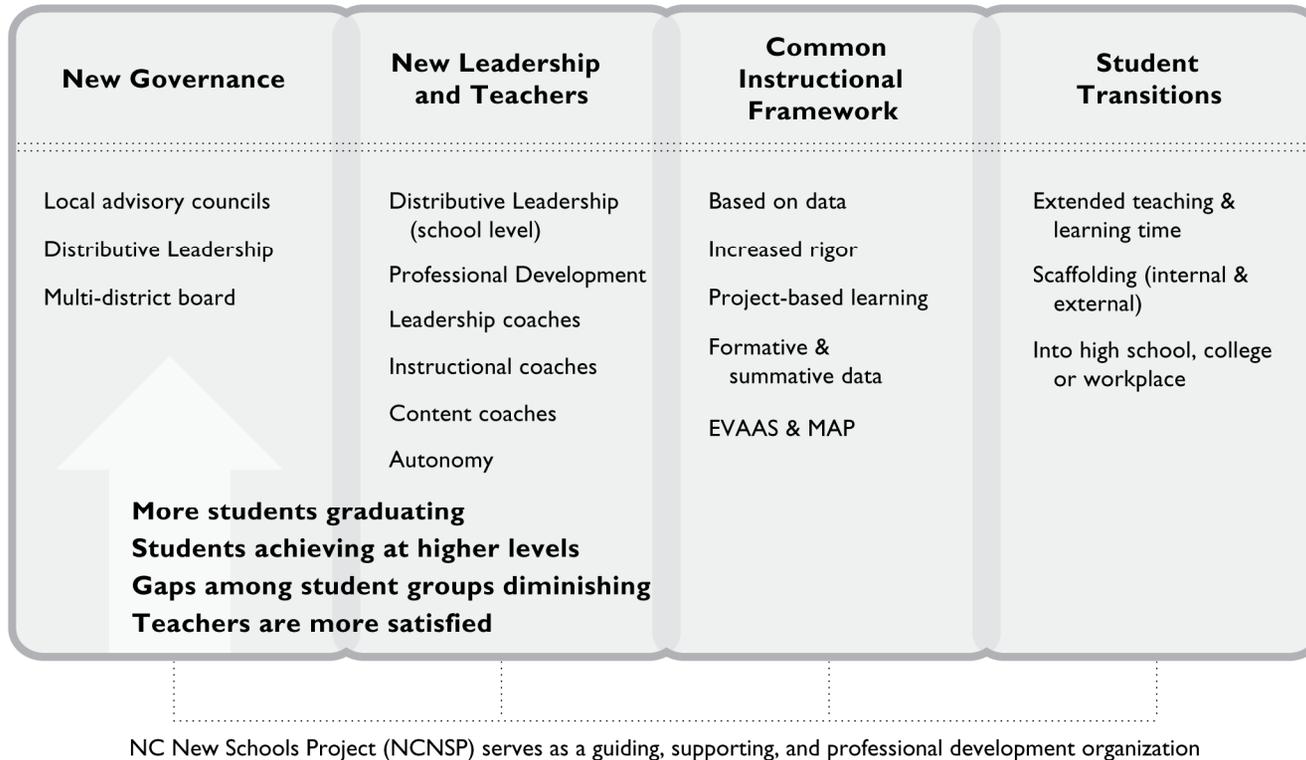


Figure 10: NC Restart and New Schools Model Strategies and the RttT Turning Around Lowest-Achieving Schools Model

See Appendix 45 for a fuller description of the tools from NCNSP’s Integrated System of School Support Services (IS4). These innovative schools, the first of which was opened in 2005, already are delivering promising results:

- *More students are graduating.* Of the 18 innovative high schools in which a full, four-year cohort graduated in 2009, seven had graduation rates above 95% and 12 had graduation rates above 80%, compared to NC’s overall rate of 72%;
- *More students are on track for college.* To be on-track for college, students need to have successfully completed Algebra I and English I by the end of 9th grade. An experimental study of Early College High Schools funded by the Institute for Education

Sciences found that 81% of ECHS students were on track in math, compared to 67% of students in the control group (Edmunds *et al.*, 2010);

