



The
Innovation
Project



2021-2022

LOOKING BACK

The Innovation Project

2021-2022

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THE INNOVATION PROJECT CORE TEAM

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TIP BOARD OF DIRECTORS

2022-2023



Dr. Kim Morrison
Superintendent
Mount Airy City Schools
(TIP Chair)



Dr. Marvin Connelly, Jr.
Superintendent
Cumberland County Schools
(TIP Vice-Chair)



Dr. Valerie Bridges
Superintendent
Edgecombe County Schools
(TIP Treasurer)



Dr. Alisa McLean
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Granville County Schools



Ms. Cathy Moore
Superintendent
Wake County Public School
System



Dr. Takeda LeGrand
Superintendent
Scotland County Schools



Dr. Aaron Woody
Superintendent
Asheboro City Schools

This year is another year illustrating what amazing educators we have across the state. I am thankful for the TIP districts that continue to implement student-centered innovative programs. In a trying time, when students need us to step up, support them, and create new avenues to graduation and rewarding careers, TIP answers the call.

The network of TIP districts continues to share best practices, pilot pathways, develop recruitment tools, and implement equity strategies that will shine the light toward a new and better education system.

Kim

DR. KIM MORRISON, SUPERINTENDENT,
MT. AIRY CITY SCHOOLS, AND CHAIR, TIP
BOARD OF DIRECTORS



TIP YEAR IN REVIEW

JOE ABLEIDINGER, ACTING CEO

As we reach the end of another challenging year, I am looking back with gratitude and awe at your work leading districts through the tumult and into pandemic recovery. This year we saw the strength of TIP in powering innovation through collaboration as districts piloted work through TIP projects and learned from and built upon one another's efforts.

For example, near the beginning of the pandemic, Edgecombe County Public Schools launched learning pods as part of their pandemic response. This and their innovative efforts with microschools earned national recognition in a [New York Times article](#), building on a pre-pandemic [EdNC profile of their microschool](#). Dr. Valerie Bridges and Erin Swanson (Edgecombe's Director of Innovation) presented Edgecombe's work on learning pods to the TIP Superintendent Working Group. Their work inspired Dr. Morrison and the Mt. Airy team to create their own microschool.

Separately, Edgecombe participated in TIP's Kellogg-funded [Early Learning Network \(ELN\)](#). Their work designing and implementing a prototype that led to the opening of their new Early Learning Academies is profiled in the following pages. Edgecombe's ELN prototype became a touchstone for a separate prototype in Wake County and design work in the other ELN districts.

The cycle of innovation through TIP continued in May when Mt. Airy hosted TIP's Spring Membership Meeting. Dr. Morrison and Penny Willard (Mt. Airy's Director of Innovative Programming) and other members of their team spotlighted the district's microschool and other innovative programs. Mt. Airy's high school entrepreneurship program, one of the first and most robust in the state, grew out of their partnership and connections at NC State facilitated by TIP, part of a model and set of programs we continue to grow through our Centennial Campus partnership and connections to the UNC system.

TIP YEAR IN REVIEW (CONTINUED)

The Mt. Airy team published an excellent summary of our visit and their innovative work in **TIP Visits MACS, The Hub of the Community**, and Dr. Morrison and Carrie Venable shared additional details and photos in their EdNC article, **Schools Embrace Being the Hub of the Community**.

After the visit to Mt. Airy, Warren County Schools superintendent Keith Sutton brought his board members to Mt. Airy to continue learning about the work and brainstorming the potential for similar projects in their district. Other districts are planning visits, and Mt. Airy's work with homeschool students continues to be an inspiration and a model for district leaders across TIP.

These are just a few of many examples of the benefits of members' connections through TIP related to rethinking, reimaging, and redesigning public education.

We are looking forward to many more deep connections like these in the year ahead. The coming year will see the arrival of TIP's new CEO, Dr. Sharon L. Contreras, in August; the launches of our high-tech learning accelerator and the Jeanes Fellows Program; the next stage of TIP's Solution Creators Action Network; and new partnerships and programs developed to serve our member districts and eventually all North Carolina students, families, and communities.

Joe

JOE ABLEIDINGER

DR. SHARON L. CONTRERAS

TIP'S NEW CEO

On January 14, 2022, TIP announced that Sharon L. Contreras will lead the organization as its next Chief Executive Officer.

[Link to Press Release](#)



A transformational leader and a passionate advocate for children, Dr. Contreras understands the role of district and school innovation in improving educational equity and in preparing every student to graduate college and career ready.

"We CAN build brighter futures for our children. While the pandemic has exacerbated long entrenched challenges and inequities, it has also called us to harness our creativity and will to innovate."

— Dr. Sharon L. Contreras, January 2022

DR. SHARON L. CONTRERAS NAMED CEO OF THE INNOVATION PROJECT



MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Last fall, Vance County Schools (VCS) hosted our TIP Fall Membership Meeting at the VCS Center for Innovation, a pioneering shared campus that promotes innovation and future readiness and embodies the district's work as a hub of the VCS community.

