

# High School Graduation Project Requirement Should Remain a Local School District Decision

A presentation to the Joint Legislative Program  
Evaluation Oversight Committee

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# Evaluation Team

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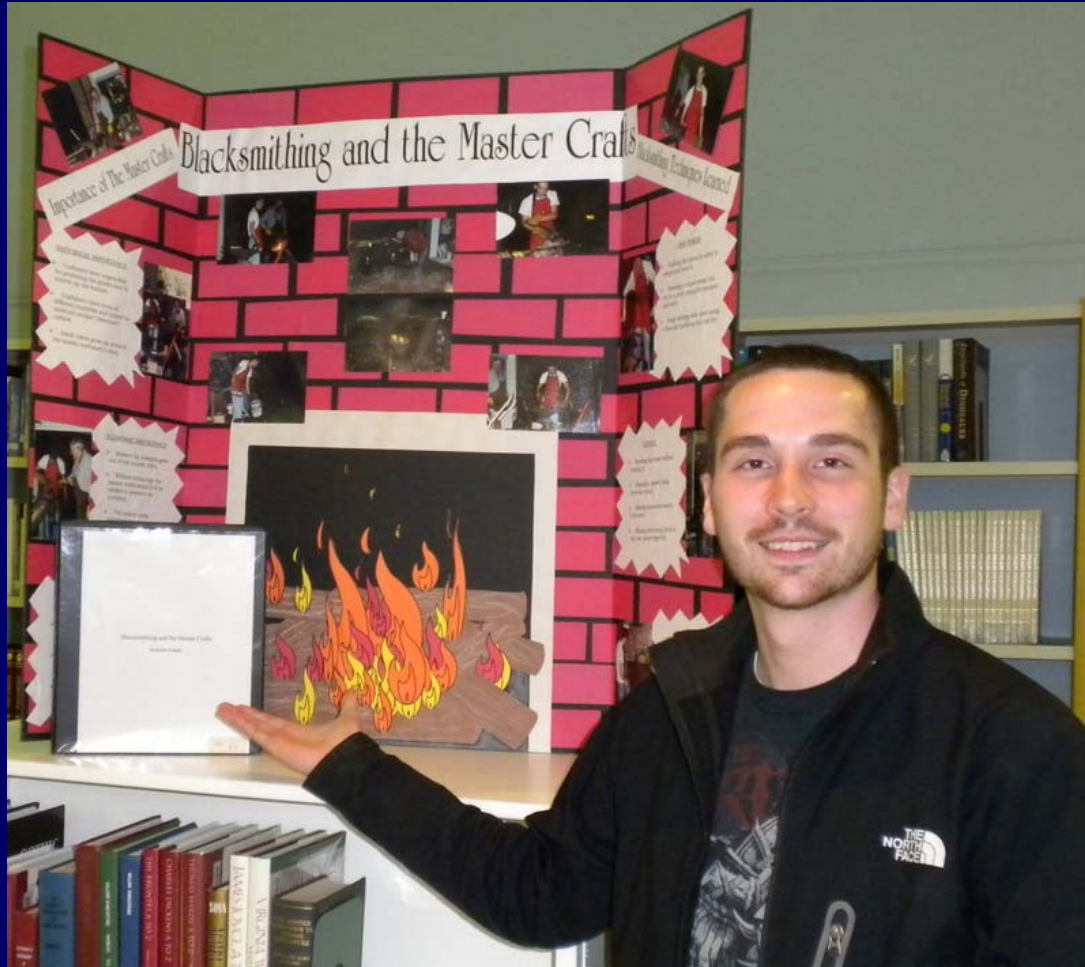


# Overview

- Cost of implementing state model is estimated at \$6.6 million for the first year and \$5.8 million for each year thereafter
- No compelling evidence that completing culminating projects improves student outcomes
- Initial implementation of state model lacked necessary elements
- **Recommendation: Project requirement should remain a local school district decision**



# Background



# Rationale

- 2005 State Board of Education Mandate
  - Required that all public high school students, starting with the class of 2010, complete a graduation project
- Session Law 2009-60
  - Suspended the mandate until July 1, 2011
  - Directed the Program Evaluation Division to evaluate the cost and effectiveness of a statewide requirement

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# Data Sources

- Survey of all public high school principals
- Site visits to schools and districts
  - Administrators, Teachers, Students, Mentors
- State Board of Education and Department of Public Instruction
- Education and business groups
- Studies on culminating projects

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# Culminating Projects Have Been Around for Nearly 25 Years

- Some North Carolina schools began requiring projects in 1994
- Schools typically had students complete projects in their senior English courses
- 69% of surveyed schools required that students in the Class of 2010 complete a project

