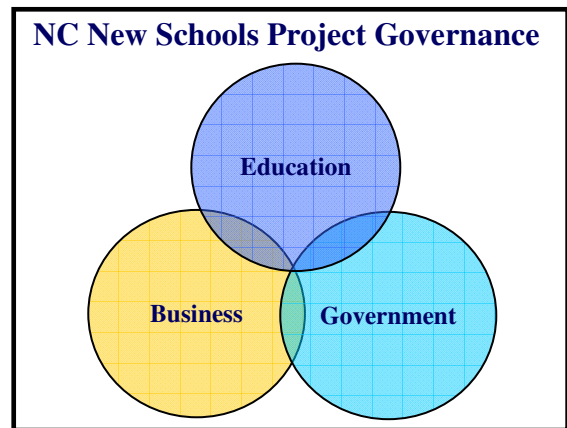




## **All Students Prepared for College, Careers and Life: An Overview of the North Carolina New Schools Project**

North Carolina needs to graduate significantly more students from high school who are substantially more prepared to meet the demands of higher education, work and citizenship. Devised in the last century, the traditionally structured, traditionally run high school has proven incapable of meeting this challenge in communities throughout North Carolina. **The purpose of the North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP) is to accelerate systemic, sustainable innovation in secondary schools across the state so that, in time, every high school in North Carolina graduates every student ready for college, careers and life in the society and economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

Established in 2003 by the Office of the Governor and the Education Cabinet and with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, NCNSP is an independent not-for-profit corporation governed by a Board of Directors chaired by Burley Mitchell, former chief justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court.<sup>1</sup> A Board of Advisors, which includes leaders from the private sector as well as prominent educational organizations in the state, assists with formalizing partnerships and strengthening collaboration.



NCNSP carries out its mission through an aggressive, three-pronged strategy of:

- Creating innovative, highly effective high schools across North Carolina
- Building a statewide consensus for significant change
- Advancing policies that promote innovation, higher standards and improved performance.

### ***Creating innovative, highly effective high schools across North Carolina***

With state and national partners, NCNSP has launched an unprecedented effort to create more than 100 new and redesigned high schools across North Carolina by 2008. These innovative high schools offer all students an academically rigorous curriculum grounded in the skills needed to succeed in college and the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace. These high schools focus on particular fields of interest to make learning more relevant to students or are based on a college campus so that students can

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<sup>1</sup> Annually, the North Carolina New Schools Project reports to the State Board of Education and the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee on the progress of innovative high schools from across the state and on the status of its initiatives. Annual independent financial and program audits are provided as well.

earn college credit. Many schools have a focus in areas that are vital to the future of the state's economy, including science, technology, engineering and mathematics. In addition, special attention is focused in the 18 northeastern NC school districts to transform schools in one of the state's most challenged regions. These innovative high schools represent a critical mass for change among North Carolina's larger pool of regular high schools and serve as models to the entire state for maximizing student achievement.

The State Board of Education, the state Department of Public Instruction, the University of North Carolina and North Carolina Community College systems, and national organizations such as Jobs for the Future, the New Tech Foundation, Asia Society, the Middle College National Consortium and others are working with NCNSP to create innovative high schools.

