



For immediate release  
May 23, 2005

## North Carolina Education Project Closes Achievement Gap

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) and the American Association of Gifted Children at Duke University (AAGC) today announced the results of Bright IDEA 1, a project involving over 900 kindergarten, first- and second-graders in five Title I schools in North Carolina. The project was implemented in regular classrooms to meet the mandate of the North Carolina General Assembly to close the achievement gap and to nurture under-represented populations for advanced or gifted classes. The results exceeded all expectations and could have an impact on national education policy.

The project has been awarded a \$2.5 million research grant over 5 years from the Jacob Javits Gifted Education Program at the US Department of Education to upscale the project across other school districts (an abstract on Project Bright IDEA 2 is available).

Key results for Bright IDEA 1 were:

- All kindergarten Bright IDEA classrooms scored in the 99th percentile on the state literacy assessment.
- Significant gains were seen in student achievement in the K-2 Literacy and Mathematics Assessments across all sub-groups of children.
- Achievement among African American and Hispanic populations was raised close to the level of white and Asian students.
- One school showed Bright IDEA second graders scoring in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills Reading exam vs. 39<sup>th</sup> percentile for those who did not go through the Bright IDEA program. Class sizes averaged 21.5 in Bright IDEA classrooms and 18.8 in non-Bright IDEA classrooms. This was the only school that administered the Iowa assessment.
- One principal provided data that showed nearly all Bright IDEA students in K-2 classrooms scoring 50-100 percent higher than students in regular classrooms for every assessment or inventory given, including the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

“Bright IDEA was built on the most advanced research and focuses on empowering regular classroom teachers through training and mentoring to design concept-based curriculum, and to change the classroom environment to meet the learning styles of all children, ” said Margaret Gayle, executive director of the AAGC and one of the Bright IDEA principal designers.

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Thomasville Primary School Principal Phyllis Lupton said, "Bright IDEA works with every child. It nurtures every child. It makes every child reach a higher level of expectation and achievement. In most cases, Bright IDEA students' test scores increased by 50-100 percent. But as good as the test data are, the important thing is that the students are becoming – and staying – excited about learning. They are becoming lifelong learners."

"I would not return to teaching the way I did prior to Bright IDEA," said Virginia Avery, a kindergarten teacher at Sherwood Elementary School. "I wish I could go back and teach all my previous students this way."

Valorie Hargett, the state consultant for the Academically or Intellectually Gifted Programs in North Carolina and a principal designer of the program said Bright IDEA students are challenged to use the full range of their talents and intellectual abilities as they address authentic and complex academic tasks. The project builds upon and extends the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study* through rigorous concept-based math activities and a research-based thinking skills program. Bright IDEA teachers create scholarly environments that engage students actively and consistently in sophisticated investigations of materials, texts, and learning activities, and require them to understand and apply critical and creative processes that are quite advanced for K-2 students. "Our emphasis on broad cognitive and metacognitive skills instead of rote learning was instrumental in lighting up our students' imaginations, which drove their learning achievement," said Hargett.

The project goes against the grain of some approaches that stress tight scripting of lessons, limited teacher flexibility and an emphasis on memorization and test preparation. Bright IDEA works within normal classroom constraints and does not extend the school day or school year or include extra tutoring or other special services. The strategies are designed to work with all content areas in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

Dr. Ron Tzur, a North Carolina State University professor and evaluator of Bright IDEA 2 said, "The two core notions behind Bright IDEA are that every kid has talent and that intelligence can be nurtured and the teacher's role is to nurture it. Bright IDEA tailors gifted methodologies for regular classroom teachers to use with all children. This raises the performance of gifted and regular children and has led to the extraordinary results achieved by Bright IDEA 1. We look forward to the controlled research methodology in Bright IDEA 2 to get a better understanding of these issues."

"Bright IDEA shows a new, exciting and highly productive path for education in this country," said Mary Watson, director of Exceptional Children at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. "Education and political leaders may have to broaden their thinking and policies now that we have demonstrated a more natural and far more effective classroom approach than is the norm today."

Teachers, principals, and central office personnel were involved in developing the project. School districts involved included: Gaston County, Henderson County, New Hanover County, Thomasville City, and Wake County. Project Bright IDEA 1 was funded by the NCDPI through its Exceptional Children Division and Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps Section and by The American

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Association for Gifted Children at Duke University through a grant from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation and private donations. Local school districts contributed funds for materials, travel, and subsistence for personnel to attend training. Participants completed 30 days of training over a three-year period.

For more information, please contact NCDPI's Exceptional Children Division Director Mary Watson, 919/807-3969, Valorie Hargett, state consultant for Academically or Intellectually Gifted, NCDPI, 919/807-3987, or Margaret Gayle, executive director of The American Association for Gifted Children at Duke University 919/783-6152.

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