

Statewide Systemic Reform

What state-level changes are called for by the global imperative for education reform? How can state education agencies use this imperative to engage in systems change rather than just the implementation of discreet new programs? Day Three of the Summer Institute is the time when we generate new ideas and recommendations for how to transform state education agencies into world-class organizations leading change in education. The program will provide chief state school officers the opportunity to consider the state-level changes in policy and practice that the conversation about global education might suggest.

Readings and Additional Online Resources:

A key article of the June 12, 2006, edition of *Newsweek* is provided in the printed Readings packet (reprinted with permission). Links to the other articles in the special section are provided.

The Future Is in Their Hands, by Barbara Kantrowitz, is reprinted with permission in this packet. The article is available online at www.msnbc.msn.com/id/13122863/site/newsweek/.

Other related articles in the series include *15 Ideas to Recharge America*, available at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/13117432/site/newsweek/>;

How to Embrace Change, by Gordon Brown, at www.msnbc.msn.com/id/13121948/site/newsweek/; and

Seeing the Bright Side, at www.msnbc.msn.com/id/13117440/site/newsweek/.

Available on the CCSSO website is the document, *The Next Stage for Large Scale Reform in England: From Good to Great* (2002), in which Michael Barber details the education reforms of the Labour Party in the United Kingdom. This article was printed in the 2005 Annual Policy Forum Readings packet, but is also applicable to the 2006 Summer Institute program. http://www.ccsso.org/projects/membership_meetings/annual_policy_forum_and_business_meeting/7396.cfm.

Additional background information is available on the CCSSO Summer Institute website at http://www.ccsso.org/projects/Membership_Meetings/Summer_Institute/, including background articles on systems reforms in Ohio and Wisconsin inspired by their global education priorities.

The Future Is in Their Hands

When North Carolina started losing jobs overseas, the state overhauled its education system to create a 21st-century work force.

By **Barbara Kantrowitz**
Newsweek

June 12, 2006 issue - Chad Lewis is a burly 18-year-old with a passion for engines. In an ordinary high school, that passion might have distracted him from required courses in history, English and math. But Lewis has spent the past two years on the campus of Guilford Technical Community College in Jamestown, N.C., where he's been studying hydraulics, suspension and electrical systems as well as more-traditional high-school subjects. Along with receiving his high-school diploma, he's in line to get an associate's degree—the equivalent of two years of college—in heavy equipment and transport technology. What that means, says Lewis, is that he is qualified to fix "anything with a diesel." What it also means, says math teacher Marsha Jensen, is that "he'll be making more money than I will."

Lewis just wants a job that allows him to "be hands-on, get dirty, go home, take a shower and feel good about what I do each day." But to North Carolina Gov. Michael Easley, students like Lewis are on the front lines of the state's aggressive efforts to combat years of disastrous job losses as key industries moved overseas. "What we're trying to provide is the best work force in the world," Easley says. "Not just in the country—in the world." That means a dramatic overhaul of the state's public schools. For much of the past decade, North Carolina has focused on preschool through eighth grade, encouraging better teacher training, setting standards and making the curriculum more rigorous. But the most radical change could be the next step, transforming high schools from a model created in the industrial age to a system that makes sense in the 21st century. Easley says the old model, which prepared a few students for college and let others drop out or graduate with minimal skills, doesn't work in an economy where almost any job with decent pay requires some advanced training.

Easley's plan calls for a network of "early college" high schools, like the one in Jamestown, that will eventually give every student in the state the chance to get two years of college by the time they graduate. He calls them Learn and Earn schools, to emphasize that more education means a bigger paycheck. He's also pushing to create new small, career-themed schools—emphasizing subjects like engineering, science or business—within larger high schools. The goal of both efforts is to make sure all students graduate with the skills they need to succeed in college or the workplace.

It's a critical mission. In the past decade, virtually every county in North Carolina has felt the impact of global competition. "Our economy was based on a three-legged stool of textiles, furniture and agriculture," Easley says, "and now textiles and furniture are largely gone and the market can't accommodate no-skill or low-skill jobs. Those jobs have gone to China or Malaysia and they're not coming back." In 1990, for example, the state's 2,235 textile and apparel plants employed 252,702 people; a decade and a half later, there were only 1,402 plants with 97,525 workers—a 61 percent decrease in employment, and the trend continues. "Where we will always win," Easley says, "is with a high-skilled work force, especially in industries where innovation and creativity are involved."

North Carolina is already attracting some of those industries, with biotechnology firms clustered around the Research Triangle Park near Raleigh, along with banking and information-technology centers in other parts of the state. And every redesigned school that succeeds increases the state's appeal to employers. The program in Jamestown is one of the first early-college high schools in the state; there are 10 more in place now, with an additional 23 set to open this fall and 20 more next year. Eventually, Easley says, there will be a Learn and Earn school available to students in all 100 of the state's counties.

