

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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.

That's why the RSS team called state legislators with a bold request. **We asked for charter-like flexibility that would empower our schools and local Board of Education with more autonomy**. The policymakers were inspired by our data and experience-backed vision. They introduced legislation, which passed in less than a month. North Carolina's Renewal district was born!

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 school leaders across the country can try in their own districts.

This Executive Summary offers a peak at many of our case studies, highlighting how key staff led change in our district and previewing how schools embraced this flexibility to meet the needs of their students and communities.

A Look at Leadership

Understanding how RSS Renewal came to be means understanding the leadership approaches, community engagement and legislative collaboration that helped drive change. *What did it really take? What lessons did leaders learn? And, how can this be replicated?*

ORIGIN STORY CASE STUDY

Taking Renewal from an idea to implementation:



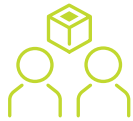
STARTED WITH THE NEED AND THE VISION FOR CHANGE

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 reimagined 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



LEADERSHIP MINDSETS CASE STUDY

In 2018, RSS leaders—a committed, trusting group of central staff working alongside a superintendent with a bold vision—came together to take on transformational change in our district.

While each leader came to the table with different experiences, perspectives and skills, RSS leaders embraced five core leadership mindsets that truly set them (and ultimately the district) up for success.

To learn more about how these mindsets helped bring about innovation in our district, check out our full case study: Leadership Mindsets: Understanding how leaders reimagined teaching and learning.



Before you say no, you have to say maybe.”

ANDREW J. SMITH
FORMER CHIEF INNOVATION OFFICER
AND CURRENT ASSISTANT STATE SUPERINTENDENT—
NC DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION



MINDSET 1:

Have the courage to identify a need



MINDSET 2:

A team of leaders must be grounded in the “why”



MINDSET 3:

Collaborative leadership doesn't require full consensus



MINDSET 4:

Stakeholder engagement is necessary, powerful work



MINDSET 5:

Embrace the challenges of transformative change bravely

School Change in Action

RSS empowered school leaders to choose their own paths, and to pursue innovation based on the specific needs and priorities of each school and its community. Teaching and learning looks different in each school in our district, but schools are all guided by the same directional model for student success and grounded in the same vision. These case studies explore what change looked like in each school and why.



MORGAN ELEMENTARY CASE STUDY



LOCATION
GOLD HILL, NC

GRADES
PRE-K-5

SIZE
~300 STUDENTS

CHALLENGE:

Kids mastered concepts at different speeds—with some falling behind and others held back from their full potential as a result.

SOLUTION:

The school launched competency-based education and updated grading systems.

RENEWAL FLEXIBILITIES USED:

The school used their budget, hiring and grading flexibilities.

Now, at Morgan Elementary, kids learn at their own pace and master skills before moving to the next one, building a strong foundation.

Kids don't simply master the concepts. They understand what they are learning and why they are learning it—and get excited to do so. Through these personalized and unique learning experiences, every Morgan Elementary student starts middle school with the right skills to succeed.

Read the full case study: [Link: [Morgan Elementary Case Study](#)]

KNOLLWOOD ELEMENTARY CASE STUDY



LOCATION
SALISBURY, NC

GRADES
PRE-K-5

SIZE
~500 STUDENTS

CHALLENGE:

Students weren't retaining concepts, and were struggling with subjects like reading and vocabulary as well.

SOLUTION:

The school launched an expeditionary learning model and incorporated project-based learning, too.

RENEWAL FLEXIBILITIES USED:

The team used hiring, budget and scheduling flexibility.

At Knollwood Elementary, learning is bigger than simply addressing academic standards—learning helps children see how big the world truly is.

Today, at Knollwood, kids build curiosity about the world around them. They connect academics with real-world concepts—and understand that by combining both, they can create their own paths forward. Students are excited to learn and to experience the world and the opportunities available to them.

