

# INNOVATOR

## News about high school innovation

August 16, 2010

Welcome to INNOVATOR, a bimonthly report on high school change in North Carolina from the North Carolina New Schools Project. INNOVATOR informs practitioners, policy makers, and friends of public education about high school innovation in North Carolina as well as success stories and research from across the nation.

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## Innovative high schools show solid gains on ABCs results

**North Carolina's innovative high schools posted notable gains in performance on the state's standardized exams in 2009-10, according to results released last week by the Department of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education.**

Among the break-the-mold schools showing the greatest progress were a number of small schools that have been created during the last five years on the campuses of former large comprehensive high schools with high rates of poverty and low achievement. Even allowing for the change this year by the state in counting retests for the first time in passing rates, the combined gains by students in the small "redesigned" high schools outpaced average state gains on five of six key end-of-course tests.

Overall, the 27 redesigned high schools saw a combined increase of 13.5 points on the percentage of all tests passed -- from 58.7 percent to 72.2 percent -- compared to a gain of 9.5 percentage points in the passing rate of all the tests taken in the state -- from 71.4 percent in 2008-09 to 80.5 percent in 2009-10.

The same kind of progress was found also with specific exams, including Algebra I, English I, Civics and Economics, Biology and U.S. History. On all five exams, which students are required to pass for a diploma, gains by innovative high schools exceeded the state's gains.

Other highlights from the test results and the state's [ABCs of Public Education](#) accountability system included these:

- Nearly two thirds all NCNSP innovative high schools (64 percent) met the academic growth projected by the state, while one in three (33 percent) exceeded their expected growth targets and were deemed to have achieved high growth. In 2007-08, 54.5 percent of NCNSP schools met their targets, with 20.2 percent exceeding them.
- The median performance composite, which includes the results of all state End-of-Course exams, was 87.3 percent for NCNSP schools in 2009-10, up from 76.2 percent in 2008-09 and 72.1 percent in 2007-08. The median for traditional 9-12 schools was 80.3 percent, up from 71.2 percent in 2008-09.
- About seven of every 10 innovative high schools (71.7 percent) had a performance composite greater than 80 percent, compared to 41.5 percent of comparison schools and 50.9 percent of all traditional 9-12 high schools.
- Nine of 10 innovative high schools that were open in 2008-09 improved their performance composites in 2009-10, and two thirds of them (77.4 percent) exceeded the performance composites of their comparison schools.
- Six of 106 innovative schools (5.7 percent) had performance composites less than 60 percent, down significantly from 22 percent of schools in 2008-09.
- For the second consecutive year, the gains for redesigned high schools were among the most significant among North Carolina's innovative high schools. The percentage of the 27 schools open in 2009-10 and meeting their targets for expected student gains increased from 30 percent in 2008-09 to 66.7 percent in 2009-10. The median performance composite for the 27 schools increased from 62.5 percent in 2008-09 to 72.5 percent this past year. One third of the schools also met their targets for high growth, a significant increase from the 9.3 percent of the redesigned schools that did so in 2008-09.

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## State data show strong graduation rates for new schools

**The biggest collective class of students yet from North Carolina's innovative high schools graduated last spring in numbers indicating the schools are succeeding on a critical goal: helping more students earn their diplomas.**

Altogether, the 45 schools with full cohorts of students finishing in four years -- or five years in the case of most early college high schools -- had a combined graduation rate of just less than 84 percent, according to [data](#) released earlier this month by the N.C. Department of Public Instruction. The state's overall graduate rate was 74.2 percent.

For the 19 early college high schools with full cohorts graduating, 90 percent of the students finished with their classes. Nine of the 19 schools had graduation rates above 95 percent and five schools had rates of at least 90 percent.

Among the 26 redesigned schools created from traditional high schools -- many of them enrolling high percentages of students from poor families -- the combined four-year cohort graduation rate was 81.4 percent. Twenty-one of the 26 schools were above the state's overall graduation rate, with 14 of the schools -- more than half -- graduating more than 85 percent of the 9th grade cohort from four years earlier.

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## Remodeled NCNSP website has new look, new features

**The North Carolina New Schools Project has re-launched its website with a new layout that's easier to navigate and a deeper resource for supporting and promoting high school innovation across the state. Take a look.**

The NCNSP [website](#) is the culmination of months of redesign -- all aimed at better serving teachers, principals, students and parents who are connected to the 107 innovative schools that stretch from Murphy in the mountains to Buxton on the Outer Banks. The site serves as a base for NCNSP teachers and administrators to share best practices and engage with colleagues throughout the state.

"Preparing today's high school students for future challenges in college, careers and life is our goal," said Tony Habit, President for NCNSP. "Our new site will help teachers and principals work together more effectively, share lessons learned and collaborate as a community. All of that will make for a richer experience for students."

Beyond creating an online community for NCNSP educators, the new site also highlights the growing successes in innovative high schools around the state, such as marked improvements in graduation rates and yearly state tests, as well as declines in dropouts.

"Innovative schools are critical to student success and our state's workforce," Habit said. "If North Carolina wants to attract businesses and industry, we need the workers of tomorrow to be the best trained in the world - and that starts with high school. Our new site tells a vivid story, through images, narrative and video, of the exciting successes in schools around our state."

The new website profiles students, teachers and schools, and offers dynamic and interactive information from Facebook and Twitter. The new content helps tell the story of success within NCNSP schools, and includes tools to locate the schools and compare their performance to other schools in their districts and with the state overall.

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## Students learn computer rehab at summer technology camp

**Students from five innovative high schools gathered in Raleigh earlier this month for a unique program that blends computer savvy with community service. For the second year running, small high schools in North Carolina with a focus on STEM themes -- science, technology, engineering and math -- sent teams of students to the Youth Technology Corps computer camp to learn how to refurbish used computers for use in their communities.**

The [Youth Technology Corps](#) (YTC), a Chicago-based non-profit, builds and runs after-school programs designed to wake the interest of high school students in STEM. In YTC programs, students take computers apart, test the components, reassemble good components into working machines, and load open-source software.

Through that exercise, they gain comfort and familiarity with technology and the process of refurbishment. Students then donate, set up, and maintain computer labs in schools, churches, youth centers, senior homes and other places, chosen by the students with the community. Furthermore, YTC students teach community members how to use the computers, software and networks to communicate and do real work.

In doing so, students reinforce what they have learned and also gain basic teaching skills. Students can then use this technology platform to pursue other interests in structured YTC programs that let them explore, design, and implement real scientific research, new applications of technology, productions using video and web media, or entrepreneurial business ideas of their own.

In partnership with the North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP) and the Teaching

Institute for Excellence in STEM (TIES), YTC expanded to North Carolina in August 2009 and further expanded this year. Students from these North Carolina schools participated in the camp this summer:

- Centennial Campus Middle School, Raleigh, NC
- Duplin Early College High School, Kenansville, NC
- Jacket Integrated Academy at Carver High School, Winston-Salem, NC
- Nash/Rocky Mount Early College High School, Rocky Mount, NC
- Northampton-West STEM High School, Gaston, NC
- Wayne School of Engineering at Goldsboro High School, Goldsboro, NC

The North Carolina students were joined by peers from eight high schools in the Chicago area. The YTC expansion in North Carolina is supported by the following organizations:

- After School Matters, Chicago, IL
- J.S. Morton School District 201
- North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP)
- Teaching Institute for Excellence in STEM (TIES)
- OfficeMax
- J.P. Morgan Chase

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## Look for NCNSP on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube

The latest updates from the North Carolina New Schools Project and partner schools can now be found on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

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