- *Students are achieving at higher levels.* Measured by NC’s accountability system, two-thirds of the innovative high schools in 2008-09 outperformed their comparison schools, and one-third had overall passing rates greater than 80% on NC end-of-course exams, compared to only about one-fifth of all high schools statewide;
- *Gaps among student groups are diminishing.* The experimental study cited above also found that, by the end of 9th grade, 75.5% of underrepresented minority students and 74.8% of white students enrolled in Early Colleges had successfully completed Algebra I, much higher than the 54.9% of underrepresented minority students and 61.2% of white students in the control group. Results were similar for English I;
- *Suspensions have been cut by almost 90%, and unexcused absences have been halved.* By the end of 9th grade, 2.7% of Early College students had been suspended at least once, compared to 20.6% in the control group, and Early College students had an average of 3.85 unexcused absences compared to 6.41 unexcused absences in the control group; and
- *Students and teachers are more satisfied.* In 2007-08, 49% of teachers in NC’s innovative high schools strongly agreed that their schools are “good places to teach and learn,” compared to 34% of teachers in the traditional high schools to which they were compared. Similarly, students in Early Colleges reported significantly higher levels of academic engagement and confidence in their math abilities than do non-Early College students, and Early College students reported higher academic expectations, more rigorous and relevant instruction, more support, and better relationships with their teachers than do students in traditional schools.

While the *NC Restart* and the *NC New School* models described have been central to the NC initiatives during the past five years, NC also supports the development of charter schools, as described in Section F2.

2. NC Elementary and Middle School Turnaround

In the 2007-08 school year, thirty-seven middle schools entered into NC Middle School Turnaround. These middle schools had a performance composite below 60% for two consecutive years and were a feeder school for one of the 44 originally identified high

schools. Each school was required to complete a turnaround plan. These schools received professional development through the UNC Center for School Leadership Development. They also received leadership and teacher coaching from the Transformation division. In year two of the three-year intervention, four of the middle schools already have exceeded a 60% performance composite, and thirty-one additional schools demonstrated growth (Appendix 46).

In the 2007-08 school year, twenty elementary schools entered into NC Elementary School Turnaround. These schools either were identified as “Low-Performing” under North Carolina’s ABCs model (see Section D2) or were in their third year of sanctions under NCLB. Each school was required to complete a Framework for Action plan. These schools received professional development through the UNC Center for School Leadership Development. They also received leadership and teacher coaching from the Transformation division. After one year of intervention, only two of those schools re-appeared as “Low-Performing” the following year. Lack of resources resulted in this intervention being discontinued in 2008-09. In 2009-10, new resources were appropriated by the NC General Assembly. A portion of these resources are being used to provide limited instructional coaching support for 20 of our lowest-achieving elementary schools in 2010.

3. NC District Turnaround

Under the District Transformation model, DPI utilizes the LEA-level measures of district capacity and performance noted in Section E.2.i above to identify struggling districts. Through a voluntary partnership with the local school board and superintendent, the Transformation division provides support to an entire district and all of the district schools to assist the district in developing its capacity to better serve students. The Transformation division provides the district with a district transformation coach who works with the superintendent and central office, and, based on a comprehensive needs assessment, an array of school transformation coaches who support the district schools. In addition, instructional coaches serve elementary, middle, and high school teachers, providing both content-specific and effective instructional practice professional development for groups of teachers or for individual classrooms. Only one year of data are available for the five districts in the District Transformation model, but these data already

demonstrate that the model is helping to increase student achievement across the entire district, as student achievement is trending upward in almost all of the schools in these five districts. (Figure 11; also see Appendix 41).

