



# THE PROJECT L.I.F.T. STORY

*Early Lessons from a  
Public-Private Education Turnaround Initiative*

Juli Kim and Shonaka Ellison | **Public Impact**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



The authors thank the members of the Project L.I.F.T. board and staff, principals and teachers of L.I.F.T. schools, and the many West Charlotte and greater Charlotte community members for their willingness to share their insights about Project L.I.F.T. In particular, the authors thank Denise Watts, Project L.I.F.T. Learning Community Superintendent, for her collaboration on research and feedback on drafting, and Carol Morris, assistant director of the Robinson Center for Civic Leadership at the Foundation For The Carolinas, for her overall project guidance. The authors would also like to thank the following people from Public Impact: Bryan C. Hassel and Lucy Steiner for their review and feedback; Shelby Boast, Charles Caron, and Margaret Hassel for transcribing interview notes; Lyria Boast, Grayson Cooper, and Olivia Perry for providing data analysis; Sharon Kebschull Barrett for copyediting; and Beverley Tyndall for leading the production process. We thank Jacky Woolsey for design and layout.

© 2015 Project L.I.F.T., Charlotte, NC

Public Impact's mission is to dramatically improve learning outcomes for all children in the U.S., with a special focus on students who are not served well. 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. For more on Public Impact, please visit [www.publicimpact.com](http://www.publicimpact.com).

Public Impact and Project L.I.F.T. encourage the free use, reproduction, and distribution of this paper for noncommercial use. **We require attribution for all use.**

Please cite this report as:

Public Impact: Kim, J., & Ellison, S. (2015). *The Project L.I.F.T. story: Early lessons from a public-private education turnaround initiative*. Chapel Hill, NC: Public Impact. Retrieved from [www.projectliftcharlotte.org](http://www.projectliftcharlotte.org)

PUBLIC IMPACT

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

5	<b>Introduction</b>
6	<b>Mission and Purpose</b>
7	<i>Strategy for closing the achievement gap</i>
10	<i>Funds to support reform strategy</i>
11	<i>Implementing the reform strategy</i>
17	<b>Creating the Public-Private Partnership</b>
17	<i>Governing board</i>
19	<i>Dual accountability</i>
20	<i>District role</i>
22	<i>Budget</i>
25	<b>Strategic Framework</b>
25	<i>Talent</i>
31	<i>Time</i>
37	<i>Technology</i>
39	<i>Parent and community engagement</i>
43	<b>Assessing Impact</b>
43	<i>External Evaluation of L.I.F.T. by Research for Action</i>
44	<i>Early successes</i>
46	<i>Challenges ahead</i>
53	<b>Early Lessons</b>
57	<b>Conclusions</b>







## INTRODUCTION

**W**est Charlotte High School in Charlotte, North Carolina, was once a storied model of racial integration. Children of some of Charlotte’s wealthiest families attended West Charlotte along with the children of the West Charlotte corridor. The school produced a number of graduates, African-American and white, who grew up to achieve local, state, and national prominence. But by the 2009–10 school year, West Charlotte held the ignominious distinction of graduating the fewest number of students of all high schools in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS).

Now a group of funders from some of Charlotte’s leading and largest foundations are working with the district to reverse the graduation trend at West Charlotte High School. The broader goal is to identify and demonstrate strategies that turn around low-performing schools, which CMS may replicate district-wide. Presently just past the midway point in implementation, Project L.I.F.T. (Leadership & Investment For Transformation) is an initiative that other communities are watching and considering emulating. From the outset, the funder group supporting Project L.I.F.T. intended it to be an experiment from which the funders, the district, and others in communities elsewhere might learn how education reform happens. The funders commissioned this case study to capture the lessons of Project L.I.F.T. to date.

Drawing from a review of key project-related documents and reports, media articles, and dozens of interviews with Project L.I.F.T. funders, district leaders, staff and school personnel, and community members, we look at the Project L.I.F.T. story so far—its genesis, implementation, and initial outcomes and indicators of success. In telling Project L.I.F.T.’s story, we elevate some of the lessons the funders and district have learned as the story has unfolded.



## MISSION AND PURPOSE

In the 1970s, the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education*<sup>1</sup> thrust Charlotte into the national spotlight as a harbinger of district-wide integrated public schools. For decades, Charlotte remained a model for the country of how a school district could successfully and peacefully desegregate its schools. Federal court decisions in the late 1990s ended court oversight of the district's desegregation efforts, and the district adopted a school assignment plan based on neighborhood schools with limited choice through mechanisms such as magnet programs. Given the city's largely segregated housing patterns, the district's schools began to reflect the immediate communities they served. Soon the achievement gap between schools with high populations of low-income and minority students and other district schools became increasingly evident (see "School Desegregation in Charlotte," page 8).

Though CMS had earned national recognition in the early 2000s for gains made in student academic achievement overall, the achievement gap between low-income and minority students and others continued to present a tremendous challenge. In 2006, the district hired Superintendent Peter Gorman to execute a refined mission to "maximize achievement by every student in every school."<sup>2</sup> Focused on improving teacher quality and student achievement, the district, under Gorman's leadership, implemented new reforms to turn around low-performing schools, cultivated significant new district partnerships with national foundations, and strengthened relationships with Teach For America and Communities in Schools. Gorman also developed a critical relationship with the C.D. Spangler Foundation, a longtime funder of public education in North Carolina.



Meanwhile, the Foundation For The Carolinas had engaged some of Charlotte's leading foundations in funder collaboratives addressing community and nonprofit challenges from the 2008 recession. Through these initiatives, Anna Spangler Nelson of the C.D. Spangler Foundation and Tom Lawrence of the Leon Levine Foundation developed a relationship that revealed a common interest in identifying a way that funders could work together to address the district's academic achievement gap with greater impact than any of the funders had had individually.

Nelson and Lawrence took their ideas to Gorman and leaders of Charlotte's largest family and corporate foundations. With the help of Foundation For The Carolinas (see "Foundation For The Carolinas," page 12), Nelson and Lawrence formed the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Investment Study Group, comprising Charlotte's major foundations; prominent city leaders, including then-Mayor Anthony Foxx; and CMS leadership to participate in a planning process that would ultimately result in the development of a strategy to close the achievement gap.

## Strategy for closing the achievement gap

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Investment Study Group first convened in summer 2010. From the outset, the funders adopted a learning stance. With district help, the group embarked on a systematic and iterative process of researching what works to close gaps, consulting with leading experts on models and initiatives that had been effective in boosting student achievement in other communities, and testing those ideas in a series of forums intended to engage the community in the planning process.

Four key areas of investment emerged from the group's learning process: Time, Talent, Technology, and Parent and Community Engagement. Notably, the Technology pillar arose based on feedback the group received through its early community engagement process. Though other investment areas were considered, including a pre-kindergarten component and a residential school for at-risk students, reasonable expectations about the funds that could be raised to support a collective initiative played a role in narrowing the focal points. Funding pre-K programs, for instance, would have required most of the grant funding considered at the time. In its final report, the CMS Study Group observed:

The evidence is conclusive among researchers and educators that focusing on these four areas can yield the greatest return on investment for improved student achievement, with talent—excellent principals and effective teachers—as the most critical school-based factor. We heard resounding endorsement for this focus from parents, teachers and others through our community engagement efforts.<sup>3</sup>

The funders also recognized the impact a targeted collective effort could have versus a district-wide initiative. They reasoned that focusing on just one of the district's learning communities would most readily allow the funders and district to

**From the outset, the funders adopted a learning stance.**

**The funders also recognized the impact a targeted collective effort could have versus a district-wide initiative.**

## School desegregation in Charlotte

Charlotte's school desegregation is closely tied to the city's history of residential segregation. Chartered as a courthouse town in 1768, Charlotte existed as an agricultural trading village where work and residence intermingled, and during the slavery era, black slaves lived on the property of white slave owners. Even after the Civil War, black and white residents continued to live in close proximity in Charlotte. But as the city became increasingly industrialized beginning in the 1880s, residential housing patterns grew more segregated along economic and racial lines. By the 1920s, Charlotte was a patchwork of black and white neighborhoods, which gave way over the next four decades to "pie-shaped wedges

defined by race and income."<sup>1</sup> Wealthy white residents concentrated in southeast Charlotte, with less-wealthy whites in the northeast and southwest, and black residents on the northwest side. Schools generally reflected this pattern of segregation, and despite district efforts beginning in 1957 to integrate schools following the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, CMS schools remained largely segregated.<sup>2</sup>

Then, in 1970, a federal court ordered the school district to use busing to integrate the district's schools. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the decision the following year, and *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*<sup>3</sup> became a landmark precedent for other





court-mandated desegregation cases. As a school district comprising both city and county schools,<sup>4</sup> CMS implemented its busing plan across the entire county, a move credited with reducing “white flight” to the suburbs.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, although Charlotte experienced some protests and open racism, the transition to integrated schools occurred with much less violence than in other U.S. cities, such as Little Rock, Arkansas, and Boston. By 1974, Charlotte had become a national model for integration, as “the city that made it work,” and solidified its standing as a truly progressive Southern city.<sup>6</sup>

In the early 1990s, the district adopted a program of magnet schools as an alternate integration method to busing and used a system of racial quotas to ensure a balance of white and minority students at each magnet school reflective of the district’s overall racial balance.<sup>7</sup> In 1997, a group of white parents filed a lawsuit against the district seeking an end to the use of racial quotas to assign students to magnets, and seeking a declaration that the district had become legally desegregated and thus fulfilled its court-ordered obligations

under *Swann*.<sup>8</sup> The *Swann* plaintiffs requested that the *Swann* case be re-opened, charging that the district still maintained the characteristics of a segregated school system and that the use of racial quotas to determine magnet school enrollment was constitutional. The two cases were consolidated, and in 1999, a federal district court declared that the district had become legally desegregated, or in legal parlance, achieved “unitary” status.<sup>9</sup> By 2002, the district adopted a student assignment plan based on neighborhood schools. Housing in Charlotte was largely segregated by race and socioeconomic class, so, four decades after busing, CMS schools were largely re-segregated, with minority and low-income students concentrated in Charlotte’s inner city and white, more affluent students in suburban schools. West Charlotte High School became nearly 90 percent black. Great teachers left West Charlotte, and the needs of high-need students became more pronounced. By the 2009–10 school year, West Charlotte High School’s 51 percent graduation rate was the lowest in the district. ♦

---

1. Hanchett, T. (1998). *Sorting out the New South city: Race, class and urban development in Charlotte, 1875–1975*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

2. In 1964, 57 CMS schools were white and 31 were black.

3. 402 U.S. 1 (1971)

4. Charlotte City Schools and Mecklenburg County Schools merged in 1960 to form Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools; for more history, see <http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/mediaroom/aboutus/Pages/History.aspx> At the time, the city schools were predominately black and the county schools were predominately white. Bradshaw, K. A. (n.d.). *Charlotte, NC: Birthplace (and place of death) of integration in public schools*. Retrieved from <http://carolinahistory.web.unc.edu/charlotte-nc-birthplace-and-place-of-death-of-integration-in-public-schools/>

5. Eaton, S., & Orfield, G. *Dismantling desegregation: the quiet reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*. New York: New Press, 1996.

6. Brown, V., & Rab, L. (2014, September). In the rearview mirror: Busing in Charlotte. *Charlotte Magazine*. Retrieved from

<http://www.charlottemagazine.com/Charlotte-Magazine/September-2014/In-the-Rearview-Mirror-Busing-in-Charlotte/>

7. In *Capacchione v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools*, a federal district court reviewed the CMS magnet program and found that the district first filled magnet school seats by giving priority to students in surrounding neighborhoods and siblings, then filled remaining seats by selecting students from a black lottery and non-black lottery until a 40 percent black and 60 percent white racial balance was achieved. The district’s 1992 student assignment plan provided that spaces in magnet schools would be allocated to a percentage of black students equal to the system-wide percentage of black students.

8. *Cappachione v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, 57 F. Supp.2d 228 (1999)

9. On appeal, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the lower court’s finding. *Belk v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, 269 F.3d 305 (4th Cir. 2001).

concentrate and test evidence-based strategies. The group decided to concentrate its efforts on the West Charlotte corridor student feeder zone. Among all CMS high schools, West Charlotte's graduation rate was the lowest, at 51 percent.<sup>4</sup> Further, the CMS Study Group noted that the West Charlotte corridor is "an area where community support is strong and opportunities to leverage community resources are significant. If we can achieve success in the most challenged area of the community, we can learn from and replicate those successes elsewhere."<sup>5</sup> (See "West Charlotte Corridor," page 15.)

Although the group targeted the West Charlotte corridor, it clearly intended that successes there would be replicated in other CMS schools and feeder zones, and that the initiative would be a learning laboratory not only for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district but for urban districts across the state and nation. In addition, the study group recognized that the initiative would require collaboration with community partners to provide important out-of-school supports that students need to be successful in school, and policy changes at the state level that would provide flexibility to pursue bold innovations underlying the L.I.F.T. intervention strategy.

Reflecting the funders' learning stance, the final report of the CMS Study Group concluded:

In many respects, Project L.I.F.T. will be an experiment—an experiment in discovering what works best to shift school culture, student performance and community engagement in high poverty schools. We realize the task ahead will not be easy, particularly as CMS continues to face budget challenges. Success is not guaranteed, even though our planning framework is based upon sound, evidence-based practice. If we want to succeed, we have to be willing to fail. As investors and community leaders, we're willing to take that risk. The possibility of closing the achievement gap is worth the investment of our time, talent and resources.<sup>6</sup>

## **Funds to support reform strategy**

With a strategy in place, the group was able to shape a project budget. The CMS Study Group funders collectively committed \$40.5 million and agreed on a five-year implementation period. Specific implementation initiatives and activities were yet to be determined, but the strategy suggested informed what support each of the four pillars would require. The funders considered several "scenario" budgets, ranging from "the sky is the limit" to minimum required investments. The final \$55 million budget reflected a balance between the money presumed necessary for the initiative to reach its goals and the amount the funder collaborative pledged. Moreover, the difference between the budget and pledges presented a reasonable goal for fundraising from other sources.

