

# Supporting Dropout Prevention in North Carolina's Rural Schools

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## Executive Summary

North Carolina's Race to the Top proposal outlines plans to increase the state's graduation rate to 86 percent by the 2016 – 2017 school year. In order to reach that goal, graduation rates will need to rise in counties throughout the state, including in the state's many rural communities. Race to the Top has the potential to bring increased attention and funding to the issues of high school graduation and dropout prevention. Even before the federal Department of Education selected North Carolina as a Race to the Top recipient state, North Carolina Governor Bev Perdue had underscored the importance of high school graduation in her "Career & College: Ready, Set, Go! Every Child a Graduate" education agenda.

In light of this focus on high school graduation, the policy question for this report is: *how should the State of North Carolina prevent students in rural areas from dropping out of high school?* I make recommendations for how the General Assembly, the State Board of Education, and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) can take action to increase graduation rates in rural communities.

### *The Dropout Challenge in North Carolina and Resulting Problems for the State:*

Only 74.2 percent of the students who entered high school in 2006 – 2007 in North Carolina graduated four years later. About 65 percent of black students, 60 percent of Hispanic students, and 80 percent of white students graduate from high school in North Carolina each year. While much discussion in education policy centers on the achievement gap between the performance of white students and their African American and Latino peers, a "graduation gap" persists as well. A gap also exists between the graduation rate for males (70 percent) and females (79 percent).

The dropout challenge poses a series of problems for the state. North Carolina loses billions in future income and personal wealth when students leave high school. Additionally, the state bears additional expenses for healthcare and crime costs that result when students drop out of high school.

Legal problems exist as well. The North Carolina State Constitution guarantees a “sound basic education” to all children in the state. In 1997, the State Supreme Court held in *Leandro v. North Carolina State Supreme Court* that low-income students in the state were not receiving the education that they were promised. One piece of evidence used to make this ruling was the low graduation rates in many of the state’s schools.

There is also a public sentiment that providing an education for young people is simply “the right thing to do.” High school dropouts have negative life outcomes in a number of areas; particularly troubling is the fact that dropouts are more likely to be low-income and members of ethnic minorities.

The state’s rural areas tend to face more of a struggle to keep their students in high school. Rural schools often have less funding than their urban counterparts, usually because of lower property values in rural areas. Rural school districts must spend more of their limited funds to transport students spread over a large geographic area to and from school. It is more difficult for rural schools to find highly qualified and effective teachers to support students and teach the elective and advanced courses that interest and challenge students. Rural areas are less likely than urban areas to be home to community organizations that work to keep students in school, especially during out-of-school hours and the summer.

*North Carolina’s Policies on Dropout Prevention and Rural Schools:*

North Carolina currently provides specialized support to its rural schools and districts. Rural school districts are eligible for the Small County Supplemental Funding stream. The NCDPI’s District and School Transformation Division provides support for school improvement in the state’s lowest-performing rural school districts.

With respect to dropout prevention, in 2007, the North Carolina General Assembly established the Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation to review dropout prevention in the state, including a review of programs in place and research on best practices. The legislature also created the Committee on Dropout Prevention and appropriated

funding for the Committee to support dropout prevention programs run by school districts, government agencies, and non-profit organizations. While the NCDPI was the administrative home and pass-through for the funds, the General Assembly required that the agency remain detached from the grant process. The Committee, with certain guidance from the General Assembly, was solely responsible for the selection of grant recipients.

*Research Methodology:*

I first conduct a literature review of best practices in dropout prevention programs. This knowledge provides a critical base of information for my examination of the strategies and characteristics of successful dropout prevention programs in rural North Carolina. I determine the effectiveness of dropout programs operating in rural areas by analyzing program goals and outcome data as reported by the programs and EDSTAR, the research group selected by the state to evaluate the dropout prevention grants. I gauge effectiveness by assessing the quality of each goal through a consideration of its rigor, the percentage of students it strives to affect, and whether the goal is ambitious enough to place at-risk students on a trajectory to graduation. I next calculate the percentage of students that met each of the programs' targets.

Next, I compare the programs I consider effective and contrast them with the ineffective programs. Using evaluation reports, I assemble descriptive information (including the type of agency administering the program and services provided), goals and progress (including data used to target students for services and evaluate success), and implementation details (including activities to encourage high school graduation among non-targeted students and coordination with existing programs or services) for each program. I also use economic research on rural counties in North Carolina to examine how their economic health affects high school graduation rates.

*Findings:*

The literature on dropout prevention programs highlights some key dropout prevention strategies that have shown to be effective through rigorous program evaluations. These strategies include strong support relationships between adults and at-risk students, intervention during the

ninth grade (including ninth grade academies), increased rigor of coursework, meaningful remediation, the use of sophisticated data systems, an emphasis on early childhood education, and public awareness of the link between early childhood education and dropout prevention, and school wide-reform.

My review dropout prevention programs in rural areas in North Carolina indicates that effective programs that specifically target at-risk students, provide them with structured activities when they are not in school, and mandate the creation of individualized graduation plans for students. In addition, programs run by schools or school districts, especially those also undertaking school-wide reform, tend to be more effective than programs run by community organizations or other government agencies.

*Recommendations:*

My recommendations for the State of North Carolina fall into three categories: recommendations that require funding (either through new funds or the reallocation of funding from other areas of the budget), recommendations that are cost-neutral, and recommendations that focus on changes to the rubric for the selection of dropout prevention grant recipients.

**Recommendations that Require Funding:**

- (1) The General Assembly should allocate funding to Communities in Schools of North Carolina to provide graduation coaches throughout North Carolina.
- (2) The General Assembly should create a competitive funding stream for high schools that wish to implement a school-wide reform model.

**Cost-Neutral Recommendations:**

- (1) The State Board of Education should require school districts to use the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) to identify students at-risk of dropping out and require the creation of personalized graduation plans for these students.

- (2) The NCDPI's Division of School and District Transformation should specifically include increasing graduation rates as a part of the system of support that it provides for all schools in partner districts.
- (3) The NCDPI should take the lead on the creation of a P-20 Council for the State of North Carolina. Once the Council has been created, a subset of members should serve on a Committee on Dropout Prevention to identify areas for cross-agency collaboration to keep students in school.
- (4) The NCDPI should publish a best practices guide similar to South Carolina's *At-Risk Student Implementation Guide*.

**Recommendations for Changes to the Dropout Prevention Grants Selection Rubric:**

- (1) Include a row under "Part C: Description of the Program/Initiative" to evaluate the extent to which the program uses resources to recruit staff or volunteers who develop strong relationships with students and train those staff members or volunteers how to fully support students.
- (2) Include a row under "Part C: Description of the Program/Initiative" to evaluate the extent to which the program is a part of a school-wide reform initiative designed to improve student outcomes.
- (3) Under Part B: Description of Target Students, rewrite descriptors so that a program that receives five points on the second row must use EVAAS to identify students to be served.
- (4) Under Part F: Community Input and Collaboration, require non-school or local education agency applicants to include a letter of support from the applicable school or district in order to receive four or five points for this section.
- (5) Under Part D: Description of Best Practices, rewrite descriptors so that a program that receives four or five points for this section must include evidence of best practice research.

## Introduction and Policy Question

The federal Department of Education recently selected North Carolina as a recipient of Race to the Top funding. North Carolina plans to use its \$399 million to pursue its goals of high school graduation for all students, and career- and college-readiness for all graduates. The name of the Race to the Top initiative “Career & College: Ready, Set, Go! Every Child a Graduate” conveys the importance of high school graduation to the state’s plans.

Over the next four years, the state will focus much of its time and resources ensuring that all students graduate from high school. It is critical that the NCDPI knows what works, and what does not, in the area of dropout prevention. My policy question will explore dropout prevention in a specific type of school in North Carolina: *How should the State of North Carolina prevent students in rural areas from dropping out of high school?* The client for this master’s project is the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), specifically its Chief Financial Officer, Mr. Philip Price.

In this project, I provide background information on the dropout problem in North Carolina’s high schools, specifically the ways in which the problem is more serious in rural areas and for minority students. I next consider the economic, ethical, and legal challenges posed by the state’s dropout problem. I then detail how North Carolina currently supports its rural schools, as well as dropout prevention programs. My literature review explores dropout prevention strategies that have proven to be effective, and the challenges that rural schools face when addressing the dropout problem.

My data and methods section details my analytical strategy and the specific sub-questions that must be answered to provide my client with an answer to the policy question. I next use the results of my document reviews, stakeholder interviews, economic research, case studies, and best practice research to answer the sub-questions. I then discuss the implications of my findings for dropout prevention in rural schools in North Carolina before finally making recommendations on how the State of North Carolina should prevent students in rural areas from dropping out of high school.

## Background on the Dropout Challenge in North Carolina

As documented below, North Carolina has a serious dropout problem. The dropout challenge leads to a series of economic, ethical, and legal problems that have serious consequences for the state. I examine the gravity of these problems before considering the ways in which the state currently supports rural schools and dropout prevention programs.

### *The Dropout Challenge in North Carolina:*

Of the 112,321 students who entered North Carolina's high schools in the 2006 - 2007 school year, only 83,321 (74.2 percent) graduated four years later.<sup>1</sup> As Table 1 indicates, about 65 percent of black students, 60 percent of Hispanic students, and 80 percent of white students graduate from high school in North Carolina. While much discussion in education policy centers on the achievement gap between the performance of white students and their African American and Latino peers, a "graduation gap" persists as well. A gap also exists between the graduation rate for males (70 percent) and females (79 percent). Table 1 shows significant discrepancies between the graduation rates for low-income students and their more affluent peers, English Language Learners and their native English-speaking peers, and students with disabilities and their non-disabled classmates (NCDPI, 2010c).

Subgroup	Number of Students	Number of Graduates	Rate (Percent)
<i>Ethnicity</i>			
American Indian	1,715	1,165	67.9

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<sup>1</sup> North Carolinians now can be more certain that these data accurately reflect the current problem. Prior to 2006, the state used a highly questionable formula to calculate graduation rates for the state, local education agencies, and individual high schools. For example, the state reported a 91 percent graduation rate in 2003; independent calculations using the same data resulted in a 70 percent graduation rate (Kuenzi, 2008). The state now uses the average freshman graduation rate, which is also used by the National Center for Education Statistics. The average freshman graduation rate is defined as the percent of ninth graders who graduate with a diploma four years after they enter high school. Students who have left school are counted as dropouts if the school has not received notice that they have enrolled in high school in another district or state (NCDPI, 2007).

Subgroup	Number of Students	Number of Graduates	Rate (Percent)
Asian	2,460	2,097	85.2
Black	34,083	22,811	67.9
Hispanic	8,183	5,024	61.4
Multiracial	2,629	1,873	71.2
White	63,247	50,347	79.6
<i>Gender</i>			
Female	57,195	39,087	78.9
Male	55,122	43,510	69.6
<i>Economic Status</i>			
Low-income	43,175	28,606	66.3
Not low-income	69,146	54,715	79.1
<i>Language Skills</i>			
Limited English Proficient	3,609	1,743	48.3
Not Limited English Proficient	108,712	81,578	75.0
<i>Disability</i>			
Student with Disability	10,859	6,246	57.5
Not Student with Disability	101,462	77,075	76.0
Data as reported by the NCDPI, 2010c.			

Interestingly, the state does not provide disaggregated graduation rates for different geographic locations, including urban and rural areas. However, the Rural School and Community Trust has reported that North Carolina is home to almost 677,000 (48.5 percent of the total student population) rural students, the largest number of rural students in any state. Of those, 36 percent are members of an ethnic minority, 14 percent are disabled, 8 percent are English Language Learners, and 46 percent live in poverty (Johnson and Strange, 2009). Although the state does not report a graduation rate for rural students, independent researchers found that the rate in 2009 was 66.5 percent, which is low in comparison to the rates for other subgroups detailed above (Johnson and Strange, 2009). As 46 percent of the rural students in the state live in poverty, accordingly, the graduation rate for students in poverty (66.3 percent) is similar to the 66.5 percent graduate rate for rural students.

The graduation challenge is particularly dire in certain high schools in the state. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University have found that half of the 1.2 million American students who drop out each year attend one of two thousand high schools that they labeled as “dropout factories” (Balfanz

and Legters, 2007). Located in low-income neighborhoods (mostly in northern and western cities and southern states), these schools serve a greater number of poor and minority students than schools in more affluent neighborhoods. They tend to be lower-resourced and employ less qualified teachers than more wealthy schools. At these schools, the graduation rates for African American and Hispanic students are much lower than the nationwide rates for these groups. The approximately 1,700 “dropout factories” are responsible for 69 percent of all African American dropouts, 63 percent of all Hispanic dropouts, and only 30 percent of all white dropouts (Amos, 2008). North Carolina is ranked sixth nationally for the percentage of its high schools classified as “dropout factories.” Nationally, 12 percent of high schools are “dropout factories.” North Carolina is home to 77 of these schools, which represents 23.2 percent of the high schools in the state and 4.5 percent of the total number of “dropout factories” in the country (Zuckerbrod, 2007).

*The Dropout Challenge as an Economic Problem in North Carolina:*

Individual students who drop out of school suffer economically because of their decision to do so. Even in robust economic times, the unemployment rate for high school dropouts remains higher than for graduates; similarly, the unemployment rate for dropouts is the first to increase in the face of an economic downfall (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). Adults without high school diplomas consistently earn less than graduates (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009).

North Carolina also suffers when students leave high school without graduating. The Alliance for Excellent Education considers the number of dropouts in a state in 2005 – 2006, and applies models developed by scholars in the areas of economics, healthcare, and crime to estimate costs related to high school dropouts. North Carolina will not benefit from \$13.4 billion in future income and personal wealth from the students who dropped out in 2005 - 2006. Each year, the state also spends an additional \$492 million on healthcare and \$151 million in costs related to crime that could be avoided if more students graduated (Amos, 2008). Given the current recession, legislators face the short-term temptation to reduce costs, including those for education and dropout prevention.

However, the state stands to benefit in the long-term not only from potential savings, but also from increased productivity if more high school students graduate and find employment.

*The Dropout Challenge as a Legal Problem in North Carolina:*

The North Carolina State Constitution entitles all students to a “sound basic education.” In a series of court cases in North Carolina, the State Supreme Court consistently upheld this right. In *Leandro v. North Carolina*, the Court held that low-income students in the state were not receiving their rightful education (North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts, 1997). In the years since the ruling, the state and Superior Court Judge Howard Manning moved to identify low-performing schools that fail to meet the standard for basic education. A graduation rate of lower than 55 percent in some years and 60 percent in others was one of the criteria for identification (Manning and Wilson, 2002). If North Carolina high schools do not improve their graduation rates, additional legal challenges may arise for both the state public school system and individual local education agencies.

*The Dropout Challenge as an Ethical Problem in North Carolina:*

For many Americans, the provision of an education for all students is an ethical responsibility of the government. If providing a basic education is “the right thing to do,” the current dropout challenge indicates a need for change. High school dropouts form a category of individuals who are more likely to have negative life outcomes in a number of areas. While research specific to North Carolina is not available, national trends indicate that young people who drop out of high school are more likely to participate in criminal behavior. Nearly 80 percent of inmates in state prisons dropped out of high school (Sweeten et al, 2009). Dropouts are also more likely to experience chronic health problems, including a greater chance for early death. They are more likely to practice poor health habits (such as smoking and unhealthy eating), and are less likely to have health insurance, which can worsen their health (Sweeten et al, 2009).

High school dropouts represent a distinct identity group of individuals who, unlike most of their graduating peers, suffer adverse life outcomes as a result of a teenage decision to leave school. For individuals who believe in universal opportunity and equality for all, it is easy to make a clear

case that high school dropouts cannot realize either in this state. Considering that high school dropouts are more likely to be low-income, disabled, non-English speaking, male, and members of ethnic minorities, the problem takes on multiple layers of social injustice.

*Specific Challenges to Dropout Prevention in Rural Areas:*

Rural schools face numerous challenges that prevent them from instituting effective dropout prevention programs. Due to lower property values in many rural areas and lower capacity for counties to allocate additional support for schools, rural school districts must often function with less funding than their urban and suburban counterparts. North Carolina spends less per pupil in a rural school (\$5,107) than it does on the average pupil (\$7,996) (Johnson and Strange, 2009). With fewer resources, rural schools may have difficulty providing specialized services to students at risk of dropping out, for example, those struggling with learning disabilities.

Rural schools also face significant challenges with staffing. A lack of resources limits the services these schools can provide beyond simply offering required classes for graduation. As a result, students are unable to partake in academic electives, honors courses, or vocational education coursework that may keep them engaged in school (Sipple and Brent, 2009). Additionally, rural school districts often struggle to recruit and retain high-quality educators who can serve as sources of support for students. Studies have shown that teachers often prefer to teach close to the area in which they were raised or near the university at which they studied (Sipple and Brent, 2008). With smaller populations and lower college enrollment rates, rural areas are unlikely to experience an influx of college graduates returning home to become teachers (American Youth Policy Forum, 2010). Rural schools are often left to recruit teachers from other areas. Such recruitment is challenging because teacher salaries are often lower in rural schools than in urban and suburban schools.