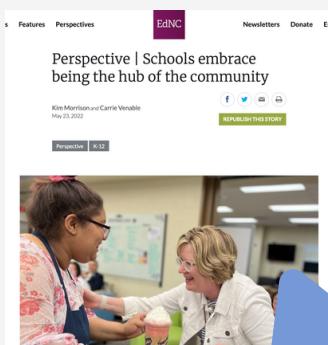


Link to Center for Innovation Site

VANCE COUNTY SCHOOLS

MOUNT AIRY CITY SCHOOLS

In May, for our spring meeting, we gathered in the Mt. Airy City Schools (MACS) Community Central Office, where we learned about the district's microschool and other innovative programs and toured the district's Blue Bear Bus before visiting Mt. Airy High School, where we learned about the school's Aviation Science and Drone program and the Blue Bear Cafe.



Link to EdNC Article



Transforming Early Learning by Reimagining School

YEAR 3

With a generous three-year grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, TIP and its partner the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at N.C. State developed and supported an inter-district network focused on redesigning learning environments to better address the early learning needs of vulnerable children. In its first two years, the Early Learning Network (ELN) engaged school design teams and principals from 36 schools in 12 North Carolina districts. The ELN immersed participating schools and districts in a cohort-based program defined by three interrelated activities that together enable transformative results:



Our third year focused on supporting participating district teams in responding to the pandemic through the same three interventions.

Transforming Early Learning by Reimagining School

(CONTINUED)

TIP's Early Learning Network partner the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at N.C. State University has published a video retrospective and a case study on the Early Learning Network. We are grateful to the Friday Institute team for their partnership in this work!



The Opportunity to Dream: How an Early Learning Network Implemented the Liberatory Design Process

From January to December 2021, the Professional Learning and Leading Collaborative (PLLC) team supported five school districts who participated in The Innovation Project's (TIP) Early Learning Network, an initiative that centered equity in addressing vulnerable children's learning needs. PLLC staff members led district teams through the Liberatory Design Process—a seven step approach to centering equity in reimaging and redesigning educational interventions. These seven steps include: Notice, Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, Test, and Reflect.

PUBLISHED December 21, 2021

RESOURCE TYPE Case Study

PUBLISHED December 21, 2021

Friday Institute for Educational Innovation

SUGGESTED BY

Case Study Landing Page

"The Opportunity to Dream"
How an Early Learning Network Implemented the Liberatory Design Process

Case Study PDF

Edgecombe County Public Schools

EARLY LEARNING NETWORK PROTOTYPE

As part of their design work in TIP's Early Learning Network, the Edgecombe County Public Schools (ECPS) team asked an important question: How can ECPS educators ensure that every child is ready to succeed when they start kindergarten?

The team then collected input and research, launched a prototype program, and collected feedback in a cycle of continuous improvement and iterative design.

01 INPUT + RESEARCH

The ECPS team started with community feedback, interviewing students, parents and early childhood educators. They also looked at trusted research and data about successful early learning programs.

02 PROGRAM LAUNCH

These insights helped the team reimagine what early learning could look like in the district—and what it could look like in other districts across the country. They created a three-part program, which they launched in 2021.

03 FEEDBACK + IMPROVE

The team is seeking continual feedback from families, students, community members and educators as the district pilots these critical programs. They are updating the program based on the data—ensuring they best serve children and families.

TIP was pleased to be able to support a part of ECPS's prototype program launch through the ELN. A video and three one-pagers tell the exciting story of this work in more detail.



CLICK HERE
FOR VIDEO



How ECPS Engaged Parents, Caregivers and the Community
To build community engagement, ECPS did the following:
• Conducted interviews with local students and a parent to learn about their experiences with ECPS and what they liked about the school.
• Hosted a virtual town hall meeting for parents and caregivers to provide information about the school and answer questions.
• Offered virtual access credit participation.

High-Tech Learning Accelerator

READY FOR LAUNCH!

We are excited to launch TIP's new high-tech learning accelerator at the end of June 2022. Through this initiative, students in TIP districts will engage with high-tech fields like artificial intelligence and machine learning, software development, computer systems engineering, and cybersecurity. TIP's interdistrict network will give learners opportunities to explore these fields and collaboratively prepare for modern work.

This initiative will be a proof of concept for a new way to do school—one that's learner-centered, industry-relevant, and competency-based.

We look forward to sharing more information with you in the coming weeks, including the initiative branding, new team members, and our implementation partners. Over the summer we will unveil our new website and announce additional implementation partners and exciting events and opportunities for the year ahead.