## Implementing the reform strategy

On January 31, 2011, the funder collaborative and district formally announced Project L.I.F.T. They used the 2011–12 school year for planning, with implementation in 2012–13.

With nearly three-quarters of the budget committed and the mission and purpose clear, the funders needed someone to develop a strategy implementation plan and raise the remaining \$15 million. The funder collaborative and district worked together to develop a job description for an executive director. Denise Watts, an acclaimed CMS principal with a proven record as a school turnaround leader, emerged as the clear front-runner. She assumed her duties in August 2011.

### Project L.I.F.T. Goals

With only one year to plan, Watts immediately started developing an implementation plan that would put the four pillars of the L.I.F.T. strategic framework into place. Her plan crystallized Project L.I.F.T.'s goals. To improve academic outcomes in the West Charlotte corridor and become a sustainable and replicable school improvement model, Project L.I.F.T. adopted three goals:<sup>7</sup>

- 90 percent of West Charlotte High School students will graduate on time.
- 90 percent of L.I.F.T. students will achieve proficiency in reading and math.
- 90 percent of students in the West Charlotte corridor will achieve more than one year's growth goal in one year's time.





## Foundation For The Carolinas

**A**s a community foundation, Foundation For The Carolinas (FFTC) is a public charity that holds and allocates philanthropic funds on behalf of individuals, families, corporations, nonprofits, and other community organizations and collectives. Like most community foundations, FFTC plays a key role in identifying and addressing challenges and problems in the community it serves. As the largest community foundation in North Carolina, and one of the largest in the country, FFTC has effectively used its position and assets to elevate its civic leadership role in Charlotte and its satellite communities. For example, the foundation's infrastructure includes a formal program, the Robinson Center for Civic Leadership, that connects individuals based on their civic interests and facilitates collective engagement to address pressing needs and issues in the community.

It was this kind of activity that helped nurture relationships among the funders who would ultimately support L.I.F.T. During the 2008 recession, FFTC, through the Robinson Center, led a Community Catalyst Fund initiative that brought together funders to help address financial challenges that local nonprofits faced in the economic decline. Both the Levine Family Foundation and the C.D. Spangler Foundation provided significant support, and through this work Tom Lawrence and Anna Spangler Nelson connected.

With its convening and problem-solving experience, Foundation For The Carolinas was a natural resource to whom Lawrence and Nelson turned for help in realizing their idea for organizing collective funder support for district reform. Ultimately, the foundation would become a funding partner in

addition to providing administrative and financial supports and services at critical junctures of L.I.F.T.'s development and implementation.

The foundation convened funders and coordinated and facilitated the CMS Study Group learning agenda. Access to consultant resources enhanced the foundation's capacity to inform development of the learning agenda, project budget, and coordination of initial community engagement activities.

The foundation's infrastructure allowed L.I.F.T. to become a program within its Robinson Center for Civic Leadership rather than becoming a new nonprofit. While the foundation receives an annual payment of \$50,000 for its fund management services from the foundation's CMS grant-making affiliate, some L.I.F.T. supports provided by the foundation are funded through the Robinson Center program, and are not assessed against the L.I.F.T. budget, which helps reduce the amount of the \$55 million spent on administration.

With more than \$1.5 billion in assets, Foundation For The Carolinas has the capacity to manage the L.I.F.T. funds. The foundation created a fund for L.I.F.T. that is managed within the Robinson Center for Civic Leadership program and maintains a separate fund for grants from one of the L.I.F.T. foundations that had certain extra restrictions. As fund manager, the foundation pays L.I.F.T. bills, though its role in this regard is limited to transactional administration. While the L.I.F.T. board has oversight of how L.I.F.T. funds are spent and reviews expenditures annually, the foundation has more responsibility for L.I.F.T.'s revenue, including monitoring payments on pledges. ♦

As Watts has noted, lesser goals may have been more reasonable and attainable, but L.I.F.T. needed aspirational goals to excite and inspire people working to advance L.I.F.T., particularly its leaders and teachers. In hindsight, the goals present a challenge. If L.I.F.T. does not meet the 90-90-90 goals, now well-publicized, the initiative and the significant investment behind it risks being seen as a failure. However, as the CMS Study Group noted in its final report, “System change takes time and perseverance.” Nonetheless, the group set an ambitious timeline of five years.

Changes in state student performance measures complicated matters for L.I.F.T. Unforeseen when the strategic plan was developed, North Carolina realigned end-of-year state assessments with the Common Core for State Standards adopted by the state in 2010. These new assessments, effective in 2012-13, resulted in dramatic declines in proficiency rates statewide. Moreover, these changes reflected a significant shift for teachers and students. Teachers were challenged to align their teaching and instruction to the new state standards, and many students experienced shifts in testing outcomes due to the tests’ increased rigor. For L.I.F.T., the new assessments meant a higher bar to meet the 90 percent proficiency goal, and less-meaningful comparisons in student growth and achievement between the first and second years of L.I.F.T. implementation. Suddenly, meeting the 90-90-90 goals within five years seemed more out of reach.

The year after the new assessments became effective, the State Board of Education adjusted the achievement levels for the state’s end-of-year tests. Essentially, the state added a new level into its achievement measurement scale and adopted new college and career readiness standards effective in 2013-14. These adjustments effectively lowered the on-grade-level proficiency thresholds (or the standards for success at the next grade level) for students across all assessments, but established higher college- and career-readiness proficiency standards (or the standards for being successful after high school graduation).<sup>8</sup> For L.I.F.T., the new standards again changed the meaning of the 90 percent proficiency goal: Though more students would meet grade-level standards, the ultimate proficiency measure, college- and career-readiness, had been raised.

Given the lessons the Charlotte philanthropic community and district have already learned about setting goals, unforeseen circumstances outside of the district’s control, and time frames, L.I.F.T. has become the learning lab it was intended to be for urban districts. Since L.I.F.T.’s inception, several other public-private partnerships have emerged in Charlotte to address community challenges. One endeavor, Read Charlotte, is focused on improving literacy among district students and was spearheaded by one of the foundations supporting L.I.F.T. and joined by other L.I.F.T. funders. Its goal for seeing sustainable results is 10 years.

## West Charlotte Corridor

**W**est Charlotte High School and its feeder schools are situated in an area of Charlotte known as the northwest corridor, which began as suburbs developed in the early 1900s especially for black middle-class residents. Washington Heights, roughly in the center of the current West Charlotte High School feeder zone, was among the first of such suburbs to open in 1913 as a “streetcar suburb” at the edge of Charlotte connected to the city by a trolley line. Given the prevalence in that era of real estate covenants restricting ownership and use of Charlotte suburban buildings to whites, savvy real estate developers built Washington Heights, named after black educator Booker T. Washington, and partnered with one of the city’s black leaders and capitalists to help sell new homes to middle-income black residents.<sup>1</sup> In 1938 the Charlotte school board decided to build West Charlotte High School to serve students living in Washington Heights and neighboring “black suburbs.”<sup>2</sup> Along with federal urban renewal policies, West Charlotte High School helped attract black families to Charlotte’s northwest side. The school was relocated to its current site in 1955 and “instantly became the city’s flagship African American educational facility.”<sup>3</sup>

Historically, the northwest corridor has been the center of Charlotte’s black community and an epicenter of black leadership. Biddle Institute was established there following the Civil War to educate leaders among newly freed African-Americans, becoming Johnson C. Smith University in 1923.<sup>4</sup> The black middle class, including teachers and principals, doctors, ministers, and businessmen, anchored the northwest corridor beginning in the early 1900s. Today, many black leaders in Charlotte and North Carolina state history have ties

to the northwest corridor, including Sarah Stevenson, who in 1980 became the first African-American woman elected to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board; Kelly Alexander, Sr., statewide chair of the NAACP from 1948 to 1984; Fred Alexander, the first African-American to win a seat on the city council in the 20th century; leading civil rights attorney Julius Chambers; Shirley Fulton, North Carolina’s first African-American female superior court judge; and former Charlotte mayor Anthony Foxx, who graduated from West Charlotte High School in 1989, and currently serves as U.S. Secretary of Transportation.<sup>5</sup>

For decades, West Charlotte High remained an all-black high school. When Charlotte began busing in 1971, West Charlotte was one of few of the black high schools to stay open. White students from some of Charlotte’s wealthiest and elite neighborhoods began attending West Charlotte. The school’s facilities were improved with the arrival of the white students,<sup>6</sup> who changed the student body composition to 40 percent white and 60 percent black. Attendance boycotts and fighting in the first year soon gave way to efforts among students to get along. Within a few years, West Charlotte had become such an exemplar of successful integration that four white students from a Boston high school struggling with integration visited the school to see firsthand what successful racial integration looked like.<sup>7</sup> West Charlotte graduates from the 1970s to 1990s, including Project L.I.F.T. Co-Chair Anna Spangler Nelson, speak with pride about the strong relationships built among white and black students, the benefits of attending school with students of other races, and the pride the surrounding community took in its school.<sup>8</sup> ♦

1. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission. (n.d.). *Washington Heights*. Retrieved from <http://www.cmhpf.org/kids/neighborhoods/WashHts.html>; Hanchett, T. (n.d.). *The growth of Charlotte: A history*. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission. Retrieved from <http://www.cmhpf.org/educargrowth.htm>

2. Rhue, M., Johnson, T. A., Griffin, W. (2009, June 16 revised). *African American History Timeline: Charlotte, North Carolina, 1700s–1980*. Johnson C. Smith Library. Retrieved from [\[library.jcsu.edu/biddlequintet/history/Biddle-History-Charlotte%27s%20African%20American%20History%20Timelinex.pdf\]\(http://library.jcsu.edu/biddlequintet/history/Biddle-History-Charlotte%27s%20African%20American%20History%20Timelinex.pdf\) /](http://</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

3. Hanchett, T. (2014). Neighborhood history around Johnson C. Smith University in Ron Stodghill (Ed.), *Let There Be Light: Exploring How Charlotte’s Historic West End is Shaping a New South*. Charlotte, N.C.: Johnson C. Smith University. Retrieved from <http://www.historysouth.org/jcsu>



4. Hanchett, T. (2014). Neighborhood history around Johnson C. Smith University.

5. Hanchett, T. (2014). Neighborhood history around Johnson C. Smith University; Bewig, M. (n.d.). Secretary of Transportation: Who is Anthony Foxx? Allgov.com. Retrieved from <http://www.allgov.com/news/appointments-and-resignations/secretary-of-transportation-who-is-anthony-foxx-130512?news=849992>

6. Winerip, M. (2013, September 9). Desegregation and the public schools. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/09/booming/desegregation-and-the-public-schools.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/09/booming/desegregation-and-the-public-schools.html?_r=1)

7. AP Wire Service. (1974, October 21). Boston students visit Charlotte. *The Sumter Daily Item*. Retrieved from <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1979&dat=19741021&id=a38iAAAAIBAJ&sjid=BKoFAAAAIBAJ&pg=2266,2721899&hl=en>

8. American Public Media. (n.d.) An imperfect revolution: Voices from the desegregation era. Retrieved from <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/deseg/d1.html>;

American Public Media. (n.d.) Tim Gibbs. Retrieved from <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/deseg/b1.html#gibbs>; American Public Media. (n.d.) An imperfect revolution: Voices from the desegregation era [radio show transcript]. Retrieved from <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/deseg/transcript.html>; Rab, L. (2014, September). The Fall of the lions. *Charlotte Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.charlottemagazine.com/Charlotte-Magazine/September-2014/The-Fall-of-the-Lions/>; You Tube. (n.d.) West Charlotte High School Story. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1qc3dMSORk>



## L.I.F.T. Timeline

2010–2015	Project L.I.F.T. Milestones
2010	<p><b>April</b>—Tom Lawrence and Anna Nelson initiate discussions regarding a strategic funding effort to support Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) efforts to close the achievement gap</p> <p><b>September</b>—Foundation For The Carolinas convenes the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Investment Study Group</p>
2011	<p><b>January</b>—Project L.I.F.T. is announced</p> <p><b>June</b>—Peter Gorman resigns as CMS superintendent</p> <p><b>August</b>—Project L.I.F.T. hires Denise Watts as Project L.I.F.T. executive director; Watts is employed by Foundation For The Carolinas</p> <p><b>October</b>—Project L.I.F.T. 90-90-90 goals and strategic plan presented to L.I.F.T. board</p>
2012	<p><b>January</b>—CMS rehires Denise Watts as L.I.F.T. Learning Community superintendent; CMS establishes L.I.F.T. Learning Community comprising West Charlotte High School and its eight feeder schools</p> <p><b>March</b>—Watts assumes supervision of the L.I.F.T. learning community, expands L.I.F.T. staff</p> <p><b>June</b>—Knight Foundation pledge pushes Project L.I.F.T. past \$55 million fundraising goal</p> <p><b>July</b>—Heath Morrison becomes CMS superintendent</p> <p><b>August</b>—Project L.I.F.T. strategic plan is implemented in the L.I.F.T. Learning Community; new state student performance measures become effective beginning with state tests administered in 2012-13</p>
2013	<p><b>August</b>—Project L.I.F.T. implements Opportunity Culture in five schools; four schools begin operating under continuous learning calendars</p> <p><b>February</b>—Project L.I.F.T. begins distribution of 3,300 XO laptops to all K-4 students in the Project L.I.F.T. Learning Community</p>
2014	<p><b>August</b>—CMS implements Opportunity Culture in non-L.I.F.T. district schools</p> <p><b>November</b>—Heath Morrison resigns as CMS superintendent</p>
2015	<p><b>January</b>—Ann Clark becomes CMS superintendent</p>



## CREATING THE PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

From the beginning, the funders envisioned a partnership with the district that went beyond traditional models of funder-district relationships, in which funders provide support for district initiatives or the district implements initiatives that funders introduced to the district, for example. The district wanted to show that a public-private partnership could result in the level of innovation associated with the more autonomous charter school sector. To allow funders to retain decision-making authority, CMS and the funders wanted outside governance of L.I.F.T. And as the initiative had a finite lifespan, forming a new nonprofit to oversee the initiative did not make sense. After the board considered several fiduciary arrangements, Foundation For the Carolinas agreed to manage L.I.F.T. as a program within its foundation and administer the funders' pooled resources without charge (see "Foundation For The Carolinas," page 12).

