

APPENDIX C

Proposal Cover Page

(Print or duplicate and complete this form *and include it in your application package.*)

Project Title: _____

Section 1. Applicant Information

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Section 2. Project Information

Project Director Name and Position (if different from contact): Tina Mashburn/Executive Director

Secondary Education Phone: 704-630-6061

Email: tina.mashburn@rss.k12.nc.us

Total Project Budget: 1,186,400 Requested Grant Amount: 1,186,400

By signing below, I assure NCDPI that I am an official of the organization and authorized to bind the organization. I certify the following (*check each box so as to indicate your review and certification*):

- The information provided in this proposal is correct and complete.
- The applicant understands that this proposal and all attachments submitted are public records.
- The applicant understands that if awarded a grant, it will be required to:
 - o Participate in all evaluation activities, including collection, recording, and reporting of data, as required by NCDPI, NCSBE, or third-party evaluators, in compliance with relevant privacy laws.
 - o Submit required financial and performance reports to NCDPI.
 - o Comply with the North Carolina General Statutes, the North Carolina Administrative Code, and any other rules or regulations that may govern the performance and oversight of this program.
 - o Begin serving participants before or by July 1, 2020.

Signature and date: (in blue ink) Tina Mashburn

Title: Executive Director Secondary Ed Phone: 704-630-6061

Table of Contents

	page
1. District Introduction and Need	1
2. Implementation and Timeline	4
3. Advanced Teaching Roles and Job Responsibilities	13
4. Informing Employees and the Public: Advanced Teaching Roles and Compensation	15
5. Voluntary Relinquishment of Advanced Teaching Roles	15
6. Salary Supplement Information	15
7. Implementation Plan	15
8. Plans for Financial Sustainability	16
9. Measurable Objectives	16
10. Community Engagement	17
11. Sharing Information	17
12. Local Evaluation Procedures	18

Attachments

Attachment A: Budget

Attachment B: Friday Institute Evaluation

Attachment C: Digital Scholars Logic Model

Grant Narrative

(1) District Introduction and Need

Rowan-Salisbury Schools (RSS) is a consolidated district of 18,659 students located in southwest North Carolina between Mecklenburg and Guilford Counties. The district has a diverse population that is 56% white, 18% African American, 20% Hispanic, 6% multi-racial and less than 1% Asian and American Indian with a poverty rate of 63%. There is a total of 34 schools with 7 high schools, 1 early College, 7 middle schools and 19 elementary schools. RSS employs more than 1,250 classroom teachers and 1,200 other staff including administrators, counselors, librarians/media specialists and other support staff.

When Dr. Lynn Moody became Superintendent in 2014, RSS was a low performing district with only 46% of the students proficient at math, reading language arts and science. After analyzing the data, it was determined that a lack of reading proficiency was undermining students' performance across the entire curriculum. She moved quickly to develop a strategic plan with two main areas of focus:

- Digital conversion, and
- Integrating literacy learning across all the content areas.

Technology was the tool to support differentiated instruction, embedded assessment, regular skills practice, instructional resources and professional development for educators.

The initial plan worked, and the performance scores rebounded in 2015-16. More than 90 percent of the schools increased their performance composite score from the previous year. The overall upward trend was enough to remove RSS from the state's list of low performing districts. While the schools had improved, they were still not where they needed to be in terms of student

performance; however, the focus on digital instruction and literacy formed a foundation on which to build for continued improvement.

Data from 2018-2019 End of Year testing results of RSS show a downward trend with that 39% of students were proficient in math, 45% were proficient in reading and 46% were career and college ready. The data also showed a continued achievement gap between white students and other subgroups with a greater disparity for Students with Disabilities (SWD) and Limited English Proficiency (ELP). Finally, 15 of its 34 schools were designated as Low Performing. While there was some incremental change, the achievement levels were not where RSS wants its students to be if they are to be successful citizens.

Rowan-Salisbury Schools opted to become a "Renewal School System" in 2018 to gain greater flexibility as a district in the operations and accountability of its schools' performance. Prior to 2018, 15 of RSS's 34 schools had low performing status, giving the district the highest percentage of low performing schools of any district in the state and making the district eligible for renewal status. While students made incremental improvements, the student population overall was not achieving at the levels envisioned for high performance. The renewal status allows the district greater flexibility with budgeting, curriculum, hiring teachers, and the opportunity to explore innovative opportunities for their unique student populations in each school. As a result, core to RSS's plan for Renewal is to focus on working to create high performing schools where teachers will be empowered to lead, design, personalize and create how instruction is offered to students.