(continued on next page)



ACCELERATOR LAUNCH CONTINUED

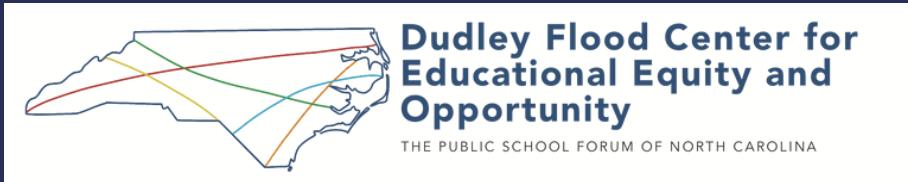
In the meantime, we are delighted to spotlight the experiences of 32+ students, 20+ family members, and 30+ district innovation leads at our pre-launch event, I'm That Designer, April 7-8, in Wilmington. Sponsored by Live Oak Bank, this event gave students the opportunity to work in small groups through a process facilitated by nonprofit **District C** to answer the question, "What kinds of learning experiences might you design to help students learn about, prepare for, and pursue high-tech jobs?" Innovation leads worked separately on a similar challenge question. On the second day of the event, both students and innovation leads had the opportunity to pitch their solutions to a distinguished panel with members from the Friday Institute, Apple, the Governor's office, Live Oak Bank, the General Assembly, and NCDPI.

You can see a snapshot of the experience in our event [recap video](#) or read summaries of the experiences of students, parents, and innovation leads in the [one-pagers linked here](#).



Jeanes Fellows Program

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation has awarded TIP a two-year, \$200,000 grant to enable TIP and our partners to pilot a modern-day iteration of the historic Jeanes Teachers Program. The Jeanes Teachers were a group of predominantly Black female educators who worked as teachers and community advocates and had a profound impact on the education of southern Black children.



TIP has selected the Dudley Flood Center as our lead programmatic partner. The Flood Center recently announced the operational launch of the “reimagined” Jeanes Fellows Program, which is designed to provide consistent and intentional infrastructure to support community-school relationships using an equity lens. The program will operationalize needed action captured in the Leandro Action Plan, the DRIVE Task Force Final Report and Recommendations, and the NC State Board of Education’s Statewide Strategic Plan.

TIP’s role in the reimagined program will be guided by two Burroughs Wellcome Fund Teachers of the Year: Mariah Morris (2019) and Eugenia Floyd (2021).



We will announce the details of the Kellogg grant and our partnership with the Flood Center in a press release later this summer. We will soon share details with interested TIP Members about opportunities to be part of the historic first cohort of the newly reimagined program.



TIP Solution Creators Action Network



TIP launched our Solution Creators Action Network (TIP-SCAN) in May 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, to support TIP districts in moving from crisis to transformation, with support from the NC State Board of Education and the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation. The first phase of the work focused on the mindset for transformation and led to the initiative's "Three Commitments," to equity, learner-centered transformation, and open, transparent design.

In Phase II of the work, over the past year, we have supported TIP districts to work with TNTP to focus more deeply on their local visions, challenges, and opportunities related to these commitments.

Based on feedback from TNTP and participating districts, we have chosen to begin Phase III focused on **innovative, learner-centered, and equitable talent strategies**. Interested districts will begin working with TNTP in the Summer of 2022, continuing through the 2022-23 year.

TIP and TNTP will work collaboratively through the Summer of 2023 to help districts secure support to implement the new classroom and teacher pipeline initiatives they create through TIP-SCAN.

Z. Smith Reynolds
FOUNDATION

NSF MASTER TEACHER FELLOWS

Work continued this year on the [North Carolina High School Mathematics Master Teacher Fellows Program](#), supported by a \$1.84 million NSF grant that TIP and N.C. State University received in March 2019. The goal of the Program is to prepare 19 mathematics teachers in TIP districts to serve as Master Teacher Fellows and mentors to fellow practitioners in North Carolina.

TIP hired Dr. Tamar Avineri to serve as our liaison to the Program. Dr. Avineri has worked with the Program team to help the Teacher Fellows prepare for the National Board Certification process. She has helped design the Program's Summer Institute, outlined and facilitated Program meetings, and provided support and feedback to Teacher Fellows as they prepared their NBPTS portfolios.

Looking ahead, Dr. Avineri will continue working with TIP and the Program, designing this summer's Summer Institute, which will focus on mentorship and leadership.



NC STATE
College of Education

The
Innovation
Project



Additional Highlights from 2021-22



Members heard from Coach Kelvin Sampson, University of Houston Men's Basketball Coach and the CBS National Coach of the Year, at TIP's Superintendent-Board Leadership Retreat in Charlotte.

BURROUGHS
WELLCOME
FUND



Thanks to the generous support of the Burroughs Wellcome Fund, the National Paideia Center facilitated a second cohort of TIP's Dialogues on Racial Justice at no cost to members.

Z. Smith Reynolds FOUNDATION

We are grateful for the continuing support of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, which in December awarded TIP a three-year, \$300,000 general operating grant. The foundation is also supporting TIP's pandemic recovery efforts through our TIP-SCAN initiative, spotlighted above. We are honored by the foundation's support and partnership in our work.



TIP has reengaged this year as a Centennial Campus Partner at N.C. State, giving us access to co-working spaces and meeting rooms in Raleigh and partner locations across the state, as well as numerous exciting opportunities for collaboration at NCSU and throughout the UNC system.