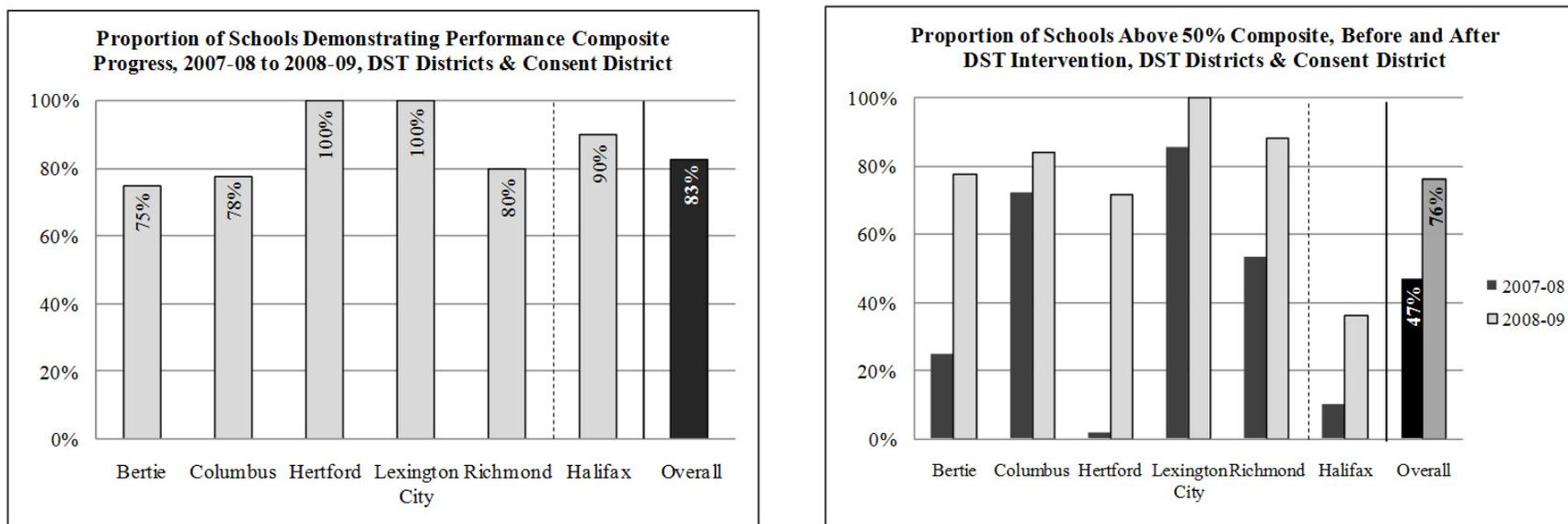


Figure 11: Progress in District Turnaround Schools and Consent District Schools, 2007-08 – 2008-09

4. NC Consent Order

In the spring of 2009, an additional model of intensive intervention, the Consent Order, was developed. Under direction of the State Supreme Court (as part of the *Leandro* decision) the state is constitutionally responsible for ensuring a sound, basic education for every student. When a district is identified for significant underperformance and there is a lack of evidence that district leadership is making the necessary changes, the Court has directed the State Board of Education to assume oversight. The Transformation division is in its first year of intervention in one district (included in Figure 11; also see Appendix 41 for data from this district) through a court-monitored Consent Order.

Lessons Learned

Half of the low-performing schools in North Carolina are urban and half are rural. Through the work of the Transformation division, we have learned that some turnaround strategies employed in urban districts cannot be applied directly to NC rural districts. For example, urban districts may have strong central staff to support turnaround efforts, while rural districts may lack the resources needed to develop such a staff. In an urban district, incentives can encourage highly effective teachers and principals to transfer within the district from high-achieving schools to the lowest-achieving ones. In rural low-achieving districts, there are typically insufficient numbers of high-achieving schools and highly effective staff to allow this approach to work. Recruiting from outside the district is required, but it is often difficult to attract people to relocate to economically-distressed rural areas. Therefore, it may not be feasible to meet the staff change requirements of the turnaround model in many rural districts. As another example, urban areas often have the capacity to employ a *school closure model*, in which students are enrolled in other schools in the LEA that are higher-achieving. In a distressed rural area, it is less likely that a higher-achieving school is available within the same LEA, or even within a reasonable distance across LEAs.

In addition, in districts with limited resources and clusters of low-performing schools, we have learned that it is insufficient to intervene in individual schools, as the district itself lacks the capacity to cultivate or sustain substantial school improvement. By employing a whole district transformation model and supporting the development of both district and school capacity, we can lift the student achievement across the district, strengthen achievement across school feeder patterns, and sustain this change.

Finally, specific supports are needed to provide rural districts with an adequate supply of high-quality principals and superintendents and to develop and sustain high-quality teachers. As part of our overall RttT initiative, we will develop innovative, field-based leadership academies that are placed strategically and recruit from specific geographic areas (see Section D3). As also described in Section D3, we will: (1) expand the number of Teach for America teachers in these schools; (2) begin the NC Teacher Corp, based on the Teach for America model, to bring additional teachers to these schools; (3) create a stronger, three-year induction support program for other new teachers in these schools; and (4) make further use of virtual and blended courses to expand the opportunities for

students in these schools. In addition, we will provide incentives tied to student learning gains for teachers and principals in the lowest achieving schools, as described in Section D2.

