

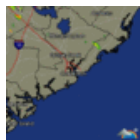
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Grant expected to make big impact

BY BRENDA RINDGE
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Thursday, March 15, 2012

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WALTERBORO -- The addition of the New Tech Network at Colleton County High School will help the school improve its graduation rate, said Colleton County School Superintendent Leila Williams.

"This is going to give us that last bit that we need to get us to that very next level," Williams said Tuesday during a program to kick off implementation of New Tech.

She said the school's graduation rate is in "the low 70s," and she's aiming to make it 100 percent.

"Even though we've made improvements in our graduation rates and our dropout rate has declined, we still know we are not satisfied, cannot be satisfied," she said.

In a given year, 95 percent of seniors in schools in the New Tech Network graduate nationally, and 80 percent of entering freshmen graduate in four years.

The New Tech Network is a nationwide program that works with schools, districts and communities to develop innovative public high schools.

Currently made up of 86 public high schools in 16 states, it uses project-based learning to prepare students for college and careers.

"I always say, if children are not learning the way we teach, then let's go ahead and teach the way they learn," Williams said. "And I think this New Tech concept is the way that our children learn."

Colleton County High School and Scott's Branch High School received a \$3 million grant to add the program to their schools in fall 2013. Scott's Branch will involve the entire freshman class, while Colleton will use the school-within-a-school concept.

The federal Investing in Innovation grant is a project between the schools, KnowledgeWorks and the Riley Institute at Furman. It was one of 38 projects funded from more than 900 applications, said Riley Institute Executive Director Don Gordon. It required a 15 percent, or \$450,000, local match.

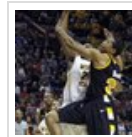
"We got amazing help in Colleton County, Clarendon County and across the state," Gordon said.

Many local businesses and organizations chipped in to make sure the grant became a reality within two weeks, he said.

The five-year grant will provide professional development and training for teachers, staffing from the Riley Institute and New Tech Network and more.

"We do a lot of talking about school reform," said Dick Riley, former governor and U.S. education secretary, who introduced the programs at the schools Tuesday. Riley is

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Grant expected to make big impact | The Post and Courier - Charleston, South Carolina also on the board of KnowledgeWorks, which runs the New Tech Network.

Riley said the two South Carolina schools will become nationally recognized programs.

"What we're talking here is more than reform -- this is transforming education itself," he said. "This New Tech concept is the best method we have come up with to connect up the academic part of things with the skills to use those academics. It's amazing what students can learn if you put them in charge of learning."

Reach **Brenda Rindge** at 937-5713 or on **Facebook**.

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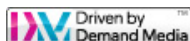
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