Teachers, especially young individuals new to the profession, are hesitant to move to isolated areas away from friends, family, and consumer services, including doctors, recreational activities, and shopping opportunities (Sipple and Brent, 2008). These same challenges complicate rural districts'

searches for social workers, psychologists, case managers, and other individuals who support students either within the school or in out-of-school dropout prevention programs.

As rural districts encompass students spread over a large geographic area, the amount of funding required to simply transport students to school leaves no money left over for field trips or buses to allow students to stay after-school for academic enrichment or remediation (Sipple and Brent, 2008). When state education budgets are cut, rural school districts must often reallocate funding from education expenses to busing simply to ensure that students can get to school (American Youth Policy Forum, 2010).

Rural areas are less likely than metropolitan areas to be home to community organizations such as the YMCA and Big Brothers/Big Sisters. In urban areas, these programs often work alongside schools to prevent students from dropping out. Such organizations remain hesitant to move into rural areas because of the absence of large clusters of users found in urban areas. Should these organizations want to serve a large clientele as they do in cities, the cost of doing so is prohibitive. Spreading the necessary awareness in a sparsely populated region is more expensive than simply opening a community center on a busy city street. Community organizations report that the cost per person for services is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. As a result, service providers in these areas are less likely to offer the level of specialized support services found in cities (Gutierrez, 2010).

## **North Carolina's Policies on Dropout Prevention and Rural Schools**

North Carolina has no specific policy on dropout prevention in rural areas. "Rural dropout prevention policy" is merely the combination of the policies, programs, and funding related to rural schools and a separate set of policies, programs, and funding for dropout prevention.

### *North Carolina's Support for Rural Schools:*

As discussed above, rural schools face a host of specific challenges due to their relative geographic isolation. Some state programs provide districts with resources to address some of those challenges. For example, North Carolina provides targeted financial support for rural districts through Small County Supplemental Funding (SCSF). SCSF recognizes that smaller local education agencies may face staffing concerns. The NCDPI allocates state funds for teacher salaries based on the number of students in a local education agency. Schools and local education agencies can supplement their teaching staff by using financial support from other sources, such as county taxes or grants.

School districts with fewer than 3,239 students (and some districts with up to 4,080 students) receive SCSF funding on the basis of their size, geographic isolation of schools (the number of students per square mile), need for vocational education classes, and ability to offer classes in the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCDPI, 2009). In recent budget negotiations, the North Carolina General Assembly reduced funding levels for SCSF and prevented better support of rural schools (NCDPI, 2010a). Budget cuts hamper progress even more as North Carolina still spends less per pupil in a rural school (\$5,107) than it does on the average pupil (\$7,996) (Johnson and Strange, 2009).

During the 2006 - 2007 school year, the NCDPI began providing intensive support to low-performing high schools identified as "turnaround schools" due to their low graduation rates and performance composites on state exams. The NCDPI required high schools with performance composites below 60 percent to implement school-wide reform models, and provided schools with four options: redesign with the North Carolina New Schools Project, America's Choice, or Talent Development High Schools, or implement a self-designed reform model (Preston and McFarland,

2010). Many of the high schools receiving “turnaround support” were located in rural local education agencies.

Under Race to the Top, the NCDPI’s School and District Transformation Division has intensified its efforts for systematic change. The division currently partners with twelve school districts to provide intensive support to the district staff, as well as the staff at each school in the district. Of the twelve districts receiving assistance, seven meet this report’s definition of a rural local education agency. Accordingly, the District and School Transformation division offers support tailored to rural districts’ needs more broadly, as well as the specific needs of their local communities. Services provided to these districts include leadership coaching for central office staff and administrators, strategic planning to meet district and school goals, assistance with financial planning, advice on recruitment and hiring of new teachers, guidance on curriculum design and assessment administration, intensive subject-specific professional development for educators, and training on the effective use of data (NCDPI, 2011b). This support is all intended to meet one overarching goal for local education agencies partnering with the NCDPI: increased achievement for students.

*North Carolina’s Support for Dropout Prevention:*

The state also turned its attention to the dropout problem. In 2007, the General Assembly established the Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation. The Assembly voted to reconvene the Commission each year from 2007 to 2011, when the new Republican leadership in the General Assembly did not recreate the Commission (North Carolina General Assembly, 2011). There were sixteen members, including eight members appointed by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate and the remainder by the Speaker of the House of Representatives. In the initial authorizing legislation, the General Assembly tasked the Commission with the evaluation of programs to reduce the dropout rate, review of literature on factors that keep students enrolled, evaluation of programs implemented with funds from dropout prevention grants, and the creation of an easily accessible network to share best practices in the area of dropout

prevention. The legislature also required the Commission to examine prominent high school reform efforts, research the effects of increased compulsory school attendance age, review graduation requirements, and examine strategies that prevent students from repeating grade levels (Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation, 2010).

Since 2007, the Commission met fewer than ten times each year. During meetings, members heard testimony from staff at the NCDPI, members of the North Carolina Committee on Dropout Prevention, and scholars and practitioners who work to prevent students from leaving high school. Each year, the Commission made a number of legislative recommendations on a wide range of topics, including funding and selection criteria for dropout prevention grants; benchmarks for increasing the state's graduation rate; and additional studies on topics of interest. The Commission saw mixed success with its recommendations; for example, the General Assembly and State Board of Education adopted four of the Commission's six recommendations from 2009 (Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation, 2010).

In the same 2007 legislation, the General Assembly created the North Carolina Committee on Dropout Prevention and appropriated funding for the Committee to support promising dropout prevention programs selected from local-level applications. The Committee has fifteen members who are all political appointees; the Governor, President Pro Tempore of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives each select five members. The NCDPI is the administrative home of the Committee, and NCDPI staff support members (Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation, 2010). In selecting grant recipients, the Committee must provide no more than \$150,000 per recipient, distribute funding geographically throughout the state, and support:

“...innovative programs and initiatives that target students at risk of dropping out of school and that demonstrate potential to (i) be developed into effective, sustainable, and coordinated dropout prevention and reentry programs in middle schools and high schools

and (ii) serve as effective models for other programs.” (Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation, 2010)

The legislation also called on the Committee to select grant recipients that base their proposal on evidence of “best practices,” or strategies that have proven successful in decreasing the dropout rate. Local education agencies, schools, and non-profit organizations are all eligible to receive grants. The legislature called on the Committee to commission a yearly study of the effectiveness of the programs, and made demonstrated effectiveness a selection criterion for previously funded programs. The legislature also set aside a certain amount of funding for programs that had previously failed to receive funds (Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation, 2010).

The level of funding for the dropout prevention grants remained stable from 2007 to 2010 (\$13 million), even as the state experienced budget woes (NCDPI, 2010a). By 2009, ninety counties in the state had received funding for three consecutive years, and the remaining ten had not received any funding (Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation, 2010). However, as of April 2011, the Governor had eliminated funding for the dropout prevention grants in her recommended budget; the General Assembly had not yet published its own set of budget decisions (North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management, 2011).

Another relatively stable aspect of the dropout prevention grants is the General Assembly’s insistence that the NCDPI remain detached from the grants, the programs they fund, and the evaluation process. While the NCDPI serves as the administrative home to the Committee on Dropout Prevention, staff members only provide infrastructure (including the database of grant applications) and logistical support to the Committee members. This limited involvement resulted from the General Assembly’s clear message that the NCDPI was to have no involvement in the selection process for grant recipients (Garland, 2011). As the General Assembly built in evaluation of the grants and their effect on the number of high school dropouts, members specifically required that

an outside group, not the NCDPI, conduct the evaluation (Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation, 2010).

The “hands-off” message from the General Assembly begs the question, would the dropout prevention grants be more effective if the NCDPI became more involved in the process? All of the program staff members interviewed for this report indicated that they see the NCDPI as a source of information on dropout prevention, including best practices and advice for problem solving. If the NCDPI could be involved, it could take additional steps to advise grantees. For example, the NCDPI’s regional roundtable structures bring together NCDPI staff members and officials from school districts to discuss issues that challenge the districts, including racial/ethnic gaps in student achievement and meeting the academic needs of students in the Exceptional Children’s program. Such regional roundtable meetings could cover dropout prevention, but the NCDPI is hesitant to increase its involvement to this level (Anonymous, 2011).

Another political barrier threatening the dropout prevention grants, and therefore any positive effect they might have on students, is the desire for legislators to fund projects that have immediate tangible results in their communities (Legislative Staffer Two, 2011). Even members of the General Assembly concerned about education find it more politically feasible to fund education using a method that ensures concrete results, for example, a certain number of teaching positions saved or a new computer lab. Current reporting requirements for grantees make it difficult to ascertain the number of students who graduate from high school explicitly due to services provided by a dropout prevention grant. Sophisticated data analysis and far more stringent reporting and data collection requirements for grant recipients would be needed to isolate the effect of the programs. The General Assembly values the freedom afforded to dropout prevention grant recipients, and will unlikely force any such requirements on them now (Legislative Staffer One, 2011). The trade-off is that it is difficult for anyone, including elected officials, to assert the real effects of the grants. As a result, political support for the grants may decrease in times of budget cuts and public demands for essential services that positively affect their daily lives.

Since their creation, the dropout prevention grants have been a political issue. One legislative staffer referred to the grants as “pork,” a program that exists solely so that representatives can show their support for a program that funds local efforts in most counties statewide (Legislative Staffer One, 2011). Modifications to the authorizing legislation for the grants confirm this interpretation of the legislative motivation behind the grants. Due to requirements, the Committee on Dropout Prevention spread funding geographically throughout the state, and did not fund a single program, no matter how strong its application, for more than \$150,000 (unless the program served multiple counties). In 2010, the General Assembly even provided a specific amount of funding for counties that had never received support from a grant (Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation, 2010). By placing such restrictions on the funding distribution, the General Assembly undercut its own desire to finance programs based on best practice research. In deliberately “forcing” the spread of funding throughout the state, the General Assembly essentially ensured that it would provide funding for ineffective programs.

Indeed, the General Assembly needs to strike a delicate balance when creating guidelines for the funding of dropout prevention grants. If there were no requirements to spread funding geographically and provide funding to counties not served previously, it would follow that the state’s larger, more urban counties would receive the bulk of the funding (Legislative Staffer Two, 2011). These counties are more likely to have more knowledgeable central office staff, perhaps even dedicated grant writers, to apply for funding and draw on best practice research in the applications. In addition, more developed areas offer more potential partners to provide dropout prevention programs, including branches of the YMCA and Big Brothers/Big Sisters (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). Perhaps the General Assembly’s concern with spreading funding throughout the state is a manifestation of their concerns about equity between rural areas and more urban areas.

Neither of the legislative staffers to whom I spoke reported that members of the General Assembly raised such equity concerns with them while discussing the dropout prevention grants. When asked to reflect on whether the elected officials had such concerns about the fairness of the

grants, both acknowledged that members from rural areas often expressed broad concerns that their constituents do not receive the same level of services. However, they did not express those sentiments when discussing the dropout prevention grants specifically (Legislative Staffers One and Two, 2011). It appears that the elected officials saw the grants more as a way to bring home funding to their districts than as an effective way to prevent students from dropping out of high school.

*North Carolina's Support for Dropout Prevention in Rural Areas:*

Indeed, many legislators representing rural areas hail from counties that benefitted from dropout prevention grants. I define a rural school as one located in a local education agency that receives funding through at least two of the three state and federal funding streams for rural school districts: the state Small County Supplemental Funding (SCSF) stream created by the General Assembly, the federal Rural and Low Income Schools Program, and the federal Small, Rural Schools Achievement Program. The NCDPI and federal Department of Education use a wide range of criteria for these funding programs, including geographic isolation (as measured by the number of students per square mile) and adjusted property tax base per student (NCDPI, 2009). A school district that receives funding from only one of these sources may not be rural in nature; for example, some independent, small urban local education agencies receive support through SCSF. However, the receipt of funding through at least two of the sources indicates that the district has many of the characteristics that define the local education agencies as rural. The list of rural local education agencies in North Carolina appears on Pages 46 – 48 in Appendix A.

I further narrowed my scope to the rural agencies and constituent schools that received funding from the state dropout prevention grants. Appendix B on Page 49 details which of the rural local education agencies in the state have received support from a dropout prevention grant during the past four years. Appendix C on Pages 50 – 51 provides a listing of specific programs that received dropout prevention grants, including the recipient organization, the name of the program, and the amount of funding provided. The rural local education agencies that received support from dropout prevention grants since 2007 are:

- Alleghany County Schools
- Bertie County Schools
- Graham County Schools
- Hertford County Schools
- Martin County Schools
- Northampton County Schools
- Roanoke Rapids Graded School District
- Washington County Schools
- Yancey County Schools
- Ashe County Schools
- Cherokee County Schools
- Greene County Schools
- Jones County Public Schools
- Mitchell County Schools
- Pamlico County Schools
- Tyrell County Schools
- Weldon City Schools
- Avery County Schools
- Edenton-Chowan Schools
- Halifax County Schools
- Madison County Schools
- Mount Airy City Schools
- Perquimans County Schools
- Warren County Schools
- Whiteville City Schools

*Race to the Top and the Environment for Reform:*

Soon after her election, North Carolina Governor Bev Perdue released her plans for education reform. Under the slogan “Career & College: Ready, Set, Go! Every Child a Graduate,” Perdue advanced three sets of policy goals. “Ready” refers to efforts to ensure that all children in elementary school can read, write, and do mathematics at grade level. As part of that goal, Perdue also proposed the creation of an Early Childhood Advisory Council to bring together state agencies and programs that address the needs of children from ages 0 - 5. “Set” encompasses the Governor’s policies to increase student achievement at all grade levels, including increased options for virtual learning and a restructuring of the state ABCs accountability model to include national assessments (State of North Carolina Office of the Governor, 2011).

The last word in the Governor’s slogan, “Go,” encompasses her efforts related to high school graduation and college enrollment, including an increased number of graduation coaches throughout the state, remediation for students struggling to meet graduation requirements, and the Career and College Promise, a program that will allow students to complete their first two years of college or technical training, at no cost, while they are still in high school. The second part of the Governor’s

slogan clearly references the goal of high school graduation for all students (State of North Carolina Office of the Governor, 2011). Effective dropout prevention is integral to the state's progress toward her goal.

"Career & College: Ready, Set, Go! Every Child a Graduate" soon became more than just the name of the Governor's education agenda. It was also the theme of the state's application for Race to the Top funding from the federal Department of Education. The Department of Education created the \$4 billion competitive grant program to spur and reward educational innovation by the states, specifically in the areas of standards and assessments, teacher and administrator quality, data systems, and reform in the nation's lowest-performing goals. After an unsuccessful application for funding in the first round, the Department of Education selected North Carolina and ten other states (including the District of Columbia) as grant winners (Department of Education, 2011).

The Department of Education required each state applying for Race to the Top funds to set benchmark targets for state-level goals for the 2016 - 2017 school year. North Carolina set goals for student achievement, graduation rate, college readiness, and college enrollment. Specifically, the state outlined progressively increasing targets designed to improve the statewide graduation rate to 86 percent by the end of the 2016 - 2017 school year. College readiness and college enrollment also hinges on the state's ability to keep students in school until graduation (State of North Carolina, 2010). With so many of the state's Race to the Top goals focused on high school graduation and eventual enrollment in college, dropout prevention is poised to become a critical policy area.

## **Literature on Successful Dropout Prevention Strategies**

Only a handful of rigorous studies of dropout prevention programs exist (Owen and Rosch, 2008). Many programs currently operating in the United States are small in size and scope; a dropout prevention program that serves one high school in a state is unlikely to be the subject of an intense program evaluation. As a result, much of the literature only offers dropout prevention strategies that the authors believe hold promise, often because programs that appear to be successful have made use of these practices. This type of literature's results must be considered cautiously because it is often impossible to isolate the exact effect of a specific dropout strategy on a program's outcomes. I specifically highlight cases in which program evaluation reports indicate that a package of services offered by a particular program has demonstrated effectiveness when analyzed rigorously.

I consider literature related to three types of dropout prevention strategies: relationships between students and adults, academic re-structuring, and system-level change. By the latter, I refer to structural and policy changes that must take place at a level higher than the individual school, for example, at the district- or state-level.

### *Supportive Relationships between Students and Adults:*

"At-risk students are less likely to drop out if they form an on-going relationship with a designated adult in the schools who consistently shows concern and provides personal attention in helping at-risk students address their academic and personal problems and assists them in staying on-track for graduation" (Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation, 2010, Page 11). Most literature on dropout prevention asserts the importance of supportive relationships between students and adult mentors or teachers. When students feel that someone at school cares about them and expects them to attend, they are less likely to be truant (Smink and Reimer, 2005). In addition, teachers and mentors can serve as advocates who can connect students with other resources they may need, such as childcare and transportation subsidies, medical care, and mental health services (Owen and Rosch, 2008; Princiotta and Reyna, 2009; Balfanz, et al,

2009; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). No replacement seems to exist for these types of bonds between students and supportive adults.

