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Contact Todd Silberman, (919) 277-3760

Donors step up to help NC secure \$15 million federal grant

More than 20,000 North Carolina students to benefit from early college initiative

Many companies, foundations and individuals from across North Carolina and across the country have stepped up to help the North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP) raise \$1.5 million in pledges in recent weeks to successfully meet a required private sector match for a \$15 million federal grant. This grant would extend successful early college strategies to as many as 20 traditional high schools in rural, low-income communities across the state, benefiting more than 20,000 students.

Pledges to achieve the grant match came from the following: the A.J. Fletcher Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Fred Eshelman, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Golden Corral and Investors Management Corporation, the Golden LEAF Foundation, the Hidalgo Family, Kryosphere, Lenovo, Lumbee Guaranty Bank, Novartis, SAS, The Lauren & James Whitehurst Family Foundation and the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation.

The U.S. Department of Education last month selected NCNSP from among nearly 600 applicants across the country as one of 23 organizations to potentially share \$150 million under the federal **Investing in Innovation (i3) competitive grant program**. The NCNSP initiative is the only proposal from North Carolina recognized for funding in this highly competitive grant program, and one of only five to be selected for potential funding at the \$15 million level.

Eligibility for funding from the U.S. Department of Education is tied to NCNSP's success in securing additional, private support for the five-year initiative. Successfully achieving the match is a key hurdle prior to the final award from the department, which is expected next month.

Gov. Bev Perdue, who appealed to corporate and foundation leaders for support, said she believes the new initiative will bring new opportunities to many students in rural areas of the state.

“Every child, no matter where they live, should graduate high school ready for a career, college or technical training,” Gov. Perdue said. “I want to personally thank the businesses, individuals and organizations that contributed to helping secure this grant. Because of their generosity, the North Carolina New Schools Project will be able to reach even more students in more communities.”

The grant program supports the goals of Gov. Perdue's new Career & College Promise initiative, which gives high school juniors and seniors the opportunity to earn college credit, tuition-free, as a way to get a solid head start on college or strong preparation for a career.

NCNSP President Tony Habit said he is grateful to the many organizations and individuals who pledged funding and volunteered their time to secure this significant resource for the state.

"This speaks to our progress as a state," Habit said. "The U.S. Department of Education has signaled its confidence in the state's progressive efforts to improve educational opportunities for all students, and key leaders in North Carolina think that such education innovation is an important investment."

The North Carolina New Schools Project, in partnership with the State Board of Education, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction, the N.C. Community College System, the SERVE Center at UNC-Greensboro, and local school districts, will use the federal grant to apply lessons learned from the state's growing number of early college high schools, which focus on ensuring that all students graduate ready for college and careers.

High schools in six rural county districts are currently included in the initiative proposal – Beaufort, Hertford, Madison, Richmond, Sampson and Wilkes. Additional schools in other districts are being identified as additional partners in the effort.

With 74 early college high schools now open in 63 counties – from some of the state's largest to some of its smallest – North Carolina claims about a third of the innovative schools nationwide. The mold-breaking schools allow students to earn an associate degree or significant college credit, tuition free, along with their high school diploma. The schools are intended to serve students who are often underrepresented in college, including those who are from low-income families, minorities and those whose parents didn't attend college.

A multi-year research study of early colleges in North Carolina is finding strong evidence of success. Dropouts are few, and graduation rates are high. Solid academic achievement is reflected in test scores that exceed state averages as well as high rates of postsecondary enrollment. The study is also finding that the schools are helping to close gaps in achievement between white and minority students.

The North Carolina New Schools Project supports the 74 existing schools with coaches for teachers and principals and carefully designed professional development based on a set of proven design principles, all of which are aligned to an overarching goal of graduating all students ready for college, careers and life.

Under the new federal grant, NCNSP will extend successful early college high school strategies to between 15 and 20 traditional high schools and up to 10 rural, low-income county districts where they are located. One key goal of the initiative is for all students to graduate with at least 21 college credits, or the equivalent of about seven courses.

Each of the high schools will receive support similar to the early college high schools already affiliated with NCNSP. Teachers will learn to follow a proven common instructional framework that ensures consistent expectations and teaching approaches are followed in all classrooms. Students will be challenged to read, write, think and talk every day in every class.

Early college high schools, typically located on the campus of a community college or university, are aimed at challenging students who are the first in their family to earn a college degree and who also need additional support to succeed academically. This initiative will allow these effective strategies to reach more traditional high schools across the state.

The North Carolina New Schools Project is a statewide public-private partnership that sparks sustainable innovation in North Carolina secondary schools. Its vision is to ensure every student graduates ready for college, careers and life. The North Carolina New Schools Project partners with school districts, businesses and higher education to link innovation in education to the emerging economy.

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