*Trust is the true foundation of the partnership.*

### Governing board

Project L.I.F.T.'s governance structure demonstrates the unique nature of its approach to public-private partnership. Only 12 pieces of paper provide actual governance guidelines. Trust is the true foundation of the partnership.

The funders from the CMS Study Group whose foundations had committed support to L.I.F.T. coalesced into a board. Seven pages of bylaws dictate board operations and Project L.I.F.T.'s objectives: closing the achievement gap; collectively helping to lift up and accelerate CMS efforts to improve academic outcomes for all students; increasing the return on investment and collective impact of philanthropic





investments to close the achievement gap through support of a common agenda; and taking bold action to attain dramatic results in student achievement. The bylaws also set the terms of board membership: Only funders who committed at least \$2 million to Project L.I.F.T. may hold a voting seat, and the CMS superintendent represents the district as a non-voting member. As the bylaws also require representation of the community, the board retained from the CMS Study Group Dr. Ophelia Garmon-Brown, a physician serving the northwest corridor community who could bring perspectives of families in the West Charlotte feeder zone.

Leaders from the Leon Levine Foundation, the C.D. Spangler Foundation, Duke Energy Foundation, The Belk Foundation, Foundation For The Carolinas, Bank of America, Wells Fargo Foundation, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation have served on the board since its inception. The sitting CMS school board chair is considered an ex-officio member, though not explicitly provided for in the bylaws. (Current CMS Superintendent Ann Clark was chief academic officer when the CMS Study Group was first convened and served as an ex-officio member.) Anna Spangler Nelson of the C.D. Spangler Foundation and Richard “Stick” Williams of the Duke Energy Foundation have been board co-chairs from the start. Board members agree that Nelson, herself a West Charlotte High School graduate, has been the driving force behind the board’s efforts since the CMS Study Group was formed. The L.I.F.T. board meets monthly to review implementation and funding issues, and conducts an annual assessment of the L.I.F.T. and CMS partnership.

A memorandum of agreement (MOA) between the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education and Project L.I.F.T., titled simply, “Collaboration Agreement,” outlines the responsibilities of the district and Project L.I.F.T. Only five pages long and sparsely worded, the MOA reflects the partnership’s spirit of trust. Aside from traditional legal provisions governing the length, severability, and interpretation of the

document, the MOA essentially holds the school board responsible for employing L.I.F.T. learning community staff and the L.I.F.T. funders responsible for reimbursing the district for L.I.F.T. personnel costs. Both parties are responsible for “collaborating, consulting, and cooperating with [the other party] and its representatives to accomplish the mutual goals of the parties.”<sup>9</sup> Both parties seem satisfied with the partnership. To a person, each board member identifies trust, rooted in transparent discussions, an honest exchange of ideas, and mutual respect and appreciation as critical elements underlying Project L.I.F.T.

The effectiveness of the L.I.F.T. public-private partnership has already inspired and informed other new public-private collaborations in Charlotte. A new \$5.5 million initiative, Read Charlotte, aimed at doubling the literacy rate of CMS third-graders, is supported by a partnership that includes 14 Mecklenburg-based companies and charitable organizations, CMS, the City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, the Mecklenburg County Library, and the UNC-Charlotte College of Education.<sup>10</sup> Learning from the L.I.F.T. experience, this literacy initiative includes city and county government representatives on the governing board. L.I.F.T. has engaged city and county partners at various stages of implementation—for instance, the City of Charlotte provided L.I.F.T. its current office space, a former public library near the West Charlotte High School campus—but has no formal government representation. While he was mayor, Anthony Foxx served on the L.I.F.T. governing board until his appointment as U. S. Secretary of Transportation, but as a citizen representative, not as mayor.

## Dual accountability

Within a few months of Denise Watts becoming executive director in August 2011, as an employee of the Foundation For The Carolinas, it became apparent that she needed to be within CMS. When she was outside of CMS, Watts had no authority over schools and staff in the West Charlotte corridor. She could not get data, such as student performance, principal or teacher evaluations, and Title I funding allocations, to help her plan implementation. To Watts, the solution was evident: She needed to become a district employee again.

Reluctant to relinquish authority over L.I.F.T.’s executive director, the L.I.F.T. board considered several governance proposals. In the end, the board and CMS agreed that Watts’s position should move back into CMS under the supervision of Ann Clark, then the chief academic officer, who had represented the district in the CMS Study Group alongside Superintendent Gorman. The district’s strong desire to see L.I.F.T. test different strategies, combined with Clark’s assurance that she would not constrain or impede Watts’ execution of the L.I.F.T. strategy, persuaded the L.I.F.T. board. The district re-employed Watts in January 2012. As a district employee, Watts became subject to CMS rules and policies, but Project L.I.F.T. paid her salary. Clark’s continuing and direct involvement would prove critical to maintaining district support for L.I.F.T.

Two other changes followed. Watts had spent her first months as executive director planning the L.I.F.T. implementation strategy, fundraising, connecting with staff

at L.I.F.T. schools, and meeting with potential community partners. She quickly realized that full implementation of L.I.F.T. in 2012–13 could be jeopardized without more personnel. The L.I.F.T. board agreed. Within a few months, Watts hired a human capital strategist and director of evaluation,<sup>11</sup> followed by communications and community engagement staff. That fostered more efficient planning and implementation, but some critical work fell through unforeseen gaps in the public-private partnership. For instance, within the first year, the L.I.F.T. board and staff recognized that some budgeting and accounting functions had not been addressed by either the public or private side of the partnership. In addition, a high rate of staff turnover in key positions required Watts to realign staff responsibilities repeatedly. By all accounts, Watts did a tremendous job to move L.I.F.T. forward during the first half of L.I.F.T.’s planning year—by her own estimate, she devotes 60 to 70 hours per week to her job—but she and her staff often wonder how much farther along the initiative would be had a full project team been in place from the start.

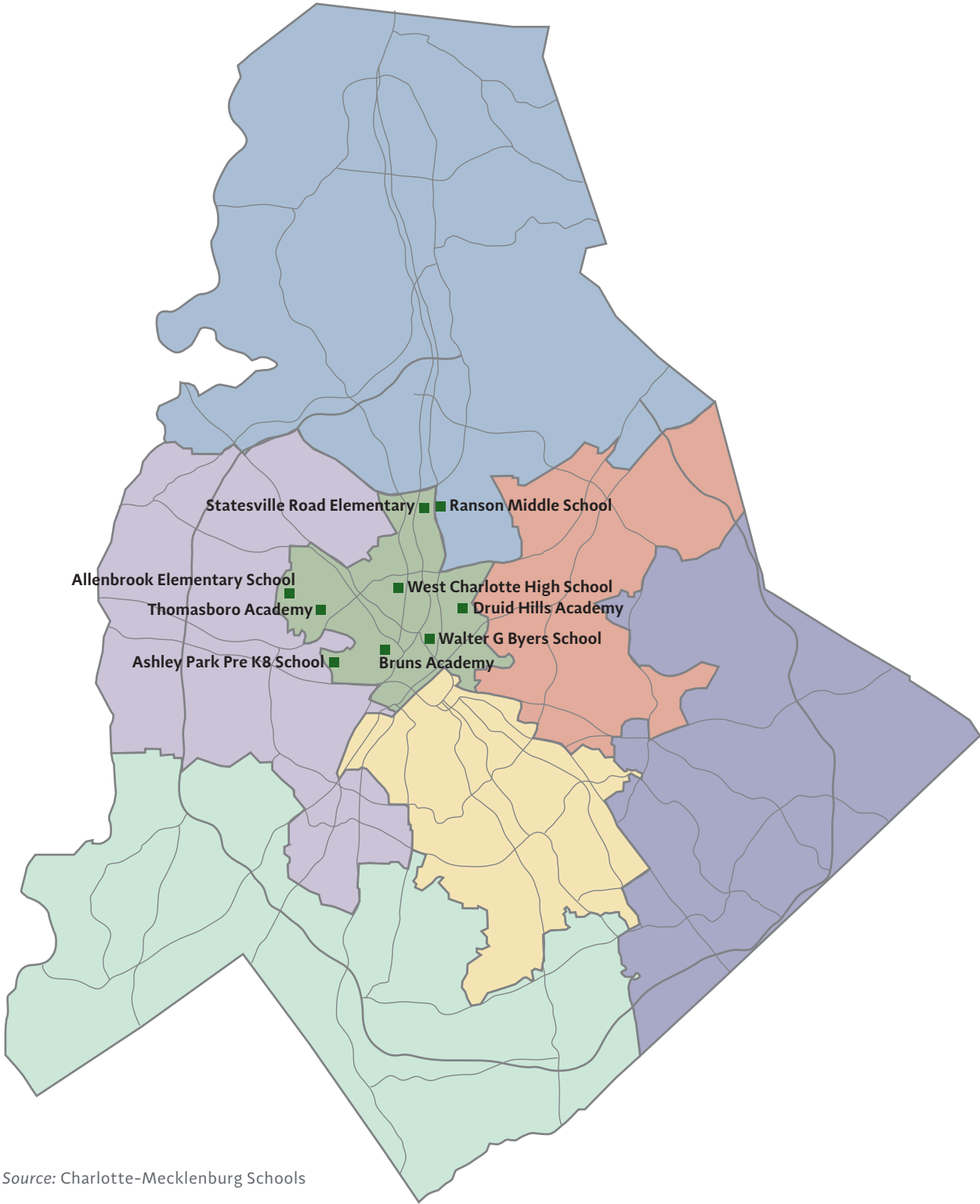
## District role

Another operational change affected the organization of the Project L.I.F.T. schools within CMS. As L.I.F.T. superintendent, Watts had direct authority and oversight of the West Charlotte corridor L.I.F.T. schools. But they were part of two other zones, or learning communities, of schools supervised by two learning community superintendents. Watts quickly realized the inherent challenges of supervising a split learning community with principals accountable to more than one superintendent. At Ann Clark’s suggestion, the district agreed to create the L.I.F.T. learning community under Watts’ sole authority. Watts became superintendent of the L.I.F.T. learning community on March 1, 2012.

The L.I.F.T. learning community is sometimes referred to as a “feeder pattern,” with a set of elementary schools passing students to a set of middle schools, and then on to West Charlotte High School (see Figure 1). The reality is much more complex. Most first-time ninth-graders at West Charlotte High School are students who have come from L.I.F.T. feeder schools, but the high school also serves students who come from outside the L.I.F.T. learning community. Some students who attend L.I.F.T. elementary schools are zoned for non-L.I.F.T. middle schools, then West Charlotte High School. Given a graduation rate hovering at 50 percent at West Charlotte, parents with the wherewithal pursue lottery-based magnet high school programs or other transfers, leaving West Charlotte with some of the hardest-to-educate students. The resulting “leaky” feeder pattern means that although the majority (74 percent in 2013–14) of first-time ninth-graders at West Charlotte High School have come from other L.I.F.T. schools, only 37 percent of eighth-graders who attend L.I.F.T. schools attend West Charlotte High School.<sup>12</sup> This pattern complicates L.I.F.T.’s ability to measure the effectiveness of its strategy. Especially problematic is measuring its effectiveness based on the graduation rate, since so many of West Charlotte High School’s students attend one or more non-L.I.F.T. schools prior to enrolling.

Establishing L.I.F.T. as a learning community solidified it as a district initiative during CMS leadership transitions. Peter Gorman’s resignation in June 2011 created concerns for the L.I.F.T. board, as he had been instrumental in developing L.I.F.T.’s strategic framework and in persuading the school board—whose leadership also changed in 2011—that CMS should participate in the initiative. The interim

Figure 1: Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District, Project L.I.F.T. Learning Community 2014-15



Source: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools



appointment of the district's chief operating officer as superintendent ended when Heath Morrison became superintendent in July 2012, just months before full implementation of L.I.F.T. in fall 2012. Though Morrison had not been involved with L.I.F.T. before, he proved to be an advocate. His resignation in November 2014 again raised continuity concerns among L.I.F.T. board members. But L.I.F.T.'s close connection with Ann Clark, who became superintendent in January 2015 with plans to retire in 2016, has proved critical to the L.I.F.T.-CMS partnership. Her constant involvement in L.I.F.T. has demonstrated the importance of partnering with the district leadership team as opposed to only one district leader.

## Budget

By the time the L.I.F.T. funders announced Project L.I.F.T. in January 2011, their foundations had collectively pledged \$40.5 million to the initiative. One of Watts' immediate responsibilities when she began as executive director in August 2011 was to close the gap between funds already committed and the \$55 million projected L.I.F.T. budget. With the help of the L.I.F.T. board, Watts secured grants and in-kind donations from Charlotte-based individuals, local corporations, and national organizations. A grant from the Knight Foundation in June 2012 pushed L.I.F.T. past its goal, while bringing in a philanthropic partner with expertise in technology and community outreach.