One of North Carolina's most respected dropout prevention program providers, Communities in Schools of North Carolina, focuses on providing students with "graduation coaches" who serve as mentors and assist them with the emotional and academic challenges that make their path to graduation more difficult (Owen and Rosch, 2008; Communities in Schools of North Carolina, 2010; Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation, 2010; ICF International, 2010). In 2010, ICF International completed a program evaluation of the Communities in Schools programs. The agency used a quasi-experimental design to determine the effects of the programs on school outcomes and randomized control trial in three sites (located in Kansas, Florida, and Texas) served by Communities in Schools to evaluate the programs' student-level effects.

The evaluation team looked for "substantively important effects," as defined by the Department of Education What Works Clearinghouse, to include any impacts with an effect size of .25 or higher. At the school-level, participating schools had higher graduation rates, lower dropout rates, better attendance, and higher scores on state reading and math exams than their non-participating comparison schools. At the student-level, teens were more likely to complete their grade, graduate, attend school regularly, score higher on state reading and math exams, and report improved feelings of self-worth, personal responsibility, and future aspirations. In their conclusion to the evaluation, the ICF International investigators highlight the relationship-building at the foundation of Communities in Schools programs (ICF International, 2010). They conclude that, "...regardless of how Communities in Schools is developing relationships; it appears to be working" (ICF International, 2010, Page 25).

While some schools, particularly in urban areas, may be able to recruit ample volunteers to build such relationships, rural schools struggle to find such volunteers from the community. As a result, teachers often assume positions as mentors and classroom educators (Princiotta and Reyna, 2009). In order to do so effectively, teachers need an environment in which they can develop these

relationships, as well as training in how to support at-risk students both academically and emotionally. In terms of environment, researchers point to class size, school structure, and teacher “rotating” as critical elements. In a report on dropout prevention, the Education Commission of the States offered that it is easier for teachers to develop strong supportive relationships with students when their class sizes are reasonable (Dounay Smith, 2007). However, other more rigorous studies refute this conclusion, and, instead, show that, after early elementary school, class sizes do not have a substantial impact on student achievement (Regional Educational Laboratory at EDC, 2009). If relationships are key to increased achievement and eventual graduation for older students, these studies should have found more evidence of a relationship between the variables.

Many scholars believe that supportive relationships begun during students’ first year in high school can help them to “start on the right foot,” decreasing the chance that they will choose to leave before graduation (Jerald, March 2006). In their study on Chicago high schools, Allensworth and Easton found that 81 percent of students who pass all required ninth grade courses graduate four years later while only 22 percent of those who do not pass all required courses graduate in four years. As a result, they conclude that the ninth grade is a critical point for students and offer that effective programs target students in the ninth grade and work to support them as they make the challenging academic and personal adjustment to the high school environment (Allensworth and Easton, 2005).

*Academic re-structuring:*

Effective programs also recognize that the traditional high school structure and coursework may not be meaningful for some students. Programs can respond to these students by offering additional vocational education coursework, opportunities for internships with local businesses, or options to take college coursework. Such experiences make school more engaging and relevant for students, which can help them graduate (Wyant, 2008). In particular, the North Carolina State Superintendent of Public Instruction specifically pointed to the expansion of career and technical education as a dropout prevention strategy (Atkinson, 2011). The development of educational technology also has the potential to link academic topics, such as mathematics, with topics of interest

to students, such as the design of NASCAR automobiles (Smink and Reimer, 2005). Research that emphasizes the need to make coursework more relevant and engaging is based on strategies used by model programs identified by organizations such as the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. It is natural that students will be more engaged in their schoolwork if they find it interesting; however, there has been no systematic study of this point.

As states and local education agencies have raised their graduation requirements, graduation rates have actually increased, even among students who were low-achieving eighth-graders (Jerald, March 2006). Researchers considered the graduation rates of eighth graders across the nation who entered high school after their states had increased the rigor of graduation requirements. After holding all other factors constant, the analysts found that increased rigor was associated with a higher graduation rate for those eighth graders (Jerald, March 2006). It seems that students become increasingly motivated when more is expected of them. This trend also holds true when considering the rigor of individual courses. Students thrive when they are challenged to succeed and respected as scholars who can meet those challenges. Even students who are several academic grade-levels behind perform better when remediation activities challenge them without insulting their intelligence, which happens, for example, when teachers present what are obviously fifth-grade reading passages to a tenth grader reading at a fifth-grade reading level (McPartland and Jordan, 2004).

When done in a way that respects students, remediation is critical to decreasing the high school dropout rate. Numerous remediation strategies exist for students who are struggling academically. Some schools have elected to include remediation periods within the school day, while others have after-school programs that provide the opportunity for credit recovery and academic help. While the abovementioned educational technology can provide some needed remediation to students, schools have had success in the use of tutors, either by peers or adult mentors. In some districts, alternative programs provided another option for students who will reach the age limit for school enrollment before meeting requirements for graduation. In these alternate settings, students

can complete more condensed coursework in smaller settings more suitable to their needs (Smink and Reimer, 2005). Again, the importance of remediation has emerged only from examinations of model programs, not through individual program evaluations. Separate studies of alternative education settings have shown that one type of alternative school has been successful in keeping at-risk students in high school by offering intensive remediation on a different school schedule. So-called “Twilight Schools” operate later in the afternoon and evening, thereby allowing students to work or care for family members during the day (Dounay Smith, 2007).

*System-level Change:*

In 2006, Achieve and Jobs for the Future reviewed a number of dropout prevention programs that had increased graduation rates at the schools they served. They found that a majority of programs took place at schools that had access to a sophisticated data system administered by either the state or the school district. These comprehensive data systems allowed staffers to intervene with students who are at risk (Jerald, June 2006). Many states are developing such sophisticated data systems that integrate student-level information on test scores, grades, promotion, attendance, and other demographic variables.

Researchers have been able to isolate many of the characteristics that place students at-risk of dropping out, for example, retention in elementary school and poor attendance. As a result, it is possible to predict which students are at-risk of dropping out of high school while they are in middle school (Garland, 2011). It is also possible to use these data to identify schools with large numbers of at-risk students and target information and dropout prevention resources to these institutions.

The fact that schools can identify students who are at-risk of dropping out of high school while they are still in early elementary school reinforces the idea that early childhood and elementary education serve as a form of dropout prevention. As Smink and Reimer offer, “the most effective way to reduce the number of children who ultimately drop out is to provide the best possible classroom instruction from the beginning of their school experience through the primary grades” (2005, Page 10).

Supporting students academically and emotionally in their earlier years can decrease the chances that they experience problems in middle and high schools (Smink and Reimer, 2005; Owen and Rosch, 2008; Princiotta and Reyna, 2009; Balfanz, et al, 2009). When identifying “dropout factories” across the nation, Balfanz et al found that most of these schools were located in districts that also included a large percentage of low-performing early elementary school students (2009). Conceptualizing early childhood education as a form of dropout prevention requires a new consideration of the factors that ensure the academic success of high school students.

This mindset of teachers, parents, school district officials, and legislators would need to change in order to make this shift. Some states that shifted successfully have formed P-20 Councils, specifically with Committees on Dropout Prevention, to consider how schools, social service agencies, and advocacy groups can begin to support young children and continue this support through graduation. Other states achieved much better coordination of services and support in the area of dropout prevention as a result of bringing all stakeholders to the same table. A P-20 Council can help meld early childhood and K-12 education into a seamless process for students (Princiotta and Reyna, 2009).

A P-20 Council can also help to make high school graduation a more salient goal for an entire state if all agencies that affect the welfare of children embrace the issue. South Carolina serves as a prime example of this collective effort. In South Carolina, the At-Risk Student Committee of the Education and Economic Development Coordination Council published the *At-Risk Student Implementation Guide: A Comprehensive Resource for Identifying Programs to Help Decrease South Carolina's Dropout Population*. While not explicitly called a “P-20 Council,” the state’s Education and Economic Development Coordination Council brings together all state divisions related to children, as well as economic development-related offices. Schools and community organizations use the guide to identify strategies that will meet their specific needs, as well as to learn more about national programs that can assist with their dropout prevention efforts. Providers use a matrix to first identify characteristics of their at-risk student population, for example, excessive absences from

school or single parenthood, and then find specific strategies that have proven effective with those students. If desired, the guide also helps schools identify national programs that offer packages of the services they want to provide for students (At-Risk Committee of the Education and Economic Development Coordination Council of South Carolina, 2010).

During the early 2000s, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation spent much time and resources on the small school movement, an effort to create “schools within schools” that provide for smaller, self-contained environments. The Gates Foundation later acknowledged that smaller schools did not cause widespread increases in academic achievement (Greene and Symonds, 2006). However, the idea still manifests today in the creation of ninth grade “academies,” in which all ninth grade students share the same set of core academic teachers and are contained within one area of the school. In such an atmosphere, teachers report that it is easier to develop relationships with students and recognize the challenges they face (McPartland and Jordan, 2004). Indeed, in North Carolina, researchers have found that ninth grade academies have a statistically significant positive effect on promotion and graduation rates (Cook et al, 2008).

Some schools have chosen to extend this model into later grades by creating tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade “academies,” or by grouping students into smaller settings based on their interests and career plans. Other schools achieved increased academic success after instituting plans to rotate teachers with the same group of students. Under this type of plan, for example, an Algebra I teacher follows her students to the next grade and teaches them Geometry. Teachers get to know students and their families much better over the course of multiple years, and they are also able to individualize instruction based on their knowledge of how the student learns. While these relationships may not be built within an “academy” setting, they still create the types of relationships that have shown to be effective (Balfanz, et al, 2009).

Serving as a mentor for an at-risk student is no easy task, even for teachers with training in pedagogy and child development. Professional development for teachers and, indeed, training for all mentors, is important to ensure their knowledge of what support services are available for students,

how to assist students in accessing these services, and how to support them in reaching their goals. Teachers need even more training on the academic strategies that help at-risk students achieve (McPartland and Jordan, 2004; Smink and Reimer, 2005; Balfanz, et al, 2009). Surveys of teachers support this dropout prevention strategy; they report that they want more specialized training in how to support struggling students. However, there have been no evaluations of a large-scale effort to change the kind of professional development provided to teachers. As a result, I cannot conclude that this strategy will actually result in increased graduation rates.

Even if schools implement all of the above best practices for dropout prevention, some researchers suggest that the effectiveness of these reforms will be limited if they are not part of a larger, whole-school reform. Smink and Reimer argue that schools must go through a process of systemic renewal in which they "...engage in deliberate reflection on the processes, procedures, and structures of the school and work to change it to be more supportive for at-risk students" (2005, Page 5). It is critical that teachers, staff, volunteers, and communities believe that they have ownership of dropout prevention programs; they are more likely to be fully engaged in the interventions if they believe this to be the case (McPartland and Jordan, 2004).

These school-wide reforms can include some of the strategies discussed above, such as breaking a larger school until smaller academies and eliminating the procedures that may keep some at-risk students out of school, for example, not providing any opportunities for credit recovery. Some for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, including America's Choice and the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University provide specific models to restructure and reform struggling schools.

Schools that suffer from high dropout rates may find it beneficial to explore these programs and the services they provide (Dounay Smith, 2007). The Consortium for Policy Research in Education evaluated the America's Choice reform by comparing the academic performance of students in reform schools with a matched sample in traditional schools. Researchers found a statistically significant increase of two to six percentage point improvement in achievement for

students in the America's Choice schools (Supowitz et al, 2001). The Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University has created the Talent Development High School model for schools seeking to reform. Using a comparative interrupted time series design to evaluate the effectiveness of Talent Development High Schools, researchers found that students in these schools earned 1.1 more credits than comparison group students, and were eight percent more likely to progress to the tenth grade (Kemple et al, 2005).

Overall, the research highlights some key dropout prevention strategies that have shown to be effective through rigorous program evaluations. These strategies include strong support relationships between adults and at-risk students, intervention during the ninth grade (including ninth grade academies), increased rigor of coursework, meaningful remediation, the use of sophisticated data systems, an emphasis on early childhood education, and public awareness of the link between early childhood education and dropout prevention, and school wide-reform.

## **Measuring and Promoting Effectiveness of Dropout Prevention Programs in Rural North Carolina:**

My analytical strategy has several parts: document review of grant applications for the state dropout prevention grants and evaluation reports of funded projects, interviews with stakeholders, economic research on rural communities in North Carolina, case studies of rural dropout prevention programs in North Carolina, and best practice research on successful dropout prevention programs across the nation.

A list of rural local education agencies served by grants appears on Page 15 . I first evaluate the effectiveness of these programs before considering how to promote their effectiveness.

### *Effectiveness of Existing Programs*

Since 2009, the Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation has contracted with EDSTAR, a Raleigh-based consulting firm that specializes in the evaluation of educational programs. In October 2009, May 2010 and October 2010, EDSTAR published evaluation reports that identified certain dropout prevention grant-funded programs as “promising” or “model” programs (Johnson, 2009, May 2010, and October 2010). It is necessary to trace the evolving reporting by the grant recipients before considering how EDSTAR determined which programs fit into these categories. When the grants were first created in 2007, the General Assembly wanted the grant recipients to be autonomous and free of much oversight after they were selected for funding. At that point, no one on the North Carolina Committee on Dropout Prevention anticipated that the grants would extend beyond a one-time provision of funds to local school districts and community organizations. There was no discussion or mandating of data collection or performance metrics when grants were awarded in 2007 (Garland, 2011).

After legislators commented that the dropout prevention grants were a one-time occurrence, the General Assembly surprised districts by again provided funding for the grants in 2009 and 2010 (Garland, 2011). At this point, they included a provision for external evaluation of the effectiveness of programs funded by the dropout prevention grants, as well as for the North Carolina Committee on Dropout Prevention to provide a report on model programs funded through the grants; the

Committee published this report on March 15, 2010 (North Carolina Committee on Dropout Prevention, 2011). In early 2009, the Committee issued a request for proposals to find an external evaluator and selected EDSTAR through the competitive bidding process (Johnson, 2009).

EDSTAR first attempted to review the effectiveness of the 2007 dropout prevention grant recipients. They soon found, however, that only 27 percent of the programs had collected the pre- and post-data on recipients needed to evaluate them in a systematic way. EDSTAR worked with the 2007 grant recipients to measure outcomes when data were available. They also created logic models to demonstrate the programs' approaches to increase the graduation rates for targeted students. Given the lack of infrastructure and data to conduct program evaluations, no evaluations of the individual programs funded in 2007 have occurred. EDSTAR aggregated the available data from the 2007 recipients to produce partial outcome information for all the 2007 programs (Johnson, 2009).

EDSTAR's next task was to work with 2008 grant recipients to re-write the objectives and goals they had offered in their grant applications. While most of these goals were directly related to decreasing the dropout rate, programs were not clear on the intended recipients of their services or their specific desired outcomes. EDSTAR worked with each grant recipient to shape objectives into "SMART Goals" that were Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound, as well as to create logic models to trace how they goals would be realized (Johnson, 2009).

With new goals in place, EDSTAR then assisted 2008 recipient programs as they worked to gather the pre- and post- data that would allow for an evaluation of the programs' achievement. The programs began providing programming to students; however, it was possible in some cases, to collect pre-intervention data, for example, a student's attendance record for the previous school year (Johnson 2009). In 2010, EDSTAR provided an evaluation template to all 2008 dropout prevention grant recipients and requested that they complete the evaluation report. Within these reports, programs reported:

- (1) Descriptive information: type of agency administering the program, service delivery models used, schools served, services provided, family engagement activities, and program description.
- (2) Goals and progress: SMART goals, data used to target students for services and evaluate success, percentage of students who achieved SMART goals, and highlights or stories of individual success.
- (3) Implementation details: activities to encourage high school graduation among non-targeted students, coordination with existing programs or services, other resources used to support programming, plan for sustaining the program at the end of the grant cycle, and budget details.

While the completion of these evaluation reports was optional, 14 of the 16 rural dropout prevention programs funded in 2008 did not complete them; the remaining two programs are Northampton County Schools' Project DOSO and the Y.E.S. program operated in Halifax County by the Hobgood Citizen Group (EDSTAR, 2010). As of April 2011, EDSTAR had not yet gathered outcome information for the recipients of the 2009 Dropout Prevention Grants.

EDSTAR has used the 2008 evaluation reports and other internally-developed criteria to identify "promising" or "model" programs from among the 2008 recipients, including some programs that first received support in 2007. EDSTAR highlighted programs that specifically served students with characteristics that made them more likely to drop out of school, for example, those with elementary-level reading ability in high school. The selected programs also included some preventative components aimed at intervening with students before they develop any of the risk factors associated with dropping out of high school (Johnson, 2009).

In some cases, EDSTAR selected programs with strong quantitative evidence to indicate that they had met program objectives. However, they also identified as "promising" programs some grantees "discovered quite by accident through informal conversations with staff members. Required

data forms did not necessarily reflect the positive results taking place” (Johnson, 2009). EDSTAR’s “promising” programs appear in Table 2.

Table 2: 2007 – 2008 “Promising” Dropout Prevention Programs as Identified by EDSTAR			
Year	Local Education Agency Served	Grant Recipient	Program Name
2007	Edenton-Chowan Schools	Edenton-Chowan Schools	Check and Connect Life Coaches
2007	Graham County School	Graham County Schools	Project SUCCEED
2008	Greene County Schools	Greene County Schools	Empowerment Program
2008	Halifax County Schools	Ivory Community Development Corporation	IVORY Learning Center
2008	Pamlico County Schools	HeartWorks Children’s Medical Home Mission	Community Dropout Prevention Program

Data as reported by Johnson, 2009, May 2010, and October 2010.

