

Building on New Tech's success | News | The Press and Standard

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In the days preceding last weekend's graduation ceremonies for the Colleton County High School, Superintendent Dr. Franklin Foster and Dr. Juliet White, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, sat down to talk about the future of the school district's relationship with the New Tech Network (NTN).

Colleton County School District partnered with NTN to open Cougar New Tech in 2013 through the use of a U.S. Department of Education Investing in Innovation (i3) grant. That grant focused on ensuring that all students graduated better equipped to take advantage of the college and STEM-rich career opportunities available across South Carolina.

Adopting NTN, Foster explains, enabled the district to "redesign the way instruction is delivered at schools."

Its inception, he said, gave the district the opportunity to improve learning outcomes. The NTN's method of learning has the students posed with a problem and they have to find the information to solve that problem, using guidance of the teacher.

White said there is "clear evidence of the benefits." A deeper examining of the state's high school test data, she said, demonstrates that the success rate for students in Cougar New Tech "is significantly higher."

The grant, Foster offered, is an opportunity to expand upon our success."

This year's graduating class was a milestone in that partnership — among those receiving their diplomas were seniors who spent their entire high school careers participating in Cougar New Tech.

More milestones are on the horizon. In the beginning of the 2017-2018 the NTN method of learning will be implemented at Bells Elementary School, making Bells the first elementary school in the state to begin using the system.

White said there was a reason for choosing Bells Elementary School to adopt NTN: Bells' Principal Lauren Behie.

“Dr. Foster is always challenging principals to look at innovative ways of improving student achievement,” White said. Lauren Behie began information gathering on NTN last summer and embraced its implementation. “To have success, you always have to start where you see the interest,” White said.

The following year, Colleton County School District is poised to become the first district in the Southeastern United States to have NTN implemented from kindergarten through 12th grade. That milestone will be reached when Colleton Middle School implements NTN at the start of the 2018-2019 school year.

In May, it was announced that the Colleton, Charleston and Florence School Districts had formed the South Carolina Learning Network in order to obtain grant funding to fund NTN initiatives in the three districts.

The network had been formed to enable the districts to receive a \$2.5 million grant from Los Angeles-based ECMC Foundation.

The three-year grant will be used to redesign the curriculum of elementary, middle and high schools over the next three years by covering much of the costs of training, coaching and professional development for the teachers, principals and district staff in all three school districts.

Most of the expense in adopting NTN, Foster explained in is the startup costs. The grant, he said, “will help offset a lot of the professional development costs.”

The funding will allow Charleston County School District to introduce the New Tech Network system of teaching into one of its high schools and allow Florence County to expand the New Tech Network already in place at one of its high schools.

In addition to the elementary and middle school implementation of NTN, the grant money will also be used to help establish a new academy, Health Careers, at Colleton County High School at the start of the 2017-2018 school year.

“We are pleased to be working closely with superintendents Dr. Franklin Foster, Dr. Gerrita Postlewait (Charleston school superintendent), and Dr. Laura Hickson (Florence school superintendent). The work in each district will be customized, and we look forward to engaging with teachers, principals, and community members. This new effort expands on the successful partnerships established in the last five years in South Carolina,” said Lydia Dobyms, president and CEO of New Tech Network. “This initiative will enable schools to provide powerful learning opportunities that will prepare all students for work or college paths.”

Advancing evidence-based education innovation is central to ECMC Foundation’s mission to inspire and to facilitate improvements that affect student outcomes — especially among under-served populations. “This is an opportunity to have a lasting impact on over 8,000 students in South Carolina. The New Tech school model enables students to develop deeper learning competencies, which will prepare them to be successful in any future path they choose,” said Kyle Miller, ECMC Foundation senior program director of teacher and leader development.