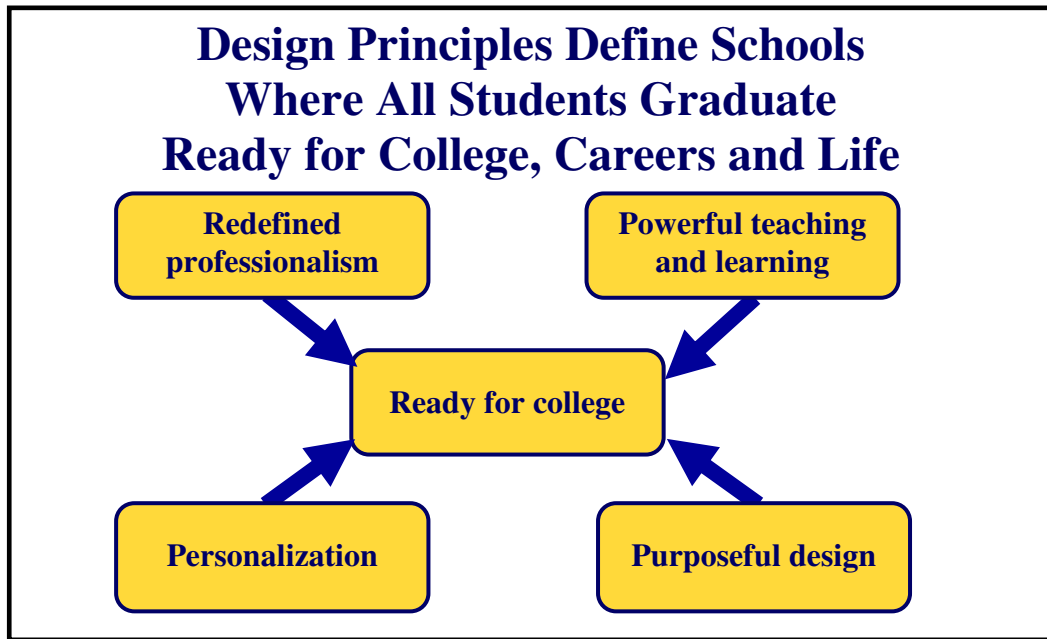
**NCNSP's clear intent is to spark and support deep instructional change.** The conditions that permit this change are created in part by purposefully and dramatically rethinking traditional high schools' organization to allow different teaching and learning. This contrasts with layering a new "program" over existing instructional practice and school organization. NCNSP engages with schools over six years – one year of planning followed by five years of implementation support. This engagement recognizes the complexity and depth of work required to transform instruction in ways that meet the demands of a global, knowledge-based economy. Since 2003, NCNSP has partnered with local school districts and educators to open 102 innovative high schools enrolling more than 15,000 students in the 2008-09 school year.

NCNSP's approach to innovation in a school has four elements – NCNSP's Design Principles, support for two types of innovative school models, the incorporation of academic themes by some schools, and an integrated system of implementation supports provided to schools.

NCNSP works with schools to implement a rigorous and far-reaching set of Design Principles that lead to student success judged by all students graduating "ready." The Design Principles are non-negotiable for any school partnering with NCNSP on innovation. NCNSP developed its Design Principles through observation of high school innovation underway in other states, experience in its first three years partnering with schools, and – most importantly – the views of principals and teachers on what is required for meaningful transformation of teaching and learning. Each Design Principle is defined by evidence and specific indicators observable in schools. The Design Principles are:

- **Ready for College:** Innovative high schools are characterized by the pervasive, transparent, and consistent understanding that the school exists for the purpose of preparing all students for college and work. They maintain a common set of high standards for every student to overcome the harmful consequences of tracking and sorting.
- **Require Powerful Teaching and Learning:** Innovative high schools are characterized by the presence of commonly held standards for high quality instructional practice. Teachers in these schools design instruction that ensures the development of critical thinking, application, and problem solving skills often neglected in traditional settings.
- **Personalization:** Staff in innovative high schools understand that knowing students well is an essential condition of helping them achieve academically. These high schools ensure that adults leverage knowledge of students in order to improve student learning.

- **Redefine Professionalism:** The responsibility to the shared vision of the innovative high school is evident in the collaborative, creative, and leadership roles of all adult staff in the school. The staff of these schools takes responsibility for the success of every student, holds themselves accountable to their colleagues, and is reflective about their roles.
- **Purposeful Design:** Innovative high schools are designed to create the conditions that ensure the other four design principles: ready for college, powerful teaching and learning, personalization, and redefined professionalism. The organization of time, space, and the allocation of resources ensures that these best practices become common practice.