With their “promising” programs label from EDSTAR, these programs enjoy a reputation as the “effective” recipients of the dropout prevention grants. However, the identification of some of these programs without quantitative data to show achievement of their goals is troubling. To explore this issue further, I examined the “SMART goals” of each of the five programs, as well as data used to measure progress. The results of this examination appear in Appendix D on Pages 52 – 57.

While completing this level of analysis, I discovered that some of the programs’ goals might meet the requirements of a SMART objective, but not have the level of rigor needed to decrease effectively the dropout rate for targeted students. Table 3 shows the results of my analysis for all of the rural dropout prevention programs. I first evaluated the quality of individual SMART goals as low- medium- or high-quality. I assess the quality of each goal by considering its rigor, the percentage of students it strives to affect, and whether the goal is ambitious enough to place at-risk students on a trajectory to graduation. Lastly, I calculate the percentage of students that met each SMART goal.

I explain my rationale for these classifications in Appendix D on Pages 52 – 57. For example, the first table in Appendix D (on Page 53) presents information on Edenton-Chowan Schools’ Check

and Connect Life Coach program. The second “SMART goal” for the program only strives for targeted students to miss fewer than eleven days of school. A student who misses eleven days at school is still in serious danger of failing classes during that semester, falling further behind in credit accumulation, dropping out of school, and, in some districts, being dropped from the student rolls for attendance reasons.

Table 3: Compiled Analysis of Quality of SMART Goals and Achievement of Goals  
 Programs identified as effective by the author are shaded in yellow.

	SMART Goal One		SMART Goal Two		SMART Goal Three	
	Quality of Goal	Goal Met?	Quality of Goal	Goal Met?	Quality of Goal	Goal Met?
<b>Programs Labeled as Promising by EDSTAR:</b>						
Edenton-Chowan Schools - Check and Connect Life Coaches	Medium	No	Medium	No	Low	Yes
Graham County Schools - Project Succeed	Low	Yes	Low	No	Low	Yes
Halifax County Schools - IVORY Learning Center	Medium	No	Low	Yes	Medium	Unclear
Pamlico County Schools - Community Dropout Prevention Program	High	Yes	High	Yes	Medium	Yes
Greene County Schools - Empowerment Program	High	Yes	High	No	High	No
<b>Effective Program Not Labeled as Promising by EDSTAR:</b>						
Jones County Schools - Support for AVID Students	High	No	High	No	High	No
<b>Other Programs:</b>						
Ashe County Schools - At-risk Eighth Graders	High	No	Medium	No	High	Yes
Bertie County Schools - Hive Empowering Youth Program	High	No	Low	Yes	High	No

	SMART Goal One		SMART Goal Two		SMART Goal Three	
	Quality of Goal	Goal Met?	Quality of Goal	Goal Met?	Quality of Goal	Goal Met?
Cherokee County Schools - Social Worker and Nurse Care Teams	Low	Yes	Low	Yes	Low	Yes
Halifax County Schools - Together Transforming Lives	Low	Yes	Low	Yes	Medium	Yes
Perquimans County Schools - Perquimans Success Academy	Medium	No	Medium	No	Medium	No
Warren County Schools - Warren County Coalition for Dropout Prevention	Low	No	Low	Yes	Low	No
Washington County Schools - AVID	Low	Yes	Low	Yes	High	No
<p>Data as analyzed by author, 2011. SMART Goals are individual targets set by the dropout prevention programs; while each program must have three SMART goals, the programs are free to select outcome measures they find meaningful. The author assessed the quality of each goal by considering its rigor, the percentage of students it strives to affect, and whether the goal is ambitious enough to place at-risk students on a trajectory to graduation. Lastly, she calculated the percentage of students that met each SMART goal.</p>						

After completing the analysis in Table 3, I conclude that only two of the five programs identified by EDSTAR should actually be labeled “promising” programs. The table suggests Greene County Schools’ Empowerment Program met both of its high-quality goals while failing to meet its one medium-quality goal. Pamlico County’s Community Dropout Prevention Program met both of its high-quality goals, as well as its medium-quality goal.

EDSTAR misclassified three rural dropout programs as effective despite evidence to the contrary. As a result, I concluded that EDSTAR overlooked some rural dropout prevention programs that are indeed effective. I completed the same analysis for the remainder of the thirteen rural dropout prevention programs<sup>2</sup> for which complete data are available to evaluate whether or not goals

<sup>2</sup> These programs are: Ashe County Schools’ Program for At-risk Eighth Graders, the One Economy Corporation’s Hive Empowering Youth Program in Bertie County Schools, the Cherokee County Department of

have been met. This analysis appears in Appendix E on Pages 58 – 66. Jones County Schools’ dropout prevention program, in addition to the above-mentioned programs in Greene and Pamlico counties, are the only effective rural dropout prevention programs identified in this analysis.

My methodology for the identification of effective rural dropout prevention programs also considers the economic situation in these rural areas. Unemployment in an area may affect students’ decisions to leave high school, or pursue their studies until graduation. Table 4 shows 2007 – 2010 trends in unemployment rates in counties served by dropout prevention programs. Chart 1 aggregates the data to show trends for all of the rural counties served by dropout prevention programs, those counties served by effective programs, and those counties served by ineffective dropout prevention programs.

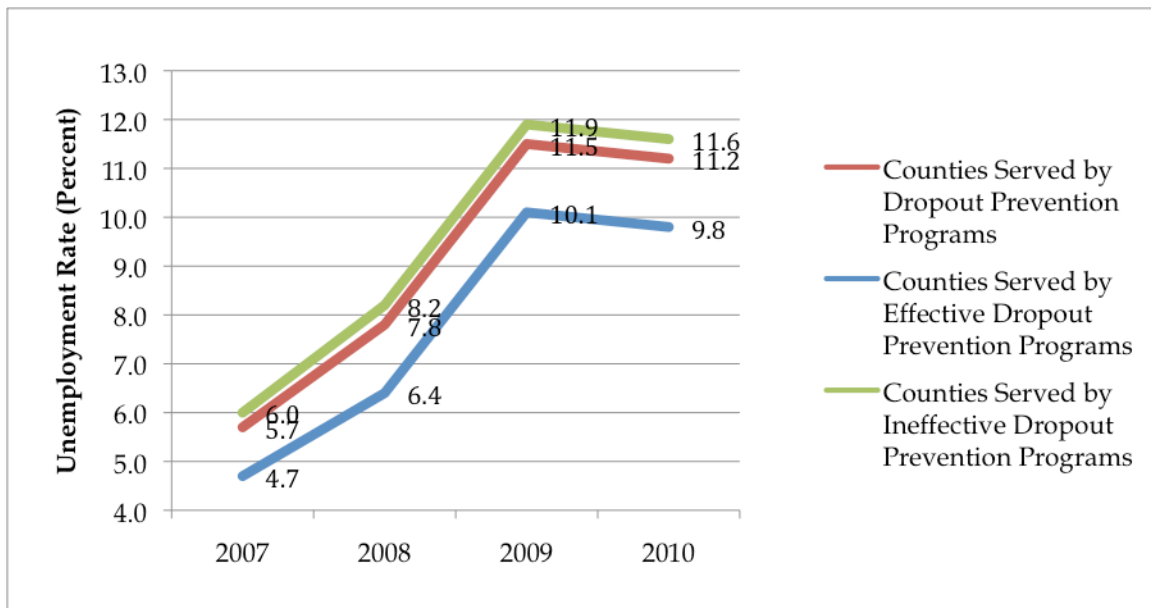
Table 4: Non-Seasonally Adjusted Unemployment Rates (Percent) for Rural Counties Served by Dropout Prevention Grants, 2007 – 2010				
Counties with effective dropout prevention programs are shaded in yellow.				
County	2007	2008	2009	2010
Jones	4.4	6.5	10.2	10.2
Greene	5.4	6.7	10.6	9.9
Pamlico	4.3	6.0	9.4	9.4
Ashe	5.0	6.8	11.4	11.8
Bertie	5.6	7.7	10.5	10.8
Cherokee	6.2	9.2	14.6	13.8
Chowan	6.1	8.7	11.1	10.3
Graham	7.1	10.7	16.1	15.3
Halifax	6.4	9.0	13.1	12.7
Perquimans	5.2	6.8	10.1	9.1
Warren	6.2	8.5	12.5	12.0
Washington	6.4	7.7	11.2	11.6

Data as retrieved by author from Bureau of Labor Statistics database, 2011.

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Social Services’ School Social Worker and Nurse CARE Teams in Cherokee County Schools, Together Transforming Lives, Inc.’s Together Transforming Lives Program in Halifax County Schools, Jones County Schools’ Support for AVID Students, Perquimans County Schools’ Perquimans Success Academy, the Warren Family Institute’s Coalition for Dropout Prevention in Warren County Schools, and Washington County Schools’ AVID Program.

Chart 1: Non-Seasonally Adjusted Unemployment Rates (Percent) for Rural Counties Served by Dropout Prevention Grants, 2007 - 2010



Data as retrieved from Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011 and tabulated by author, 2011.

Chart 1 demonstrates that the effective programs are located in areas with lower unemployment rates. In 2009 and 2010, when all of the programs were providing services to students, there was a 1.4 percent difference in the unemployment rates between the effective and ineffective programs. In one scenario, the relative economic health of the areas served by the effective programs (when compared to the areas served by the ineffective programs) may be a cause of their levels of success. In an area with a low unemployment rate, young people may believe that the community holds job opportunities for them if they complete their education and enter the workforce with high school diplomas.

However, one can also imagine a scenario in which students living in areas with high unemployment rates might have a greater incentive to stay in school. One of the reasons that young people drop out of school is to enter the employment market and earn money, albeit usually in minimum wage, low-skill jobs. A prospective high school dropout might see the high unemployment in a county as a sign that he or she will not be able to obtain a job after leaving high school. The student may then decide to remain in school because of a lack of jobs in the community. It is also

possible that a student considering dropping out of high school might see increased unemployment as a sign that employment will be easier to obtain if they have a high school diploma and comparative advantage over less educated applicants for jobs. In either of these situations, high unemployment serves as a deterrent to leaving high school.

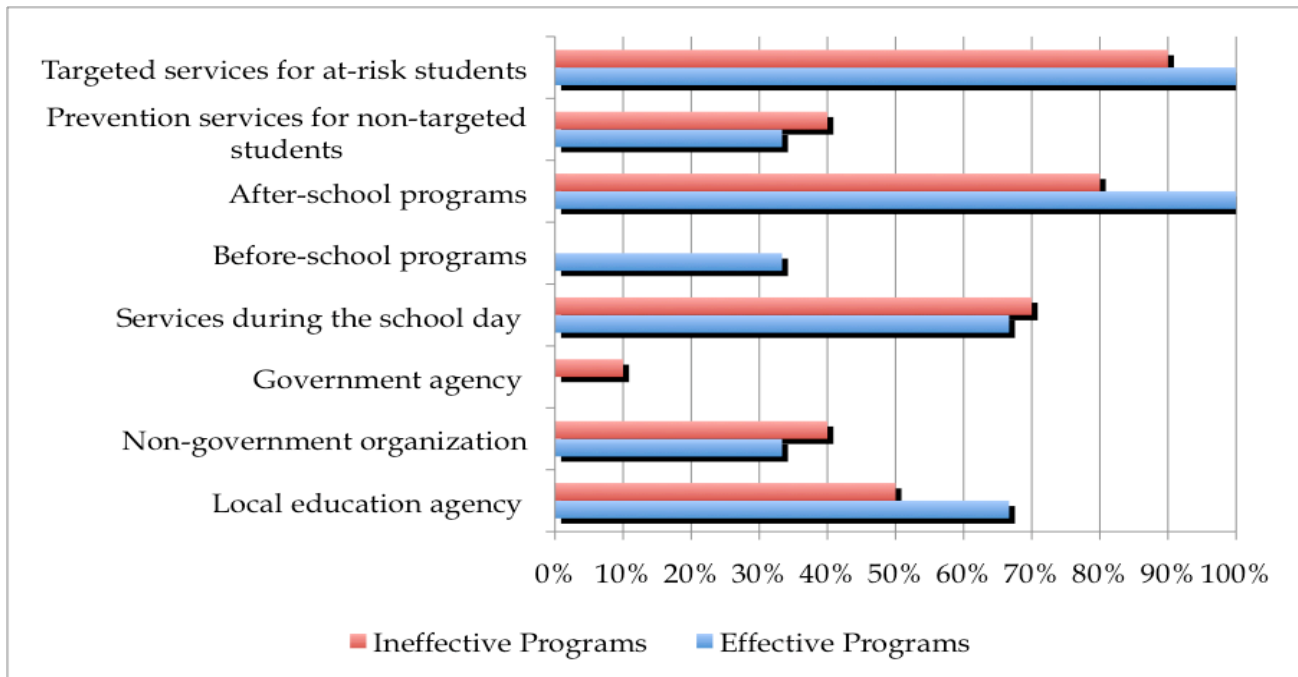
The fact that the effectiveness of programs seems to differ with the employment landscape in a county is certainly a topic for further study. However, for the purposes of this report, I will assume that the dropout prevention programs in Jones, Greene, and Pamlico counties owe their effectiveness to elements related to the programs themselves and not the economic situation in those counties. It is possible that the programs in these counties would be just as effective if their respective unemployment rates were higher, or that their effectiveness might increase if unemployment rates increased. With such uncertainty, it is difficult to make any conclusions on the relationship between unemployment and graduation rates.

#### *Promoting Effectiveness of Existing Programs*

The three dropout prevention programs that are effective in rural areas in North Carolina demonstrate best practices. What services do they provide to students, and how do they provide them? To answer this question, Chart 2 compares the type of agency administering the program and service delivery models at use in the effective and ineffective rural dropout prevention programs. Appendix G on Pages 69 – 71 provides program-level information on these characteristics.

The chart demonstrates that the effective programs are more likely than the ineffective programs to serve students both before- and after-school, during times when they might otherwise not be engaged in education-focused activities. While 100 percent of the effective programs provide after-school programming for participants, only just over 80 percent of the ineffective programs do. All of the effective programs target their services to at-risk students, but a small number of ineffective programs do not. Finally, nearly seventy percent of effective programs are administered by local education agencies, while ineffective programs were more likely run by government agencies or non-government organizations.

Chart 2: Comparison of Type of Agency Administering Programs and Service Delivery Models of Effective and Ineffective Rural Dropout Prevention Programs



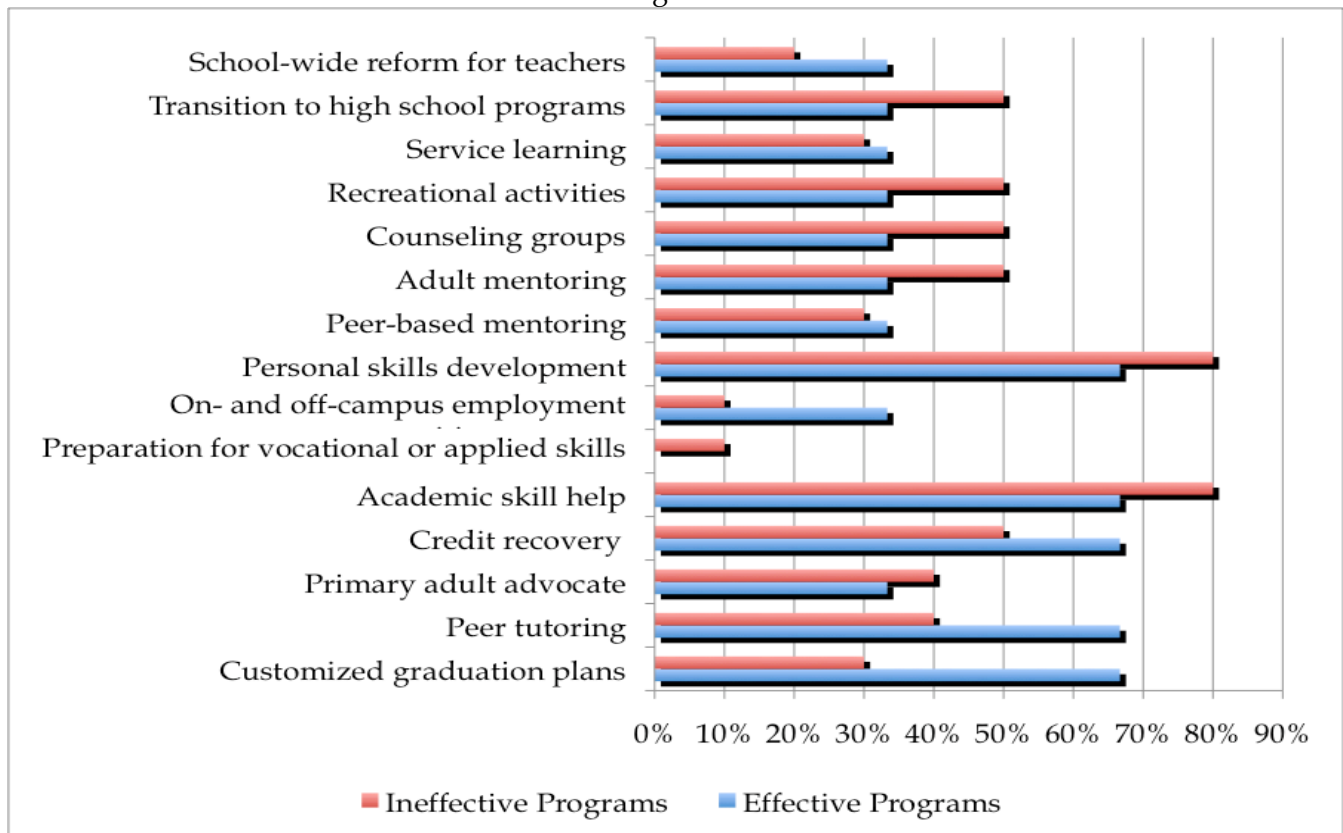
Data as tabulated by author, 2011.

