

Final Evaluation Report

Project Cutting Edge with its original partners Halifax County Schools, Franklin County Schools in North Carolina, and Charleston County Schools located in South Carolina with technical support and assistance from St. Augustine College located hours from the Cyber Campus at Halifax County Schools in a collaborative arrangement sort to reduce their respective dropout rate by utilizing cutting edge telecommunication technologies, specialized equipment, and the Internet. As stated in the original proposal, the overall purpose of the Project is to provide technology-supported professional development to selected teachers in the three areas, improve instructional delivery, and increase academic achievement among students. The thinking is that at-risk adolescents who are exposed to the intervention program outlined herein will reflect a viable pattern of positive adolescent development and progress through the education al systems as reflected by a decrease in high school dropout rates and an increase in graduation rates. In addition, T1 lines using the NC Super Highway (NCREN) would be used to communicate with each partner to discuss the various components of the curriculum.

The evaluation plan changed significant in Year 1 and part of Year 2. The original proposal stated that St. Augustine College would provide participants with a specialized, interactive curriculum at their various sites. In addition, St. Augustine would also provide participants through an interactive curriculum the necessary skills to earn a GED, develop and offer refresher courses, and a means to obtain a diploma. Because of staff changes and administrative decisions at St. Augustine College, it (St. Augustine College) withdrew as a partner or participant in the project. This had a profound impact on the

delivery of services to the participants via the Internet. After an exhaustive search for an evaluator, this evaluator was hired and begun to examine what had taken place.

One of the primary focuses of the Project was to share information used to reduce the dropout rate between the Partners. Because of St. Augustine premature departure, information sharing between the principal Partners did not take place initially as outlined in the proposal. Although collaboration existed throughout the duration of the Project, at times it was difficult to standardize and replicate the various instructional strategies to share with the others participating partners.

Evaluation Methodology

The method of evaluation incorporated both objective (i.e., drop-out rates graduation numbers) and subjective (i.e., student opinions, parent interviews) indicators of program effectiveness in a manner that facilitates qualitative (i.e., Program Data Sheet) and quantitative (i.e., Demographic Data Sheet) interpretation. “Cutting Edge” students/parents were required to sign consent/confidentiality statements prior to participation in the project. Throughout the project, evaluator interviewed program staff and participants using surveys/questionnaires relevant to program procedures. In addition, the evaluator met with Directors at the various sites and Program Officer, Mr. Thomas Hardy to ensure Program uniformity. The evaluator also reviewed “Cutting Edge” project components, conducted on-going interviews, and monitored participant usage of computer, website, and database technology.

Specifically, the evaluation consisted of:

- Reviewing the progress “Cutting Edge” has made toward project objectives (i.e., Is the program enhancing student achievement particularly with regard to dropout rates, graduation numbers, and GED completion?).
- Examining the perceived benefits of participation in the program (i.e., Do users become more familiar with computer use? To what extent does the project benefit parents?).
- Identifying participant criticisms, recommendations and suggestions for program improvement and advancement. (Are participants appropriately knowledgeable regarding program elements and future utilization of its benefits?).

The following Logic Model depicts the evaluation process.

CUTTING EDGE PROJECT --- LOGIC MODEL

THE PROCESS			THE RESULT		
Input Resources	Interventions (Activities)	Measurement (Evaluation)	Outcome (Immediate)	Outcome (Long-term)	Community Impact
<p>Grant funding (#37-60-01072), In-kind contribution</p> <p>Cutting Edge Project Development Team</p> <p>Substantial numbers of students, parents, teachers, community organizations/institutions, to include: The school districts of Charleston, SC and Halifax & Franklin Counties, NC; Cyber campus (NovaNet) facilities, NC Super Highway, NC Regional Educational Network, Arrow Educational Products, Inc., TOP facilities</p> <p>Cutting Edge Project Evaluator</p>	<p>Staff/personnel selection & training, to include workshop and conference attendance.</p> <p>Client and cohort population selection.</p> <p>Development of an appropriate specialized curriculum (i.e., credit courses).</p> <p>Establishment of a digital networking system.</p> <p>Computer skill-building, web-conferencing.</p> <p>Daily and weekend coursework.</p> <p>Budget/Records monitoring.</p>	<p>Baseline demographics collection to include: observation, surveys, interviews, case studies, statistical analysis of data.</p> <p>Attendance reports, retention figures, graduation rates, diplomas & GED's earned.</p> <p>Follow-up analysis of serviced population with a cohort comparison group.</p> <p>Compliance reports.</p>	<p>Increased technology access and proficiency (staff and client).</p> <p>Higher numbers of school credits, GED's and diplomas.</p> <p>Periodic reviews and reporting.</p> <p>Financial accountability.</p> <p>Project progress appropriate to Objectives.</p>	<p>Decrease in school drop-out rates, improved academic achievement, lower drop-out rates and higher graduation rates.</p> <p>Data helpful in the development of "Best Practices".</p> <p>A comprehensive, summative project evaluation.</p>	<p>A community that has significantly enhanced its ability to provide for the diverse educational needs of its citizens, particularly those at risk of drop-out.</p>

Sample of Selected Data Sheets

CUTTING EDGE PROJECT
PROGRAM DATA SHEET
(STAFF)

Name (optional) _____ Position _____

In your opinion, what are the goals/objectives of the “Cutting Edge” Project?

Please describe your duties/responsibilities regarding the project (CUTTING EDGE).

What type/s of support has been helpful to you as a staff participant in the project?

Please provide several suggestions regarding the project that could facilitate its development and success (e.g., data collection procedures, training/education, and community involvement).