The NC RttT Initiative to Turn Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools (*TALAS*)

With RttT funding, the *NC TALAS Initiative* will build on lessons learned from our work in rural and urban LEAs with our current *Restart, New Schools, and District and School Transformation* approaches to transition to the four models described by the Department of Education 1: Turnaround, 2: Restart, 3: Closure; and 4: Transformation. Our previous work establishing new schools, restarting schools and transforming schools has prepared us well to implement these models successfully, since our current models are very similar to the Department's models. Our three primary goals of the *TALAS* also are natural extensions of our ongoing work with our lowest-achieving schools:

1. *Dramatically improve achievement in the lowest 5 % of schools in NC where Performance Composites are below 50% proficient and graduation rates in high schools where the graduation rate is under 60%;*
2. *Raise district-wide performance in those districts with a high concentration of lowest-achieving schools; and*
3. *Provide new opportunities for students in the lowest-achieving schools and districts to attend schools that will better support their achievement and successful graduation and lead them to college and career readiness.*

Meeting these goals will result in measurable outcomes in the schools involved: improved student achievement; increased graduation rates; reduction of achievement gaps; evidence of more challenging courses of study; and evidence of increased readiness for post-secondary opportunities. Additional outcomes will be an increased supply and retention of effective leaders and teachers.

On May 27, 2010, the NC General Assembly approved, and the Governor signed, an act entitled *The Reform of Continually Low-Performing Schools*, which is effective immediately. The act expands G. S. 115C-105.37, which provides for the identification of low-performing schools. (The original Statute and the newly approved bill are provided in Appendix 40.) This new act provides authorization for the State Board to approve requests from local boards of education to reform continually low-performing schools by using any of the transformation, restart, turnaround, or school closure models. The act also specifies that the State Board of Education

shall establish procedures to implement the act, including annual reporting requirements for local boards that use one of these models and a procedure for removing or continuing the authorization. The definition of each model in the act is based directly on the Federal guidelines for these models. For the Restart Model, the act specifies that:

The State Board of Education would authorize the local board of education to operate the school with the same exemptions from statutes and rules as a charter school authorized under Part 6A of Article 16 of this Chapter, or under the management of an educational management organization that has been selected through a rigorous review process.

LEA Restart Schools under this bill would have the flexibility of charter schools and would meet the Federal guidelines for innovative, autonomous public schools; however, they would not be counted against the NC cap of 100 charter schools. Therefore, this act allows for the establishment of additional innovative, autonomous schools in NC.

The Transformation division will provide management and oversight for the *TALAS* initiative. The initiative will include the following steps:

Ensure that all schools and all districts that meet the lowest-achieving criterion receive appropriate support services designed to increase student performance to a level significantly above the lowest-achieving criterion.

We will target the 132 schools meeting the criterion described above. Our data show that schools with below-50% proficiency composites (*i.e.*, schools in which more than 50% of the students' test scores on state assessments are below proficient) are synonymous with the lowest 5% of schools in NC and with Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. Our goal is that, by SY 2013-14, all of these schools will be well above the 50% proficiency composite measure, enabling NC to redefine lowest-achieving as those schools with a composite measure below 70% and to then apply Transformation division resources to schools in the 50% to 70% range. These schools begin with performance composites at differing levels, but in general, we will seek a three-year increase of 20 points for each school. From our previous work in the Transformation division, we know a three-year gain of 20 points is both possible and realistic. In addition, we will seek a three-year increase in graduation rates of no less than 15%, or an overall rate of 60%, whichever is higher. Tied to this goal is our ongoing effort to transform the culture of low expectations and low

performance by building local capacity, so that change is sustained and districts and schools continue to move toward 100% proficiency.

Require district agreements to address the improvement of the lowest-achieving schools.