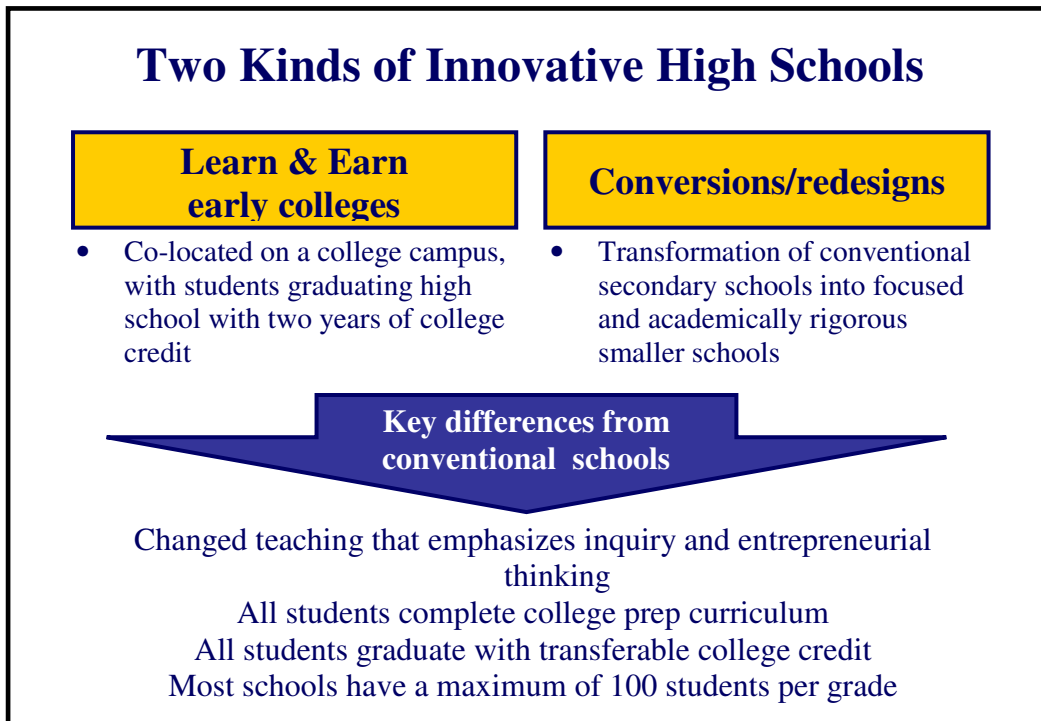
### *Types of Schools*

NCNSP and its partners are working with local school districts and their higher education partners to create two types of schools: redesigned high schools and Learn and Earn early college high schools. As of the 2008-09 school year, 102 redesigned and Learn and Earn early college high schools are open across the state.

- **Redesigned High Schools:** NCNSP is partnering with school districts to convert conventional high schools into sets of autonomous, focused and academically rigorous innovative schools which operate on an existing campus. These new schools each adopt a curricular focus or common methodology as one strategy to enable teachers in the core courses to work together to make connections between courses and the world of work. The intent of a focus is not preparation for a specific career, but rather preparation for a lifetime of learning and workplace changes. For the 2008-09 school year, 42 redesigned high schools across 23 school districts are open for students. Among these 42 are 10 schools that were identified for “turnaround” work by the Department of Public Instruction based on poor academic results. In addition, 25 of those 42 represent schools created to completely convert seven traditional comprehensive high

schools into multiple autonomous small schools. In new and redesigned high schools, NCNSP emphasizes fields such as pre-engineering, international studies, information technology, and biotechnology which are vital to North Carolina’s future.