Three factors weighed heavily in developing the initiative budget:

- From the CMS Study Group, the funders knew that funding the Talent pillar was their top investment priority, and Time interventions would be very expensive.
- The funders wrestled with the balance of investments between high school and K-8. A five-year goal of increasing West Charlotte High School's graduation rate to 90 percent necessitated a big investment in interventions there. But the funders had learned that long-term benefits increase with investments in earlier education interventions.
- They also aimed for sustainability by frontloading the budget to avoid a funding cliff at the end of the five-year funding period, and to create an incentive for CMS and L.I.F.T. schools to begin planning how to absorb L.I.F.T. initiative costs well before the end of the initiative.

So the board spread its investments across the four intervention pillars, with more going to Talent and Time initiatives, and with investments in K-8 and high school relatively proportional to the initiatives targeted at each level. The board's early plan to measure outcomes and assess and recalibrate investments each year based on data has been somewhat compromised by the change in state testing standards in the 2012-13 school year and related lags in assessing and publicizing end-of-year test scores. Consequently, the board has relied more than initially intended on qualitative data and feedback from L.I.F.T. learning community and school staff.

---

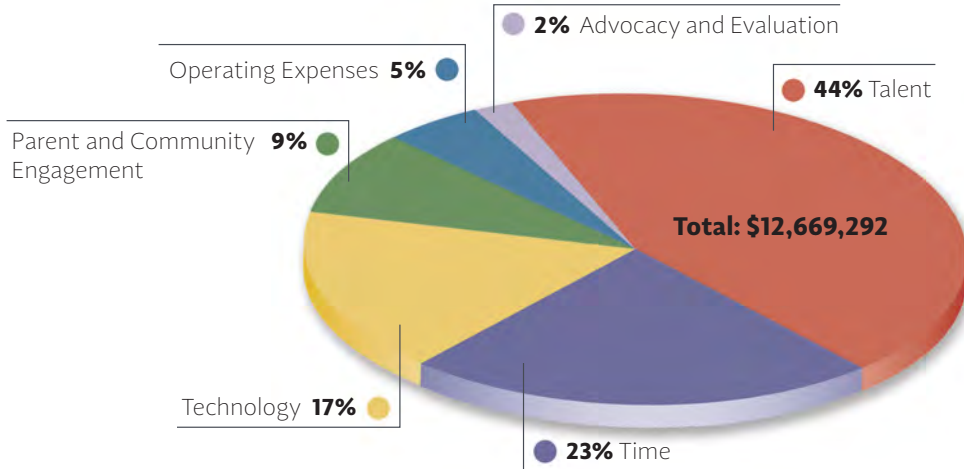
## Figure 2: L.I.F.T. Funders

The Project L.I.F.T. budget is supported by \$55 million raised from local and national foundations, local and national corporate sponsors, and individual donors. Members of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Investment Study Group, which conceived Project L.I.F.T., pledged the first \$40.5 million of the \$55 million fundraising target. A subsequent initial pledge from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation designated to support community engagement and technology initiatives helped L.I.F.T. reach its \$55 million target. The \$55 million total also includes in-kind donations from corporate organizations, including Presbyterian Healthcare Foundation and Microsoft, and applicable federal School Improvement Grants (SIG) and Title I dollars allocated to the L.I.F.T. schools. A fundraising effort targeting Charlotte's African-American community within the L.I.F.T. learning community raised \$400,000 in pledges.

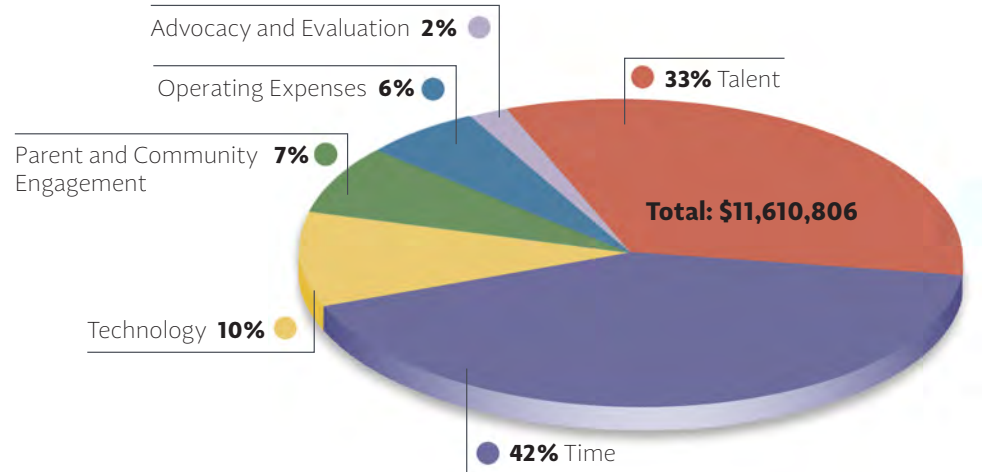
### Project L.I.F.T. Governing Board Commitments

<b>The Belk Foundation</b>	<b>\$1</b> million
<b>Foundation for the Carolinas</b>	<b>\$2</b> million
<b>Wells Fargo Foundation</b>	<b>\$2.5</b> million
<b>John S. and James L. Knight Foundation</b>	<b>\$4.1</b> million
<b>Duke Energy</b>	<b>\$5</b> million
<b>Bank of America</b>	<b>\$10</b> million
<b>C. D. Spangler Foundation</b>	<b>\$10</b> million
<b>Leon Levine Foundation</b>	<b>\$10</b> million

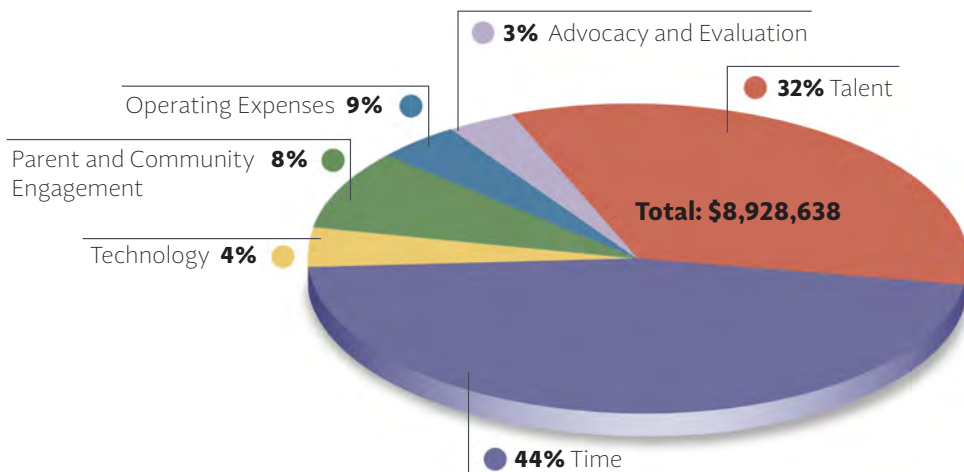
**Figure 3: Project L.I.F.T. Budget Allocations, Year 1: 2012–13**



**Figure 4: Project L.I.F.T. Budget Allocations, Year 2: 2013–14**



**Figure 5: Project L.I.F.T. Budget Allocations, Year 3: 2014–15**





## STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

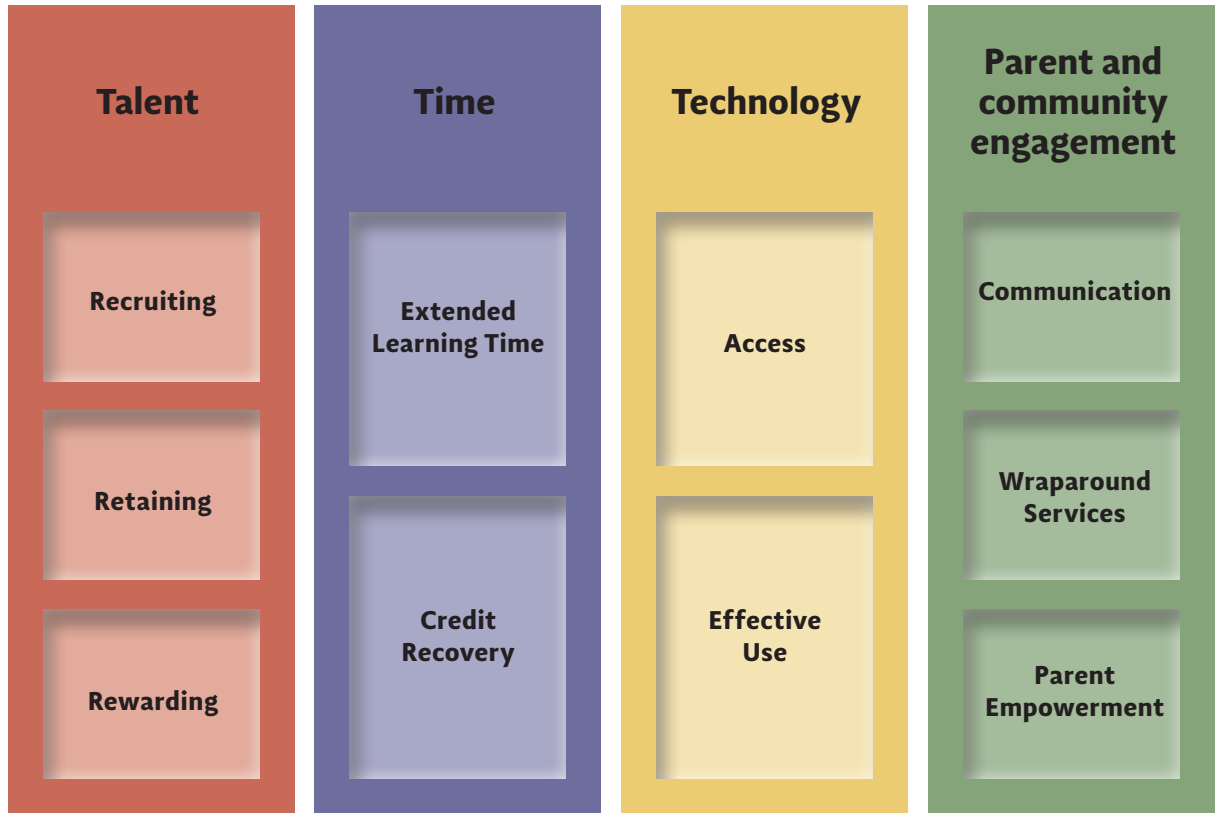
L.I.F.T. is premised on the idea that interventions in four discrete but overlapping pillars will reverse course for its low-performing schools and significantly improve student achievement. As the work within pillars has evolved in keeping with the L.I.F.T. experimental approach, the interrelationships among pillars have shifted, though the overall strategy has remained the same. Similarly, the development and reliance on partnerships with community-based organizations has been a constant component of the strategic framework's four pillars, though investments in partnerships have shifted from year to year. Early in implementation, L.I.F.T. needed to focus especially on advocating for state policy changes for the Talent and Time pillars. The L.I.F.T. budget includes funds to support continued monitoring of relevant legislative and state policy activity.

### Talent

Research conclusively shows that among school-based factors affecting student achievement, teacher quality is the most significant.<sup>13</sup> Ensuring that all schools have excellent principals and effective teachers is the critical intervention that anchors the L.I.F.T. strategic framework. L.I.F.T.'s plan to improve the quality of teachers and leaders in its schools hinges on the complementary principles that teaching is a profession, and high-quality teachers should be rewarded for their work. To that end, it focuses on strategies for recruiting and retaining excellent teachers, and providing professional growth opportunities within and outside the classroom.



Figure 6: L.I.F.T. Strategic Framework



### Recruiting effective teachers and principals

Before L.I.F.T., the nine schools in the West Charlotte corridor were recognized as high-need, hard-to-staff schools. Schools had high teacher turnover and typically opened the year with vacancies. So L.I.F.T. has a human capital strategist primarily responsible for recruiting, retaining, and rewarding high-quality teachers and principals. Dan Swartz, a former Wells Fargo recruiter, joined L.I.F.T. in March 2012. Since then, the recruitment and retention strategy has undergone constant refinement to meet the schools' needs, align with L.I.F.T. strategies, and address challenging circumstances created by legislative decisions (see "Refining the L.I.F.T. recruitment strategy," page 27).

**Early recruiting.** At its core, the L.I.F.T. recruitment strategy relies on early recruiting, a system of hiring bonuses, and, in some schools, the use of highly paid advanced roles to attract candidates. Recruiting for the 2012–13 school year, Swartz recognized that spring was too late to start recruiting high-quality candidates. Most high-quality candidates have already received teaching offers by the time CMS schools are allowed to begin hiring in June or July, when county and state budgets are approved, Swartz says. Moreover, the highest-caliber teachers for turnaround schools have the most options, so they are done looking by spring. L.I.F.T. found that staff hired in July and August tend to struggle more during the school year or quit midyear.

## Refining the L.I.F.T. recruitment strategy

Leading up to implementation of L.I.F.T. in the 2012–13 school year, some teachers in West Charlotte corridor schools were asked to leave, and a few others elected not to participate in the L.I.F.T. initiative. With 275 vacancies, including over 100 displacements, going into L.I.F.T.’s first year, L.I.F.T. relied heavily on Teach For America corps members to fill positions.

L.I.F.T.’s recruiting focus shifted for the 2013–14 school year. Seeking more experienced teachers, L.I.F.T. capitalized on media attention to it and used social media channels to attract teachers from within and outside the state. To help generate word-of-mouth interest, L.I.F.T. also paid its teachers for referrals they generated for teacher candidates outside of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. At the time, Charlotte’s pace of recovery from the 2008 recession helped attract teachers from out of state. But recruiting conditions changed for the 2014–15 school year, forcing L.I.F.T. to focus on in-state recruitment.