Another important element of the success of more effective dropout prevention programs is the package of services they provide to participants. Chart 3 compares the services delivered by all of the rural dropout prevention programs. This comparison highlights some key differences in the services provided by the effective programs and those that have not succeeded. Over 65 percent of the effective dropout prevention programs worked with students to develop customized graduation plans; only 30 percent of the ineffective programs took this step with students. Another major programmatic difference is the source of support for participating students. Over half of the effective programs provide peer tutoring, while the ineffective programs spent more of their time and resources on adult mentoring for students. Roughly the same percentage of ineffective and effective programs offered peer-based mentoring for students. The effective programs provide more peer role models for their participating students.

A final difference that emerges from Chart 3 is the implementation of school-wide reform in the effective rural dropout prevention programs. Only two of the eleven ineffective programs took

place within an environment of broader reform at the school-level. “School-wide reform” is a difficult process to measure through the dropout prevention programs’ reporting to EDSTAR. One program reporter may interpret school-wide reform as a new school administrator with new policies and procedures, while another reporter may consider it to be the presence of some type of outside reform agent, such as the NCDPI’s School and District Transformation division. I explore the topic of “school-wide reform” in more detail in the Discussion and Policy Options section below.

Chart 3: Comparison of Services Provided by Effective and Ineffective Rural Dropout Prevention Programs



Data as tabulated by author, 2011.

Interviews with program administrators at rural dropout prevention programs also provide insight into intangible elements of a dropout program that do not lend themselves well to the type of categorization offered above. At Jones County High School, one of the effective dropout prevention programs, the program’s director noted that her program was part of a school-wide reform, and that, as a result, she found all teachers to be helpful and supportive of her efforts, even those educators not

directly involved with her work (Fleming, 2011). Along the same lines, the director of the IVORY Learning Center in Halifax County emphasized that all of her staff were members of the local community. They knew many of the children and their families, which made it easier for parent contact to occur seamlessly (Brown, 2011). It does appear that those adults involved in serving students through dropout prevention programs are more invested in the programs when there is community ownership of them.

Overall, reviewing the strategies in use by effective dropout prevention programs in rural areas indicates that programs that specifically target at-risk students, provide them with structured activities when they are not in school, and mandate the creation of individualized graduation plans for students are more likely to be effective. In addition, programs run by schools or school districts, especially those also undertaking school-wide reform, tend to be more effective than programs run by community organizations or other government agencies.

## **Discussion and Policy Options:**

The literature review, analysis of dropout grant recipient programs, and an in-depth examination of the effectiveness and characteristics of the funded programs leads to a number of realities that North Carolina must face when considering how to prevent students in rural areas from dropping out of high school.

- The majority of programs in rural areas currently funded by dropout prevention grants are not effective in keeping students in school.
- Rural counties are at a comparative disadvantage when working to prevent students from dropping out of high schools. Rural areas face greater logistical challenges, including transporting students to and from programming, as well as more fiscal challenges, as there are fewer locally funded positions that can provide support for students. Rural areas are home to fewer national agencies that have experience in working to prevent students from dropping out of high school, including Communities In Schools (Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation, 2010). Rural schools may also lack the infrastructure and staff needed to design research-based dropout prevention programs.
- Effective strategies for keeping students in high school include: strong support relationships between adults and at-risk students, intervention during the ninth grade (including ninth grade academies), increased rigor of coursework, meaningful remediation, use of sophisticated data systems, an emphasis on early childhood education, and public awareness of the link between early childhood education and dropout prevention, and school wide-reform.
- North Carolina currently faces a budget deficit of \$800 million (North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management, 2011). In such dire economic times, there may be more political support for budget decisions that maintain critical state services, such as classroom teachers, than for competitive grant programs and reform initiatives.

Given the above realities, my recommendations for the State of North Carolina fall into three categories: recommendations that require funding (either through new funds or the reallocation of funding from other areas of the budget), recommendations that are cost-neutral, and recommendations that focus on changes to the rubric for the selection of dropout prevention grant recipients.

*Recommendations that Require Funding:*

**(1) The General Assembly should allocate funding to Communities in Schools of North Carolina to provide one hundred graduation coaches throughout North Carolina.**

As discussed in the literature review, Communities in Schools has seen much success in its dropout prevention efforts, both nationally and here in North Carolina. Communities in Schools of North Carolina currently has thirty-seven local chapters that serve students in forty-two counties in the state (Communities in Schools, 2010). With a record of success demonstrated through external review, the organization is well positioned to train, deploy, and support graduation coaches to provide the assistance that at-risk students in North Carolina need, especially in rural areas where there is a dearth of mentors. In 2010, the General Assembly's Fiscal Research staff estimated that \$6.1 million would be needed to provide one hundred graduation coaches (Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation, 2010). When placing graduation coaches, Communities in Schools should give priority to local education agencies with graduation rates of less than sixty percent, as this is an indicator that the NCDPI uses when defining a low-performing high school. As the organization already has a presence in many of the state's more urban areas, much of the expansion will occur into the state's rural communities.

**(2) The General Assembly should create a competitive funding stream for high schools that wish to implement a school-wide reform model.**

Under North Carolina's Race to the Top award, there is new funding to provide support to struggling high schools and the districts in which they are located. The NCDPI's District and

School Transformation Division is using that funding to create system-level change in schools identified as low-performing under Race to the Top. However, some schools not served by the School and District Transformation Division could benefit from a school-wide reform plan. The average cost of contracting with an external partner for such services is \$250,000 for the first year and \$150,000 for each subsequent year (McPartland and Jordan, 2004). By creating a \$10 million competitive grant program, the General Assembly could allow upward of twenty high schools to engage in the deliberative reform processes that are often necessary to improve student outcomes.

*Cost-Neutral Recommendations:*

- (1) The State Board of Education should require school districts to use the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) to identify students at-risk of dropping out and require the creation of personalized graduation plans for these students.**

The State of North Carolina currently provides all school districts with access to EVAAS, a sophisticated statistical modeling software used to predict student scores on state exams, determine the amount of student growth that can be attributed to a particular teacher or school, and to identify students who are at-risk of failure in core academic subjects, and, therefore, at-risk for dropping out of high school. The Department of Public Instruction's contract with SAS, the owners of the EVAAS system, also provides teachers with free training on how to use EVAAS.

EVAAS identifies students who are at-risk of dropping out of high school even before they enter middle school. The State already requires teachers to create personalized education plans for students who score level I or II on state exams in core subject classes. While many students who are at-risk of dropping out may receive a personalized education plan, not all students will be served under the existing mandate. The current process for the creation of a personalized education plan focuses on the specific instructional strategies needed for a student to be successful in individual classes, not on the more overarching academic, social, and emotional support needed to keep a student in school (NCDPI, 2011a).

The review of effective rural dropout prevention programs in North Carolina indicates that personalized graduation plans are key to keeping students on the path to graduation, specifically in rural areas where it may not be easy for students to access social services they need. In these communities, schools must serve as “brokers” for the many types of support that students need. The creation of personalized graduation plans can clearly set out goals for students, as well as sources of support needed to reach those goals.

**(2) The NCDPI’s Division of School and District Transformation should specifically include increasing graduation rates as a part of the system of support that it provides for all schools in partner districts.**

The staff members in the division should include dropout prevention as one area of programmatic support that they provide to districts and schools. They currently focus much of their efforts on increasing student achievement, which is inextricably tied to raising graduation rates. However, staff members can work with district officials, administrators, teachers, and student support staff to examine how to keep students in school, and what additional programs or strategies can be used to encourage students to graduate. In addition, these staff members can help to shape the system-wide approach to dropout prevention that has shown to be effective. Dropout prevention is not the sole responsibility of high schools, but also part of the purview of early childhood education, elementary schools, and middle schools. The NCDPI staff members can work to infuse dropout prevention into strategic planning and action at all levels of the seven rural local education agencies that they assist.

**(3) The NCDPI should take the lead on the creation of a P-20 Council for the State of North Carolina. Once the Council has been created, a subset of members should serve on a Committee on Dropout Prevention to identify areas for cross-agency collaboration to keep students in school.**

Within North Carolina’s state government, many agencies advocate for the well-being

of children, including the NCDPI, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety, the Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Community College System, and the University of North Carolina General Administration. In addition, the state is home to many not-for-profit organizations that work to influence policy in a way that increases opportunities for children, for example, the Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University and Action for Children.

**(4) The NCDPI should publish a best practices guide similar to South Carolina's *At-Risk Student Implementation Guide*.**

Currently, the NCDPI only provides detailed technical assistance on dropout prevention to applicants for, and recipients of, the dropout prevention grants. Guidance on the specific interventions shown to be effective in keeping students in school is limited to a list of broad strategies on the NCDPI's website and publications that highlight promising programs (Strahan, 2011).

When schools and community organizations are presented with descriptions of model programs, as North Carolina currently does, it can be challenging for them to decide which programs, or characteristics of programs will meet the needs of their students. The guide provided to schools and organizations in South Carolina is organized in a manner that is much more useful to those seeking to design dropout prevention programs. The guide is available on South Carolina's website and is accessible to all existing dropout prevention programs or those planning new programs. The NCDPI can use the guide as a model when creating its own documents; the South Carolina guide contains information specific to programs, laws, policies, and funding streams specific to the state.

*Recommendations for Changes to the Dropout Prevention Grants Selection Rubric:*

As discussed above, the General Assembly wants to maintain the autonomy of the local schools, districts, and organizations that apply for, and receive, dropout prevention grants (Legislative Staffer Two, 2011). As McPartland and Jordan note,

“What is the proper balance between a “prescriptive” model (where the core elements, including an organizational blueprint and a specific curriculum of lessons plans and classroom activities, are explicitly provided) and a “process” model (where emphasis is placed on bringing together the key stakeholders to work on defining local changes that address a key set of goals, principles, or assumptions about an effective high school)?” (2004).

The General Assembly has, in short, valued the “process” more than the “prescription.” That being said, the evidence presented in this report clearly demonstrates that some specific strategies are more likely than others to result in lower dropout rates for participating students. Therefore, I recommend the following changes to the dropout prevention rubric that is currently in place (Appendix H on Pages 72 – 77):

- (1) **Include a row under “Part C: Description of the Program/Initiative” to evaluate the extent to which the program uses resources to recruit staff or volunteers who develop strong relationships with students and train those staff members or volunteers how to fully support students.**

Both the literature review and the analysis of strategies used in effective dropout prevention programs in rural North Carolina indicate that strong relationships between students and adults increase graduation rates.

- (2) **Include a row under “Part C: Description of the Program/Initiative” to evaluate the extent to which the program is a part of a school-wide reform initiative designed to improve student outcomes.**

Both the literature review and the analysis of strategies used in effective dropout prevention programs in rural North Carolina indicate that school-wide reform is a critical element to programs that increase graduation rates.

**(3) Under Part B: Description of Target Students, rewrite descriptors so that a program that receives five points on the second row must use EVAAS to identify students to be served.**

Both the literature review and the analysis of strategies used in effective dropout prevention programs in rural North Carolina indicate that the use of data to target students is a strategy that increases graduation rates.

**(4) Under Part F: Community Input and Collaboration, require non-school or local education agency applicants to include a letter of support from the applicable school or district in order to receive four or five points for this section.**

The analysis of strategies used in effective dropout prevention programs in rural North Carolina indicates that effective programs are either run directly by local education agencies or community organizations that collaborate closely with school districts.

**(5) Under Part D: Description of Best Practices, rewrite descriptors so that a program that receives four or five points for this section must include evidence of best practice research.**

Program staff members can benefit from a review of existing research on dropout prevention and effective strategies to keep students in school. This knowledge will allow them to design and implement the strongest possible programs.

## **Conclusion:**

North Carolina's Race to the Top outlines plans to increase the state's graduation rate to 86 percent by the 2016 – 2017 school year. In order to reach that goal, graduation rates will need to rise in the state's many rural communities. Race to the Top has the potential to bring increased attention and funding to the issues of high school graduation and dropout prevention. Increasing the graduation rate is much more than a policy goal for a grant program, however. North Carolina's dropout challenge poses economic, legal, and ethical problems for the state.

In this project, I highlighted dropout prevention strategies that have proven effective in keeping students from around the country in school. I also identified effective rural dropout prevention programs funded by the state's dropout prevention grants and analyzed these programs to identify successful practices and strategies that they use to increase high school graduation rates in their communities.

From this information, I offered a number of policy recommendations for the General Assembly, the State Board of Education, the NCDPI, and the dropout prevention grants. The state's sizeable budget deficit ensures that cost-neutral policy options will have more traction over the next year. I provided four specific cost-neutral recommendations, as well as changes to the rubric for selection of dropout prevention grant recipients. In April 2011, it appeared that the dropout prevention grants would be eliminated from the budget. Should this reduction occur, several of my recommendations suggest actions unrelated to the grants.

Race to the Top provides an excellent impetus for a renewed statewide commitment to high school graduation for all students, including the rural students in the state. This report emphasizes that the state must not leave behind rural students and their unique situations when addressing the high school graduation rate for the state.

## Appendix A: Classification of Rural Local Education Agencies in North Carolina, 2010

Average Daily Membership = Number of Students in a Local Education Agency

SCSF = Small County Supplemental Funding. The State of North Carolina provides additional financial support for small local education agencies.

SRSA = Small, Rural Schools Achievement Program. The United States Department of Education provides additional funding for school districts that are small and geographically isolated.

RLIS = Rural, Low-Income Schools. The United States Department of Education provides additional funding for school districts that are geographically isolated and serve predominantly low-income students.

**Schools that receive at least two of these three funding streams are considered rural for the purposes of this report. They are shaded in yellow.**

Local Education Agency Name	Average Daily Membership	Eligible for SCSF?	Eligible for SRSA?	Eligible for RLIS?	At Least Two Indicators Match?
Alleghany County Schools	1,464	Y	N	Y	Y
Ashe County Schools	3,131	Y	N	Y	Y
Avery County Schools	2,154	Y	N	Y	Y
Bertie County Schools	2,781	Y	N	Y	Y
Caswell County Schools	3,003	Y	N	Y	Y
Cherokee County Schools	3,405	Y	N	Y	Y
Clinton City Schools	2,977	Y	N	Y	Y
Edenton-Chowan Schools	2,293	Y	N	Y	Y
Graham County Schools	1,188	Y	N	Y	Y
Greene County Schools	3,195	Y	N	Y	Y
Halifax County Schools	3,917	Y	N	Y	Y
Hertford County Schools	3,068	Y	N	Y	Y
Jones County Public Schools	1,159	Y	N	Y	Y
Lexington City Schools	2,900	Y	N	Y	Y
Madison County Schools	2,560	Y	N	Y	Y
Martin County Schools	3,853	Y	N	Y	Y
Mitchell County Schools	2,056	Y	N	Y	Y
Mount Airy City Schools	1,587	Y	N	Y	Y
Northampton County Schools	2,464	Y	N	Y	Y
Pamlico County Schools	1,379	Y	N	Y	Y
Perquimans County Schools	1,703	Y	N	Y	Y
Roanoke Rapids Graded School District	2,839	Y	N	Y	Y
Tyrell County Schools	574	Y	Y	N	Y
Warren County Schools	2,473	Y	N	Y	Y
Washington County Schools	1,846	Y	N	Y	Y
Weldon City Schools	1,022	Y	N	Y	Y
Whiteville City Schools	2,224	Y	N	Y	Y
Yancey County Schools	2,337	Y	N	Y	Y
Alamance-Burlington Schools	21,872	N	N	N	N
Alexander County Schools	5,443	N	N	N	N
Anson County Schools	3,791	Y	N	N	N
Asheboro City Schools	4,470	N	N	N	N
Asheville City Schools	3,650	Y	N	N	N
Beaufort County Schools	6,961	N	N	Y	N

