



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Guilford County School District Becomes Fifth N.C. District Leading National Opportunity Culture Initiative to Reach All Students with Excellent Teaching

CHAPEL HILL, N.C.— Under Superintendent Sharon Contreras, Guilford County Schools, based in Greensboro, N.C., has joined the national [Opportunity Culture initiative](#) to extend the reach of excellent teachers and their teams to more students, for more pay, within schools' recurring budgets.

[Researchers](#) at the Brookings Institution and American Institutes for Research released a study in January showing the effect Opportunity Culture can have: Teachers who were on average at the 50th percentile in student learning gains, and who then joined teams led by multi-classroom leaders, produced learning gains equivalent to those of teachers from the 75th to 85th percentile in math, and, in six of the seven statistical models, from 66th to 72nd percentile in reading.

Opportunity Culture, founded and led by Public Impact of Chapel Hill-Carrboro, N.C., now includes more than 20 districts in nine states, including four other N.C. districts. Guilford will be the second of the state's five largest districts to join.

Contreras was also the superintendent in Syracuse, N.Y., when she took the unprecedented step of becoming the first collective bargaining Opportunity Culture district in 2014–15, only the third district in the initiative's pilot phase.

"I have seen what works and doesn't, and will bring the very best of Opportunity Culture to the students and teachers of Guilford County," Contreras said. "The recent study's results are deeply encouraging, and we will benefit from learning lessons from the early Opportunity Culture districts to guide our work toward strong outcomes."

In November 2016, Contreras convened a 120-member [Transition Team](#), which included the chancellor of N.C. A&T University, the superintendents of the Wake County and Charlotte-Mecklenburg districts, teachers, principals, educator association representatives and leaders of education organizations, to assess Guilford and make recommendations on school and district performance improvements.

The team's Talent Development [report](#) included a vision for talent development that included timely, job-embedded professional development; opportunities for teachers to lead without leaving the classroom; career pathways that expand the reach of excellent teachers and principals; and competitive teacher and principal salaries to attract and retain top educators. Opportunity Culture schools address all of those aims.

Guilford leaders also expect Opportunity Culture to help the district meet its new strategic goals by 2022, which include increasing by 50 percent the number of schools that exceed expected growth, and decreasing the achievement gap between black and Latino students and their white peers by 7 percentage points.

Guilford has 126 schools and about 4,800 teachers. They serve more than 73,000 students, of whom about 41 percent are black, 14 percent Hispanic, and 34 percent white, with about 60 percent eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Design teams made up of teachers and administrators at nine schools are now planning their Opportunity Culture implementation for the 2018–19 school year: Bessemer Elementary, Cone Elementary, Falkener Elementary, Foust Elementary, Hampton Elementary, Wiley Elementary, Ferndale Middle, Hairston Middle, and Jackson Middle. Guilford plans to add many more schools to the initiative over time. Students at Hampton Elementary were relocated this week following a tornado on Sunday that damaged the school, so Public Impact will work with its Opportunity Culture design team on a modified schedule this spring.

These nine schools are all Title I schools; nearly three-fourths of the schools in the AIR-Brookings study were Title I.

In [Opportunity Culture schools](#), each school’s design and implementation team uses job redesign and age-appropriate technology to reach more students with high-standards, personalized instruction—one hallmark of great teachers. School teams redesign schedules to provide additional school-day time for teacher planning and collaboration, typically with accountable teacher-leaders called “multi-classroom leaders” leading teams and providing [frequent, on-the-job development](#).

The school design teams reallocate school budgets to fund pay supplements permanently, in contrast to temporarily grant-funded programs. High-performing Opportunity Culture schools in other districts have made these funding decisions wisely to increase student growth in core subjects without narrowing the curriculum. Guilford recently ended its Mission Possible program, which also paid supplements to some teacher-leaders; the program ended in December 2017 when federal funding for the bulk of supplements ran out.

The Guilford Opportunity Culture schools will use the multi-classroom leader role, as well as the teaching role known as expanded-impact teachers and the paraprofessional role known as reach associates. All these roles will receive substantial pay supplements, going up to \$20,000 in Title I schools for multi-classroom leaders (MCLs). Supplements vary by how much teachers or MCLs are extending their reach and supporting colleagues.

“We hope to bring these within-budget, advanced-pay opportunities to many more of our outstanding teachers in the future, to help more Guilford students achieve their potential. We are also considering similarly cost-efficient, advanced roles for principals that would allow them to lead more than one school, for more pay,” Contreras said.

The North Carolina school districts of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Cabarrus, Edgecombe, and Vance counties are also creating Opportunity Cultures. District leaders in the state continue to learn from one another’s experiences; teams from these Guilford schools visited Opportunity Culture schools in Charlotte-Mecklenburg before signing on to the initiative. Principals said they thought Opportunity Culture would help them recruit teachers and promote outstanding teachers already in the district by offering teacher-leader roles, and improve teacher working conditions in their schools by offering teachers more support to increase student achievement.

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About Public Impact

Public Impact’s mission is to improve education dramatically for all students, especially low-income students, students of color, and other students whose needs historically have not been well met. We are a team of professionals from many backgrounds, including former teachers. We are researchers, thought leaders, tool-builders, and on-the-ground consultants who work with leading education reformers.

Learn more about an Opportunity Culture on the [OpportunityCulture.org](#) website, which provides [tools](#)—all free—to build an Opportunity Culture, [videos](#) of teachers and principals, and related [resources](#). Funding for development of resources to help schools design and implement Opportunity Culture models and support teachers taking on new roles has been provided by [national foundations](#).

Hear directly from educators who have worked in Opportunity Culture schools in [columns](#) published on national and state news sites.

For more information, please visit [www.OpportunityCulture.org](#). To arrange an interview with Public Impact, contact Sharon Keschull Barrett at Sharon.Barrett@publicimpact.com; 919.590.4154.