During the 2013 legislative session, the North Carolina General Assembly enacted a

new law eliminating teacher tenure after the 2017–18 school year and automatic pay increases for teachers with advanced degrees.<sup>1</sup> Annual teacher salaries were also capped, resulting in the state’s average teacher pay falling to among the lowest in the country. Facing criticism during the 2014 legislative session for reduced education funding and low teacher pay, the legislature revisited teacher pay, considering a number of salary restructuring ideas, such as a proposal to implement a career contract with a set salary that teachers would lose if they left teaching before a certain period of time.<sup>2</sup> Taken together, the 2013 decisions and 2014 reconsiderations forced L.I.F.T. to abandon out-of-state recruiting. With 99 percent of its recruiting efforts focused on reaching in-state candidates, L.I.F.T. is focused on recruiting the top 25 percent of experienced teachers in North Carolina and is increasingly using its own teachers to persuade those in other North Carolina districts to teach in L.I.F.T. schools. L.I.F.T. teachers and principals are prominent in video clips circulated through social media and recruiting channels. ♦

---

1. See N.C. Session Law 2013-360 (SB 402). Teachers who had already earned a master’s degree or who had begun a master’s program prior to July 1, 2013, or whose job requires a master’s degree or higher would receive a salary supplement for holding an advanced degree.

2. A North Carolina lower court found unconstitutional the legislation eliminating teacher tenure for teachers who had already obtained tenure. An appellate decision is pending. During the 2014 session, the state legislature adopted a system of performance-based salary increases for teachers who are rated highly effective on the N.C. teacher evaluation system.

L.I.F.T. is working with the district to test a forecasting model that would allow it to hire most new teachers from March to May. In spring 2015, CMS allowed L.I.F.T. to hire a few teachers a few weeks earlier than the usual summer hiring period, and hire a few extra positions over staffing need projections for 2015–16 to account for resignations submitted late in the summer. In the meantime, as L.I.F.T. continues to work with the district on a spring hiring strategy, it has developed a strategy of engaging prospective teachers from January to April to keep them interested in L.I.F.T. when other districts may be making them offers.

**The prospect of an upfront bonus upon hiring helps attract high-quality candidates and keep them engaged in the hiring process.**

**Hiring bonuses.** The prospect of an upfront bonus upon hiring helps attract high-quality candidates and keep them engaged in the hiring process. Hiring bonuses also helps L.I.F.T. offset the relatively low teacher salaries mandated by the state’s salary schedule. Principals have discretion to offer hiring bonuses totaling up to \$10,000 to top teacher candidates based on four categories: licensure in a critical need area, such as math and science (\$500–\$1,500 bonus); proven success, evidenced by experience in a successful Title I school or data showing individual success in affecting student performance (\$500–\$5,500 bonus); rating for a behavioral event interview (BEI) based on school turnaround competencies (\$1,000–\$1,500 bonus); and relocation expenses (\$1,500 bonus). A recruitment bonus rubric delineates a scale and criteria in each category for determining the amount a candidate may receive.

**Extending the reach of excellent teachers.** Another critical element of L.I.F.T.’s recruiting strategy is Opportunity Culture. (Note: The authors are employed by Public Impact, the education research and consulting firm that developed the Opportunity Culture initiative and provided consulting services to Project L.I.F.T. and CMS in its implementation.) Intended to extend the reach of excellent teachers to more students, for more pay, within existing school and district budgets through job redesign and age-appropriate use of technology, an Opportunity Culture provides opportunities for great teachers to continue to teach while leading teams of other teachers or to extend their reach directly to more students. And developing teachers get to work with and learn from master teachers, ultimately taking on greater responsibilities as their skills grow (see “Opportunity Culture,” page 29).

Implemented initially in 2013–14 in four of the nine L.I.F.T. schools,<sup>14</sup> Opportunity Culture expanded to six L.I.F.T. schools in 2015–16.<sup>15</sup> Though a critical element of the Talent pillar, Opportunity Culture pay supplements are not supported by L.I.F.T. grant funds. All the pay increases for multi-classroom leaders and reach-extending teachers are funded at the school level by reallocating regular funding streams. Because state law restricts districts’ use of teacher pay funds, L.I.F.T. schools worked with CMS to exchange and convert some locally funded positions for the new Opportunity Culture positions.

As a new program, Opportunity Culture is building up empirical evidence of effectiveness, but qualitative feedback from staff at L.I.F.T. schools has been positive. Further, the potential for increased pay for multi-classroom leaders and reach-extending teachers, coupled with career advancing opportunities to affect more students in a collaborative team environment has proven an effective recruiting tool. In 2014, L.I.F.T. received more than 800 applications for just 27 Opportunity Culture positions. Since demand for Opportunity Culture positions exceeds the number of positions available each year, L.I.F.T. has been able to fill regular vacancies from this pool of candidates, who take the jobs hoping that working in the L.I.F.T. learning community will give them an advantage when Opportunity Culture expands to other L.I.F.T. schools.

With these strategies, L.I.F.T. schools’ teacher vacancy rate has declined. In 2012, L.I.F.T. had nearly 300 vacancies to fill. In January 2014, the L.I.F.T. learning

**In 2014, L.I.F.T. received more than 800 applications for just 27 Opportunity Culture positions.**

## Opportunity Culture

**A**n Opportunity Culture uses job redesign and age-appropriate use of technology to extend the reach of excellent teachers and their teams to more students, for more pay, within regular budgets. In an Opportunity Culture, all teachers have career opportunities dependent upon their excellence, leadership, and impact on student learning. Opportunity Culture staffing models change teaching roles and the use of time and technology in ways that allow excellent teachers to reach more students directly and by leading teams of teachers, helping them to develop and excel.

Project L.I.F.T. schools use several Opportunity Culture staffing models.

- With Multi-Classroom Leadership, an excellent teacher leads a team of one or more teachers and takes accountability for the team's teaching and the performance of all the team's students.
- In the Time-Technology Swap model, teachers use blended learning—using digital instruction for a limited, age-appropriate period, enabling them to work directly with one group of students on higher-order skills while another group of students learns the basics online.
- L.I.F.T. schools also use Elementary Specialization, in which teachers teach only their best subjects or subject pairs (such as math/science). Specializing teachers and blended-learning teachers have paraprofessional support so the teachers have time for team planning and individual work with students. ♦

community had fewer than five vacancies total when schools opened in August. In 2013, CMS received a grant to expand the Opportunity Culture initiative to schools outside of L.I.F.T. beginning in 2014–15.<sup>16</sup>

### Retaining effective teachers and principals

To retain excellent teachers and principals, L.I.F.T. uses performance bonuses and awards. In addition to traditional retention bonuses that principals give to teachers they want to retain, L.I.F.T. used a system of performance bonuses in the initiative's first and second years to recognize and reward excellent teachers (see "L.I.F.T. Performance Awards," page 30). But in its third year, L.I.F.T. found that teachers are significantly invested in job satisfaction, success in their role, and developing leadership skills. Accordingly, L.I.F.T. is moving from monetary retention rewards to increasing investments in professional development opportunities. Teachers committed to L.I.F.T. place higher value on professional development that enhances their teaching, increases their teaching skills, and helps them feel invested and be better at their jobs, says Swartz, L.I.F.T.'s human capital strategist. At the same time, investing in professional development costs less than pure monetary rewards, and returns value to L.I.F.T. schools and students.



## L.I.F.T. Performance Awards

L.I.F.T.'s retention strategy includes awards that recognize and reward strong performance, intended to allow high-performing L.I.F.T. staff to earn more, and are a tacit acknowledgement of the pressure that L.I.F.T. schools feel to meet the 90-90-90 goals within five years.

In its first two years, L.I.F.T. adopted a “Compensation for Greatness” performance reward system. One type of Compensation for Greatness award emphasized collaboration and recognized individuals, teams, and schools. Using a combination of student growth, teacher attendance, school goals, and school culture, L.I.F.T. employees from custodial staff to teachers and principals could earn up to \$2,500. Another type of Compensation for Greatness award recognized individual performance. The most effective teachers, recognized as “Irreplaceables” who had achieved high student growth, received a \$5,000 Innovation Award to use in their classrooms and were recognized at a special dinner hosted by Foundation For The Carolinas, complete with a limousine ride and red-carpet reception. A third kind of “Compensation for Greatness” award allowed principals to reward teachers immediately. Each principal developed a reward plan incorporating specific goals to improve school culture and morale, and received \$5,000 to \$7,000 in gift cards to distribute to staff in the course of their daily work.

Though a successful strategy, the Compensation for Greatness awards proved expensive. Moreover, the individual award for high growth was difficult to implement. That award relied on school testing data to determine recipients. But delays in receiving data from the state in each of the first two years of L.I.F.T. prevented L.I.F.T. from distributing the awards until the following school year.

Beginning in its third year, L.I.F.T. emphasized the “Irreplaceables” and “Team Blue Bonus” awards. Irreplaceables recipients are identified on a quarterly basis. Based on critical turnaround teacher competencies, including teamwork, student impact and achievement data, and teacher attendance, L.I.F.T. principals force-rank their teachers. Those in the top 25 percent receive a \$2,500 bonus, and meet with L.I.F.T. Superintendent Denise Watts throughout the year to provide her with feedback on supports they need to be effective teachers and strategies being implemented to improve instruction and school culture. Team Blue Bonuses of \$3,000 are given to teachers in a tested subject area who achieve high student growth defined as exceeding expected growth on annual state achievement tests. These awards have a higher dollar value because teachers in tested subject areas are directly affecting the attainment of L.I.F.T.'s 90-90-90 goals and are under greater pressure to achieve results. ♦

Teacher retention at L.I.F.T. schools has improved, going from 55 percent in L.I.F.T.'s first year, 2012–13, to 61 percent at the beginning of its second year.<sup>17</sup> And L.I.F.T. retained 86 percent of its highest-performing teachers going into 2013–14.<sup>18</sup> However, staff turnover continues to present a challenge. L.I.F.T. has lost teachers to other states that pay teachers more. In addition to natural attrition due to individual circumstances, turnaround environments experience higher rates of burnout. The attention to L.I.F.T. exacerbates pressures its schools already feel strongly to achieve results. Legislative shifts in measuring student performance as well as the state's adoption of a system that grades schools adds additional stress for L.I.F.T. teachers and principals.

L.I.F.T. also suffers from its own success. Once a hard-to-staff learning community, L.I.F.T. has become so adept in training and developing effective teachers and leaders that other schools and education reform organizations now recruit for leadership positions from L.I.F.T.'s talent pool. Since L.I.F.T. started, 15 principals and assistant principals have accepted leadership positions in the district or at other challenging CMS Title I schools. Two L.I.F.T. principals have become learning community superintendents. Another principal left L.I.F.T. to work with the University of Virginia's School Turnaround Program.

## Professional development

L.I.F.T.'s professional development strategy is grounded in the "L.I.F.T. Way," a teaching and leadership framework that sets forth what success and excellence should look like in L.I.F.T. schools in four areas fundamental to instruction: school culture, personalized learning, alignment of resources, and data-driven instruction (see "The L.I.F.T. Way," page 32). Developed with the University of Virginia's School Turnaround Program, the L.I.F.T. Way helps guide training needs, helping the L.I.F.T. team identify appropriate partners to deliver professional development to school staff. Given the promise of the L.I.F.T. Way, CMS has assembled a design team to develop a district teaching and leadership framework using elements of it.

All L.I.F.T. principals participate in turnaround leadership training from the University of Virginia. Other training partners include New Leaders, Relay Graduate School of Education (for the Leverage Leadership program), Center for Transformative Teacher Training, and TNTP (The National Teacher Project). Generally, professional development is not individualized. Rather, L.I.F.T. staff works with principals to differentiate needs among individual school staff and match groups of teachers with training opportunities. One L.I.F.T. approach that the district is watching is streamlining the delivery of professional development in a way that provides layers of reinforcement. L.I.F.T.'s strategy involves training principals first, then training instructional leader teaching staff, then teachers.

Other professional development is available through Opportunity Culture. With its emphasis on coaching, mentorship, and leadership, Opportunity Culture provides individualized, classroom-based training for new teachers and leadership and instructional development for experienced teachers.

## Time

Though the effectiveness of extended learning time is less clear than the impact of teachers on student achievement, CMS was interested in implementing year-round school calendars when L.I.F.T. was being designed and implemented. L.I.F.T.'s strategy relies on two primary mechanisms for increasing instructional time: year-round or "continuous learning calendars" for elementary and middle school students, and a credit-recovery program for high school students.

**Once a hard-to-staff learning community, L.I.F.T. has become so adept in training and developing effective teachers and leaders that other schools and education reform organizations now recruit for leadership positions from L.I.F.T.'s talent pool.**

## The L.I.F.T. Way

**D**enise Watts, L.I.F.T. executive director and learning community superintendent, and Chris Triolo, L.I.F.T. executive director of teaching and learning, recognized the need to define how L.I.F.T.'s principals and teachers worked to achieving the 90-90-90 goals. The L.I.F.T. Way was designed to guide and align the Talent interventions in four key instructional areas: school culture, alignment, personalized learning, and data-driven instruction. Each of these domains reflects a value statement and encompasses key indicators, with artifacts such as assessments, lesson plans, observations, and surveys that help demonstrate realization of the indicators. The L.I.F.T. Way framework sets forth the following value statements:<sup>1</sup>

**Culture:** Project L.I.F.T. is a community of schools in which all shareholders are valued and included in the educational process. School staff sets and follows systems and processes with consistency and model what is expected of students. School is a safe environment where each student has the full support of school staff, parents, and community partners. All shareholders work to help students achieve personal and academic goals.

**Alignment of Resources:** Shareholders are well versed in the academic expectations for students and are dedicated to developing and refining their

educational talent. Shareholders function relentlessly on the premise that students can and will learn at high levels, and they constantly reflect on individual and team performance, making modifications as needed. They carefully plan and deliver meaningful and relevant learning experiences that help students become self-sufficient, prepare them for future endeavors, and instill a lifelong love for learning.