Bladen County Schools	5,122	N	N	Y	N
Brunswick County Schools	11,640	N	N	N	N
Buncombe County Schools	24,991	N	N	N	N
Burke County Schools	13,383	N	N	N	N
Cabarrus County Schools	27,553	N	N	N	N
Caldwell County Schools	12,512	N	N	N	N
Camden County Schools	1,882	Y	N	N	N
Cataret County Schools	8,147	N	N	N	N
Catawba County Schools	17,029	N	N	N	N
Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools	11,481	N	N	N	N
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	131,714	N	N	N	N
Chatham County Schools	7,591	N	N	N	N
Clay County Schools	1,333	Y	N	N	N
Cleveland County Schools	15,891	N	N	Y	N
Columbus County Schools	6,478	N	N	Y	N
Craven County Schools	14,414	N	N	N	N
Cumberland County Schools	50,983	N	N	N	N
Currituck County Schools	3,883	Y	N	N	N
Dare County Schools	4,729	N	N	N	N
Davidson County Schools	20,134	N	N	N	N
Davie County Schools	6,491	N	N	N	N
Duplin County Schools	8,771	N	N	Y	N
Durham Public Schools	31,386	N	N	N	N
Edgecombe County Public Schools	7,161	N	N	N	N
Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Schools	5,870	N	N	Y	N
Elkin City Schools	1,156	Y	N	N	N
Franklin County Schools	8,393	N	N	N	N
Gaston County Schools	30,996	N	N	N	N
Gates County Schools	1,853	Y	N	N	N
Granville County Schools	8,520	N	N	N	N
Guilford County Schools	70,370	N	N	N	N
Harnett County Schools	18,764	N	N	N	N
Haywood County Schools	7,951	N	N	N	N
Henderson County Schools	12,970	N	N	N	N
Hickory City Schools	4,289	N	N	N	N
Hoke County Schools	7,590	N	N	N	N
Hyde County Schools	569	Y	N	Y	Y
Iredell-Statesville Schools	20,913	N	N	N	N
Jackson County Schools	3,512	Y	N	N	N
Johnston County Schools	31,212	N	N	N	N
Kannapolis City Schools	4,962	N	N	N	N
Lee County Schools	9,423	N	N	N	N
Lenoir County Public Schools	9,039	N	N	Y	N
Lincoln County Schools	11,756	N	N	N	N
Macon County Schools	4,232	N	N	Y	N
McDowell County Schools	6,248	N	N	N	N
Montgomery County Schools	4,215	N	N	Y	N

Moore County Schools	12,188	N	N	N	N
Mooresville Graded School District	5,402	N	N	N	N
Nash-Rocky Mount Schools	16,811	N	N	N	N
New Hanover County Schools	23,570	N	N	N	N
Newton Conover City Schools	2,859	Y	N	N	N
Onslow County Schools	23,179	N	N	N	N
Orange County Schools	7,000	N	N	N	N
Pender County Schools	8,017	N	N	N	N
Person County Schools	4,987	N	N	N	N
Pitt County Schools	22,342	N	N	N	N
Polk County Schools	2,333	Y	N	N	N
Public Schools of Robeson County	22,824	N	N	Y	N
Randolph County Schools	18,350	N	N	N	N
Richmond County Schools	7,546	N	N	Y	N
Rockingham County Schools	13,543	N	N	N	N
Rowan-Salisbury Schools	20,027	N	N	N	N
Rutherford County Schools	8,896	N	N	N	N
Sampson County Schools	8,207	N	N	Y	N
Scotland County Schools	6,208	N	N	Y	N
Stanly County Schools	9,032	N	N	N	N
Stokes County Schools	6,883	N	N	N	N
Surry County Schools	8,366	N	N	N	N
Swain County Schools	1,848	Y	N	N	N
Thomasville City Schools	2,440	Y	N	N	N
Transylvania County Schools	3,545	Y	N	N	N
Union County Schools	38,034	N	N	N	N
Vance County Schools	7,027	N	N	Y	N
Wake County Schools	138,461	N	N	N	N
Watauga County Schools	4,242	N	N	N	N
Wayne County Schools	18,751	N	N	N	N
Wilkes County Schools	9,773	N	N	Y	N
Wilson County Schools	12,109	N	N	N	N
Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools	51,062	N	N	N	N
Yadkin County Schools	5,807	N	N	N	N

Data as reported by the NCDPI, 2010b.

## Appendix B: Rural Local Education Agencies Served by Dropout Prevention Grants, 2007 - 2010

Y = A school district or organization that serves children from the county has received a Dropout Prevention Grant.

N= A school district or organization that serves children from the county has not received a Dropout Prevention Grant.

A (x) indicates children from the county were served by more than one program that received a Dropout Prevention Grant. The “x” represents the number of programs.

**Rural local education agencies that have never received a dropout prevention grant are shaded in yellow.**

Local Education Agency Name	Recipient in 2007?	Recipient in 2008?	Recipient in 2009?	Recipient in 2010?
Alleghany County Schools	N	N	N	Y (2)
Ashe County Schools	N	Y	Y	N
Avery County Schools	Y	N	Y	Y
Bertie County Schools	N	Y	N	Y
Caswell County Schools	N	N	N	N
Cherokee County Schools	N	Y	N	Y
Clinton City Schools	N	N	N	N
Edenton-Chowan Schools	Y	Y	Y	Y
Graham County Schools	Y	Y	N	N
Greene County Schools	N	Y	N	N
Halifax County Schools	N	Y (3)	Y (3)	Y (2)
Hertford County Schools	Y (3)	Y	Y (2)	Y
Jones County Public Schools	N	Y	N	Y
Lexington City Schools	N	N	N	N
Madison County Schools	N	N	Y	N
Martin County Schools	N	Y	N	Y
Mitchell County Schools	Y	N	Y	N
Mount Airy City Schools	N	N	N	N
Northampton County Schools	N	Y	N	Y
Pamlico County Schools	N	Y	N	N
Perquimans County Schools	N	Y	Y	N
Roanoke Rapids Graded School District	N	N	N	N
Tyrell County Schools	N	N	Y	N
Warren County Schools	N	Y	N	Y
Washington County Schools	N	Y	N	N
Weldon City Schools	N	N	N	Y
Whiteville City Schools	N	N	N	N
Yancey County Schools	N	N	Y	Y

Data as reported by North Carolina Committee on Dropout Prevention, 2010 and North Carolina Committee on Dropout Prevention, 2009.

**Appendix C: Recipients of Dropout Prevention Grants, by County, 2007 - 2010**

<b>Programs that serve more than one rural local education agency are shaded in blue.</b>					
<b>Grant Number</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Program Name</b>	<b>Amount</b>
17519	2010	Alleghany	Alleghany Connections	Alleghany Connections	\$43,350.00
16639	2010	Alleghany	Alleghany County Schools	CREST Program	\$174,865.00
15094	2009	Ashe	Ashe County High School	Ninth Grade Intervention	\$149,481.00
14104	2008	Ashe	Ashe County Middle School	At-Risk Eighth Graders	\$150,000.00
12846	2010	Avery	Avery County Schools	INNOVATE	\$175,000.00
12946	2009	Avery	Avery County Schools	Summit Program	\$148,474.00
12946	2007	Avery	Avery County Schools	Summit Program	\$148,474.00
16712	2010	Bertie	North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching	Professional Development	\$172,904.00
14078	2010	Bertie	One Economy Corporation	Hive Empowering Youth Program	\$174,974.00
14078	2008	Bertie	One Economy Corporation	Hive Empowering Youth Program	\$147,547.00
16367	2010	Cherokee	Cherokee County Schools	Intervention with Absent Students	\$175,000.00
14088	2008	Cherokee	Cherokee Department of Social Services	School Social Worker and Nurse Care Teams	\$129,903.00
12662	2010	Chowan	Edenton-Chowan Schools	Check and Connect Life Coaches	\$175,000.00
12662	2009	Chowan	Edenton-Chowan Schools	Check and Connect Life Coaches	\$174,597.05
12662	2008	Chowan	Edenton-Chowan Schools	Check and Connect Life Coaches	\$150,000.00
12662	2007	Chowan	Edenton-Chowan Schools	Check and Connect Life Coaches	\$150,000.00
13134	2008	Graham	Graham County Schools	Project SUCCEED	\$150,000.00
13134	2007	Graham	Graham County Schools	Project SUCCEED	\$150,000.00
12820	2008	Greene	Greene County Schools	Empowerment Program	\$33,750.00
15034	2010	Halifax	Halifax County Schools	Safety Net for Academic Performance	\$175,000.00
15034	2009	Halifax	Halifax County Schools	Safety Net for Academic Performance	\$174,654.26
12998	2010	Halifax	Ivory Community Development Corporation	IVORY Learning Center	\$150,000.00
12998	2009	Halifax	Ivory Community Development Corporation	IVORY Learning Center	\$150,000.00
16966	2010	Halifax	Weldon City Schools	Transition to Success	\$160,000.00
19188	2010	Halifax	It's a Kids World After All	It's a Kids World After All	\$98,500.00
15016	2009	Halifax	CARE	Reaching Forward Program	\$71,500.00
12742	2009	Halifax	Together Transforming Lives	Together Transforming Lives	\$175,000.00
12742	2008	Halifax	Together Transforming Lives	Together Transforming Lives	\$175,000.00
12954	2008	Halifax	Hobgood Citizen Group	Y.E.S.	\$53,793.00

16712	2010	Hertford	North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching	Professional Development	\$172,904.00
17325	2010	Hertford	C.S. Brown CDC High School	Non-Traditional Program	\$152,000.00
12740	2009	Hertford	Hertford County Public Schools	STEM Program	\$99,500.00
12740	2007	Hertford	Hertford County Public Schools	STEM Program	\$25,390.00
12822	2009	Hertford	Hertford County Public Schools (BEARS)	BEARS	\$99,500.00
12822	2007	Hertford	Hertford County Public Schools (BEARS)	BEARS	\$25,390.00
12812	2008	Hertford	Futures for Kids	Futures for Kids Career Prep	\$150,000.00
12812	2007	Hertford	Futures for Kids	Futures for Kids Career Prep	\$150,000.00
12688	2010	Jones	Jones County Schools	Personnel Development	\$104,665.00
12688	2008	Jones	Jones County Schools	Support for AVID Students	\$43,360.00
15103	2009	Madison	Madison County Schools	Words MGI	\$173,000.00
16712	2010	Martin	North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching	Professional Development	\$172,904.00
12624	2009	Martin	Martin County Schools	Overaged Middle Schoolers	\$109,516.00
15033	2009	Mitchell	Mitchell County Schools	Attendance Officer	\$84,526.36
12982	2007	Mitchell	Mitchell County High School	Mitchell Leadership Academy	\$95,032.86
16996	2010	Northampton	Weldon City Schools	Transition to Success	\$160,000.00
19188	2010	Northampton	It's a Kids World After All	It's a Kids World After All	\$98,500.00
12826	2008	Northampton	Northampton County Schools	Project DOSO	\$147,950.00
14194	2008	Pamlico	HeartWorks Children Medical Home Mission	Community Dropout Prevention Program	\$142,000.00
12626	2009	Perquimans	Perquimans County Schools	Perquimans Success Academy	\$175,000.00
12626	2008	Perquimans	Perquimans County Schools	Perquimans Success Academy	\$150,000.00
15039	2009	Tyrell	NC State University	Outreach to Hispanic Students	\$174,900.00
19188	2010	Warren	It's a Kids World After All	It's a Kids World After All	\$98,500.00
13316	2008	Warren	Warren Family Institute	Warren County Coalition for Dropout Prevention	\$149,000.00
14346	2008	Washington	Washington County Schools	AVID	\$150,000.00
19188	2010	Weldon City	It's a Kids World After All	It's a Kids World After All	\$98,500.00
15091	2008	Yancey	Yancey County Schools	SOAR	\$97,324.00

Data as reported by North Carolina Committee on Dropout Prevention, 2010 and North Carolina Committee on Dropout Prevention, 2009.

## Appendix D: Rural Dropout Prevention Programs Labeled “Promising” by EDSTAR, 2007 – 2008

In this appendix, I report the SMART goals as written by the dropout prevention staff members who completed required evaluation reports. I assess the quality of each goal by considering its rigor, the percentage of students it strives to affect, and whether the goal is ambitious enough to place at-risk students on a trajectory to graduation. I synthesize information from the evaluation reports to determine which sources of data can be used to target students for services and evaluation outcomes. Lastly, I calculate the percentage of students that met each SMART goal.

<b>Local Education Agency Served:</b>	Edenton-Chowan Schools	
<b>Dropout Prevention Grant Recipient:</b>	Edenton-Chowan Schools	
<b>Name of Dropout Prevention Program:</b>	Check and Connect Life Coaches	
<b>SMART Goal One:</b>	By the end of the spring semester 2010, 80 percent of students who passed less than 75 percent of their courses in the semester prior to enrollment in the Life Coach program and have been in the program for a minimum of one semester will increase the percentage of courses passed.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Medium-quality. The goal is ambitious in that it includes 80 percent of the students in the Life Coach program. However, a mere "increase" in the percentage of courses passed is not rigorous and may not have a true effect on the students' likelihood of dropping out of high school.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal One:</b>
Student report cards and transcripts	Student report cards and transcripts	74 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal
<b>SMART Goal Two:</b>	By the end of the spring semester 2010, 75 percent of students who were absent 15 or more days in the semester prior to enrollment in the Life Coach program and have been enrolled in the program for a minimum of one semester will be absent fewer than 11 days.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Medium-quality. The goal is ambitious in that it includes 80 percent of the students in the Life Coach program. However, 10 absences are still enough to markedly increase the chance that a student will drop out of high school.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Two:</b>
Attendance records	Attendance records	63 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.
<b>SMART Goal Three:</b>	By the end of the spring semester 2010, 75 percent of students who received 2 or more out-of-school suspensions in the year prior to enrollment in the Life Coach program and have been enrolled in the program for a minimum of one semester will have fewer out-of-school suspensions than the previous year.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Low-quality. There is no quantifiable element to how much the decrease in out-of-school suspensions should be. This goal does not acknowledge other discipline consequences, including in-school suspensions, that affect student progress toward graduation.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Three:</b>
Discipline data	Discipline data	84 percent of targeted students met this goal.

Data as reported by EDSTAR, 2010.

<b>Local Education Agency Served:</b>	Graham County Schools	
<b>Dropout Prevention Grant Recipient:</b>	Graham County Schools	
<b>Name of Dropout Prevention Program:</b>	Project SUCCEED	
<b>SMART Goal One:</b>	By June 2010, 65 percent of all students in the program who were not proficient in reading or mathematics in 2008 – 2009, or who earned failing grades in one or more core academic classes during 2008 – 2009, will show improved proficiency as demonstrated by performance on End-of-Grade and End-of-Course exams, as well as report cards.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Low-quality. “Improved proficiency” could refer to a mere one percentage point gain in scaled score on a reading or mathematics End-of-Grade exam. This level of improvement will not increase the likelihood of graduation for participants.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal One:</b>
Student report cards and transcripts; End-of-Grade and End-of-Course exam results; teacher referrals	Student report cards and transcripts; End-of-Grade and End-of-Course exam results	67 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal
<b>SMART Goal Two:</b>	By June 2010, 70 percent of students will report that AVID has helped improve their grades, 70 percent of parents will report that their students are more organized, and 70 percent of teachers will report that AVID keeps students engaged in the learning process.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Low-quality. Students and teachers may have difficulty discerning which specific interventions result in higher grades and student engagement. Organization has not been shown to be a strong indicator of academic success.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Two:</b>
Student report cards and transcripts; End-of-Grade and End-of-Course exam results; teacher referrals	Student, parent, and teacher surveys and interviews	63 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.
<b>SMART Goal Three:</b>	By the end of the spring semester 2010, 75 percent of students who received 2 or more out-of-school suspensions in the year prior to enrollment in the Life Coach program and have been enrolled in the program for a minimum of one semester will have fewer out-of-school suspensions than the previous year.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Low-quality. There is no quantifiable element to how much the decrease in out-of-school suspensions should be. This goal does not acknowledge other discipline consequences, including in-school suspensions, that affect student progress toward graduation.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Three:</b>
Discipline data	Discipline data	89 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.

Data as reported by EDSTAR, 2010.

<b>Local Education Agency Served:</b>	Greene County Schools	
<b>Dropout Prevention Grant Recipient:</b>	Greene County Schools	
<b>Name of Dropout Prevention Program:</b>	Empowerment Program	
<b>SMART Goal One:</b>	By August 2010, high school participants who failed one or more courses will recover missing course credits through the Twilight School.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	High-quality. The goal implies that all students in the program will recover all missing course credits. This accelerated academic progress will increase the likelihood that they will graduate from high school.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal One:</b>
Student transcripts	Student transcripts	91 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal
<b>SMART Goal Two:</b>	By June 2010, 95 percent of high school participants who are behind 1 or 2 classes where they should be on the path to graduation will earn credit for those courses through the Twilight School.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	High-quality. 95 percent of the high school participants is an ambitious goal; targeting those students who are only 1 or 2 classes behind is realistic in terms of the amount of coursework that can actually be completed in an after-school setting.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Two:</b>
Student transcripts	Student transcripts	87 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.
<b>SMART Goal Three:</b>	90 percent of high school students who petition to withdraw from school due to high absenteeism will instead enroll in the Twilight School.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Medium-quality. This objective is not time-bound. In addition, enrollment in the Twilight School does not indicate that students will actually make any academic progress through the program.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Three:</b>
Withdrawal forms and student exit interview	Enrollment in Twilight School	0 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.

Data as reported by EDSTAR, 2010.