Empowering teacher leaders builds on RSS's partnership with digiLEARN, a North Carolina non-profit, to implement and expand the Digital Scholars Initiative. The Digital

Scholars Model (DSM) was designed by digiLEARN in partnership with North Carolina teachers around the components of effective professional development – it should be job-embedded, inquiry-driven, and collaborative (Darling-Hammond, 2010). As part of the DSM, practicing teachers selected to serve as Scholars, must master specific competencies, and perform leadership and job responsibilities such as coaching teachers and using their classrooms as Learning Labs for other teachers to observe and learn. They also receive compensation, extended employment and personalized professional development aligned with their personal, classroom and district’s goals.

Rowan-Salisbury’s focus on teacher improvement is based on “Years of research on teacher quality support(ing) the fact that effective teachers not only make students feel good about school and learning, but also that their work actually results in increased student achievement.” (Tucker and Strange, 2005). A critical component of RSS’s Renewal process is recruiting, developing and retaining the most effective teachers to help close achievement gaps, increase levels of student proficiency, and increase the number of students who are Career and College ready.

This need for more effective teacher professional development is not unique to the RSS District. A 2019 report by WestED, *The Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina* found that NC schools have issues with equitable distribution and retention of effective teachers, which negatively impact high-need students’ outcomes. The report found high-need schools are more often staffed by teachers rated “Needs Improvement,” a problem compounded by the fact that “frequency, approach, and overall quality” of professional development (PD) opportunities vary across schools, and state-level efforts are “inadequate and inequitable.” Many teachers report that offerings do not reflect the research-defined qualities of

effective Profession Development -sustained over time, active learning, job-embedded, with opportunities for expert coaching and self-reflection (Linda Darling Hammond, 2010).

Through employing the Digital Scholars Model, RSS provided new leadership roles for teachers to advance digital learning platforms and best instructional practices. The DSM keeps effective teachers in the classroom by providing recognition and compensation for their service as teacher leaders. Research in *There's Now a Body of Research on What It Means to Be a Teacher Leader* by Madeline Will indicates that teacher leader roles that provide high-quality, ongoing instructional support to other teachers foster a culture which improves not only the skills and retention of other teachers, but the retention of effective, experienced teachers who might otherwise leave the profession. To ensure educators embrace these new roles, the process for determining who gets them must be fair, well-scoped, and evidence supported. Using this research as its guide, RSS is seeking this grant to focus on expanding the Digital Scholars Model to its Middle Schools and design other Advanced Teaching Roles that support the Renewal Directional System where teachers will lead on the design and implementation.

(2) The Implementation and Timeline

Year 1 2020-21

Goal 1: Excellent teachers providing job embedded, active learning, sustained over time with opportunities for expert coaching and self-reflection will lead to improved student achievement and improved teacher effectiveness.

Strategy: RSS will work with digiLEARN to expand the Digital Scholars Initiative to each of its 7 Middle Schools which are designated as low performing. The Scholars will remain practicing teachers, using their classrooms as Learning Labs for other teachers to

observe and learn, provide coaching and support to teachers design and create how instruction is offered to students based on individual school renewal plans.

Overview:

The purpose of the Digital Scholars Initiative is to accelerate innovation, personalized learning, and design-thinking opportunities for schools and school districts. NC teachers, digiLEARN, Getting Smart and the Friday Institute partnered to design Initiative.(DSM Attached) Digital Scholars are teachers who take on invaluable leadership roles at their school and district levels while remaining practicing classroom teachers. They receive release time, personalized professional development, and extended employment so they can:

- Learn how to lead other educators
- Use their classrooms as Learning Labs for other teachers to observe and learn new instructional practices
- Collaborate with entrepreneurs, researchers, teachers and administrators to design solutions that will help their schools better innovate and design new learning models

Digital Scholars use their classrooms as Learning Labs where other teachers can observe their practices. Based on evaluations by the Friday Institute, (Attached) the learning labs are proving to be successful as teachers can see effective student learning practices demonstrated and see students taking ownership of their own learning. They will organize and lead Learning Institutes that are intended for students, teachers, entrepreneurs, and researchers to collaboratively develop solutions through a formal design thinking process. Together, they identify specific learning goals and explore ways technology might be used to facilitate teaching and digital and

personalized learning. They also will build capacity in their own districts to prepare other teachers to become Digital Scholars.

