

## RSS Renewal Origin Story Case Study

# THE JOURNEY TO RSS RENEWAL



### About Rowan-Salisbury Schools

At Rowan-Salisbury Schools (RSS), we have a guiding belief: children are more than their test scores. We know not every student learns in the same way—and that when educators have the flexibility to try new, innovative teaching approaches, we can truly help students learn and succeed.

Through our Renewal status, we enjoy curriculum, personnel, financial and scheduling flexibility. Every school in our district has created a plan to serve their students' specific needs, while building academic and interpersonal skills—and helping students pursue their unique life goals, too.

**Now, through our case studies, we're sharing more specifics about what we've done, how we've done it, and what education leaders across the country can try in their own districts.**

### An Idea for Innovation Comes to Life

In spring of 2018, then Superintendent Dr. Lynn Moody sat in a room with a North Carolina state senator and a representative.

With local control and flexibility on her mind, Dr. Moody shared about her experiences as a coach, teacher and superintendent. She showed state politicians what Rowan-Salisbury teachers and students had already achieved, while explaining how much higher the school system could soar. Dr. Moody talked about how school leaders simply needed the power to truly innovate outside of outdated learning models and funding constraints, and the right flexibility and resources.

*She outlined her strategic plan for the district, explained how charter-like flexibility would benefit our schools and asked for their help making it happen.*

Dr. Moody inspired the policymakers with her data and vision for RSS. They introduced legislation, which then passed in less than a month. And, North Carolina's Renewal district was born!

# FROM IDEA TO IMPLEMENTATION

## Here's a snapshot of RSS leaders' process



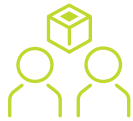
### STARTED WITH THE NEED AND THE VISION FOR CHANGE

Leadership got clear on the “why” and the “why now” and articulated a vision for a better, brighter district



### IDENTIFIED THE SOLUTION AND CREATED THE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

Leadership saw legislation as their path to success and worked with policymakers who ushered a bill into law, granting charter-like flexibility to the whole district



### COLLABORATED, WORKED TRANSPARENTLY AND SOUGHT BUY-IN

The Renewal team shared the strategic vision with businesses, faith groups, school leaders, educators and more—bringing the whole school community along



### BEGAN TO EXECUTE THE VISION, REWRITING THE PLAYBOOK FOR WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE IN THE DISTRICT

Educators and schools leaders reimaged what teaching and learning looks like, creating new directional models



### ENGAGED SCHOOL LEADERS

The district leadership team empowered schools to use the new flexibility and directional models in a way that meets the specific needs of their school communities



# A CLOSER LOOK AT THE JOURNEY TO RENEWAL

## IT ALL STARTED WITH A BOLD QUESTION AND A BRAVE ANSWER.

### *What would you do if you had a magic wand?*

This is the bold question that then North Carolina State Senator Michael Lee posed to Dr. Moody after she described the district's challenges in 2018. At the time, Rowan-Salisbury Schools included both Restart schools and traditional schools. The district faced challenges in navigating school communities that functioned like different systems.

Senator Lee was committed to improving education, creating learning environments that evolved to truly meet the needs of each and every student. Similarly, Dr. Moody questioned the way things have always been and asserted that, with flexibility, they might be able to change course.

### **She envisioned a school system with autonomy that empowered schools to create an engaged learning environment so students enjoy learning and teachers enjoy teaching.**

Their shared interest in innovation led to legislation to make that happen. With then Rep. Craig Horn's partnership, and a shared commitment to education success, they passed the bill.

## WITH TRUST AND A SHARED VISION, A TEAM OF CORE LEADERS GOT TO WORK, EMBRACED UNCERTAINTY AND BROUGHT THE COMMUNITY ALONG.

By asking themselves *what do we need to do to make our vision for success happen for all of our students*, leaders were able to narrow in on the following model, focused on students' full experiences at school:



Leaders understood that Renewal meant change for the whole community. They held themselves accountable to bringing everyone along—actively communicating with the community, listening and embracing the idea that change cannot be top down. Whole school communities—from businesses to teachers to school leaders—had a stake in this work, and leaders wanted to make that clear as they moved the work along.

## SCHOOL LEADERS WERE EMPOWERED WITH NEW FLEXIBILITY TO TAKE ON AND IMPLEMENT TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE IN THEIR SCHOOLS.

From vision to directional model, RSS now had all of the foundational elements in place. Then, it was time for each school leader to take this flexibility and apply it, narrowing in on what their individual schools needed. In short, it was time to innovate!

With this flexibility, school leaders could design and implement new, innovative and tailored learning environments to truly meet each school community's unique needs. Leaders at each school could evaluate core challenges and engage students and educators to come up with specific solutions.

*For example, at Morgan Elementary, the school identified a challenge: learners mastered concepts at different speeds—with some falling behind and others held back from their full potential as a result. The school used their budget, hiring and grading flexibilities to launch competency-based education (CBE)*

*and updated grading systems. CBE provides every student with the right amount of time to master each concept before moving on to the next. The updated grading system allowed teachers to focus on student progress rather than use traditional numerical scales.*

*To come up with this solution, the team did a deep data analysis, engaged staff through a teacher-led design team and collaborated with families. The resulting system they put into place was a true reflection of the school community's priorities, supporting innovative teaching for the real world.*

All 33 RSS school teams created unique plans like this one to serve their students' exact needs. And it's working—from lower absenteeism to excitement about school, concept retention and more, the teams are seeing a real, positive difference for their students.



## Learn More

Learn more about the leadership mindsets that enabled RSS leaders to bring Renewal to life here: [resources.rssrenewal.org/case-study/leadership/](https://resources.rssrenewal.org/case-study/leadership/)

See what this looks like in action in Renewal schools here: [resources.rssrenewal.org](https://resources.rssrenewal.org)