Districts that contain lowest-achieving schools will be required to agree to the following:

- Districts agree that all lowest-achieving schools (as outlined in the definition above) will engage in the Transformation division comprehensive needs assessment, accept Transformation division change coaches to work with the school(s) and district through the change process, engage in the development of a thorough change plan with implementation map, secure any appropriate partners, and work with the Transformation division to monitor progress and adjust plans as needed;
- Districts identified for District Transformation will accept a district transformation coach to support the district itself in efforts to build capacity to increase the sustainability of school improvement;
- Districts commit to utilizing one of four models in each of their lowest-achieving schools: turnaround, restart, closure, or transformation, as defined by the US Department of Education. LEAs with more than nine low-achieving schools – currently Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Durham, Forsyth, and Guilford – will not be able to select the transformation model for more than 50% of their schools;
- Districts agree to replace school leadership, involving the Transformation division in the process, if a principal has led a lowest-achieving school for the two years before Transformation division intervention without adequate progress in improving student achievement. The baseline requirement for improvement is at least 10-point growth on the school’s performance composite across two years of school leadership;
- If a school has made less than a 5-point increase on its performance composite after two years, the district will relinquish to the State Board oversight and control of curriculum and instruction, personnel, and budget and final decisions regarding school management and governance; *and/or*

- Districts recognize that the State Board will require more aggressive intervention in lowest-achieving districts and schools if the district administration does not provide sufficient leadership for and cooperation with the turnaround process.

Increase the strategies and options available in school and district turnaround plans.

To begin, *TALAS* will enhance and expand the current comprehensive needs assessment process by supporting schools and districts as they work to better understand the results of their assessments and develop strategic plans for change and for improving instructional practice. This effort is already underway, with Cambridge Education providing consultation and training that will further enhance the Transformation division assessment of struggling schools' processes, procedures, and instructional practices by including a rubric designed to evaluate impact on student learning. Change coaches will be identified and assigned to work with school leadership and instructional personnel.

Then, in an effort to customize supports for participating LEAs, we will make additional strategies and options available as they are identified during the comprehensive needs assessment process. In addition to those described for the coaching model above, the choices will include:

- Further revisions in school governance and management structures;
- Strategic staffing initiatives, including incentive and learning team models, as described in Section D3;
- Targeted teacher and principal candidate recruitment, preparation, and induction, as described in Section D3;
- Engagement of Teach for America or NC Teacher Corps teachers, as described in Section D3;
- Provision of a team of DPI community coaches to assist districts and schools with development of community support for school change, acceptance of external partners, recognition of the reality of current student achievement, and engagement of community and parents in the change process;
- Increased use of NC Public Virtual School courses, as described in Section D3;
- Extended learning time for students;

- Effective implementation of instructional technology such as those demonstrated in the NC Learning Technology Initiative;
- Development of higher education, business, and community partnerships;
- Partnering with an Education Management Organization or external reform partner; and
- Closing a school and reassigning students.

Develop a set of STEM “cluster” high school networks.

As noted above, one of the lessons learned during the past several years is that turning around the lowest-achieving districts and schools requires more than just intervening at the building level; as important is working to change the educational opportunities available to students. Building on the foundation of redesigned schools and Early College initiatives and using the New School model described above, the NC RttT plan will address this lesson learned with the development of networks involving innovative STEM-focused schools. RttT support will further the development of a set of anchor schools at the center of each cluster network, whose themes will reflect their importance to NC economic and workforce development requirements: 1) engineering and energy; 2) aerospace; 3) biotechnology and agriscience; and 4) health and life sciences. These unique school settings will provide another option for students, especially those in urban and rural poor communities that are most often served by the lowest-achieving schools. This approach will serve to attract students traditionally underrepresented in STEM fields and to prepare students to face the “Grand Challenges” of the 21st century, as outlined by a committee of the National Academy of Engineering (see Appendix 47 for more information). Preparing students to meet these Grand Challenges requires a project-based approach to teaching and learning and will provide rich opportunities for cross-disciplinary connections and service learning built upon curriculum in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Tackling such Grand Challenges requires consideration of: the economic, political, and social barriers to solutions; the impact of decisions; and issues of ethics, sustainability, and equity.

Beginning with the STEM-themed high schools already operating in NC, we plan to: 1) develop STEM-*anchor schools*, one for each of the four selected themes, designed to provide leadership in curriculum innovation (via, for example, Project Lead the Way, Engineering for the Future, and other engineering programs), professional development, technology use, and models of collaboration

with business and higher education partners, and, overall, to serve as test-beds for innovation; and 2) link these anchor schools to a growing set of “cluster” networks of schools that serve high-need communities throughout NC. While RttT funding will be used to advance the development of the initial four STEM-anchor schools and their associated “cluster” networks of affinity-like schools, NC, local, and other funding will support further development of other schools and networks (e.g., Project Lead the Way, Health Sciences, Schools-within-Schools) across the larger STEM network.

