

Testimony

Testimony from Dr. Rebecca Garland, Chief Academic Officer, NC Department of Public Instruction

Good morning, Senator Hagan. Thank you for inviting me to testify about **educational innovation in North Carolina**. On behalf of our 1.5 million North Carolina public school students, I would like to thank you for your support of public education in the United States Senate as well as your previous support while you were a member of our North Carolina General Assembly.

In August 2006, the North Carolina State Board of Education adopted a visionary, ambitious strategic plan for changing public education. That plan continues to serve as the framework for major efforts in five broad areas – Globally Competitive Students (standards and assessments), 21st Century Professionals (effective teachers, leaders, and preparation programs), Healthy and Responsible Students, (child nutrition and healthy life style), Innovation in Schools (seamless education to postsecondary, charter schools, and redesign high schools) and 21st Century Systems (data systems, turnaround processes for low performing schools, and virtual education). *See Attachment – Future-Ready Students for the 21st Century.*

Each of the four required pillars found in the components of the *Race to the Top* proposal were already identified in 2006 by the NC State Board of Education as areas in which North Carolina needed major overhaul and innovative practices. Using the Board’s vision as a foundation, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the University of North Carolina System, and the North Carolina Community College System have worked seamlessly to introduce new initiatives that will ultimately result in improved outcomes for North Carolina students. Governor Beverly Perdue, who was a member of the State Board of Education in 2006 by virtue of her role as Lieutenant Governor, was the impetus for the Board’s strategic plan. Then Lieutenant Governor Perdue spearheaded the creation of the North Carolina Virtual Public School. Since assuming her current position, Governor Perdue endorsed continuation of the major programs initiated under the strategic plan. She has also enhanced those reform efforts with her **Ready, Set, Go** agenda, focusing efforts to ensure that all North Carolina students graduate from high school, college and career ready.

While North Carolina has many innovative programs underway, I will focus on a few. We like to think of most of our programs as Second Generation. For the past fifteen years, North Carolina has led the nation in accountability, support for low performing schools, and National Board certification for teachers. By using lessons learned from earlier work, we feel that our next generation of work allows us to stand on the foundation of solid evidence of what does and doesn't work in our state.

Standards and Assessments

Even before the Common Core Content standards work began, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction began rewriting the entire North Carolina Standard Course of Study with an eye toward fewer and more transparent standards based on 21st century knowledge and skills. Along with a new Standard Course of Study, North Carolina is rewriting its whole series of End-of-Grade and End-of-Course assessments, paired with a balanced assessment system that will include diagnostic measures for the individual student as well as formative and benchmark tools for the teacher to adjust instruction. The assessments will be delivered online through a Learner Management System that will house curriculum and instructional tools for the teacher and learning activities and resources for the student. The assessments will include scenario-based performance tasks as well as more traditional items. North Carolina had a timeline in place for such a tool before the multi-state assessment consortia were formed and before the economic decline. By joining in a multi-state group, North Carolina hopes to be able to move toward such a system in a shorter timeframe with the benefit of federal grant resources.

Effective Teachers, Leaders, and Preparation Programs

In addition to new content standards, North Carolina educators have new professional practice standards written to address 21st century knowledge and skills and a new generation of students who expect schooling to be more than "sit and get." The new Educator Evaluation System, required for all teachers and principals in the state, includes evaluation instruments for superintendents and central office staff, principals, teachers, and participants in teacher and school leader preparation programs. All of the instruments are aligned so that teachers in pre-service through sitting superintendents have the same expectations of what makes effective instruction and schooling. As a result of new standards, all of the pre-service programs at the public and private institutions of higher education are being revised and will be submitted to the North Carolina State Board of Education for approval.

In addition to revising educational programs at all levels, the University of North Carolina System has undertaken an ambitious effort to evaluate and improve its preparation programs. In one recent study UNC ranked its teacher preparation programs in terms of student performance in public school classrooms. Another study using public school student performance data compared graduates from UNC programs with teachers prepared from other sources such as out-of-state, Teach for America, and private institutions. The UNC System is committed to using data to improve its preparation of education professionals.

Both the evaluation system and the redesign of preparation programs are targeted at improved student performance. North Carolina has also approved alternative pathways to teacher and principal licensure and is currently investigating additional alternative programs. In North Carolina, educational leaders in K-12 and postsecondary are tightly focused on providing every student in our state with an effective teacher and school leader regardless of the zip code in which the student resides.

College and Career Ready

North Carolina is committed to high school reform and to increasing the number of students who attend postsecondary school. In order to encourage first generation college attendance, North Carolina funds 70 Early College High Schools, with two more funded and in planning – the most of any other state. The Early Colleges are a cooperative effort between K-12 public school systems and the University of North Carolina campuses, the Community College campuses, and the Independent Colleges and Universities in North Carolina. The goal for the students is to graduate from high school in five years with a high school diploma, as well as an Associate’s Degree or transferable college credit that will be accepted by the University of North Carolina System and by many of the private institutions. Tuition and textbooks are provided by the State. Preference for entrance is given to first-generation college students. Early data indicate higher graduation rates at the Early Colleges – typically in the 90% range, as well as students who report favorably on their experiences on the campuses.

North Carolina also has 44 redesign high schools that have been restructured around the small schools model. Many of the schools have adopted a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) focus. All students are enrolled in rigorous college preparatory courses. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has been instrumental in this initiative.

Effective Schools

The North Carolina General Assembly funds the District and School Transformation Division at the Department of Public Instruction in order to ensure that students in all North Carolina public schools get a sound education. Currently the Division works with over 150 schools. Schools are selected based on several directives – the NC Court System through the Leandro Hearings, the Governor’s List for high schools targeting those under 60% proficiency, Title 1 Improvement sanctions, the ABCs of Public Education sanctions, five DPI-LEA partnerships for comprehensive improvement, and one school system takeover initiative. In all of the schools, teachers receive additional support from ongoing instructional facilitators, principals receive assistance through ongoing coaching and needs assessments, and in six systems, the superintendent and central office personnel are paired with full-time leadership coaches. In all instances the model is based on building local capacity for continuous improvement. After two years of implementation, the majority of targeted schools have posted significant student achievement gains.

The North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS)

The NCVPS is ranked as one of the best in the nation. You will be receiving comments from Dr. Bryan Setser, the director of the program. The NCVPS has been made more effective because of the North Carolina Connectivity initiative in which the state has assumed responsibility for providing connectivity to each school in North Carolina.

Transparent, Data-Driven Systems Approach

In all of the initiatives outlined above, staff members at the Department of Public Instruction are working using data, planning strategically, and soliciting input from stakeholders through a transparent process. Programs are evidenced-based using North Carolina data and lessons learned from past experiences. As data-systems improve, program selection and outcomes for students will improve. The Department tracks its own performance using a Performance Navigator that is open to public view and scrutiny. North Carolina is committed to data and innovation as the drivers for a more effective and efficient educational system.

Thank you for allowing me to share some of our innovative practices.