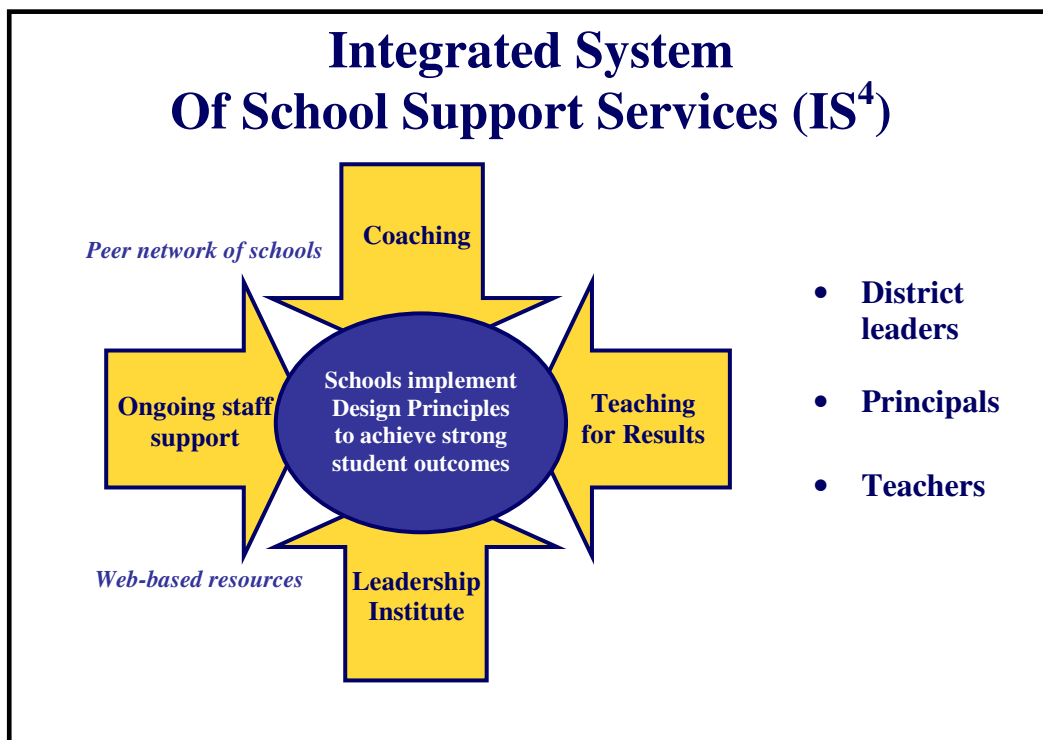
- **Learn and Earn Early College High Schools:** Located on the campus of two- or four-year community colleges and universities, Learn and Earn early college high schools provide an academically rigorous course of study that ensures all students graduate with a high school diploma and two years of transferable college credit or an associate degree. Sixty Learn and Earn early college high schools across 53 school districts are open for the 2008-09 school year, with another 12 in their planning year. Governor Easley launched the Learn and Earn Early College High School Initiative with the goal of creating 75 such schools by 2008. Learn and Earn is jointly administered by NCNSP and the Department of Public Instruction.



*Support for Innovative High Schools*

NCNSP and its partners offer assistance to innovative high schools through an Integrated System of School Support Services, or IS<sup>4</sup>. These school support services are aligned specifically with the five Design Principles and utilize an “anchor experience” for principals and lead teachers at a highly effective, innovative exemplar outside of North Carolina. IS<sup>4</sup> includes:

- **Teaching for Results:** Each year, teachers in innovative schools take part in a series of intensive professional development that sustains their focus on instruction, academic rigor and professional learning communities. The sessions stress differentiating instruction, teaching literacy across the curriculum, facilitating meaningful learning, and providing effective student support. During the school year, the sessions involve visits to peer schools in which teachers use a medical “rounds” model to improve their practice collaboratively.