Month	Goal or Deliverable	Who is Responsible	Status
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An RSS Lead Digital Scholar will be identified through an application process to provide professional development and support for those designated to serve as digital scholars. 	RSS Leadership Team	
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application process for teachers to serve as Digital Scholars in the 7 participating middle schools will be announced and disseminated through the school system and media. • Digital Scholars will be selected based on the scoring rubric and recommendations by a team of 	RSS Leadership Team	

	<p>teachers, community leaders and district leaders.</p>		
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Planning Meeting:</i> digiLEARN meets with RSS leadership team to plan out the Digital Scholars program and outcomes ● <i>Kick-Off Scholar Meeting:</i> Virtual or in-person meeting with the 8 RSS scholars, the RSS lead Scholar and digiLEARN team 	<p>-RSS lead Scholar</p> <p>-RSS Scholars</p> <p>-RSS Middle School Principals</p>	
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Learning Labs:</i> RSS Scholars host their first set of Learning Labs for the year ● <i>Design Thinking and PBL Training:</i> RSS Scholars attend for their own PLPs and development 	<p>-RSS lead Scholar</p> <p>-RSS Scholars</p>	
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Learning Labs:</i> RSS Scholars host their 2nd round of Learning Labs ● <i>Design Thinking Training:</i> Attend a Design Thinking training hosted in Rowan and begin to implement practices learned. 	<p>-RSS lead Scholar</p> <p>-RSS Scholars</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Debrief Meeting:</i> After the Learning Labs RSS Scholars and digiLEARN Coordinator meet virtually to debrief the experience and progress 		
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Planning Meeting:</i> Scholars to meet and plan the Spring Learning Lab sessions 	-RSS lead Scholar -RSS Scholars -RSS Middle School Principals	
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Learning Labs:</i> RSS Scholars host their 3rd round of Learning Labs ● <i>District PD or Training:</i> Scholars host an in-district PD session about their work 	-RSS lead Scholar -RSS Scholars	
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Debrief Meeting:</i> Scholars to meet with RSS Lead Scholar and digiLEARN to debrief on Learning Labs ● <i>Professional Learning Experience:</i> Scholars attend a professional learning experience that enhances their own learning. 	-RSS lead Scholar -RSS Scholars	

<p>April</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Learning Labs:</i> RSS Scholars host their 4th round of Learning Labs ● <i>Debrief Meeting:</i> Scholars to meet with RSS Lead Scholar to debrief on Learning Labs 	<p>-RSS lead Scholar</p> <p>-RSS Scholars</p>	
<p>May</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Planning Meeting:</i> Scholars to meet and iterate upon the Learning Lab design 	<p>-RSS lead Scholar</p> <p>-RSS Scholars</p>	
<p>June</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Professional Learning Experience:</i> Scholars attend a professional learning experience that enhances their own learning. ● Evaluate the year and student progress ● Plan for 2021-22 	<p>RSS lead Scholar</p> <p>-RSS Scholars</p> <p>-RSS Middle School Principals</p> <p>-RSS Leadership Team</p>	

Timeline for implementation in 2021-22 and 2022-23 will be determined after evaluation of the 20-21 work. The preliminary plan is to expand Digital Scholars to all 8 High Schools in 21-22 and all 19 Elementary Schools in 22-23.

Goal 2: Recruiting, developing and compensating excellent teachers will ensure that all schools, especially those identified as low performing, will have excellent teachers significantly increasing student achievement.

Strategy: RSS will seek partners with knowledge and skill in the design and development of job descriptions and effective evaluation systems for teacher leaders that is fair, well scoped, evidence support and is aligned with its Renewal Directional System approved by the NC State Board of Education.

Overview:

The “Renewal School System” model provides charter-like flexibilities for all 34 Rowan-Salisbury Schools. Teachers are empowered to lead, design, and create instruction that is offered to students. This allows RSS to do things never thought possible in traditional public schools such as:

Curriculum Flexibility: Opportunity for teacher-led teams to design new curriculum with the possibility to be exempt from some standardized testing.

Budget Flexibility: Opportunity to receive state funds in one lump sum, rather than in multiple restricted funding streams that allow RSS to use the money in the way we deem most appropriate to support our students.

Personnel Flexibility: Opportunity to hire teachers with industry expertise to teach in their areas of strength regardless of their teaching license.

Calendar Flexibility: Opportunity to create a school calendar that meets the needs of students, parents, staff, community and the designed curriculum.

The Renewal School System process requires each school to develop its own plan, created by a teacher-led design team. A teacher-led design team is a collaborative group of teacher leaders who, with the school principal, will design structures that support learning experiences. This team will activate and influence the learning community to embrace these structures as they guide students toward achieving their personal educational goals. Teachers are empowered to lead, design and create the ways in which instruction is offered to students. By giving more flexibility and autonomy, these teams can now dream and think differently. They are tasked to understand the connection between design and innovation within our school and community.

Imbedded in the process is the flexibility for school teams to rethink how schools are staffed and to evaluate the skills needed for teachers to enable all students to achieve at high levels. It also provides an opportunity to rethink the role of the teacher and how RSS can develop advanced teaching roles to recruit, develop and retain highly effective teachers with skills that align with each school’s population. This also means designing new job descriptions, compensation and evaluation models.