**Personalized Learning:** Shareholders recognize and value the individual interests and talents of students and intentionally plan meaningful learning experiences that meet the needs of the diverse learners entrusted in their care. This challenge is pursued incessantly, and the responsibility of providing a first-rate education at every grade level, “for every child, every day, for a better tomorrow” is shared by all shareholders.

**Data-Driven Instruction:** Schools will follow the data-driven instructional model and use data regularly across all levels (administrative, teacher, student) to adjust practice and accelerate learning. Shareholders analyze assessments to determine strengths and needs of students. They discuss results and plan next steps in a positive emotional climate. Shareholders own the responsibility of creating and monitoring students' progress towards goals on customized learning plans. ♦

---

1. Internal Project L.I.F.T. document from February 2013.

## Continuous Learning Calendars

**Policy change.** CMS has not been successful in gaining an exemption from state law that limits the dates students may attend school during summer. But joint L.I.F.T. and CMS lobbying efforts during the 2012 legislative session succeeded in gaining a waiver to allow extended learning time for L.I.F.T. schools beginning in 2013–14.<sup>19</sup>

L.I.F.T. worked between September and December 2012 to identify year-round schools for 2013–14. L.I.F.T. staff engaged in extensive community outreach to present a case for year-round calendars, marketed as “continuous learning calendars,” and to gauge school and community reaction. In the end, only schools that elected to participate were selected to operate on year-round calendars. (School closures implemented by the district before L.I.F.T. began had left the impression among community members that they did not have any choice on these issues. L.I.F.T. wanted to develop buy-in.) With limited funds—extended learning time is an expensive endeavor—L.I.F.T. selected pilot schools with the highest needs from among the schools that requested a year-round calendar.

**Two calendars.** L.I.F.T. implemented two types of year-round calendars in four pre-K–8 schools in 2013–14. L.I.F.T. is evaluating whether the differences in these calendars yield different student achievement outcomes compared with each other and with traditional nine-month schools. One continuous learning calendar keeps the same number of days as other district schools spread out over a 12-month period. The other also spreads school days over 12 months, but adds 19 days of instruction. Two schools operate on 180-day calendars,<sup>20</sup> while two others operate on 199-day calendars.<sup>21</sup> Both run continuously from July to June and feature periodic “intersessions,” or two-to six-week breaks throughout the academic year. A L.I.F.T. community partner provides optional intersession programming for these schools’ students aligned with their curriculum. L.I.F.T. also provided after-school programming for these schools’ students through another community partner in the 2013–14 school year, but that was discontinued in 2014–15.

**Summer learning.** While L.I.F.T. and CMS lobbied the legislature the summer of 2012, L.I.F.T. provided an optional summer learning program for all its students. More than 2,000 K–8 students participated in literacy-focused learning offered by L.I.F.T. in partnership with two out-of-school time providers during the summer of 2012. One provider continues to provide summer literacy programming at L.I.F.T.’s traditional calendar schools, but L.I.F.T. discontinued the other program in 2014 to fund the \$1.6 million cost of year-round schools. The L.I.F.T. board also discontinued or reduced funding to some other community partners for 2013–14, reflecting difficult but necessary investment trade-offs to fund the year-round schools strategy.

The effect of extended learning time on student performance remains unclear. If outcomes validate using extended learning time, the expense of these continuous learning calendars poses the greatest sustainability challenge. In addition, for CMS to replicate this in other district schools, it would need an exemption to or change in state law; so far, efforts to gain a district-wide exemption have failed.

**The effect of extended learning time on student performance remains unclear.**





***The L.I.F.T. Academy contributed significantly to the 78 percent West Charlotte High School graduation rate in 2013–14, a 22 percent increase since 2010–11.***

## **L.I.F.T. Academy**

With increasing graduation rates as a primary objective, the L.I.F.T. strategy recognizes that many 10th- through 12th-graders are nearly 21 years old, but still lack the credits needed to graduate. These “over-age, under-credited” students have often struggled in school and are at significant risk of dropping out, directly affecting graduation rates. L.I.F.T. sought initially to help these students earn high school equivalency diplomas through non-CMS programs, but found that students were unable to pass initial competency tests, and found that families wanted students to stay at West Charlotte High School.

So L.I.F.T. opened the L.I.F.T. Academy, a credit-recovery program for students enrolled in West Charlotte High School. With a seat-time waiver from the N.C. Department of Public Instruction, the academy uses a combination of flexible day and evening scheduling, individual and group-based instruction, and online courses to remediate students who are off track to graduate on time by more than two academic years of credit. The L.I.F.T. Academy approach also involves a community partner organization that works specifically with academy students on developing life skills, job readiness and career planning, college preparation and planning, and financial literacy. Initially, the L.I.F.T. Academy targeted only seniors, but it now serves underclassmen as well.

Housed initially on the West Charlotte High School campus, the academy moved to a separate site in 2013–14. Technically, the L.I.F.T. Academy remains a program within West Charlotte High School. Its teachers are West Charlotte teachers who continue to participate in faculty activities at the high school. But the program operates as a separate, non-traditional high school.

For the L.I.F.T. Academy’s first two years, L.I.F.T. employed a “co-principalship” strategy to ensure focused leadership that aligned instruction between the high school and credit-recovery program. The L.I.F.T. Academy had its own principal, with L.I.F.T. funds covering salaries of the principal, assistant principal, guidance counselor, and a few teachers, plus the costs of the life skills community partner program and the academy’s building lease and operational expenses. West Charlotte High School and the L.I.F.T. Academy shared responsibility for expenses related to additional staff and resources. Beginning in 2015–16, the West Charlotte High School principal will lead both the high school and L.I.F.T. Academy.

According to L.I.F.T. staff and the governing board, the L.I.F.T. Academy contributed significantly to the 78 percent West Charlotte High School graduation rate in 2013–14, a 22 percent increase since 2010–11. At a cost of \$7,984 per student, the L.I.F.T. Academy has served 75 students, 63 percent of whom were 12th-graders.<sup>22</sup> About 40 of these seniors graduated from the L.I.F.T. Academy and West Charlotte High School.<sup>23</sup> On average, L.I.F.T. Academy students earned 8.1 credits, compared with 6.2 credits earned by non-academy students at West Charlotte, and 25 percent of L.I.F.T. Academy students earned 13 or more credits.<sup>24</sup>

The L.I.F.T. Academy does not have the capacity to serve all students who need it, but it and the L.I.F.T. board are keen to expand the program. Sustaining the academy is a priority for the L.I.F.T. governing board and the district, which is already planning on using the academy model in some of its other Title I high schools.

### ***L.I.F.T. Academy Puts Students Back On Track***

**T**estimonials of several L.I.F.T. Academy graduates provided to Project L.I.F.T. reflect successes the program has had in reaching students at-risk of not completing high school.

S.J. first started attending West Charlotte High School in his senior year. He was not on track to graduate on time. But, he says, ***“L.I.F.T. put the pressure on me to do better for myself. The teachers stayed on me and motivated me. Without the L.I.F.T. Academy, I would not have graduated.”***

J.W. had time to think about how to better himself while he was incarcerated. He had not completed his last semester in school and was failing most of his classes before he dropped out. While in jail, he realized that he wanted to get his diploma, graduate, and have his family attend the graduation ceremony and see him succeed. At the L.I.F.T. Academy he had to catch up on math, English, and science. But his teachers worked closely with him, he says, developing a personal relationship that motivated him to push himself to work hard.

C.L. was failing her classes and blamed everyone else rather than take personal responsibility for her efforts. But the L.I.F.T. Academy teachers helped inspire and motivate her. She said that if she didn't go to school, teachers called, went to her house, or emailed her grandmother, showing her that they cared. ***“Teachers are the heart of Project L.I.F.T. They build connections with students and helped me believe in myself.”***

L.I.F.T. Academy was the third high school Z.L. had attended in three years—but the only one where he started and finished the year. The academy's teachers helped him pull up his G.P.A. from 1.98 to 3.1 and graduate on time. He credits those teachers for ***“caring about whether I graduated and helping me get my priorities in place.”*** ♦

## **“L.I.F.T. is an opportunity”**

**A**fter a professional development conference in January 2015, a subset of teachers from Project L.I.F.T. schools gathered to talk about what it means to them to teach in the Project L.I.F.T. learning community. Immediately, the group described L.I.F.T. as an “opportunity” for everyone involved, especially teachers, students, and the community. Anonymous quotes from their conversation are used below.

### **An opportunity for teachers**

**“Any of us could speak to the fact that we have opportunities elsewhere, and we choose to be where we are.”**

Project L.I.F.T. teachers have the opportunity to be part of transforming West Charlotte, to be part of something that falls outside of typical district reforms, and to be part of students’ lives as opportunity is presented to them.

**“L.I.F.T. is a career accelerator.”** L.I.F.T. teachers recognize and appreciate the opportunities that L.I.F.T. presents as an “incubator” for CMS. They view multiple aspects of L.I.F.T. as opportunities to grow and advance in their profession. Specifically, teachers cited such critical benefits as the chance to reach more students and coach other teachers through an Opportunity Culture; the layers of coaching and mentoring that run up and down the L.I.F.T. infrastructure, from L.I.F.T. staff to principals to teachers to students; and the multiple levels of other support and professional development. **“L.I.F.T. truly believes in cultivating great teachers and having the best teachers. They constantly push teachers to be the best and they offer approaches and strategies and programs for teachers to be the best in Project L.I.F.T.”**

### **An opportunity for students**

**“L.I.F.T. is trying to put an excellent teacher in front of every kid. Only this will close the achievement gap.”** Many L.I.F.T. teachers have prior experience in school turnaround environments and understand

that students at these schools have very challenging needs. They see L.I.F.T. as the best chance students in the West Charlotte corridor will have to enjoy success in school. They recognize several elements of L.I.F.T. that together lay the foundation for achievement: the opportunity to be taught by an excellent teacher; staff unity in dedication and drive to improve student achievement; like-mindedness and understanding of “what it takes for the students we teach to achieve;” high student achievement goals represented in L.I.F.T.’s 90-90-90 goals; and access to resources unavailable to other Title I or turnaround schools (for example, technology hardware and dedicated staff support). **“In other turnaround environments, people come and go because they aren’t prepared to handle the kind of environment we are in. But everyone at L.I.F.T. knows what they are getting into, and they want to be here for our kids.”**

### **An opportunity for the community**

**“L.I.F.T. is an opportunity to build bridges with other CMS schools and cultural bridges with the larger Charlotte community.”** L.I.F.T. teachers appreciate that, while the initiative has received significant media attention in the Charlotte community, many Charlotteans still do not fully appreciate what it is like to be a teacher or a student in a Title I school. Some L.I.F.T. teachers also acknowledged that staff at other CMS schools misunderstand some elements of the L.I.F.T. model; for example, that the stipends L.I.F.T. offers some teachers as part of its recruitment strategy are discretionary and outside of the CMS salary structure. Several teachers described their own experiences telling their friends and colleagues about L.I.F.T. and how its schools are different from schools where they have previously taught. They see themselves as ambassadors, part of the opportunity that L.I.F.T. presents to help others understand “what our kids have to deal with outside of school to be able to achieve in school” and “what we are doing to help students succeed.” ♦



## Technology

Community input led to including technology-related interventions in L.I.F.T.'s turnaround strategy, said members of the L.I.F.T. governing board who also served on the CMS Study Group. As part of its learning process, the CMS Study Group used community meetings to solicit feedback on potential interventions the group was considering. In one meeting, students, joined by their parents, expressed concern that their community was behind—and getting worse—in the technology era. Students told study group members that they needed access to technology and teachers who could show them how to use it. So the L.I.F.T. strategic framework included a focus on increasing community access to technology in the West Charlotte corridor and providing supports to ensure its effective use to facilitate learning. By closing the “technology gap,” L.I.F.T. would address a contributing source of the achievement gap.

### Access to technology

In the 2012–13 school year, through a partnership with Microsoft, L.I.F.T. provided 369 West Charlotte corridor families with the opportunity to purchase laptops for in-home use. Fully loaded laptops were offered at a discounted price subsidized by L.I.F.T. funds. Relying on research that a year of Internet access increased the likelihood of continuing connectivity thereafter, L.I.F.T. secured a partnership with a wireless Internet provider that provided one year's Internet broadband access at an affordable rate and support services for families that purchased laptops through L.I.F.T.

During the 2012–13 and 2013–14 school years, with targeted funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, L.I.F.T. distributed more than 3,300 XO laptop devices designed by One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) for primary school children, to be used in L.I.F.T. schools by first- through fourth-grade students. L.I.F.T. also distributed tablets to all ninth-graders at West Charlotte High School through its partnership with Microsoft. The successful distribution of the OLPC XO devices and tablets in the L.I.F.T. learning community paralleled district efforts to implement its one-to-one technology strategy district-wide, and encouraged the district's hardware rollout in the 2014–15 school year.

**Students told study group members that they needed access to technology and teachers who could show them how to use it.**



***L.I.F.T. could not financially sustain the distribution of technology hardware and Internet access for the community outside of schools.***



### **Effective use of technology**

The technology intervention strategy has evolved since the L.I.F.T. framework was first conceived. The district now addresses plans and funds the ongoing L.I.F.T. objective of securing and maintaining technology resources for its schools, but L.I.F.T. could not financially sustain the distribution of technology hardware and Internet access for the community outside of schools. The effectiveness of that strategy is also difficult to measure.<sup>25</sup> Now, with CMS leading district-wide efforts to provide schools with access to technology, L.I.F.T. is focusing on using technology to enhance effective teaching. L.I.F.T. recently embarked on a job-embedded teacher training program to help teachers move from using technology superficially—as a substitute for chalkboards and books—to using it as an instructional platform. For example, rather than use computers to take multiple choice tests, L.I.F.T. wants students to create digital products, such as coded programs, that demonstrate mastery of knowledge. Two specialized L.I.F.T. staff members are working with a select group of teachers from several L.I.F.T. schools to train them on using technology to accelerate student learning and increase student achievement. L.I.F.T. also implemented Discovery Education, a data-driven instructional assessment tool intended to help K-12 teachers align their teaching and instruction with state standards and end-of-year assessments.