- **Leadership Institute for High School Redesign:** Given the importance of leadership in managing change and the unusual demands placed on school leaders in innovative high schools, NCNSP targets principals for leadership development that is tightly aligned with the content of teacher development activities, allowing school leaders and their faculties to grow together.
- **Coaching:** Innovative high schools receive ongoing, on-site coaching over the course of their six year partnership with NCNSP. Initially, the coaching focuses on school change, with schools receiving 15 days of service on average. After the first year, the focus of coaching shifts to instructional practice for the remainder of the five years of the partnership, with schools receiving a minimum of 30 days of service.
- **NCNSP Program Staff Support:** NCNSP’s School Development Team, made up of highly accomplished teachers and administrators, provides ongoing support to innovative high schools. Each School Development Team member has a portfolio of schools to manage, ensuring the delivery of integrated supports and acting as a primary point of contact with NCNSP.

Beginning in the 2007-08 school year, innovative high schools have had access to literacy and math assessments that can be given twice during the school year to determine students’ progress. The tests are computer-based and adaptive, with their difficulty increasing based on a student’s level of mastery.

### *Early Results Show Promise*

Transforming a school in meaningful ways that actually change teaching and learning is hard work. In its partnerships with local school districts, the North Carolina New Schools Project forges five-year agreements in recognition of the difficulty and complexity of this work. Emerging results from the 2005-06, 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years, however, indicate that high school innovation is taking hold in North Carolina.

**More students staying in school** – Dropout data from the Department of Public Instruction for the 2006-07 school year show that more students who are in innovative high schools are staying in school.

- Nearly half (48 percent) of the 82 innovative high schools had **no** dropouts during the 2007-08 school year. The innovative high schools represented 44 percent of all high schools in North Carolina with no dropouts.
- Forty-nine of the 76 innovative high schools that enrolled 9<sup>th</sup> graders lost no freshmen as dropouts in 2007-08.
- Of the 82 innovative high schools, 69 (84 percent) outperformed their comparison high schools, with a slightly higher percentage (86 percent) of the 76 schools with 9<sup>th</sup> graders outperforming comparison schools for freshman dropouts.
- The overall dropout rate in innovative high schools was 3.37 percent, compared to the statewide rate of 4.97 percent. The combined dropout rate for Learn and Earn early college high schools was .78 percent and for redesigned high schools was 5.45 percent.<sup>2</sup>
- Two-thirds of the 30 redesign schools outperformed their comparison school for all dropouts; 16 of 25 redesign schools with 9<sup>th</sup> grade classes outperformed their comparison school for freshmen dropouts.
- Eight of 10 STEM high schools (80 percent) had no dropouts in 2007-08, their first year of operation. Nine of the 10 schools lost no students in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, which for most of the schools was their only class.

**More 9<sup>th</sup> graders are being promoted** – Ultimately, to graduate a student must first complete the required courses and be promoted from grade to grade. Research has shown that promotion out of 9<sup>th</sup> grade is an especially strong indicator of a student's likelihood to graduate. Based on data on grade level promotion from the Department of Public Instruction for the 2006-07 school year (the most recent available), more students in innovative high schools are being promoted into 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

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<sup>2</sup> Redesigned high schools must equip existing faculty with new instructional strategies in contrast to launching a new school with a common instructional approach and selecting a faculty consistent with that approach. Improvements in promotion rates and acceleration of the academic achievement of students who previously would have dropped out lag behind the introduction of these strategies. This lag time is consistent with many school-wide reforms nationally.

- Three-quarters (78 percent) of the 49 innovative high schools that had 9<sup>th</sup> grade classes promoted at least 90 percent of their 9<sup>th</sup> graders, with 20 of those schools (41 percent) promoting **100 percent** of their 9<sup>th</sup> graders.
- Four out of every five innovative high schools with sizable 9<sup>th</sup> grade classes (84 percent) had a 9<sup>th</sup> grade promotion rate that was greater than (at least 1 percentage point) their comparison school or district. More than half (55 percent) of innovative high schools had improved their 9<sup>th</sup> grade promotion rate by at least 10 percent over their comparison school or district.