Figure 12 below illustrates working plans for the STEM anchor schools and the networks that support them.

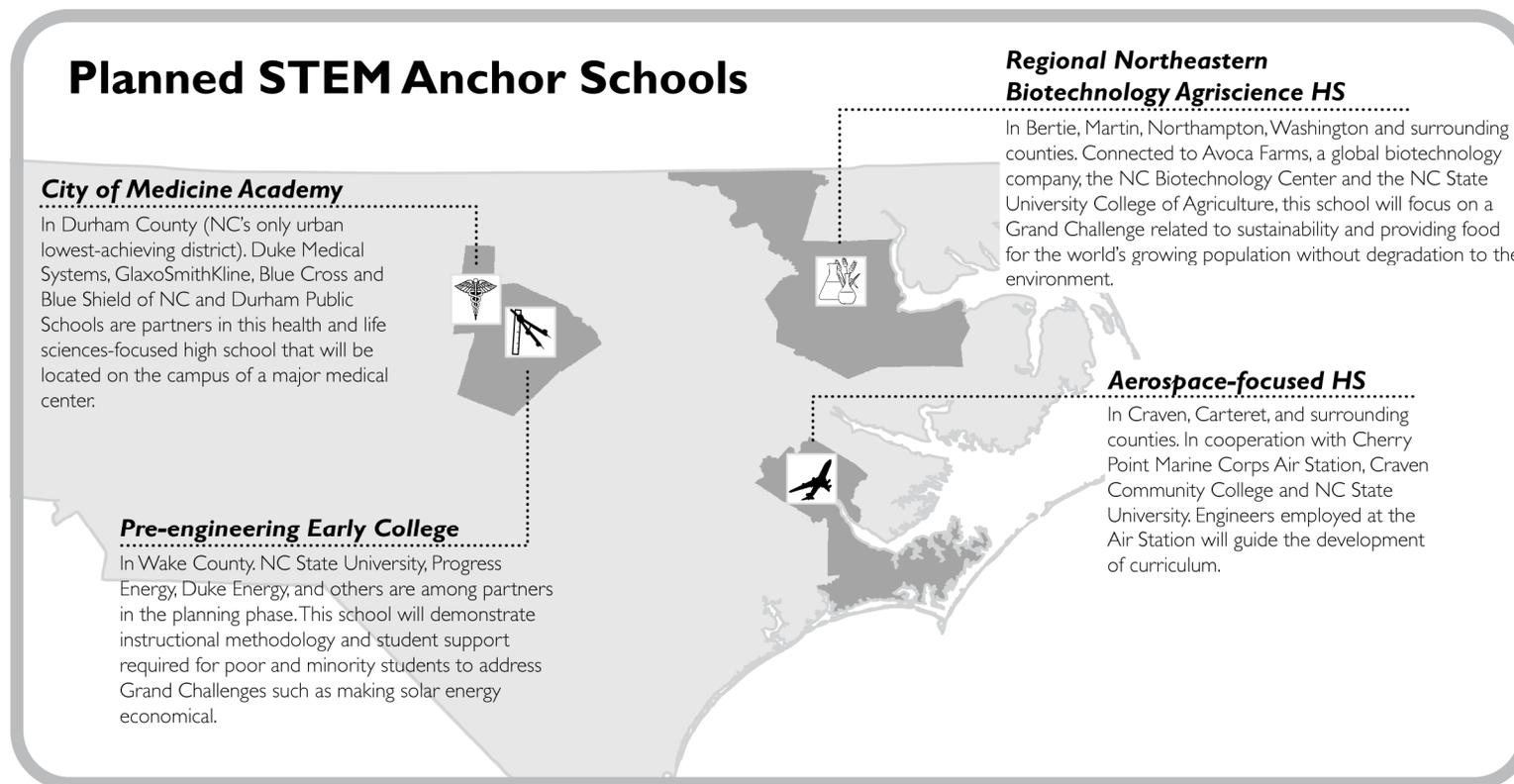


Figure 12: Working Plans for STEM Anchor Schools

As the hub of each cluster, the anchor school will accelerate the development of a fully articulated and coherent curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development model consistent with the NC vision for STEM education. Anchor schools also will provide support for peer schools within each cluster, including peer school reviews, in which teams from these peer schools visit an anchor school to observe classes, collect data, and provide feedback on teacher-developed questions about student learning and questions about school-wide practices to support continuous improvement. These unique learning environments will represent opportunities to engage parents and the private sector in further development of innovative and charter-like school settings.