Month	Goal or Deliverable	Who is Responsible	Status
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop District team to design and develop Job descriptions and supporting effective evaluation systems for teacher leaders aligned with the Renewal Directional System. 	District Renewal Lead/Human Resources	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify district design parameters and alignment with District and Individual School Renewal Plans. • Develop RFP to seek partner to help with the design and development. 		
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Release RFP at the state and national levels 	District Renewal Lead/Human Resources	
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select appropriate Partner • Hold initial planning meeting 	District Renewal Lead/Advanced Teaching Roles Team	
October- December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold planning meetings with each school’s design team to determine unique needs jobs/roles aligned with their renewal plans. 	Advanced Teaching Roles Team/Partner/School Design Teams	
January- April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate school level discussions with each school faculty to seek input in designing job/roles unique to each school. 	Partner/School Design Teams	
May-July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop recommendations for New Advanced Teaching Roles aligned for the uniqueness of the RSS schools. This 	Advanced Teaching Roles Team/Partner	

	<p>will include development, implementation and budget.</p>		
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(3) Advanced Teaching Roles and Job Responsibilities. The Digital Scholars Role is provided below as an Advanced Teaching Role. RSS will be developing other Advanced Teaching Roles in the first year of the grant.

Digital Scholars Role Requirements

During the 2020-2021 school year, the Digital Scholars will be responsible for fulfilling the following requirements and using extended employment time to complete their role duties.

Scholars will be expected to:

- 1. Meetings and Communication:** Attend (virtually or in-person) a one-hour meeting once a month to receive program updates and provide feedback on progress. Scholars will be expected to maintain active communication with the digiLEARN team about their work.
- 2. Learning Labs:** Host 6-8 Learning Labs in their classroom and provide follow-up coaching and support for the educators who visited their classroom. Digital Scholars will be expected to provide feedback on and enhance the Learning Lab process and tools.
- 3. Professional Learning:** Draft, implement and regularly update a Digital Scholar-specific Professional Learning Plan (PLP) that has both goals for their digital classroom practices as well as leadership and coaching of other educators within their district as well as from across the state. The Digital Scholars also are expected to host one or more PD experiences for educators in their district (date and time to be determined) and attend one or more PD experience that addresses a goal on their individual PLP.

- 4. Ambassador:** Digital Scholars will train other scholars as well as present to organizations about the program. The Scholars will have additional paid time to complete this requirement and will be expected to use extended time to cover their planning hours.

Scholar Selection

In keeping with the teacher focus, the following criteria is requested in the selection of teachers to participate as a Digital Scholar.

- a.** Experience as a teacher with strong content knowledge and pedagogy.
- b.** Demonstrated success in student achievement.
- c.** Experience in developing and delivering professional development is preferred but not required.
- d.** Knowledge about and experience in using technology for instruction.
- e.** Knowledge about various digital resources and personalized learning is preferred but not required.
- f.** Interest in using digital tools to personalize learning for all students.
- g.** Willing to commit the time for extended employment, personalized professional development as well as work with other Digital Scholars and leadership from digiLEARN to implement and promote the Digital Scholars Initiative.

Compensation

Compensation is \$20,000 per year to serve as digital scholar, leading learning labs, coaching and supporting teachers with implementing best practices including 1 month (20 days) of additional employment. The extended employment will be used to work with digiLEARN and other digital scholars and work for your school district. Additional funding for travel will be provided for

approved personalized professional development.

(4) Informing Employees and the Public: Advanced Roles and Compensation Models

Employees and the Public will be informed of New Advanced Roles as they will be part of actively developing the roles through the renewal process. The RSS Human Resource department

(5) Voluntary Relinquishment of Advanced Teaching Roles

Should a teacher relinquish his or her role and associated duties as Digital Scholar or other advanced teaching role, the removal of that title will not be considered a demotion under Part 3 of Article 22 of Chapter 115C of the General Statutes. Once the teacher relinquishes the role, the teacher will no longer be paid the additional compensation for the role relinquished and will continue to be paid the salary applicable to that individual as approved by the RSS and the state.

(6) Salary Supplement Information

The amount of Salary supplements for the Digital Scholars is \$20,000 per year paid twice during the year as part of the December and June payroll. In addition, the Scholars commit to serve in the role for a minimum of 2 years. Continued participation is determined by the evaluation of their work and student performance as determined by the systems evaluation process. Salary supplements for new Advanced Teaching roles will be determined as they are developed.

(7) Implementation Plan

The Implementation Timeline is in section 2 however the chart below provides the number of positions projected for 3 years.