**It's early, but some schools do better than expected** – Based on results from the state's ABC accountability system, many schools are making or exceeding growth expectations and are outperforming the comparable high schools in their districts.

- More than two thirds of innovative high schools had higher ABCs performance composites than comparison high schools. Eighty six percent of early college high schools, 39 percent of redesigned high schools and 90 percent of STEM high schools met this benchmark.
- More than half (52 percent) of innovative high schools had performance composites (percent of proficient scores on all End-of-Course tests) of more than 80 percent, compared to only 13 percent of high schools statewide.

**More teachers believe in their schools** – Based on data from the 2008 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, the percentage of teachers in innovative high schools who “strongly agree” that their school is “a good place to work and learn” is nearly 50 percent greater than the percentage in comparison traditional high schools (49 percent compared to 34 percent). In fact, teachers in redesigned and early college high schools are significantly more satisfied in every area measured by the state's Teacher Working Conditions Survey.

### ***Building a statewide consensus for change***

A vital part of NCNSP's work to ensure innovative high schools perform well is to build local community support and to build demand across the state generally for higher expectations and schools that can help students reach them. To broaden and deepen support for innovation across North Carolina, NCNSP works to prompt and support the delivery of compelling messages that build demand, working with like-minded individuals and organizations to spread this call for higher expectations. This work relies heavily on the results of NCNSP's partner schools to tell the story of expectations being met through innovation.

Changing high schools in North Carolina will require changing minds. While many North Carolinians have confronted global economic change first hand, they do not always connect it to high school innovation as a vital response. Others question the need for higher expectations and doubt that schools can educate all students to reach them in any case. Still others believe that schools must be different, but do not know how they can or should be different.

NCNSP sees an unmistakable need for a broad and sophisticated statewide outreach effort to increase demand for higher expectations and for schools that can ensure all students reach them before they graduate. This effort needs to harness every available tactic to compete effectively for the public's attention in a message-glutted world. NCNSP recognizes that many voices are louder than one voice. For this reason, key statewide actors such as the Office of the Governor, the State Board of Education, state business leaders and networks of community organizations must lead the outreach. NCNSP sees its role as prompting this outreach and supporting it through expertise and technical assistance. NCNSP seeks to be the linchpin in an inclusive statewide push that would create unavoidable demand.

To be clear, NCNSP does not view its advocacy agenda as simple marketing of its Design Principles and its services to help schools deliver on them. Rather, NCNSP believes that it must focus more broadly on higher expectations and the limitations of current high schools that prevent some students from reaching those higher marks. NCNSP sees any thoughtful public dialogue about the preconditions within schools that would ensure all students graduate "ready" as leading to the ideas raised in the Design Principles.

### *Advancing policies that promote innovation, higher standards and improved performance*

NCNSP generates ideas for and actively supports policy changes by the State Board of Education, the Education Cabinet and the General Assembly to ensure that all students are required to master high academic standards and that assessment and accountability systems are aligned with this goal. Through its research, NCNSP seeks to inform policymakers and the public of the need for higher expectations and more innovative delivery systems in high school education.

The policy changes advocated by NCNSP include changes to academic expectations based on the work of the American Diploma Project and the Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, each of which involve raising standards based on the demands that high school graduates face in college and in the workplace.

Other specific policy changes advocated by NCNSP include:

- **Increased Academic Standards:** Enrolling all students in academically rigorous, honors or AP level courses to prepare them for college and work will reduce the need for remediation after high school and enhance the state's workforce.
- **Enhanced Curriculum and Professional Development:** Updating curriculum and assessments to include the knowledge and skills required in the new economy and enhancing the ability of teachers to teach both rigorous courses *and* skills such as communication and problem solving will prepare all students for college, work and a lifetime of learning.
- **Enhanced Accountability:** Enacting changes to the state's ABC accountability model will provide an incentive to high schools to graduate all students and to enroll a greater percentage of students in higher level courses.

