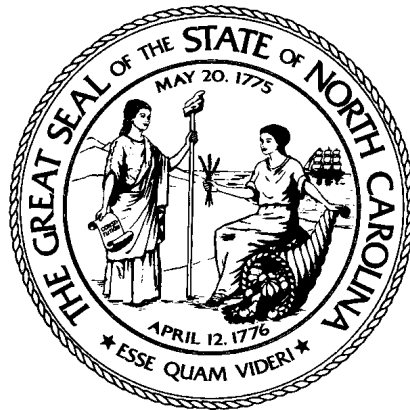


NORTH CAROLINA STATE PLAN
for the
AMERICAN DIPLOMA PROJECT



SUMMARY

Governor Mike Easley, the NC State Board of Education, the NC Education Cabinet, comprised of the Governor and the chief executives of the state's education systems, and the NC General Assembly have come together to support an aggressive agenda for reforming high school education in North Carolina to ensure all students are ready for college, work and life in the 21st Century.

Prior to joining the American Diploma Project, to support this goal, the state implemented the following strategies:

- **The NC New Schools Project.** Created in 2003 with a major grant from the Gates Foundation, the New Schools project is starting small, redesigned high schools with economic development themes across the state. Eleven are in operation this year with 22 more slated to open in the fall of 2006.
- **Learn and Earn early college high schools.** Governor Mike Easley launched the *Learn and Earn* initiative in 2004. *Learn and Earn* high schools are located on college campuses and allow students to graduate in five years with both a high school diploma and an associate's degree or two years of university credit. They also include work-based learning experiences for all students.
- **The NC Action Plan for High School Innovation.** Developed by the State Board of Education and the New Schools Project, this plan has been disseminated across the state. The Office of the Governor and the Education Cabinet have developed an Implementation Plan and have committed to put into place the key policies identified in the plan.
- **The New Schools Project Advocacy and Communications initiative,** which has been funded by the Gates Foundation and is focused on communicating the urgency for greater rigor and relevance, and relationships in high schools and the need for an aggressive reform agenda.
- **The Center for 21st Century Skills.** NC launched the country's first Center for 21st Century Skills in partnership with the national Partnership for 21st Century Skills. Operating out of the NC Business Committee for Education located in the Governor's Office, the Center is focused on redesigning curriculum, teacher training and student assessments with 21st Century content, context, and learning skills.
- **The State Board of Education's Rigor Committee.** The State Board established an ad hoc committee focused on raising high school standards, a college default diploma, and other strategies for increasing rigor and high school graduation rates.

The state joined the American Diploma Project in May of 2005. In committing to align high school and college standards, implement a college and work readiness assessment, institute a default college diploma, and hold high schools and colleges accountable for student success and completion, North Carolina is putting into place key policies that will sustain its drive to fundamentally reform high school education and ensure the longer term success of its innovative high school redesign and development efforts with the New Schools Project and Learn and Earn high schools.

The state is committed to a three-year timeline to create 150 Learn and Earn and economic development-themed high schools and to implement the key policies from the work of the American Diploma Project. The State's goals are simple: prepare all students for college and work and develop the best educated, most competitive workforce in the nation. With excellent community colleges and universities, great public support for education, and a college-going rate that is among the top in the nation, we have the tools we need to achieve this goal. We must remain committed to critical investments and aggressive policy action to ensure that students across the state have the skills they need to compete and succeed in the economy of the 21st century.

CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

North Carolina high schools have made real progress as they have moved from an institution serving very few to one striving to serve all students. In fact, high schools in North Carolina have many things of which we can be proud.

- North Carolina is ranked first in the country in the percentage of high school students taking advanced math—61%.
- 93% of our public high schools offer at least one Advanced Placement course.
- North Carolina had the largest 10-year gain in SAT scores among states with over 50% of the population taking the SAT.
- The achievement gap is narrowing in all areas.
- NC students ranked 6th in the country in the percentage of high school graduates enrolling immediately in college.