The L.I.F.T. staff also increasingly considers technology a support for implementing the other L.I.F.T. interventions. L.I.F.T. has used social media more and more to reach parents in furtherance of its parent engagement strategy, and also to recruit teachers as part of its work to increase Talent in the L.I.F.T. learning community.

## Parent and community engagement

The community engagement strategy focuses on communicating L.I.F.T.'s mission and purpose to Charlotte and especially the communities L.I.F.T. immediately affects, and engaging community members and organizations in helping address non-school, home issues that affect student achievement.

### Communicating the L.I.F.T. brand

From the beginning, the funders appreciated the importance of engaging the community in the discussion and planning of the L.I.F.T. initiative. Previous CMS initiatives aimed at improving school options in the West Charlotte corridor had resulted in school closings that rankled the community and bred mistrust of the school system.

**Initiate community dialogue.** The L.I.F.T. funders did not want to perpetuate a commonly held view in the black community that decisions affecting their school options were imposed upon them. They knew that real support would come only if the community participated in the decision-making. The CMS Study Group used a series of community meetings and events designed to raise awareness about the achievement gap and spark dialogue about how to address it. The group shared what they'd learned and solicited feedback on interventions they were considering. Hearing the community's need for a technology-focused intervention was an early engagement success for the L.I.F.T. funders and the community.

L.I.F.T. successfully engaged community voices again regarding the implementation of continuous learning calendars. In preparation for extended learning time in the 2013–14 school year, L.I.F.T. staff organized a series of town hall meetings and public presentations in the fall and winter of 2012–13 to introduce the concept, gauge community receptivity, and build support for implementation. The meetings showed that not all school communities favored adopting a continuous learning calendar, so L.I.F.T. implemented extended learning time only in schools where staff and parents welcomed the change.

**It's not about the money.** When L.I.F.T. was implemented, its staff continued efforts to engage the community to develop community trust in its work. Defusing the media focus on the amount of L.I.F.T. funding presented an early challenge. The \$55 million fundraising goal generated enormous expectations, though mathematically the grant amounts to only about \$1,200 per L.I.F.T. student per year.<sup>26</sup> The focus on the size of the grant detracted from the actual work taking place in L.I.F.T. schools and overshadowed the reality that finite funding would require prioritizing among the L.I.F.T.

**Defusing the media focus on the amount of L.I.F.T. funding presented an early challenge.**

interventions and activities. The attention to the money also immediately elevated questions about sustainability, as \$55 million worth of investments would be difficult for any budget to absorb.

**Focus on L.I.F.T. strategies.** L.I.F.T. staff developed a “L.I.F.T. rebranding” campaign to reframe the community conversation around the strategies L.I.F.T. was implementing in schools, the successes in working with students, staff, and the greater community, the sustainability of successful initiatives, and the empowerment of L.I.F.T. parents and families to be their children’s advocates for high-quality public education. The L.I.F.T. engagement strategy included a “lifestyle marketing” component, sponsoring activities such as Zumba dance classes, literacy programs, parenting classes, and movie viewings to meet parents “where they were” in the community. L.I.F.T. staff also resurrected and revitalized “West Fest,” a popular West Charlotte community event that had been an annual, city-sponsored neighborhood festival in the 1990s that showcased the artistic talents of the black community and expressed West Charlotte’s pride in its heritage.

**Use of social media.** In addition, L.I.F.T. staff used text messaging, voice mail and social media outlets, such as Facebook and Twitter, to update parents on L.I.F.T. news and events. Efforts to inform the broader community about Project L.I.F.T. included outreach to local media on successful initiatives and events such as the distribution of XO laptop devices and West Fest.

## Effective engagement

As L.I.F.T. geared up in its first year, the staff recognized the enormity of the parent and community engagement strategy, so they focused in the second year on building individual schools’ ability to work with parents and engage in community outreach. L.I.F.T. is working with schools to teach their teachers effective engagement strategies to share with parents, which will help them become better education advocates for their children and build resource teams to lead community engagement efforts.

**Wrap-around services.** Work with community partners to provide wrap-around services for L.I.F.T. students and families has been the other cornerstone of the parent and community engagement strategy. Several community partnerships have yielded particularly successful results. Working with community partners who provide services and supplies pro bono, L.I.F.T. offers access to a mobile medical clinic that has administered immunizations to more than 650 L.I.F.T. students, and in 2014 sponsored two dental clinics that served 700 L.I.F.T. students.<sup>27</sup> Another community partner placed staff in all L.I.F.T. schools to provide case-management services for L.I.F.T. students with mental health and other social-emotional needs, and has used its partnership with L.I.F.T. to develop and pilot a new case-management staffing strategy.

**Parent empowerment.** In partnership with the Charlotte Housing Authority, L.I.F.T. executed a parent empowerment program for residents in a Charlotte Housing Authority neighborhood in the L.I.F.T. learning community. Based on a framework

developed by educator Ruby Payne to help economically challenged individuals develop empowering life skills, L.I.F.T.'s Getting Ahead program helps its parents understand the opportunities and processes in schools available to all parents to advocate effectively for the educational needs of their children. Though a fairly small program relative to the population of L.I.F.T. students—about 24 parents and guardians have graduated from it over two years—both L.I.F.T. and the district appreciate the individual success stories that have emerged (see “L.I.F.T. Helps Parents Get Ahead”), and are considering how the program may be sustained and expanded in the L.I.F.T. learning community and replicated in the district.

**Social-emotional supports.** Other community partners work in different combinations of L.I.F.T. schools to provide social-emotional supports to L.I.F.T. students. The diversity of partners reflects the view of the CMS Study Group that the L.I.F.T. strategy should incorporate partnerships with successful community organizations to see how their practices work and can be scaled up in turnaround settings. But some tensions underlie this. Generally, the community partnership piece is complex and requires significant coordination at the school level and between partners. At the

**The community partnership piece is complex and requires significant coordination at the school level and between partners.**

### ***L.I.F.T. Helps Parents Get Ahead***

**K**.G., who has a 9-year-old child in a L.I.F.T. school, participated in L.I.F.T.'s eight-week Getting Ahead program. She credits it with giving her the skills she needs to advocate for her child's educational needs. Her child has cerebral palsy, and K.G. previously found it challenging to communicate effectively with district and school staff about her child's special learning needs. Now, she says, she knows how to handle the tough situations that arise. Moreover, she says Getting Ahead has also helped her push all her children to do better in school and have high expectations about the lifelong returns that come from a good education.

Encouraged by the success her son was having at the L.I.F.T. Academy, R.C. started participating in Getting Ahead. She credits the program for helping connect her to resources she needed to be a better advocate for her children's education. “Now I know who to email to get my sons' progress reports when they don't give them to me.”

K.G., R.C., and several other Getting Ahead participants also note that it inspired them personally and motivated them to “think about life in a different way” and “do things not only to help my kids but to help myself as well.”

As a component of the parent empowerment concept underlying the Getting Ahead program, a graduate is asked to work with the program leader with the subsequent class. Inspired by her experience in the program and the benefits she gained through her participation, K.G. will help to facilitate the Getting Ahead program's third cohort of L.I.F.T. parents. ♦



school level, implementation in the first and second years revealed the limited capacity of the L.I.F.T. staff and schools to maximize effectiveness of all services and community programs. The staff already has competing demands on its time from other intervention initiatives. And working with community partners to address student social-emotional learning issues creates demands on student learning time during school. Addressing social-emotional issues would help improve student learning, but pulling kids out of class potentially jeopardizes gains in student achievement and growth, an irony school staff and partners acknowledge. They are trying to accommodate each other through strategic scheduling.

Further, the community partner work reveals some misalignments between L.I.F.T. objectives and other philanthropic funding decisions. For instance, one community partner commended the work of L.I.F.T. and community organizations to provide job training for L.I.F.T. students, but questioned its effectiveness when funders are not funding support for job placement or holding job trainers accountable for providing assistance with placement.

Two main challenges constrain the community engagement strategy. First, unlike the other intervention areas, L.I.F.T. had no community engagement model to emulate. Second, the community engagement goals are inexact, complicating the initiative's ability to assess engagement efforts' effectiveness. Anecdotally, L.I.F.T. school staff realize that L.I.F.T. staff have made greater time and resource investments in communicating L.I.F.T. to the West Charlotte corridor community and the greater Charlotte community than on activities that will increase community members' direct involvement with students and schools. While work remains on that front, L.I.F.T. and school staff recognize that to sustain student achievement gains, they need to be more strategic and spend even more money on effectively engaging community members and organizations in helping address non-school, home issues that affect achievement. But the investment likely requires more than L.I.F.T. can afford and more than the funder collaborative can support on its own. Transforming L.I.F.T. in ways that support sustainability of L.I.F.T. investments in the overall L.I.F.T. strategy will likely require engaging city and county resources in a coordinated strategy that addresses economic and social issues that have contributed to L.I.F.T. students' low performance.

***The community engagement goals are inexact, complicating the initiative's ability to assess engagement efforts' effectiveness.***



## ASSESSING IMPACT

### External Evaluation of L.I.F.T. by Research for Action

L.I.F.T. is midway through implementation, so it is still too early to make conclusive assessments. But because the L.I.F.T. approach was somewhat experimental, the L.I.F.T. funders placed a premium on accountability for results from the beginning. They wanted and needed to know which efforts are having an impact and should be sustained and replicated in the district. Accordingly, L.I.F.T. chose an independent evaluator, Research For Action (RFA), to conduct an ongoing assessment of the initiative. Since 2012, RFA has been collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data and reporting results annually to the L.I.F.T. governing board.<sup>28</sup>

Several factors have complicated the evaluation. The experimental nature of L.I.F.T. means that some of its initiatives are not empirically based. New strategies, such as Opportunity Culture, have not been tried long enough to have a research base of comparative data. Some strategies do not have readily identifiable measures, such as increasing access to technology and engaging community organizations in L.I.F.T. implementation. Also, L.I.F.T. is not designed as a classic randomized control trial. Evaluating for causal relationships between initiatives and outcomes is difficult. L.I.F.T. is striving for impact on many fronts, but also implementing a number of initiatives that are at once discretely focused and intertwined. Its students receive multiple supports, and L.I.F.T. has intentionally engaged different community partners and combinations of initiatives at each of its schools—a relatively small sample that includes only one high school. Consequently, comparisons across schools and with other populations are difficult to make, and the impact of various supports are difficult to isolate.

As previously discussed, the state's adoption of new student performance assessments effective in 2012-13, and new standards effective in the 2013-14 school year,

***The state's adoption of new student performance assessments effective in 2012-13, and new standards effective in the 2013-14 school year, presented an unanticipated challenge in assessing student achievement and growth, two of the most important measures of the initiative directly tied to the 90-90-90 goals.***

**L.I.F.T. is not designed as a classic randomized control trial.**

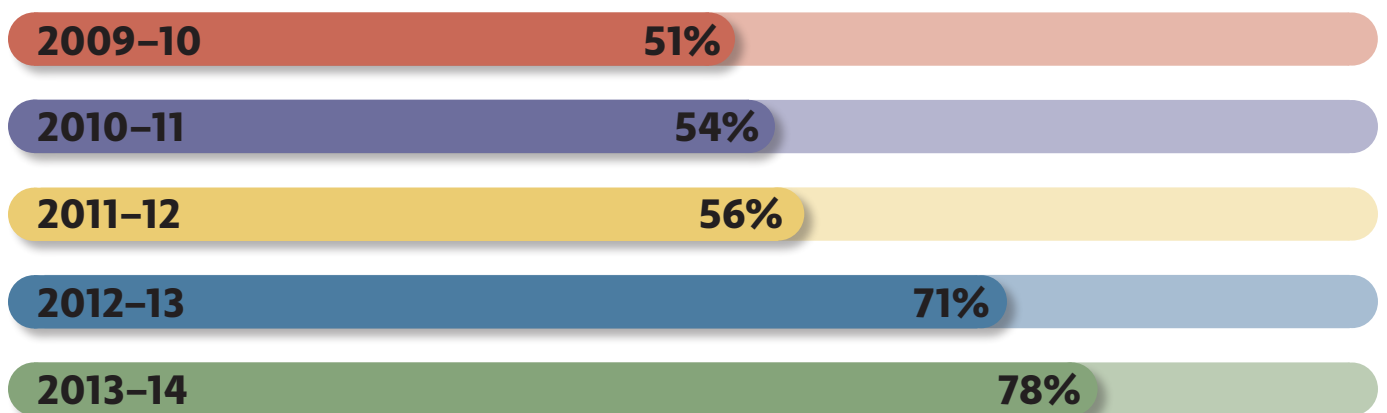
presented an unanticipated challenge in assessing student achievement and growth, two of the most important measures of the initiative directly tied to the 90-90-90 goals. With the measuring stick having changed from 2011-12 to 2012-13, comparisons between L.I.F.T.’s “baseline” results before it started (2011-12) and its first (2012-13) and second (2013-14) school years are difficult to make, particularly because the new proficiency standards shifted most North Carolina schools’ proficiency rates downward. While student performance results for the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years will allow a more meaningful year-to-year comparison, the state’s anticipated adoption of a new set of curriculum standards for subsequent years may further complicate L.I.F.T.’s ability to measure its impact on student achievement.