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# North Carolina Graduation Project

- Goals:
  - Standardize the requirement across schools
  - Make the experience available to all students
- Performance-based assessment of students' ability to integrate knowledge, skills, and performance within a topic area of their choosing

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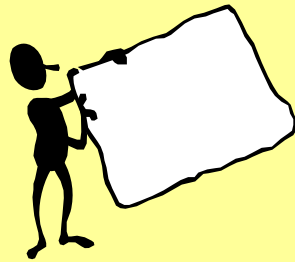


# North Carolina Graduation Project

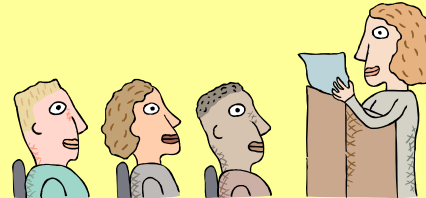
## Model Components



**Paper**



**Product**



**Presentation**



**Portfolio**

## Distinctive Model Features

- 4-year high school experience
- School-wide responsibility

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# Findings



## **Finding 1.**

**Cost of implementing state model is estimated at \$6.6 million for the first year and \$5.8 million for each year thereafter**

# Very Few Schools Follow State Model

North Carolina Graduation Project Model Components	Schools (n=360)
Students complete <b>4 components</b>	73%
Students start projects in <b>9th grade</b>	22%
Projects part of <b>courses other than English</b>	19%
4 components + 9th grade + courses other than English	6%

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# Current Costs

- Districts and schools have implemented requirements with existing resources
  - Districts spent \$708 per school in 2008-09
  - Schools spent \$7,214 in 2008-09

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# Projected Cost If Model Implemented Statewide

Categories	Costs
Coordinator compensation	\$ 5,106,886
Printing and supplies	395,514
Mentor background checks	224,736
Training and technical assistance	749,572 (one-time cost)
District costs	81,420
<b>Projected total first-year costs</b>	<b>\$ 6,558,128</b>
<b>Projected on-going annual costs</b>	<b>\$ 5,808,556</b>



**Finding 2.**  
**Studies on effectiveness have  
limited designs and  
produced mixed results**



# Limited Research Designs

- According to U.S. Department of Education, strong evidence of effectiveness requires
  - Randomized control studies
  - At multiple sites
- Only three studies have examined outcomes of culminating projects
- None of the studies had randomized designs

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# Studies Produced Mixed Results

- Studies examined perceived learning and confidence in project skills
- Findings regarding skills were inconclusive

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**Finding 3.**  
**Support is based on**  
**anecdotes and self reports**



# Benefits of Culminating Projects

- Culminating projects may offer students a learning experience that is not be captured by the traditional curriculum
- Graduation projects may encourage businesses and communities to get involved in schools

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**Finding 4.**  
**Initial implementation of state  
model lacked necessary elements**



# Missing Elements for Effective Implementation

- Program model
- Needs assessment
- Pilot studies
- Stakeholder engagement
- Centralized support
- Evaluation

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# Recommendation



# Local Option

General Assembly should direct the State Board of Education to delegate authority to school districts to decide whether to implement a graduation project requirement

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# Summary

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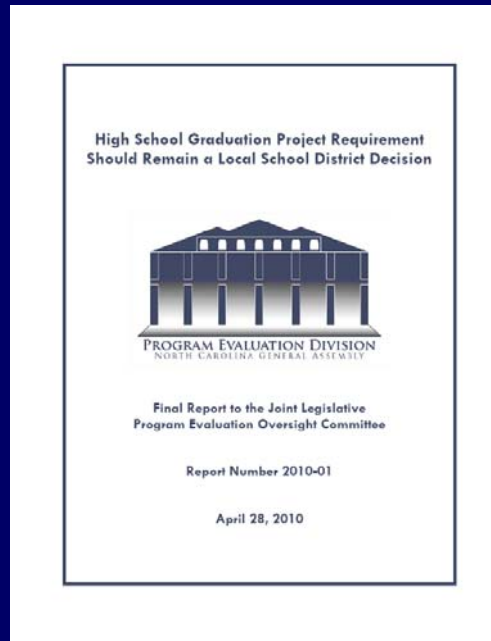
# Summary

- Program Evaluation Division recommends the project requirement remain a local school district decision
- Department of Public Instruction does not concur with this recommendation and their response is at the end of the report
- Mandate could be reinstated because legislation suspending it expires July 1, 2011



**Report available online at**

**[www.ncleg.net/PED/Reports/reports.html](http://www.ncleg.net/PED/Reports/reports.html)**



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