Despite these successes, NC continues to suffer from low graduation rates, low college readiness rates, and a college graduation rate that is too low for North Carolina's changing economy and the changing reality of global economic life and citizenship. Three realities point to the major challenges with which the state must grapple:

1. Too many students are not graduating.

- NC's 9th grade class is almost 45,000 students bigger than the state's 12th grade class. The most recent NCES data shows that for every 100 9th graders in NC:
 - 60 graduate from high school within four years
 - 41 immediately enter college
 - 29 are still enrolled in their second year
 - 19 graduate with an associate's degree within three years or a bachelor's degree within six years.
- Two recent studies (The Institute for Civil Rights at Harvard study and the Manhattan Institute's study) pegged NC's graduation rate at 64.5% and 67% respectively.
- While White students in North Carolina graduate at higher rates than their Black and Latino peers, they perform below the national average for White students.

2. Too many students are not engaged in school.

- Less than one-third of high school students enrolled in college prep programs said that schoolwork is often or always meaningful.
- Only 23% of college-prep students said that most courses were "quite interesting" or "very interesting."

3. Too many students who graduate are not prepared for the next step.

- 60% of employers rate students' basic skills as "fair" or "poor."
- 36% of students graduate from high school unqualified or marginally qualified to go to college.
- 9.5% of entering students take one or more remedial courses in a UNC System school.
- 49% of entering students in a NC community college take one or more remedial courses.

THE AMERICAN DIPLOMA PROJECT IN NORTH CAROLINA

Aligning High School and College Standards

North Carolina is acknowledged as having one of the best accountability programs in the country. Its high school accountability program holds schools accountable for the performance of students on ten end-of-course tests (as well as a dropout rate measure). What North Carolina's high school accountability program is missing is clear alignment between standards for proficiency on high school coursework and standards of readiness for college work. The state cannot say with certainty that students who pass high school courses and graduate are, in fact, prepared for college-level work.

What we do know comes from the Manhattan Institute, which reports that the percentage of NC high school graduates who are ready for college stands at 37%. While this is an 11-percentage point improvement since 1992, it is a far cry from the needs of the state in the midst of an economic transition from manufacturing-based to more knowledge-based, higher-skilled industries.

The State's work with the Achieve Alignment Institutes Cohort II will help our education system leaders begin and sustain the important alignment work needed to facilitate our students being adequately prepared for success in postsecondary education and work. More specifically, this activity will allow North Carolina to 1) undertake a research and development effort to align high school standards with the knowledge and skills needed for college success and 2) develop an assessment of college and work readiness.

Implementing a College and Work Readiness Assessment

Standards and accountability systems in North Carolina must be tied to the expectations and requirements of the 21st Century. Assessments and accountability systems must provide a balance of standardized assessments coupled with actual demonstrations of knowledge and skills to provide teachers, parents, and employers with deeper insight into students' knowledge and skills.

North Carolina strives to have an assessment system built on the following principles:

- Standards, assessments and accountability measures value 21st Century content knowledge and skills, including creative and critical thinking, problem-solving skills, communication skills and teamwork.
- High school assessments and exit requirements are aligned with college entrance and placement requirements.
- Testable items are narrowed and fully defined so that time is freed for addition of performance-based measures in all classes, including integrated courses.
- Parents, businesses and community partners participate in student demonstrations of knowledge to provide authentic feedback about standards and expectations of adult work.
- Research and evaluation are ongoing to ensure North Carolina learns from its work.

Currently, the following assessments comprise NC's current high school assessment system:

- End of Course exams – Beginning with the freshman class of 2007, students must pass 5 of 5 End of Course tests (Algebra I, English I, Biology, Economic/Civics, and US History) in order to graduate
- Culminating projects - Beginning with the freshman class of 2007, students must complete a senior project
- In addition, the state has the 13th highest state participation rate for the SAT, industry certification in such areas as Cisco Network Engineering Technology, and several school systems also use

Work Keys, a national system developed by ACT, Inc., that offers comprehensive assessment in various occupations

The state's four-year institutions and community colleges use a variety of measures to assess a student's readiness for post secondary work:

- The institutes of higher education are provided the authority to establish what goes into a standardized high school transcript, including the weighting of grades for honors and AP/IB coursework. Also, the End of Course scores are required to be at least 25% of the final grade. Because the state curriculum (NCSCOS) is standardized and aligned with the EOC's, the university is assured that students are receiving and being tested on the same curriculum goals and objectives.
- The university also offers the Early Math Placement Test (EMPT) through East Carolina University. This is a diagnostic instrument which identifies a student's strengths and weaknesses in mathematics. It also provides guidance on coursework needed to pursue a given major at any of the UNC campuses.
- Accuplacer, ASSET or COMPASS is utilized for Early College High School students who will take university courses for dual enrollment.
- The NC community colleges have been providing assessment of high school students' academic skills proficiency through the use of the Accuplacer, ASSET/COMPASS testing programs. This assessment program can be aligned to provide information on all students who might enter a community college workforce preparation or college transfer program.
- The UNC campuses use either the SAT II or locally developed placement tests to make placement decisions for incoming freshmen.

What the state lacks and is committed to developing is a college-work ready assessment, aligned to state standards that can be a common measure for our four-year and community colleges and employers to assess students readiness for college and work. This will be a difficult task because universities (public and private) with selective admissions use minimum course requirements and admissions tests that predict probable success of students to complete the freshman year.

On the other hand, community colleges are open door admissions institutions and use placement tests to determine readiness to undertake college level courses. Recent transferability agreements between the university and community colleges should enhance the probability of this task being accomplished. We are in agreement that North Carolina needs a balanced accountability model and that the assessment needs to go beyond the "hard" skills to include soft skills as well.

Instituting a Default College Diploma

In signing up to participate as a part of ADP, NC is committed to making "college prep" the default track for high school students. As the state moves more and more students to a high school pathway that prepares them for college and skilled work, it is critical that we achieve alignment between high school and college standards and clear standards for college and work readiness—so that we are truly preparing students for life in higher education and the workplace.

At present the state has four diploma pathways: 1) College Prep which prepares students to enter UNC system schools; 2) College Tech Prep which prepares students to enter community colleges; 3) Career

Prep which prepares students for industry clusters; and 4) Occupational which supports the needs of students with special needs. The NC State Board of Education has committed to a policy path that would make the College Prep and Tech Prep pathway the default pathway in North Carolina as a first step.

Next steps will move the state toward the College Prep pathway solely as the default pathway for all students.

Holding High Schools and Colleges Accountable for Student Success

North Carolina is committed to supporting more successful transitions from high schools to postsecondary institutions and work. At present, under the state's ABCs Accountability Program, high schools are accountable for student performance in ten core subjects, for dropout rates, and will soon be accountable for completion of senior projects. Students will be accountable based on High School Exit Standards, which requires passage of the state's English I, Biology, Algebra I, US History, and Civics and Economics courses. The state's university system uses the state End of Course test results for admissions and placement decisions.

The state is committed to identifying ways to improve accountability measures for schools tied to college and work readiness. A diagnostic college and work readiness assessment that can be administered in the 10th or 11th grade is one option to which the state will look.

In order to improve current accountability efforts with respect to college and work readiness, the state needs to continue its efforts to develop a longitudinal data system. NC does not have a data system with the capacity to track the progress of each student K-16 at this time, although the three NC Education Systems are in conversation about developing a K-16 longitudinal data warehouse.

North Carolina currently collects a wealth of data at the secondary and postsecondary levels including such data points as state test scores, participation information on untested students who lack 8th grade test scores, student-level course completion information, and student-level demographic and program participation data. The state does have the capability of tracking those who move from K-12 to the UNC system and can tell if they transfer within the UNC system or to any college included in the National Student Clearinghouse database.

However, the state does not currently have a seamless method of tracking all students from secondary to post secondary and into the work cycle. With the new NC WISE system for K-12 public schools, the Department of Public Instruction will assign each student a unique identifier that will enhance data tracking abilities.