Advanced Role	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023

Digital Scholars	7 Middle Schools 140,000	8 High Schools 160,000	10 Elementary Schools 200,000
Other Roles TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
Total Cost to sustain	140,000	300,00	500,000

(8) Plans for Financial Sustainability

The Digital Scholars supplements paid by grant funds will eventually transition to local and state funds. RSS has more flexibility on the use of state funds as a Renewal district. Since RSS is developing as a Renewal district, they are exploring ways to redesign and establish funding and budget priorities. Digital Scholars has proven to be successful to improving student achievement and it will be a priority to designate funds to sustain their work. Any grant funds being used to pay for trainers and professional development will be phased down to lower cost as RSS creates the capacity to develop its own Digital Scholars. Any new Advanced Teaching roles established through the Renewal process will also be a funding priority for RSS if they prove to be successful in improving student achievement and sustaining high performing schools.

(9) Measurable Objectives

The outcomes in regards to student performance and teacher effectiveness will be developed based on the evaluation of RSS through it Renewal Process. However objectives for the grant are:

Grant Funded Request	Goal of the Initiative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire a Lead Digital Scholar • Identify digital scholars for each the RSS schools (34) • Implement Learning Labs in all RSSs • Develop professional learning plans based on the individual school needs. • Develop personalized professional learning plans for each scholar. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Fulltime Lead Digital Scholars • 100% of RSSs has Digital Scholars • 100% of RSSs has learning labs for innovative instructional practices • 100% of teachers meet or exceed growth goals annually or the metric designed by RSS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop Repository of best instructional practices in a digital environment. • RSS sustains development of Digital Scholars. • Design Advanced Teaching Roles to support RSS Renewal Process • Design evaluation process for Advanced Teaching Roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce RSS attrition from 7.1% to 3% • Reduce the number of low performing schools by 60%
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Note: Metrics will need to be revised as Advanced teaching roles and evaluations are designed

(10) Community Engagement

RSS routinely holds community meetings and kick off events to engage with the broader community which has been helpful as major change initiatives have been developed and implemented. For instance, we develop a broad strategy to involve the community as the Renewal Process was developed. Large community gatherings were held to explain the Renewal process and discussion groups formed to provide input. Each school invited the local community to participate as they developed their plans. Should RSS receive this grant, it will also be a part of our community engagement strategy which is critical to the local schools developing their Renewal plans. By inviting the community to participate RSS is promoting the work and being transparent about the education being provided to the its children. Community involvement and engagement is a natural happening in RSS. The community plays an important role in assuring effective communication strategies that align with the district’s Renewal Plan, vision and mission beliefs – always focusing on showcasing our students’ work.

(11) Sharing Project Information

RSS will continue to provide information about this project and its progress as part of its established communications strategy. The Communications team is responsible for assuring

affective and extensive communications both internally and externally by working closely with the Superintendent, the Board of Education, district schools and departments. The website that provides information about the Renewal Process will include this work. RSS, we do outreach to other school districts and invite them to participate in events hosted in Rowan County. RSS will submit information to school organization such as NC Association of School Administrators, As a national leader in digital transformation and innovation, RSS continues to host national events such as with the Innovative Schools from Digital Promise and the statewide Digital Learning Summit with higher education.

(12) Local Evaluation Procedures

The Digital Scholar Model will continue to be evaluated by the Friday Institute which has an established protocol for the program. The protocol includes surveys with Digital Scholars, visiting teachers, and students designed for the purpose of the Digital Scholars Model. They will also use student performance measures to determine student achievement including the use of EVAAS for teacher effectiveness if used by RSS which has been used thus far.

RSS will be designing evaluation procedures for Advanced Teaching Roles during the next school year as part of their Renewal process. The evaluation will be shared once it is complete.