<b>Local Education Agency Served:</b>	Halifax County Schools	
<b>Dropout Prevention Grant Recipient:</b>	Ivory Community Development Corporation	
<b>Name of Dropout Prevention Program:</b>	IVORY Learning Center	
<b>SMART Goal One:</b>	By the end of first semester 2009 - 2010, participants in the program who were absent 20 or more days in the previous school year will be absent fewer than 10 days	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Medium-quality. This objective does target all students in the program who have chronic attendance problems. However, 10 absences are still enough to markedly increase the chance that a student will drop out of high school.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal One:</b>
Attendance records	Attendance records	92 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal
<b>SMART Goal Two:</b>	By the end of the spring semester 2009 - 2010, 85 percent of students who indicated low levels of self-esteem and interest in school upon entry into the program will demonstrate increased levels of self-esteem and interest in school.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Low-quality. Students and teachers may have difficulty discerning which specific interventions result in higher levels of self-esteem and interest in school.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Two:</b>
Student surveys	Student surveys	100 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.
<b>SMART Goal Three:</b>	By the end of the spring semester 2010, 25 percent of students who received 3 or more in-school suspensions in the second semester of the year prior to enrollment in the program and will have 0 in-school suspensions. By the end of fall semester 2009 -2010, participants in the program from the spring semester 2009 - 2009 will have 0 out-of-school suspensions	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Medium-quality. This objective aims to seriously curb discipline and the consequences that keep students out of class. However, only 25 percent of the students with discipline problems are expected to improve their behavior to the point at which they receive no in-school suspensions.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Three</b>
Discipline data	Discipline data	48 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal, but it unclear whether this percentage refers to the first component of the goal (in-school suspensions) or the second component (out-of-school suspensions).

Data as reported by EDSTAR, 2010.

<b>Local Education Agency Served:</b>	Pamlico County Schools	
<b>Dropout Prevention Grant Recipient:</b>	HeartWorks Children Medical Home Mission	
<b>Name of Dropout Prevention Program:</b>	Community Dropout Prevention Program	
<b>SMART Goal One:</b>	By the end of spring semester 2010, 80 percent of participants who scored below grade-level on the End-of-Grade mathematics exam in the spring of 2009 will score at or above grade-level on the exam.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	High-quality. This objective is ambitious and targets a high percentage of program participants who meet the criterion.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal One:</b>
Student report cards and transcripts; End-of-Grade exam results; teacher referrals	End-of-Grade exam results	90 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal
<b>SMART Goal Two:</b>	By the end of spring semester 2010, 80 percent of the after-school participants who had less than 50 percent probability of success on the End-of-Grade reading exam will score at or above grade-level on the exam.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	High-quality. This objective is ambitious and targets a high percentage of program participants who meet the criterion.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Two</b>
Student report cards and transcripts; End-of-Grade exam results; teacher referrals	End-of-Grade exam results	90 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.
<b>SMART Goal Three:</b>	By the end of the spring semester 2010, 70 percent of the after-school participants whose survey scores indicated low academic self-confidence will have increased academic self-confidence.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Medium-quality. The objective could be met even if students report only small increases in their feelings of academic self-confidence.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Three:</b>
Student surveys	Student surveys	100 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.

Data as reported by EDSTAR, 2010.

## Appendix E: Rural Dropout Prevention Programs Not Labeled as “Promising” by EDSTAR, 2008

In this appendix, I report the SMART goals as written by the dropout prevention staff members who completed required evaluation reports. I assess the quality of each goal by considering its rigor, the percentage of students it strives to affect, and whether the goal is ambitious enough to place at-risk students on a trajectory to graduation. I synthesize information from the evaluation reports to determine which sources of data can be used to target students for services and evaluation outcomes. Lastly, I calculate the percentage of students that met each SMART goal.

<b>Local Education Agency Served:</b>	Ashe County Schools	
<b>Dropout Prevention Grant Recipient:</b>	Ashe County Schools	
<b>Name of Dropout Prevention Program:</b>	At-risk Eighth Graders	
<b>SMART Goal One:</b>	By the end of spring semester 2010, 80 percent of participants who scored a level I or II on End-of-Grade exams in reading and/or mathematics will score a level III or IV on the exams.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	High-quality. This objective is ambitious and targets a high percentage of program participants who meet the criterion.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal One:</b>
Student report cards and transcripts; End-of-Grade exam results; teacher referrals	End-of-Grade exam results	30 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal
<b>SMART Goal Two:</b>	By the end of 2009, 80 percent of participants in the program will have missed fewer than ten days of school.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Medium-quality. The goal is ambitious in that it includes 80 percent of the students in the program. However, 9 absences are still enough to markedly increase the chance that a student will drop out of high school.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Two:</b>
Attendance records	Attendance records	70 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.
<b>SMART Goal Three:</b>	By the end of the spring semester 2010, 80 percent of students who received 2 or more out-of-school suspensions in the semester prior to enrollment in the program will have no out-of-school suspensions during the second semester. By the end of the spring semester 2010, 80 percent of students who received 2 or more out-of-school suspensions in the semester prior to enrollment in the program will have no out-of-school suspensions during the second semester.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	High-quality. This objective strives to improve student behavior for many of the students experiencing discipline problems.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Three:</b>
Discipline data	Discipline data	100 percent of targeted students met this goal.

Data as reported by EDSTAR, 2010.

<b>Local Education Agency Served:</b>	Bertie County Schools	
<b>Dropout Prevention Grant Recipient:</b>	One Economy Corporation	
<b>Name of Dropout Prevention Program:</b>	Hive Empowering Youth Program	
<b>SMART Goal One:</b>	By the end of spring semester 2010, 65 percent of participants who scored a level I or II on End-of-Grade exams in reading will score a level III or IV on the exam or English I End-of-Course exam.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	High-quality. This objective is ambitious and targets a high percentage of program participants who meet the criterion.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal One:</b>
Student report cards and transcripts; End-of-Grade exam results; teacher referrals; EVAAS results	End-of-Grade and End-of-Course exam results	7 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal
<b>SMART Goal Two:</b>	Within 90 days of the program start date, 60 percent of participants will have a better attendance rate than they did during the same timeframe of the previous year.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Low-quality. "Better attendance" could refer to a mere one percentage point gain in a student's attendance rate. This level of improvement will not increase the likelihood of graduation for participants.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Two:</b>
Attendance records	Attendance records	100 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.
<b>SMART Goal Three:</b>	By the end of spring semester 2010, 70 percent of participants who previously failed Algebra I will retake and pass the class.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	High-quality. This objective is ambitious and targets a high percentage of program participants who meet the criterion.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Three:</b>
Student report cards and transcripts; End-of-Course exam results	End-of-Course exam results	14 percent of targeted students met this goal.

Data as reported by EDSTAR, 2010.

<b>Local Education Agency Served:</b>	Cherokee County Schools	
<b>Dropout Prevention Grant Recipient:</b>	Cherokee County Department of Social Services	
<b>Name of Dropout Prevention Program:</b>	School Social Worker and Nurse CARE Teams	
<b>SMART Goal One:</b>	By the end of spring semester 2009, 75 percent of students identified as “at-risk” will receive CARE Team services.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Low-quality. A successful program will serve all of the intended recipients.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal One:</b>
Age in the ninth grade; previous placement with a foster family; previous involvement with the justice system; previous involvement with the Department of Social Services; pregnancy; previous retention in school	CARE Team rosters	90 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal
<b>SMART Goal Two:</b>	By the end of spring semester 2009, 30 percent of students who were in non-compliance with the district’s attendance policy during the fall semester 2008 will be in compliance.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Low-quality. Students may still experience attendance problems that will decrease the likelihood of graduation for participants. A goal of 30 percent still leaves 70 percent of participants in non-compliance with the attendance policy.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Two:</b>
Attendance records	Attendance records	65 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.
<b>SMART Goal Three:</b>	By the end of spring semester 2009, 75 percent of students who have been retained for one or more grades will have earned, or have a written plan in place to obtain, their high school diploma.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Low-quality. Establishing a written plan does not ensure that students will be able to follow the activities required.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Three</b>
Student report cards and transcripts; End-of-Course exam results	Graduation records; written plans	91 percent of targeted students met this goal.

Data as reported by EDSTAR, 2010.

<b>Local Education Agency Served:</b>	Halifax County Schools	
<b>Dropout Prevention Grant Recipient:</b>	Together Transforming Lives, Inc.	
<b>Name of Dropout Prevention Program:</b>	Together Transforming Lives	
<b>SMART Goal One:</b>	By March 2010, 75 percent of participating students who had less than a 50 percent probability of success on the End-of-Grade exam in reading will show improvement on the exam.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Low-quality. "Improvement" could refer to a mere one percentage point gain in scaled score on a reading or mathematics End-of-Grade exam. This level of improvement will not increase the likelihood of graduation for participants.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal One:</b>
End-of-Grade reading exam results; EVAAS	End-of-Grade reading exam results	83 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal
<b>SMART Goal Two:</b>	By March 2010, 75 percent of students who were failing their current grade will show marked improvement in grades.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Low-quality. There is no definition of "marked improvement." Research has not shown that teacher-provided grades are solid indicators of success on exams required for graduation.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Two:</b>
Student report cards and progress reports	Student report cards and progress reports	83 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.
<b>SMART Goal Three:</b>	By March 2010, 80 percent of students who received 2 or more out-of-school suspensions during the fall semester 2009 will have no out-of-school suspensions during the second semester	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Medium-quality. This goal does work to address the majority of students with discipline problems. However, it does not address in-school suspensions, which also affect student success.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Three:</b>
Discipline data	Discipline data	88 percent of targeted students met this goal.

Data as reported by EDSTAR, 2010.

<b>Local Education Agency Served:</b>	Jones County Schools	
<b>Dropout Prevention Grant Recipient:</b>	Jones County Schools	
<b>Name of Dropout Prevention Program:</b>	Support for AVID Students	
<b>SMART Goal One:</b>	By the end of the 2009 - 2010 school year, 80 percent of AVID students will score a level III or IV on their End-of-Grade or End-of-Course exam in mathematics.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	High-quality. This objective is ambitious and targets a high percentage of program participants who meet the criterion..	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal One:</b>
End-of-Grade and End-of-Course exam results	End-of-Grade and End-of-Course exam results	78 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal
<b>SMART Goal Two:</b>	By the end of the 2009 -2010 school year, 100 percent of AVID students will take at least one honors level course and make a C or better in the course.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Medium-quality. While targeting all AVID students, research has not shown that teacher-provided grades are solid indicators of success on exams required for graduation.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Two:</b>
Student records and transcripts	Student records and transcripts	86 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.
<b>SMART Goal Three:</b>	By the end of June 2010, 80 percent of eleventh grade AVID students will score a 900 or better on the reading and math composite of the SAT.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	High-quality. While the SAT is not required for graduation, higher SAT scores allow students to pursue post-secondary opportunities.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Three:</b>
State-provided SAT report	State-provided SAT report	24 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.

Data as reported by EDSTAR, 2010.

<b>Local Education Agency Served:</b>	Perquimans County Schools	
<b>Dropout Prevention Grant Recipient:</b>	Perquimans County Schools	
<b>Name of Dropout Prevention Program:</b>	Perquimans Success Academy	
<b>SMART Goal One:</b>	By the end of the 2009 - 2010 school year, 80 percent of students who had passed less than 75 percent of their courses in the year prior to program enrollment will increase the number of courses passed.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Medium-quality. While setting success for 80 percent of participants as a goal is ambitious, passing one additional course will not put some students back on a path to graduation.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal One:</b>
Student records and transcripts	Student records and transcripts	63 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal
<b>SMART Goal Two:</b>	By the end of the 2009 -2010 school year, 75 percent of participants who were absent 15 or more days in the school year prior to enrollment will be absent fewer than 11 days.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Medium-quality. The goal is ambitious in that it includes 75 percent of the students in the program. However, 11 absences are still enough to markedly increase the chance that a student will drop out of high school.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Two:</b>
Attendance records	Attendance records	39 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.
<b>SMART Goal Three:</b>	By the end of spring semester 2010, students who received 2 or more out-of-school suspensions in the school year prior to enrollment will have no out-of-school suspensions.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Medium-quality. This goal does work to address the majority of students with discipline problems. However, it does not address in-school suspensions, which also affect student success.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Three:</b>
Discipline data	Discipline data	63 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.

Data as reported by EDSTAR, 2010.

<b>Local Education Agency Served:</b>	Warren County Schools	
<b>Dropout Prevention Grant Recipient:</b>	Warren Family Institute	
<b>Name of Dropout Prevention Program:</b>	Warren County Coalition for Dropout Prevention	
<b>SMART Goal One:</b>	During the fall semester 2009 semester, 95 percent of student participants will have above average attendance, compared to average attendance in Warren County Schools.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Low-quality. This goal is difficult to evaluate because the average attendance rate for an entire district cannot be used as a meaningful benchmark for an individual student.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal One:</b>
Attendance records	Attendance records	83 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal
<b>SMART Goal Two:</b>	By the end of the 2009 -2010 school year, 95 of student participants will have improved school behavior, as measured by office referrals and teacher reports, compared to the previous school year.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Low-quality. "Improvement" leaves considerable room for the goal to be met while students still experience behavior problems that affect their academic performance.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Two:</b>
Discipline data	Discipline data	100 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.
<b>SMART Goal Three:</b>	By the end of the 2009 - 2010 school year, 95 percent of student participants' 21 <sup>st</sup> Century skills, as measured by teacher report, will improve.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Low-quality. It is difficult to assess "21 <sup>st</sup> century skills," and the accuracy of teacher reports may vary considerably between educators.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Three:</b>
Teacher report on pre-assessment	Teacher report on post-assessment	76 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.

Data as reported by EDSTAR, 2010.

<b>Local Education Agency Served:</b>	Washington County Schools	
<b>Dropout Prevention Grant Recipient:</b>	Washington County Schools	
<b>Name of Dropout Prevention Program:</b>	AVID	
<b>SMART Goal One:</b>	By the end of the 2009 - 2010 school year, 70 percent of students who had previously scored below grade-level on their End-of-Grade exams in reading and/or mathematics will pass the test they previously failed.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Low-quality. It is not possible to re-administer an End-of-Grade exam to a student if the principal promoted him or her to the next grade level.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal One:</b>
End-of-Grade exam results	End-of-Grade exam results	40 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal
<b>SMART Goal Two:</b>	By the end of the 2009 -2010 school year, at least five students who are not on-track to graduate with their class cohorts will enroll in the credit recovery program.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	Low-quality. Enrollment in the credit recovery program does not ensure that students will make progress toward graduation.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Two:</b>
Student records and transcripts	Student records and transcripts	100 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.
<b>SMART Goal Three:</b>	By the end of the 2009 - 2010 school year, students who are enrolled in the AVID program and are taking college courses through Elizabeth City State University will pass at least two of those courses with an average grade of 85 or higher.	
<b>Quality of Goal:</b>	High-quality. Student enrollment in college courses is not directly related to graduation, although it does prepare them for success in post-secondary opportunities.	
<b>Data Used to Target Students for Services:</b>	<b>Data Used to Evaluate Outcomes Related to Goal:</b>	<b>Outcome Measure for SMART Goal Three:</b>
College grade sheet	College grade sheet	75 percent of targeted students met the SMART goal.

Data as reported by EDSTAR, 2010.