Read the full case study: [Link: [Knollwood Elementary Case Study](#)]

WEST ROWAN HIGH SCHOOL CASE STUDY



LOCATION
MT. ULLA, NC

GRADES
9-12

SIZE
~1,100 STUDENTS

CHALLENGE:

Through no fault of their own, students were struggling to plan for their futures, find their purpose and understand the value of graduating.

SOLUTION:

The school is focused on a comprehensive set of programs to help students prepare for their futures, including career technical education, mentoring and life skills teaching.

RENEWAL FLEXIBILITIES USED:

The school used their budget, hiring and scheduling flexibilities.

At West Rowan High School, the team has a bold vision: every single student will have a plan when they walk across the graduation stage, from enrollment to enlistment to employment. Students have the opportunity to explore what they're passionate about while still in high school, from internships to hands-on CTE courses right on their campus. Kids are heard, supported and celebrated for who they are and what they want to do with life—helping them build the right skills to succeed in their chosen field.

Read the full case study: [Link: [West Rowan High School Case Study](#)]

SHIVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CASE STUDY



LOCATION
ROCKWELL, NC

GRADES
K-5

SIZE
~450 STUDENTS

CHALLENGE:

Like thousands of kids across the country, Shive students needed additional support with math, social-emotional skills and figuring out what they are passionate about.

SOLUTION:

The school created a customized set of programs for kids, including life skills education, building in real world experiences to the curriculum, specific math support and a mentor program.

RENEWAL FLEXIBILITIES USED:

The school used their budget, calendar and scheduling flexibilities.

At Shive Elementary, the team focuses on the whole child with one core goal: providing every child with the best foundation they can through enriching experiences, academics and the right support. Students have the opportunity to explore what they're passionate about at an early age so they have plenty of time to learn and grow. From one-on-one mentoring to clubs for every student, Shive Elementary ensures that every child has the confidence and support that will help them pursue their dreams.

Read the full case study: [Link: [Shive Elementary Case Study](#)]

NORTH ROWAN HIGH CASE STUDY



LOCATION
SPENCER, NC

GRADES
9-12

SIZE
~600 STUDENTS

CHALLENGE:

The traditional education system wasn't connecting with students, or teaching them the right SEL skills to thrive. As a result, students weren't excited about school, and the school faced high absentee and discipline rates.

SOLUTION:

North Rowan created a curriculum focused on design thinking, problem-based learning, real-life experiences and SEL, making learning come alive for students—and catering to their individual interests and strengths, too.

RENEWAL FLEXIBILITIES USED:

The school used their budget, calendar and scheduling flexibilities.

At North Rowan High School, the team works to nurture and encourage students to cultivate their own unique passions and gifts for academics, careers and life.

North Rowan wants every student to have a personalized learning experience—one that sets them up for lifelong success. They focus not only on academics, but on life skills that will help every student thrive in school and beyond.

Read the full case study: [[Link: North Rowan High School Case Study](#)]

SOUTH ROWAN HIGH CASE STUDY



LOCATION
CHINA GROVE, NC

GRADES
9-12

SIZE
~1000 STUDENTS

CHALLENGE:

The school found that their courses overfocused on preparing kids for standardized tests, missing out on opportunities to strengthen student engagement. As a result, some students were not as engaged in their school work as they could be—and didn't feel like they were learning the right life skills, either.

SOLUTION:

The school created a customized set of programs for students, including competency-based education, Pivot Education—which combines multiple subjects into one course—and building in real world experiences to the curriculum.

RENEWAL FLEXIBILITIES USED:

The school used their budget, hiring, calendar and scheduling flexibilities.

At South Rowan, the team has a simple vision: to provide the right supports for students so they are achieving and accepted for who they are, every day. Educators

focus on teaching every student in the way they like to learn—in the way that helps them learn best. As a result, students can explore what they are passionate about as they make career decisions, take classes that make course materials real and build excitement about the future, too.

Read the full case study: [[Link: South Rowan High School Case Study](#)]