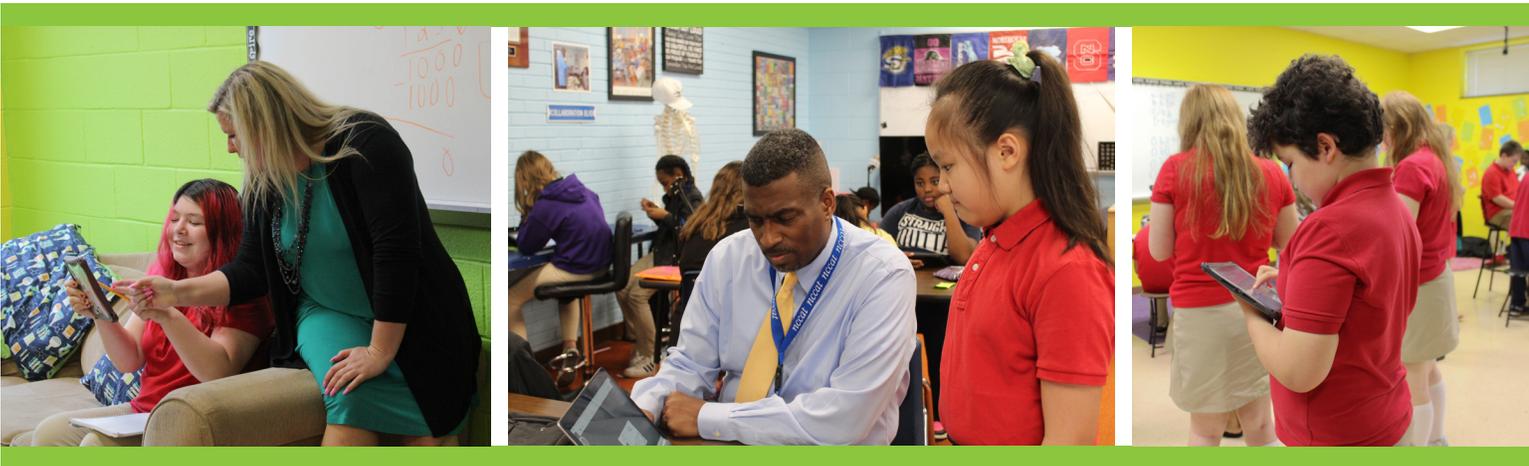
Attachment A: Budget

Budget Item	2020-21	21-22	22-23
1. Lead Digital Scholar	70,000	70,000	70,000
2. Substitute Pay	12,800	25,600	38,400
3. Technical Support for Digital Scholars	75,000	30,000	20,000
4. Evaluation for Digital Scholars	20,000	20,000	20,000
5. Technical Support for Job Description and Evaluation for Advanced Teaching Roles	180,000	180,000	0
6. Supplements RSS Advanced Teaching Estimate only until design is complete			500,000
7. Professional Learning for Digital Scholars	16,000	32,000	38,000
8. Supplements for Digital Scholars	140,000	300,000	500,000
9. Indirect costs	(21,520)	(26,304)	(47,456)
10. Total Cost	513,800	657,600	1,186,400

1. Lead Digital Scholar. This is a fulltime position to implement and support the digital scholars.
2. Substitute Pay. Covers the cost of substitutes so teachers can visit the Digital Scholars Learning Labs.
3. Technical support for Digital Scholars. The assistance is for digiLEARN to facilitate the development of the implementation of the Digital Scholars including leadership training and design thinking training.
4. Evaluation for Digital Scholars. This is for the Friday Institute to continue to provide program evaluation support to the Digital Scholars Model as it is implemented and for the scholars.
5. Technical Support for Job Description and Evaluation for Advanced Teaching Roles. This is to provide cost to a partner institution or organization to help design and development Advanced Teaching roles and evaluation for RSS.
6. Supplements for RSS Advanced Teaching Roles. In the absence of the design, this is a projection of potential costs for supplements.
7. Professional Learning for Digital Scholars. The covers the cost of personalized profession development for each scholar to receive training in an identified area of need.
8. Supplements for the Scholars @ 20K per year to full implementation
9. Indirect costs @ .4
10. Total Cost



digiLEARN
DIGITAL LEARNING INSTITUTE



2018 Digital Scholars Initiative:

**Empowering Teachers, Fostering
Innovation, Creating Impact**

2018 Digital Scholars Initiative

Personalized learning helps students become active participants in the creation of their own learning goals and teaches them how to collaborate with others, think critically and solve problems effectively – skills they will need no matter their future career. But personalized learning only works when teachers, who are on the front lines with students every day, are equipped with the resources and support they need to be innovative in the classroom.

Teachers agree. A 2016 digiLEARN survey of 1,327 teachers revealed that [85 percent](#) “believe digital tools that provide immediate, ongoing information about student understanding will increase learning.” Unfortunately, most teachers also said they feel they lack the skills and knowledge they need to effectively incorporate digital tools and personalized learning practices in their classrooms.

At digiLEARN, we strongly believe an investment in teachers is an investment in students. That’s why we started the Digital Scholars Initiative — to create opportunities for teachers and schools to accelerate innovation and build effective personalized learning models for all students, but especially for students from economically disadvantaged areas. Digital Scholars are teachers who take on invaluable leadership roles at their school and district levels while remaining practicing classroom teachers. Scholars receive release time, personalized professional development, and extended employment so they can:

- learn how to lead other educators,
- use their classrooms as Learning Labs for other teachers to observe and learn new instructional practices,
- and collaborate with researchers and other teachers to design solutions to help their schools innovate and design new learning models.