Building anchor schools within networks of schools that are focused on STEM education will enable NC to enhance student choice and ensure successful innovation in high school education. These networks will be comprised of well-articulated, effective STEM schools with community supports inside and outside the education sector that are comprehensive in scope and linked to disciplines closely aligned with the workforce demands of the emerging economy. The quality of these learning networks not only will add to the deepening of teacher capacity to fully integrate a coherent model of STEM curricula across their schools, but also will build the necessary infrastructure for a core of learning networks and systems that will help sustain the work across the state. With a goal of ultimately affecting all classrooms, lessons learned from this approach will integrate with the state-level turnaround of the lowest-achieving schools and districts while also aligning school innovation with economic and workforce development.

Connect TALAS and STEM schools with community & business collaborators.

NCDPI and the STEM schools initiative connect with two other major new NC initiatives. The first is the NC STEM Community Collaborative (NC STEM), established in 2008 by NC leaders, MCNC, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This collaborative recognizes the essential role of cross-sector community ownership in redefining education to more closely align with the new economy to ensure sustainable innovation. Through this collaborative, several community design teams, formed by local leaders of business, all levels of education, economic development, and community anchor institutions and embedded staff from the NCDPI and non-local leadership institutions, already are planning to establish and support STEM-themed high schools as well as other evidence-based innovative STEM programs aligned with RttT assurances (*e.g.*: programs implementing innovative human capital models for

teacher recruitment, preparation, retention, and compensation across a district; an experience-based learning “hub” on a corporate campus for integrated delivery of professional development; lower-income/minority internship programs, learning labs, and externships tied to STEM careers). NC STEM builds public demand for the need for STEM skills for all children, connects communities’ efforts with a network of NC and national STEM innovators and experts (including a multi-state STEM consortium fostered by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Battelle Memorial Institute), and assists with the leverage of public and private funding towards scaling sustainable innovation.

Second, in 2009, the NC General Assembly established the JOBS Commission (Joining Our Businesses and Schools), chaired by Lt. Governor Walter Dalton, for the creation of new approaches to education in each of NC’s seven economic development regions that will align with promising growth sectors of the economy, especially those driven by the pre-eminence of the sciences and technology. The JOBS Commission serves as an advisor to the NC STEM Community Collaborative, and vice versa, ensuring the unique assets, needs, and economic engines in each of the seven economic development regions are connected to local education pipelines. Each economic development region has or will have at least one NC STEM Community. This model allows the learning, practices, and innovations with the most efficacy and impact to propagate quickly through a statewide collaborative network that includes the anchor STEM schools, network of new schools, LEAs and other levels of education, NC and regional institutions, informal learning organizations, business and industry partners, and policy makers.

Evaluation

Specific questions, data sources, and timelines governing the evaluation of these initiatives are included in Appendix 7.

Evidence

Approach Used	# of Schools Since SY 2004-05	Results and Lessons Learned
<p>School Assistance*</p> <p>*Schools identified as low-achieving under NC statute</p>	<p>2004-06 5 schools</p>	<p>Two seven-person teams for each school; extremely expensive; can serve few schools Erratic progress; school performance may go up when assistance teams are present, down the following year Model was actually in place for a 10-year period (1997-2007)Lessons learned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistance necessary over multiple years due to the quick drop when services were removed • Need to develop a model to serve more schools within an existing budget (serve to scale)
<p>School Coaching Model^</p> <p>^ Schools identified for performance under 60% proficient</p>	<p>2006-09 31 high schools</p> <p>2007-09 Additional 35 high schools 37 middle schools</p>	<p>Efficient and cost effective; same budget as 2004-06 Some schools' proficiency initially was as low as 20%, but by third year, almost half of the high schools exceed target of 50% proficient Majority of schools improve; some dramatically (performance composites above 70%) Lesson learned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In rural districts with one or two high schools, intervention needs to be systemic to the district • In urban districts there was need for central leadership to focus on issues and direct resources <p>Model outlined as part of TALAS</p>
<p>District & School Coaching Model</p>	<p>2008-09 5 districts</p>	<p>Voluntary partnership between district and NC Change coaches provided by NC First year results show considerable improvement in majority of district schools Model outlined as part of TALAS</p>
<p>Transformation model under Court Consent Order</p>	<p>2008-09 1 district</p>	<p>Partnership through Consent Order Monitored by the court system Change coaches provided by NC State recommends to the LEA decisions related to finance, personnel, and C&I</p>