The early-college model was pioneered by a few private liberal-arts colleges specializing in gifted students who had outgrown their regular high schools. But North Carolina's program is aimed at students who are typically among the first in their family to graduate from high school and don't see college in their future. "It's a good accelerated path to an associate's degree and can be a fast track to a good job or a state university," says Tom Vander Ark, education director of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has given more than \$21 million to North Carolina's high-school reform effort in the past three years.

For students, part of the appeal is that they're treated more like adults, and in their college courses they get to mix with students of all ages. Being on a college campus also helps focus their long-term ambitions. Tabitha Grant, an articulate 17-year-old who just finished her junior year at Guilford, had dropped out of high school and was working in a grocery store when a social worker referred her to the school. It changed her life. At Guilford, she thrived in small classes with close connections to her teachers. "If they suspect you're upset about something," she says, "they'll pull you in and talk to you. You get people who really want the best for you and really care about you." In the college classes, students are exposed to a wide range of promising careers—everything from nursing to information technology to graphic design. That appealed to Grant, whose father worked in the furniture industry for 20 years before losing his job a few years ago. "He was out of work for two years," she says. Grant changed majors several times, but now has settled on accounting and will head for the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. "I love math," she explains.

Teachers at Guilford say such success stories inspire them to try even harder next year. "We always say we're not just flexible here, we're contortionists," says Jensen, the math teacher. "This is what education should be—caring for the kids." Whatever has happened in the past, students get a fresh start. "We talk to the kids a lot about choices," says Tonya Bodie, another math teacher. "You choose today what you're going to do for the rest of your life. You don't have to be a victim. You can choose." Listening to this, principal Tony Watlington nods approvingly: "And that's how we'll compete with the Chinese."

But the early-college program is not the answer for all students—and that's where the large- to small-school conversion program comes in. "We are trying to give students an array of options that could engage them," says John Dornan, executive director of the Public School Forum of North Carolina, a nonpartisan public-policy group. "We want to show them the link between education and their future while strengthening North Carolina's work-force competitiveness." In North Carolina and elsewhere, educators say students in large, comprehensive high schools often feel alienated and disconnected—and that sense of isolation leads them to drop out when they hit a class they can't master. Ninth grade in particular seems to be an obstacle for many students in North Carolina. According to the most recent report from the State Board of Education, more than a third of all dropouts take place in that year.

Those statistics are very real to administrators at Scotland High School in the small city of Laurinburg on the South Carolina border. The school's vast campus—on 91 acres—makes it look more like a small college. And with more than 1,800 students in grades nine to 12, just organizing everyone's schedule is a challenge. But school officials have decided to make their jobs even more complicated by breaking down the school into smaller, autonomous units. The ninth-grade dropout rate and years of job losses in the area were big incentives, says principal Roger Edwards. Each ninth-grade class started with about 580 members; by senior year, 200 were gone. "We didn't think that was good enough," says Edwards. The school applied for a federal planning grant, which enabled a small group from Scotland High to look at answers in other districts across the country. They traveled to New Hampshire, New York City and Florida. "We came back with the sense that there is no formula," says Laura Horne, whose official title is now conversion coordinator. But they all agreed that ninth graders needed special attention.

The solution: a separate ninth-grade academy set off in its own part of the school. The program started this year, and Scotland officials are pleased so far: after the first semester, disciplinary actions were cut in half, and preliminary data on the dropout rate are encouraging, Horne says. To sustain that progress, students in the next three grades will be split up into career-oriented small academies, none larger than 400 students. The topics track students' interests and community needs: engineering, math and science, health sciences, leadership and public service, business and finance, and visual and performing arts. Health sciences and engineering started this school year; the other four will be up and running in the fall. Edwards says that within each school, students will get required subjects that will enable them to enter any university in the country. But they'll also get a chance to explore subjects in a more detailed way than they would in a larger school.

It's clearly ambitious—Horne compares the transition to "herding elephants with a toothbrush"—but teachers and school officials say they're excited to try something new. "I've been teaching 38 years, 32 at Scotland High," says Connie McCrommen, who will teach theater in the visual- and performing-arts school. "I think this is a really good idea. It's going to give us more contact with the kids." Students in the first two academies say the focus on careers kept them engaged. Senior Cortelia Jefferson, 18, was in the school of health sciences, and next year she's headed for Fayetteville State University, where she'll prepare for a career in nursing or some other health-related field. "It has given me lots of opportunities," she says.

Whether North Carolina's effort will indeed make the state a player on the global stage depends on how well

schools like Guilford and Scotland succeed in their new mission. "Like every other state," says Vander Ark, "North Carolina has a lot of work to do." But when you're competing with China and India, failure is not an option.

With Pat Wingert

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