This spring, the Digital Scholars Initiative launched its pilot year of the program at Rowan-Salisbury Schools in the southwestern region of North Carolina. District leadership identified three teachers – Anthony Johnson, an elementary science and social studies teacher; Sally Schultz, a middle school math and science teacher; and Rebecca Glenn, a high school English teacher – to be the first cohort because of their expertise in digital and personalized learning.

Throughout the year, staff from digiLEARN and program partner Getting Smart worked with the cohort and the district to establish a professional learning community among the three teachers, provide personalized professional development for each Scholar, and offer planning and administrative support to facilitate Learning Lab classroom visits of each Scholar’s classroom. Learning Labs allowed teachers from throughout the district to observe instruction in a Scholar’s classroom and receive coaching from the Scholar afterward.

From March through August, The Friday Institute at North Carolina State University partnered with digiLEARN to evaluate the program’s pilot year. We are excited about our initial findings, which show that:

- Our Rowan-Salisbury Digital Scholars are master teachers that have a deep understanding of and highly advanced skills for using digital and personalized instructional strategies that lead to improved outcomes for students.
- Learning Labs are a promising strategy for spreading effective digital and personalized learning instructional practices.
- Teachers who visit Learning Labs gain useful knowledge, instructional ideas and inspiration, along with in-depth support from Scholars to implement new instructional strategies in their own classrooms.

This fall, Digital Scholars will expand to include Durham Public Schools in Durham, North Carolina. We are excited to take what we’ve learned at Rowan-Salisbury to impact even more students and teachers. Enclosed is a summary of key data from our ongoing research, which included interviews with our Scholars, surveys from the teachers who visited their Learning Labs and surveys of students from each Scholar’s class.

About The Digital Learning Institute (digiLEARN): The Digital Learning Institute (digiLEARN) is a national nonprofit dedicated to accelerating digital learning for all ages, with a goal of increasing personalized learning options for students, expanding opportunities for teachers and improving the ecosystem for education entrepreneurs. It serves as the front line for development of new learning models, tools, and content needed to help every learner succeed. Former North Carolina Governor Bev Perdue founded digiLEARN in 2014 and serves as the organization’s chair.



Empowering Teachers, Fostering Innovation, Creating Impact

- According to our digiLEARN Scholars, one of the best things about being a Digital Scholar is the **opportunity to spread knowledge to and collaborate with** other teachers. All three Digital Scholars said they were excited that teachers in their school and from across their district could observe the **innovative practices** they had put together, get ideas and begin to try implementing the practices in their own classrooms.
- To our Scholars, personalized learning means **meeting students where they are** with their knowledge and skills, and then creating personalized paths that help students succeed. A key component of personalized learning includes **giving students a voice** in their learning — choosing what they need to learn, how they learn and how they can demonstrate what they have learned.
- Digital tools make personalized learning more possible. One scholar said, “(digital technology) is essential for personalized learning,” and another said, “it would be much harder to do personalized learning without digital tools.”

Impact on Students

Scholars shared a number of ways they see how personalized learning is impacting their students:

- School-wide standardized test scores have increased.
- Student motivation has increased, and the students work harder.
- Behavior problems have decreased, and student engagement, confidence and attendance has increased.
- The school-wide climate has changed

Innovative Classroom Techniques

Scholars are using innovative classroom techniques, which include:

- Using individual learning contracts and playlists
- Administering pre-tests to assess each individual student’s level of knowledge
- Assigning digital work so students can go at their own pace, like videos
- Administering surveys to learn about individual student learning preferences
- Allowing students to choose assignments or projects so they pick how they want to show their learning

Visiting Teachers

Teachers who visited a Digital Scholar's classroom for a Learning Lab said they were **surprised by the level of focus** they saw in students. They also noticed the ways that the classroom set-up and organization of activities differed from a traditional classroom, which included:

- students working collaboratively in small groups
- students having different areas of the classroom to work in
- the number of different activities going on simultaneously around the room
- how quickly students set up in the different parts of the classroom and began working
- students' comfort and competency with using and explaining how to use Google Drive
- students' autonomy

Finding Inspiration

Visiting teachers said they were inspired by:

- student collaboration
- the Scholars' blended teaching methods
- project-based learning "that drives student interest"
- students' level of engagement
- students' comfort and competency with using and explaining how to use Google Drive, playlists and other tools
- students' ability to self-pace and assess their learning
- "true" teacher facilitation of learning

Immediate Changes

Based on their observations, visiting teachers noted specific changes they could make to their practice and classroom to facilitate greater use of digital technology and personalized learning. Examples they noted:

- providing instructions via a digital platform
- flipping lessons
- giving students the opportunity to take assessments independently (instead of as a group)
- flexible seating
- hands-on assignments
- using completely digital playlists instead of printed ones
- using project-based learning more often

Students

The majority of students in the Scholars' classrooms felt they **learned more, enjoyed learning more** and **took more responsibility for their learning** when digital tools were used for self assessment and learning. Surveys completed by 128 students showed that:

- 82 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they learned more when digital tools were used in the classroom, and 79 percent felt they enjoyed learning more. 73 percent said they felt they learned faster.
- 80 percent of students also reported they were more likely to complete in-class assignments when they used digital technology, and 71 percent said they enjoyed in-class assignments more.