Approach Used	# of Schools Since SY 2004-05	Results and Lessons Learned
<p>NC Restart (including STEM)</p>	<p>2005-06 10 high schools</p> <p>2006-2007 9 additional high schools (1 Transformation division [DST] school)</p> <p>2007-2008 16 additional high schools (10 DST schools)</p> <p>2008-2009 1 additional high school</p>	<p>Nearly three quarters of the redesign high schools with senior classes in 2008-09 (17 of 23 schools) achieved graduation rates outpacing those of comparison schools in their districts. Seventeen of the schools also had graduation rates above 80 percent, with eight of the 17 with rates of at least 85 percent.</p> <p>Lessons Learned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low capacity districts need a lot of content area support to fully integrate STEM curricula. • Leadership development is critical at the central office and district level to support effective innovation.
<p>NC New Schools Project Early College</p>	<p>2005-06 13 schools</p> <p>2006-07 20 additional schools</p> <p>2007-08 9 additional schools</p> <p>2008-2009 18 additional schools</p> <p>2009-10 10 additional schools (1 transitioned from DST/NSP STEM school)</p>	<p>On several academic and behavioral measures, ECHSs and their students consistently outperform their peers (as highlighted in text above). ECHS students earned higher grades, on average, than college-age students last year in community college courses.</p> <p>Lessons Learned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalization and appropriate support for students, particularly those of first generation college goers can indeed demonstrate dramatic academic results. • Blended models for college classes help to improve both access and can be scaled – simultaneously. • Innovation and collaboration with multiple IHE partners requires authentic and genuine communication links, strategies and partnership.

Performance Measures	Actual Data: Baseline (Current school year or most recent)	End of SY 2010-2011	End of SY 2011-2012	End of SY 2012-2013	End of SY 2013-2014
Turnaround Model	3 middle schools	6 middle schools	9 middle schools	12 middle schools	15 middle schools
Restart Model (including NC <i>Redesigned School</i> variation)	11 high schools (originally 12, but one closed)	14 high schools	17 high schools	20 high schools	23 high schools
School Closure	4 high schools	6 high schools	8 high schools	10 high schools	12 high schools
Transformation Model	59 high schools 34 middle schools	70 high schools 40 middle schools	80 high schools 50 middle schools	90 high schools 60 middle schools	100 high schools 70 middle schools
New School Model (added by NC based upon prior data and results) <i>Anchor Schools Established</i>	0	2	4	4	4
<i>Affinity Cluster Networks Established</i>	0	0	2	3	4
<p><i>Note:</i> As indicated in the text above, while current DST operation is heavily focused on a <i>Transformation Model</i> as defined in the RttT guidelines, in reality we operate using variations very similar to the other three USED-defined models and we will have no difficulty transitioning to those models. In the three years of NC Turnaround, 20 new schools were created and four schools closed. Two reopened as STEM schools, one reopened as five <i>Redesigned Schools</i>, and one closed and was replaced by five redesigned high schools under the Coalition of Essential Schools model. In addition, eight more STEM schools were carved from existing high schools. We have used elements of the <i>Turnaround Model</i> in selected urban settings where new principals and new leadership teams have entered an existing school. We do not plan to phase in gradually the number of schools we will serve, but will begin the change process for all identified schools immediately. We know this is a three-year change cycle, and we want proven results (based on the <i>Comprehensive Needs Assessment</i>) and sustainability within the RttT-funded period. We expect all schools to increase performance composites by no less than 20 points and to lift overall performance above 60% proficient after three years. For high schools, we expect the schools to increase their graduation rates either to a minimum of 60% or to a rate that is 15% higher than the current graduation rate, whichever is the higher goal.</p>					