**Appendix F: Non-Seasonally Adjusted Unemployment Rates for Rural Counties Served by Dropout Prevention Programs**

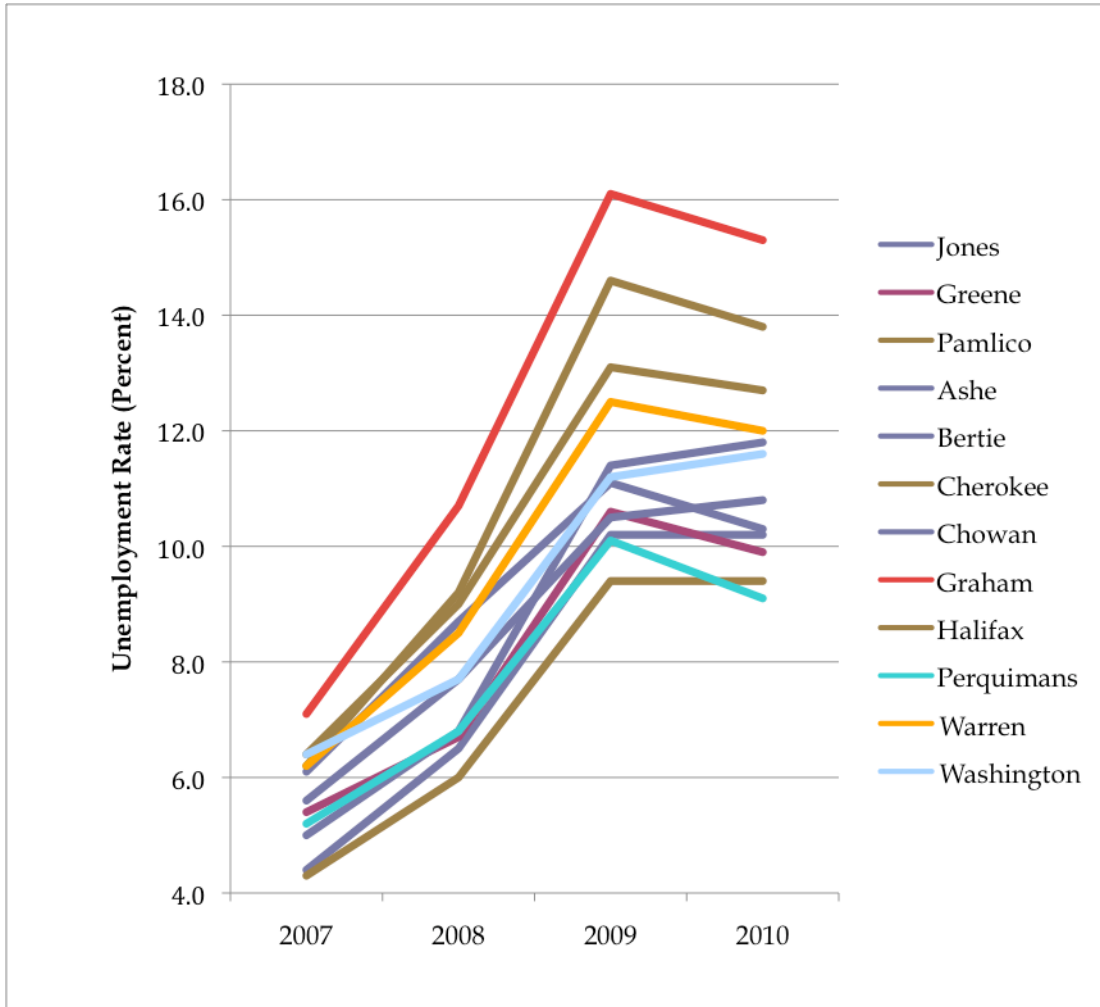
Appears as Table 3 in Text of Report:

Non-Seasonally Adjusted Unemployment Rates (Percent) for Rural Counties Served by Dropout Prevention Grants, 2007 – 2010

<b>County</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
Jones	4.4	6.5	10.2	10.2
Greene	5.4	6.7	10.6	9.9
Pamlico	4.3	6.0	9.4	9.4
Ashe	5.0	6.8	11.4	11.8
Bertie	5.6	7.7	10.5	10.8
Cherokee	6.2	9.2	14.6	13.8
Chowan	6.1	8.7	11.1	10.3
Graham	7.1	10.7	16.1	15.3
Halifax	6.4	9.0	13.1	12.7
Perquimans	5.2	6.8	10.1	9.1
Warren	6.2	8.5	12.5	12.0
Washington	6.4	7.7	11.2	11.6

Data as retrieved by author from Bureau of Labor Statistics database, 2011.

Non-Seasonally Adjusted Unemployment Rates (Percent) for Rural Counties Served by Dropout Prevention Grants, 2007 - 2010



Data as retrieved by author from Bureau of Labor Statistics database, 2011.

## Appendix G: Agency Type, Service Delivery Model, and Services Provided by Rural Dropout Prevention Programs

### Effective Programs:

	Jones County Schools, Support for AVID Students	Greene County Schools, Empowerment Program	HeartWorks Children's Medical Home Mission, Community Dropout Prevention Program
<b>Agency Type</b>			
Local education agency	X	X	
Non-government organization			X
<b>Service Delivery Models</b>			
Services during the school day	X		X
Before-school programs			X
After-school programs	X	X	X
Prevention services for non-targeted students			X
Targeted services for students with known risks (i.e. poor attendance, teen parenthood, etc.)	X	X	X
<b>Services Provided</b>			
Customized graduation plans	X	X	
Peer tutoring	X		X
Primary adult advocate			X
Credit recovery		X	X
Academic skill help	X		X
Preparation for vocational or applied skills programs			
On- and off-campus employment opportunities			X
Personal skills development	X		X
Peer-based mentoring			X
Adult mentoring			X
Counseling groups			X
Recreational activities			X
Service learning			X
Transition to high school programs	X		
School-wide reform for teachers	X		

Data as reported by EDSTAR, 2010.

### Ineffective Programs:

(1) Ashe County Schools, At-risk Eighth Graders  (3) Cherokee Department of Social Services, School Social Worker and Nurse CARE Teams (5) Graham County Schools, Project SUCCEED  (7) Together Transforming Lives, Inc. Together Transforming Lives (9) Warren Family Institute, Warren County Coalition for Dropout Prevention	(2) One Economy Corporation, Hive Empowering Youth Program (4) Edenton-Chowan Schools, Check and Connect Life Coaches (6) Ivory Community Development Corporation, IVORY Learning Center (8) Perquimans County Schools, Perquimans Success Academy (10) Washington County Schools, AVID
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	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
<b>Agency Type</b>											
Local education agency	X			X	X			X		X	5
Non-government organization		X				X	X		X		4
Government agency			X								1
<b>Service Delivery Models</b>											
Services during the school day	X		X	X		X	X	X		X	7
Before-school programs											
After-school programs	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	8
Prevention services for non-targeted students			X	X		X		X			4
Targeted services for students with known risks (i.e. poor attendance, teen parenthood, etc.)	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	9
<b>Services Provided</b>											
Customized graduation plans			X					X		X	3
Peer tutoring		X				X	X	X			4
Primary adult advocate	X		X	X						X	4
Credit recovery			X	X		X		X		X	5
Academic skill help	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	8
Preparation for vocational or applied skills programs								X			1
On- and off-campus employment opportunities								X			1
Personal skills development	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	8
Peer-based mentoring		X					X		X		3
Adult mentoring	X					X	X	X	X		5
Counseling groups	X			X		X		X	X		5
Recreational activities	X	X				X	X	X			5
Service learning		X		X			X				3

Transition to high school programs	X	X		X				X	X		5
School-wide reform for teachers								X	X		2

Data as reported by EDSTAR, 2010.

Appendix H: 2010 Selection Rubric for Dropout Prevention Grants

NORTH CAROLINA DROPOUT PREVENTION APPLICATION SCORING GUIDE						
PROGRAM/ INITIATIVE (65 points)						
A. SMART Outcomes/Goals and Objectives (10 points)						
0 Points	3 Points	4 Points	5 Points	Weight	Total Points	Comments (Required for each section)
The SMART Outcomes are NOT specific, measurable, achievable, realistic or time-bound.	The SMART Outcomes are specific and time-bound but not measurable, achievable, or realistic.	The SMART Outcomes are specific, time-bound and measurable but not achievable or realistic.	The SMART Outcomes are specific, measurable, time-bound, achievable and realistic.	X 1	R1:	
					R2:	
					R3:	
The proposed program/initiative DOES NOT explain why these SMART Outcomes were selected.	The proposed program/initiative clearly explains why some of the SMART Outcomes were selected.	The proposed program/initiative clearly explains why all of the SMART Outcomes were selected.	The proposed program/initiative clearly explains why all of the SMART Outcomes were selected. SMART Outcomes clearly identify student at-risk of dropping out.	X 1	R1:	
					R2:	
					R3:	
B. Description of Target Students (15 points)						
0 Points	3 Points	4 Points	5 Points	Weight	Total Points	Comments (Required for each section)
The proposed program/ initiative DOES NOT describe the students targeted to be served by the program/ initiative.	The proposed program/ initiative describes the target students, including the number of students to be served by the program/ initiative.	The proposed program/ initiative describes the target students, including the number of students to be served and the four-year Cohort Graduation Rates of the high schools in which these students attend.	The proposed program/ initiative describes the target students, including the number of students to be served, the four-year Cohort Graduation Rates of the high schools AND LEAs in which these students attend.	X 1	R1:	
					R2:	
					R3:	
The proposed program/ initiative DOES NOT clearly explain WHY and HOW students will be identified for participation in the program/initiative.	The proposed program/ initiative clearly explains WHY target students will be identified for participation in the program/initiative but not HOW they will be	The proposed program/ initiative clearly explains WHY and HOW students will be identified for participation in the program/initiative.	The proposed program/ initiative clearly explains WHY and HOW students will be identified for participation in the program/initiative, including the data	X 2	R1:	
					R2:	
					R3:	

The proposed program/ initiative DOES NOT clearly explain WHY and HOW students will be identified for participation in the program/initiative.	selected.	The proposed program/ initiative clearly explains WHY and HOW students will be identified for participation in the program/initiative.	sources used for identification.	<b>X 2</b>	R1:	
					R2:	
					R3:	
<b>C. Description of the Program/Initiative (15 points)</b>						
<b>0 Points</b>	<b>3 Points</b>	<b>4 Points</b>	<b>5 Points</b>	<b>Weight</b>	<b>Total Points</b>	<b>Comments (Required for each section)</b>
The application DOES NOT describe how the program/initiative will be structured and operated nor does it include a timeline of activities.	The application describes how the program/initiative will be structured and operated, but does not include a timeline of activities.	The application describes how the program/initiative will be structured and operated and includes a timeline of activities.	The application describes how the program/initiative will be structured and operated, including a timeline of activities and how the program will hold students to high academic and personal standards.	<b>x 1</b>		
The proposed program/ initiative DOES NOT describe the needed knowledge, skills, and experiences of the individuals who will be providing the services and activities of the program/initiative.	The proposed program/ initiative describes the needed knowledge of the individuals who will be providing the services and activities of the program/initiative but not their skills and experiences.	The proposed program/ initiative describes the needed knowledge and skills of the individuals who will be providing the services and activities of the program/initiative but not their experiences.	The proposed program/initiative describes the needed knowledge, skills and experiences of the individuals who will be providing the services and activities of the program/initiative.	<b>x 1</b>	R1:	
					R2:	
					R3:	
The proposed program/ initiative DOES NOT describe how the program/ initiative will increase attendance, persistence, academic success, parental involvement or graduation rates.	The proposed program/ initiative describes how the program/initiative will increase persistence, academic success and graduation rates but not attendance or parental involvement.	The proposed program/initiative describes how the program/initiative will increase persistence, academic success, graduation rates and attendance but not parental involvement.	The proposed program/ initiative describes how the program/initiative will increase attendance, persistence, academic success, parental involvement and graduation rates.	<b>X 1</b>	R1:	
					R2:	
					R3:	
<b>D. Description of Best Practices (5 points)</b>						
<b>0 Points</b>	<b>3 Points</b>	<b>4 Points</b>	<b>5 Points</b>			<b>Comments</b>

				Weight	Total Points	(Required for each section)
The application DOES NOT identify best practices that the proposed program/initiative will use.	The application identifies best practices that the proposed program/initiative will use.	The application identifies best practices that the proposed program/initiative will use. Evidence supporting these best practices is provided.	The application identifies best practices that the proposed program/initiative will use. Evidence supporting these best practices is provided. The application explains HOW and WHY these practices were selected.	X 1	R1:	
					R2:	
					R3:	
<b>E. Innovation and Model for Other Programs (10 points)</b>						
0 Points	3 Points	4 Points	5 Points	Weight	Total Points	Comments (Required for each section)
The proposed program/ initiative in NOT unique to their county/region and DOES NOT have the potential to serve as a model for other programs.	The proposed program/ initiative is unique to their county/region but DOES NOT have the potential to serve as a model for other programs.	The proposed program/initiative is unique to their county/region and has the potential to serve as a model for other programs.	The proposed program/initiative is unique to their county/region and has the potential to serve as a model for other programs than can be developed into an effective, sustainable & coordinated dropout prevention program.	X 2	R1:	
					R2:	
					R3:	
<b>F. Community Input and Collaboration (5 points)</b>						
0 Points	3 Points	4 Points	5 Points	Weight	Total Points	Comments (Required for each section)
The proposed program/initiative DOES NOT demonstrate community input.	The proposed program/ initiative demonstrates community input and explains how this input was gathered.	The proposed program/ initiative demonstrates community input, explains how this input was gathered and how it will be coordinated with existing programs, initiatives, and	The proposed program/ initiative demonstrates community input, explains how this input was gathered and how it will be coordinated with existing programs, initiatives, and	X 1	R1:	
					R2:	

The proposed program/initiative DOES NOT demonstrate community input.	The proposed program/ initiative demonstrates community input and explains how this input was gathered.	services in the community.	services in the community to enhance the effectiveness of these programs.	X 1	R1:	
					R2:	
					R3:	

**G. Sustainability (5 points)**

0 Points	3 Points	4 Points	5 Points	Weight	Total Points	Comments (Required for each section)
The proposed program/ initiative has NO plan on how to continue after grant funding has ended.	The proposed program/ initiative describes a plan for continuation after grant funding has ended but does not include any evidence that the plan is being implemented.	The proposed program/ initiative describes a plan for continuation after grant funding has ended with evidence that the plan is being implemented. However, the evidence does not identify future funding sources.	The proposed program/ initiative describes a plan for continuation after the grant funding has ended with evidence that the plan is being implemented, including sources of future funding.	X 1	R1:	
					R2:	
					R3:	

<b>Total Points PROGRAM/INITIATIVE</b>					R1: /65	
					R2: /65	
					R3: /65	

**EVALUATION PLAN (20 points)**

0 Points	3 Points	4 Points	5 Points	Weight	Total Points	Comments (Required for each section)
The proposed program/ initiative's evaluation plan DOES NOT describe the data to be collected or a recordkeeping process.	The proposed program/ initiative's evaluation plan describes the data to be collected but NOT a recordkeeping process.	The proposed program/ initiative's evaluation plan describes the data to be collected and a recordkeeping process.	The proposed program/ initiative's evaluation plan describes the data to be collected and the recordkeeping process needed to support the SMART	X 1	R1:	
					R2:	

			Outcomes.		R3:	
The proposed program/ initiative's evaluation plan DOES NOT provide benchmarks for monitoring progress toward SMART Outcomes.	The proposed program/ initiative's evaluation plan provides benchmarks aligned with SMART Outcomes.	The proposed program/ initiative's evaluation plan provides benchmarks aligned with SMART Outcomes and monitors progress toward reaching them.	The proposed program/ initiative's evaluation plan provides benchmarks aligned with SMART Outcomes. Program effectiveness is monitored and adjusted as needed.	<b>X 1</b>	R1:	
					R2:	
					R3:	
The proposed program/ initiative's evaluation plan DOES NOT explain how the data will be collected, analyzed and communicated, nor does it identify the individual (s) responsible for the evaluation plan.	The proposed program/ initiative's evaluation plan explains how the data will be collected and analyzed but NOT communicated. The plan does identify the individual (s) responsible for the evaluation plan.	The proposed program/ initiative's evaluation plan explains how the data will e collected, analyzed and communicated. The plan does identify the individual(s) responsible for the evaluation plan.	The proposed program/ initiative's evaluation plan explains how the data will be collected, analyzed and communicated. The plan does identify the individual(s) responsible for the evaluation plan and includes a process for revising the plan as needed.	<b>X 2</b>	R1:	
					R2:	
					R3:	
<b>Total Points Evaluation Plan</b>					R1: /20	
					R2: /20	
					R3: /20	
<b>BUDGET (15 points)</b>						
						<b>Comments (Required for each section)</b>
<b>0 Points</b>	<b>3 Points</b>	<b>4 Points</b>	<b>5 Points</b>	<b>Weight</b>	<b>Total Points</b>	
The proposed budget DOES NOT support the activities described in the application.	The proposed budget supports the activities described in the application.	The proposed budget supports the activities described in the application BUT some items are NOT reasonable and necessary for accomplishing the	The proposed budget supports the activities described in the application and includes ONLY items that are reasonable and necessary for accomplishing the	<b>X 3</b>	R1:	
					R2:	

The proposed budget DOES NOT support the activities described in the application.	The proposed budget supports the activities described in the application.	program/initiative's SMART Outcomes.	program/initiative's SMART Outcomes.	X 3	R1:		
					R2:		
					R3:		
<b>Total Points Budget</b>					R1: /15		
					R2: /15		
					R3: /15		
					<b>Reviewer 1 Total</b>	/100	
					<b>Reviewer 2 Total</b>	/100	
					<b>Reviewer 3 Total</b>	/100	
					<i>(The Application Total score is obtained by totaling the two closest reviewer total scores allowing a maximum score of 200 per application.)</i>	/200	
					<b>Application Total</b>		
<b>NCCDP Member: (Encrypted ID)</b> <b>Comments: (250 Character Limit)</b> <b>Funding Recommendation: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</b>							
<b>NCCDP Member: (Encrypted ID)</b> <b>Comments: (250 Character Limit)</b> <b>Funding Recommendation: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</b>							

## **Appendix I: Interviewees**

**Dr. June St. Clair Atkinson**, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, North Carolina

**Dr. Rebecca Garland**, Chief Academic Officer, NCDPI

**Ms. Debora Williams**, Special Assistant for Graduation and Dropout Prevention Initiatives, NCDPI

**Legislative Staffer One (Anonymous)**, North Carolina General Assembly

**Legislative Staffer Two (Anonymous)**, North Carolina General Assembly

**Dr. Janet Johnson**, President, EDSTAR (communication via email)

**Dr. David Strahan**, Co-Chairperson, North Carolina Committee on Dropout Prevention

**Ms. Laura Fleming**, Instructional Coach, Jones County High School

**Ms. Charlean Brown**, Program Director, Ivory Community Development Corporation

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