

Strategies to Expand Rural Enrollment in North Carolina Virtual Public School Courses

Executive Summary

Interns from the Duke Sanford School of Public Policy presented the findings of their study of rural school high schools students in NCVPS to the North Carolina State Board of Education. They presented information about enrollment of students in rural, low-wealth schools and presented 4 recommendations. These recommendations directly confirm that the online high school is heading in the right direction, since initiatives and processes were already underway prior to the study being finalized. Below are each of the four recommendations and current status of projects/initiatives that NCVPS has undertaken.

RECOMMENDATION ONE – Conduct Rigorous Survey

1 – NCVPS currently conducts an annual survey through the Friday Institute of Educational Innovation in which data is used to directly impact strategic planning for curriculum, technology and support services. Data from the 2009 report shows major increase in stakeholder feedback and positive response to NCVPS products and services.

2 – NCVPS also conducts adhoc surveys that include student feedback, distance learning advisor (DLA) feedback and teacher feedback. This data has also been used to strategically target rural schools and school districts with training and marketing resources.

3 – Student surveys are currently used at the end of each semester to gain feedback related to curriculum content, teacher communication and support services. Students are also surveyed through the annual survey issued by the Friday Institute.

RECOMMENDATION TWO – Consistently code online courses by provider in NC WISE

1 – NCVPS has issued numerous advisories to school and district-based data managers regarding the use of NCVPS-specific course codes in NC WISE in order to better track performance and accountability.

2 – NCVPS has partnered with the NC Department of Public Instruction and NC WISE to synchronize the NCVPS registration system with NC WISE data.

3 – NCVPS School Support Division has conducted training for central office distance learning coordinators (DLCs) related specifically to the importance of using NCVPS course codes in NC WISE reporting.

RECOMMENDATION THREE – Target recruitment efforts on administrators at non-participating rural high schools

1 – NCVPS has begun specific leadership training initiatives (GOLIVE) in rural districts that were identified as low enrollment, low performance schools. This coupled with weekly “coaching sessions” offered by School Support Services has resulted in an average increase of 51% enrollment in districts identified by the study as low wealth, low enrollment.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR – Leverage earned media opportunities into greater parent and student drive demand

1 – NCVPS utilizes both traditional and social media (Facebook, Twitter, blog, etc.) strategies to provide outreach to all areas of NC.

2 – Partnerships with Futures4Kids, NCPTA and local school boards provide ample opportunities for NCVPS to market to parents and students of low-wealth, rural districts.

3 – NCVPS continues to promote its benefits through weekly eLerts, blogs, direct school communications and non-traditional media and has seen a 200% increase in subscribers to its blogs and on-line newsletters. In addition, more and more requests for information are coming from rural districts as well as non-public school students in rural NC counties.