On the postsecondary side of the ledger, North Carolina has a solid foundation upon which to build accountability for student success. North Carolina Community Colleges are held accountable by statute and State Board policies for open door access and twelve critical success factors. The legislature and the State Board of Community Colleges support access through dual enrollment policies, early college high school initiatives, the "High School to Community College Articulation Agreement," and the Cooperative Innovative High Schools Programs" statute. In addition, colleges are monitored on student achievement and attainment through critical success factors that include passing rates on licensure/certification exams, performance of college transfer students, passing rates in developmental courses, curriculum student retention and graduation rates, and program enrollments. Colleges that do not meet five prescribed standards must develop action plans to bring the institutions into compliance. Colleges that exceed expectations are recognized as superior colleges and may receive performance funding based upon availability of funds.

The UNC system generates required reports for the NC General Assembly on 1) Retention, 2) Graduation, 3) Time-to-Degree, and 4) Remedial/Developmental Education among its students. There are no performance requirements for UNC schools.

NORTH CAROLINA'S READINESS FOR CHANGE

North Carolina, under the leadership of Governor Mike Easley and the state's Education Cabinet, has initiated an ambitious and aggressive plan for reforming high schools in North Carolina. The following essential ingredients demonstrate North Carolina's readiness and leadership for change:

Gubernatorial and Policymakers Commitment. **Governor Easley** has made high school reform a top priority. In his budget for 2005-07, the Governor worked with the General Assembly to secure \$6.5 million to support new economic development-themed and Learn and Earn high schools. **The State Board of Education** has also made high school reform a top priority. It has formed a new cross-functional High School Team within the state department, started a Rigor Committee focused on raising standards, and created a high school reform subcommittee of the Board. **The Education Cabinet** oversees the New Schools Project and has launched a task force to create new programmatic and fiscal policy to support the implementation of the Governor's Learn and Earn early college high schools. **The General Assembly** has passed legislation in support of innovative high school reform efforts that provides significant flexibility to new high school start-ups.

Implementation of Innovative Policies and Practices. The passage of **SB 656 The Innovative Education Initiatives Act** created policy waivers for innovative high school models and paved the way for the implementation of *Learn and Earn* high schools. Through **New Schools Project** and *Learn and Earn* projects, 24 new high schools opened this fall with another 22 small conversion schools and 23 new *Learn and Earn* schools to come on-line in 2006-07. Governor Easley has partnered with the business community to create the nation's first **Center for 21st Century Skills** to focus on redesigning curriculum and assessment in high schools and the Legislature provided \$250,000 in recurring funding to support operations.

The American Diploma Project effort in North Carolina will build upon this strong foundation. The state's team for ADP work will include senior executive staff to the state's Education Cabinet and business and education leadership from the NC Business Committee for Education and the Board of advisors of the NC New Schools Project. These individuals have worked together since 2003 on each of the reform and innovation efforts described above.

This initiative will lead to a change in the state's standard course of study and changes in end-of-course assessments. North Carolina will likely begin with a language arts course and a science or math course (or both). This activity may also lead to changes in policies about placement testing at community colleges and universities. No policy changes will be required to develop the college and work readiness assessment, but implementing one will require changes in state statute, State Board policy, and higher education placement policy.

North Carolina will draw on its work with Achieve and the American Diploma Project to marshal the tools needed to communicate the need for this alignment. In addition, the New Schools Project Advocacy Initiative will include discussion of this issue at the grassroots and state level. Furthermore, the newly created Center for 21st Century Skills will be making this a key agenda item and contribute to this work.