CUTTING EDGE PROJECT
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA SHEET

Date _____ Interviewer _____

Name/Code (optional) _____

Age _____ Race _____ Gender _____

Last grade completed _____

How are/were your grades? _____

Have you ever been expelled/suspended from school? _____

Why? _____

If currently suspended/expelled, do you plan to return to school? _____

When? _____

Do you have an arrest record? _____ Offense (optional)? _____

CUTTING EDGE PROJECT
PROGRAM /DATA SHEET
(PARTICIPANT)

Status (circle one) Student Parent Other_____

Name/Code (optional) _____

1. Please describe your relationship with project CUTTING EDGE (i.e., how long have you been with the project? How did you become involved with it?).

2. In your opinion, what are the goals/objectives of the CUTTING EDGE project?

3. What training sessions have you attended? What equipment have you been taught to use? What is your availability to this equipment and how well is it working?

4. Has "CUTTING EDGE" been helpful to you personally? _____
If yes, in what way?

5. What problems have you encountered and what additional type/s of support would be helpful to you as you participate in the project?

6. Please provide several suggestions regarding the project that could facilitate its progress and success (e.g., training/education, community involvement).

Project CUTTING EDGE
Parent/Guardian Consent/Confidentiality Agreement

Your son/daughter is one of many students who have been selected to participate in an experimental program that is being conducted by the Charleston County School System of South Carolina. The School System has formed an innovative and interactive partnership which utilizes digital technology to: 1) reduce the high school dropout rate, 2) improve academic achievement, and 3) increase the number of students who receive standard high school diplomas and Graduate Equivalency Diplomas.

Participation in this program is voluntary and all personal information will be coded so as to insure and maintain confidentiality. Data obtained from this program will be used for the purposes of a better understanding of student behavior and to increase the probability of high school completion.

Your decision to participate or not to participate in this program will not interrupt the quality of services that you receive from the Charleston County School System, nor will it in any way jeopardize your child's ongoing educational development.

If you agree to participate in this program, please sign your name in the space indicated below and be assured that your cooperation is fully appreciated.

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

Research Staff _____ Date _____

As noted earlier, the evaluative component of this project included the collection of comparative, objective, baseline demographics (Burke High School/North Charleston High School-located in Charleston, South Carolina and Selected schools in the Franklin/Halifax Counties located in North Carolina) obtained from the Superintendents' Office of the Charleston County, Franklin County and Halifax School District and subjective reports of the entire intervention process. The approach provided assessment not only of intervention outcomes, but also an assessment of overall program features during its development.

Objectives

- (1) A 50% reduction in targeted area dropout rates. 1. The data suggest that two of the three participating sites experienced a decline in their respective dropout rates. This conclusion is based on the data provided by the state of North Carolina, Halifax and Franklin County District offices. Participating schools in Halifax County and their dropout rate from 2001-04 are listed below:

	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
• NWHS	7.45	4.08	4.93
• SEHS	5.02	5.84	3.39
• HCS	6.5	5.27	4.3
• NC(state)	5.25	4.78	4.86

As noted, schools in Halifax County were significantly above the state dropout rate in 2001-02 school year. However, it is clearly observed that Halifax County Schools

had markedly improvement in the 2002-03 and failed below the state rate in 2003-04. This is an excellent indicator that the interventions were affecting the change. Franklin County Schools experienced a slight decline in their dropout rate. Franklin County dropout rate in 2001-02 was 6.35, 2003-04 6.05, while the state dropout rate was 4.86. Charleston County Schools did not experience a significant reduction in the dropout rate. The Charleston County School System experienced internal administrative changes, school district policy changes, personnel changes, and curriculum changes. The data from the Charleston County School System was inconclusive and was not presented to the evaluator in a timely manner. The incoming administrator did however explain that the inconsistency in the dropout rate was not due to any of the interventions of the project, but primarily due to the changes in staff and the increase in curriculum standards that were not in place before the grant.

(2) Increase in graduating students and those who earn GEDs. It is perceived by this evaluator that the goal of increasing the graduation rate was successful. The data indicates that the delivery of the Nova Net Curricula into the home of students through the use of computers was successful. The data indicated that 15 students, 9 males and 6 females completed high school through the use of the Nova Net Curricula. It is also worthy to note that students utilized the Nova Net Curricula at the campus sites as well.

The Credit Recovery made a positive impact as well by increasing the number of students graduating in high school. It assisted more than 20 twenty students in completing their graduation requirements.

(3) Increase in technical proficiencies of end users. The data strongly suggested that all participating sites experienced an increase in technical proficiencies for all participants. Utilizing the Nova Net to deliver the curriculum required all users to become proficient. Assignments and research activities were submitted via the Internet. On-site interviews and observations by this evaluator strongly support the results of the data.

Overview:

The program was successful with regard to its primary objective of decreasing the drop-out rates among high school students in the three selected counties. Implementation of the program involved teachers in conference attendance, workshops, training/tutorial sessions. Indicated also in the report is documentation of overall attendance and drop-out in Charleston, Halifax, and Franklin Counties. However, the data from Charleston were inconclusive.

It should be noted also that substantial numbers of students were provided the opportunity to utilize multiple technologies in the planning, development, and presentation of projects as a component of daily classroom activity.

Measurable changes in school dropout rates, high-school graduation percentages, and proficiencies of technology users was a direct result of the interventions provided by this project. It should also be noted here that Charleston's English and Math scores

improved significantly. In addition to the benefits received by the students and the staff at the various sites, it should be noted that parents of the participants also became more literate with technology.

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