"I like using technology because if you use hands-on (devices) like your iPad you can do and learn way more things and faster."

"What I like about using digital technology is that I get to finish and understand more."

"It's like a sheet of paper that's infinite."

[Click here for a video of the students in action.](#)



Strategies

Digital Scholars

A. DS define the role of digital scholars for DigiLEARN, in districts, and in schools

B. DS's develop personal learning plans

C. DS's develop an area of personalized digital learning expertise & create PD around it

D. DS's develop model lesson plans and implement them in their school/district

E. DS's develop their classrooms as learning labs for other teachers to observe and work

F. DS's access and contribute to the ongoing development of a repository of digital information and resources

G. DS's identify and recruit other potential DS's in their schools, districts and other states

Innovation Learning Camps

G. DS's, students, and entrepreneurs engage with each other to define how they can work together to improve learning

H. Innovation Learning Camps have been developed, piloted, and are held in increasing numbers each year

Innovative Learning Model Design Teams

I. Design teams of DS's, educators, entrepreneurs, and community stakeholders develop an innovative learning model using an ongoing, iterative, design process

Immediate Outcomes (1-2 Ys 2018-2019)

Digital Scholars

1. DS's build leadership skills

2. DS's build knowledge and skills for teaching adults

3. DS's build knowledge and skills around design thinking and next gen learning

4. DS's build knowledge and skills for innovative use of digital technology for teaching and learning

5. DSs demonstrate in learning labs (classrooms) model personalized and digital learning strategies

6. DS's are prepared to train/coach others to become DS's

7. DS's and other teachers regularly use and contribute to the repository of digital information and resources

Innovation Learning Camps

8 DS's,students, and entrepreneurs build partnerships with each other that are purposeful and mutually beneficial around student learning outcomes

Innovative Learning Models Design Teams

9. Schools and districts pilot innovative learning model

10. Entrepreneurs have a deeper understanding of the realities of schools and instructional needs of teachers and students

Intermediate Outcomes 2-4 Ys 2019-2023

Digital Scholars

I. DS's coach other teachers on digital teaching and learning, both in NC and across US

II. DS's influence local digital teaching and learning policies

III. DS's serve on school and district leadership committees

IV. DS's provide high-quality PD to other educators, both in NC and across US

V. DS's provide support and mentor new teachers on digital teaching and learning

VI. DS's have spread to majority of districts across NC and are networked with each other

VII. Teachers in NC & across the US regularly and contribute to the repository of digital information and resources

Innovation Learning Camps

VII. DS's and entrepreneurs actively participate in high quality partnerships with each other

Innovative Learning Models Design Teams

IX. Increase in frequency with which teachers implement instructional strategies for personalized learning in digital environments.

X. Increase in student engagement

XI. Increase in student learning outcomes

XII. Increase in student self assessment and increased learning

XIII. Entrepreneurs develop digital tools better aligned to instructional needs of teachers and students

Long-Term Goals

CULTURE: Digital learning is the new normal. Coaches lead, teacher facilitate, students learning, students teach.

STUDENT-LEARNING: Technology increases student engagement and learning. Students regularly monitor and assess their own learning. Achievement gap is closed through personalized learning for all.

PERSONALIZED LEARNING: Students, teachers, and parents understand what personalized learning is and is not.

TEACHERS: Teachers know how to personalize learning using technology. Teacher retention is increased. Learning innovations of teachers are supported, expanded, and elevated.

MEANINGFUL USE OF DIGITAL TOOLS: Technology is used effectively to improve education for students, and inspires innovation and creativity for students and teachers. digiLEARN is the source for digital learning resources.

ENTREPRENEURS: Ecosystem exists in which entrepreneurs and schools are connected. Entrepreneurs know how to create more useful technology.

LEADERSHIP & POLICY: Educational leadership embraces digital learning. Policymakers sufficiently fund digital learning and remove impediments.

Ultimate Goals

Productive citizens (economically, civic-minded, socially active, responsible) in the digital world

Innovative learning models that prepare students for the digital world

New ed tech market ecology driven by collaboration between teachers and entrepreneurs