TIMELINE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The state’s timeline for the research and policy development work related to the American Diploma project is as follows:

| DATES | ACTION STEPS |
|----------------------|--|
| Oct. 2005 –Jan. 2006 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene meetings of key stakeholders in K-12 (K-12 reps from DPI, State Board, administrators, teachers) and postsecondary to outline and refine plan for moving forward • Identify higher education and high school faculty to participate in work groups on alignment • Identify major funding for ADP research and policy development work |
| Feb. 2006 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education Cabinet Briefing and discussion • Hire State Coordinator • Attend first ADP Alignment Institute • Department of Public Instruction cross-functional team begins R&D efforts related to 21st Century Skills and college and work readiness |
| Mar. – Dec. 2006 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth discussion with State Board of Education, Community Colleges, UNC Board of Governors and Board of Directors of independent colleges at one of their monthly public meetings • Conduct research on policy and practice in other states in concert with Achieve and ADP network (i.e., default college diploma track or college and work ready assessments) • Briefing for key business groups, convened by NC Business Committee for Education • Attend second and third ADP Alignment Institutes • Meetings with key stakeholders on curricular and assessment changes in K-12 and potential placement process changes for postsecondary • NCDPI’s Accountability and Curriculum and Instruction divisions begin work on curricular and assessment changes to be made and any pilots needed • Postsecondary systems draft changes to placement processes • Education Cabinet Discussion • Briefing and discussion for Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee |
| Jan. – Aug. 2007 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize curricular, instructional and assessment changes in K-12 arena and any placement process changes in postsecondary arena. • Publish major public document about need for changes and alignment • Finalize plan with Education Cabinet on moving changes fully into place over two years • Policy work with respective education governing boards on needed policy actions related to standards, work and college readiness assessments, college default diploma and high school and college accountability • Work with the NC General Assembly on needed statutory changes to implement the ADP agenda |

Major Actions to date:

- State Board of Education policy passed to set target date for implementation of default college diploma
- Department of Public Instruction identifies cross-functional team to work on standards gap analysis and assessment issues related to 21st Century Skills and college and work readiness
- Major funding identified from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to support research and policy development work associated with the American Diploma Project
- State Coordinator identified and hired
- Briefing for the NC Education Cabinet on ADP goals and timeline
- Alignment Institute funding and team members identified

THE TEAM IN NORTH CAROLINA

The American Diploma Project is under the auspices of the state's Education Cabinet. The Cabinet includes the following:

- Governor Mike Easley, Chairman
- State Board Chairman Howard Lee
- State Superintendent June Atkinson
- UNC System President Erskine Bowles
- NC Community College System President Martin Lancaster
- NC Independent Colleges and Universities President Hope Williams

North Carolina's Core Team will be comprised of the following members:

- J.B. Buxton, Senior Education Advisor to the Governor
- Ann McArthur, Teacher Advisor to the Governor
- Tony Habit, Director, NC New Schools Project
- Janice Davis, Deputy State Superintendent, NC Department of Public Instruction
- Kathy Taft, Member, State Board of Education
- Jane Worsham, State Coordinator (former exec. dir., NC State Board of Education)
- Richard Thompson, Vice President for University-School Relations, UNC System
- Delores Parker, Vice-President for Academic Affairs, NC Community College System
- Ken Whitehurst, Associate Vice President, NC Community College System
- Tim McDowell, Vice-President, NC Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
- Tricia Willoughby, Executive Director, NC Business Committee for Education

North Carolina is also participating in the ADP Alignment Institutes. Alignment Team Members are as follows:

State Coordinator

Jane W. Worsham, former executive director of the NC State Board of Education

Business Representative

Lynn Roberson, Director, Corporate Affairs
BellSouth NC Operations
Board of Directors, NC Business Committee for Education

Public University System

Catherine Carter, Director of English Education
English Department
Western Carolina University

Sarah “Sally” Berenson, Director, Center for Research in Math and Science
North Carolina State University

Independent Colleges and Universities

Robin Smith, Dean, Academic Affairs
Salem College

Community College System

Frank Hendrick, Math Faculty
College of the Albemarle

April Kennedy, English Faculty
James Sprunt Community College

Department of Public Instruction

Wandra Polk, Director, Division of Secondary Education
NC Department of Public Instruction

Shayne Goodrum, Secondary English Language Arts Consultant
NC Department of Public Instruction

Beverly Ghesquiere, Secondary Math Consultant
NC Department of Public Instruction