### Early successes

Notwithstanding the evaluation challenges, two years of available data show that L.I.F.T. has experienced some early successes. Among the most significant achievements:

- The graduation rate at West Charlotte has improved from 56 percent in 2011-12<sup>29</sup> to 78 percent in 2013-14.<sup>30</sup> L.I.F.T. attributes some of this improvement to the L.I.F.T. Academy (see Figure 7).
- In reading, math, and science, 54 percent of L.I.F.T. students exceeded expected growth on the North Carolina growth model.<sup>31</sup> As illustrated in Table 1 in Student Performance in L.I.F.T. Schools on page 47, in L.I.F.T.’s first two years of implementation, five of nine schools met or exceeded expected growth in all subject areas. In addition, the Research for Action analysis shows that as a whole, L.I.F.T. students had significantly higher increases in scaled scores from 2012-13 to 2013-14 on state end-of-grade tests for reading relative to comparison students though scaled scores in math for the same period were on par with comparison schools.<sup>32</sup>

Figure 7: Graduation Rate at West Charlotte High School



Source: N.C. Department of Public Instruction. <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/reporting/cohortgradrate>

- The L.I.F.T. Academy has served 75 students, the majority of whom were 12th-graders (63 percent), at a cost of \$7,984 per student.<sup>33</sup> About 40 of these seniors graduated from the L.I.F.T. Academy and West Charlotte High School.<sup>34</sup> On average, L.I.F.T. Academy students earned 8.1 credits, compared with 6.2 credits earned by non-L.I.F.T. Academy students at West Charlotte, and 25 percent of L.I.F.T. Academy students earned 13 or more credits.<sup>35</sup>
- Student suspensions have generally declined across all L.I.F.T. schools year to year. The percentage of students who received an out-of-school suspension dropped from 27 percent in 2011-12 to 25 percent in 2012-13 to 20 percent in 2013-14.<sup>36</sup>
- Teacher retention increased from 55 percent in L.I.F.T.'s first year, 2012-13, to 61 percent at the beginning of L.I.F.T.'s second year, 2013-14.<sup>37</sup>
- L.I.F.T. retained its highest-performing teachers at a rate of 86 percent from 2012-13 to 2013-14.<sup>38</sup>
- A significant number of teachers who are not staying in the L.I.F.T. learning community are taking leadership roles in other CMS schools. The L.I.F.T. learning community has transformed from a hard-to-staff learning community to a recruiting pool for talent to lead other challenging schools.
- Recruiting has been successful. The number of vacancies in L.I.F.T. schools at the beginning of each year has decreased significantly. In 2012-13, L.I.F.T. had nearly 300 vacancies to fill; in 2014-15, the entire L.I.F.T. learning community started school with only five vacancies.
- L.I.F.T. received more than 800 applications for 27 new Opportunity Culture positions.
- Current technology is available and being used in all L.I.F.T. schools. With the infusion of more than 3,300 XO laptops to K-4 students and tablets to all 9th graders, followed by the district's implementation of one-to-one technology, and 369 subsidized hardware and broadband packages for L.I.F.T. families, the initiative has laid the foundation for closing the West Charlotte corridor's technology gap.
- Communication systems capitalizing on social media networks have been established to keep L.I.F.T. families informed of school activities.
- The L.I.F.T. learning community and schools have established partnerships with dozens of community service providers to address out-of-school needs that affect student learning.

Moreover, the district is applying and replicating L.I.F.T. practices across the district, as the L.I.F.T. funders had envisioned from the outset. Most notably, the district has:

- Implemented a new school turnaround initiative with 14 of the district's lowest-performing schools using the University of Virginia leadership program, an early partner of L.I.F.T. staff and principals. The district is also working on adapting components of L.I.F.T.'s early-recruiting strategy.



- Established a design team to develop a district-wide teaching and learning curriculum, adapting elements of the L.I.F.T. Way, L.I.F.T.’s teaching and instructional curriculum.
- Implemented Opportunity Culture in 17 district schools outside the L.I.F.T. learning community, with plans to increase the number of participating schools over the next several years.
- Implemented plans to model the L.I.F.T. Academy at other CMS Title I high schools.

## Challenges ahead

L.I.F.T. faces challenges in the last two years of its five-year implementation period. It has made progress and experienced enough success to be encouraged about what is to come, but may be challenged to meet its 90 percent proficiency and growth goals within five years.

As measured by the new state proficiency standards adopted for 2013–14 and beyond, only 34 percent of L.I.F.T. students met their grade-level proficiency standard in reading, math, and science, and only 24 percent met the college- and career-readiness standard.<sup>39</sup> Though state data show that the average on-grade-level proficiency across L.I.F.T. schools increased on math, reading, and science end-of-year assessments from 2012–13 to 2013–14, an analysis prepared by L.I.F.T.’s evaluator, Research for Action, shows that most of the gain is attributable to the change in state proficiency standards from 2012–13 to 2013–14, and that proficiency levels for L.I.F.T. students are generally below the averages for comparison schools, CMS, and the state.<sup>40</sup> Overall student proficiency levels increased across the state due to the state’s move from a four-level to five-level proficiency scale which resulted in a lowered threshold for on-grade proficiency, but higher threshold for college- and career-readiness.<sup>41</sup> Hence students achieving at the new proficiency threshold in 2013–14 would not have been proficient under the scale in use in 2012–13.<sup>42</sup>

An analysis of student proficiency between 2009–10, when Project L.I.F.T. was conceived, and 2013–14, the second year of L.I.F.T.’s implementation and last year of available data, illustrates the challenge L.I.F.T. faces to meet its proficiency goal—but also suggests that L.I.F.T. is beginning to make progress toward the goal. Table 2 in “Student Performance in L.I.F.T. Schools” (page 48) shows that on average, L.I.F.T. schools underperformed the state on end-of-year assessments from 2009–10 to 2013–14. However, as shown in Table 3 in “Student Performance in L.I.F.T. Schools” (page 49), a statistical analysis of the L.I.F.T. average proficiency scores compared to state average proficiency scores on end-of-year assessments indicates that L.I.F.T. schools narrowed the performance gap from its first year of implementation in 2012–13 to its second in 2013–14.

## Student Performance in L.I.F.T. Schools

### Growth in L.I.F.T. Schools

Starting in 2012, North Carolina adopted the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) to measure student growth, or evaluate how much individual students progress from year to year based on results of state assessments. EVAAS results are normed growth calculations, adjusted annually, that indicate whether students met expected growth targets based on two years of student results. EVAAS results are used in both the state teacher evaluation system and in the school accountability system. Table 1 shows EVAAS growth results for reading, math, and science for each of the L.I.F.T. schools. Schools receive a rating of “did not meet growth expectations,” “met growth expectations,” or “exceeded growth expectations” in each subject. Consistent high growth is necessary to affect low schoolwide proficiency rates; students who start out one or more years behind grade level must make more than a “year’s worth of growth” in order to catch up to performing on grade level. During the first two years of implementation, five of the nine L.I.F.T. schools met or exceeded growth in all subjects. In 2013–14, all nine schools met or exceeded growth in reading, and all but one school met or exceeded growth in math.

Table 1: EVAAS Student Growth Ratings in Project L.I.F.T. Schools, 2012–13 through 2013–14

	Reading <sup>1</sup> (Grades 3–8)		Math (Grades 3–8)		Science <sup>2</sup> (Grades 5 and 8)			
	2012–13	2013–14	2012–13	2013–14	2012-13		2013-14	
					Grade 5	Grade 8	Grade 5	Grade 8
Allenbrook Elementary	M	M	M	M	D		D	
Ashley Park PreK-8 School	M	M	E	M	M	E	M	
Bruns Academy	D	E	M	M	D	E	D	E
Druid Hills Academy	E	E	E	E	M		E	M
Ranson IB Middle School	M	E	E	D	E		E	
Statesville Road Elementary	M	E	M	E	E		M	
Thomasboro Academy	E	M	E	M	M	E	M	E
Walter G. Byers School	E	M	E	M	E		M	E
West Charlotte High School	E	M	M	M	D		D	

**E: Exceeded expected growth**

**M: Met expected growth**

**D: Did not meet expected Growth**

Source: N.C. Department of Public Instruction growth model data, provided by Project L.I.F.T.

Notes:

1. The English II assessment was first administered in 2012–13.
2. The N.C. Department of Public Instruction reports growth in science for grades 5 and 8 separately, rather than as an all-grades composite. Split cells reflect schools that reached two different levels of growth for grades 5 and 8 (e.g., **M** in grade 5 and **E** in grade 8).

Continued on page 48

## Proficiency of L.I.F.T. Students

The following tables compare statewide student proficiency rates to student proficiency rates for schools in the West Charlotte corridor from the 2009–10 school year, when Project L.I.F.T. was conceived, to 2013–14, the last year that state data was available at the time of this writing. Because end-of-grade (EOG) assessments are administered to students in grades 3 through 8, and end-of-course (EOC) assessments are administered to high school students, proficiency rates for West Charlotte High School (WCHS) are presented separately from the elementary and middle schools in the L.I.F.T. learning community. Composite EOC scores are not available, as high school students do not necessarily complete these assessments in the same year.

Table 2 illustrates the impact of the changes in state assessments and proficiency standards since L.I.F.T. began. Effective in the 2012–13 school year, North Carolina adopted new end-of-year state assessments aligned with the Common Core for State Standards, which the state adopted in 2010. These new assessments resulted in dramatic declines in proficiency rates statewide as seen in Table 2.

**Table 2. Percentage of Students Proficient on State Assessments in Project L.I.F.T and Statewide, 2009–10 through 2013–14**

		L.I.F.T. implementation				
		2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13 <sup>1</sup>	2013–14 <sup>2</sup>
<b>Grades 3 through 8 End-of-Grade (EOG) Assessments</b>						
<b>Reading and Math Composite<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Project L.I.F.T.</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>20%</b>
	<b>Statewide</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Reading</b>	<b>Project L.I.F.T.</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>33%</b>
	<b>Statewide</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>57%</b>
<b>Math</b>	<b>Project L.I.F.T.</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>30%</b>
	<b>Statewide</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>51%</b>
<b>Science</b>	<b>Project L.I.F.T.</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>53%</b>
	<b>Statewide</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>68%</b>
<b>High School End-of-Course (EOC) Assessments<sup>4</sup></b>						
<b>Reading<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>Project L.I.F.T.</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>36%</b>
	<b>Statewide</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>62%</b>
<b>Math<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>Project L.I.F.T.</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>28%<sup>7</sup></b>
	<b>Statewide</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>Science<sup>8</sup></b>	<b>Project L.I.F.T.</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>21%</b>
	<b>Statewide</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>54%</b>

**Sources:** State/LEA and school test performance from the N.C. Department of Public Instruction; 2013–14 data from the N.C. Department of Public Instruction School Report Cards. Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/reporting/leaperformancearchive/>

**Notes:**

1. North Carolina began using new end-of-year state assessments in the 2012–13 school year, resulting in lower proficiency statewide. Project L.I.F.T. initiatives were implemented in L.I.F.T. schools beginning in 2012–13.
2. The state began using a new five-level proficiency scale, which effectively lowered the on-grade-level proficiency thresholds for students across all assessments, in the 2013–14 school year.
3. The state began administering end-of-year tests for science in 2013–14, so a composite proficiency rate including science is incalculable for grades 3 through 8 before 2013–14.
4. From 2009–10 to 2011–12, Algebra I and English I assessments were administered. In 2012–13 and 2013–14, Math I and English II were administered. EOC results for all schools from 2009–10 to 2011–12 include re-tests. Re-tests were not administered beginning in 2012–13.
5. Reading proficiency is a composite of English I and II proficiencies.
6. Math proficiency is a composite of Algebra I and Math I.
7. Including Math I assessments administered to students at the four L.I.F.T. middle schools, the proficiency rate is 36%, according to 2013–14 proficiency data provided by Project L.I.F.T.
8. Science proficiency is based on proficiency in Biology I.

Effective in 2013–14, the State Board of Education adjusted the achievement levels for the state’s end-of-year tests. Essentially, the state added a new level into its achievement measurement scale, and it adopted new college and career readiness standards. Overall student proficiency levels increased across the state due to the state’s move from a four-level to five-level proficiency scale, which effectively lowered the on-grade-level proficiency thresholds for students across all assessments, but established higher college- and career-readiness proficiency standards (or the standards for being successful after high school graduation).\*

As Table 2 shows, L.I.F.T. schools have consistently underperformed the state on end-of-year assessments. But further analysis indicates that L.I.F.T. is beginning to close this performance gap. Table 3 presents the results of a z-score analysis used to show the statistical difference between the L.I.F.T. average proficiency rate on end-of-year assessments and the average school proficiency rate in North Carolina for each year since Project L.I.F.T. was conceived (2009–10) and implemented (2012–13). The negative z-scores indicate that L.I.F.T. schools continue to underperform the average school proficiency in the state through 2013–14, the last year of available data. However, the positive change in z-scores from 2012–13 to 2013–14 show a smaller difference between the L.I.F.T. average proficiency rates and the average proficiency rate at North Carolina schools. (See Figure A.) This diminished difference suggests that L.I.F.T. is improving in performance relative to other schools in the state.

**Table 3: Z-Scores<sup>1</sup> for Project L.I.F.T. versus statewide proficiency rates**

	L.I.F.T. implementation				
	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13 <sup>2</sup>	2013–14 <sup>3</sup>
<b>Grades 3 through 8 End of Grade (EOG) Assessments</b>					
<b>Reading and Math Composite<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>-1.22</b>	<b>-1.33</b>	<b>-1.43</b>	<b>-1.39</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Reading</b>	<b>-1.20</b>	<b>-1.32</b>	<b>-1.38</b>	<b>-1.32</b>	<b>-1.23</b>
<b>Math</b>	<b>-0.98</b>	<b>-0.96</b>	<b>-1.09</b>	<b>-1.23</b>	<b>-1.06</b>
<b>Science</b>	<b>-1.16</b>	<b>-1.13</b>	<b>-1.16</b>	<b>-1.15</b>	<b>-0.57</b>
<b>High School End-of-Course (EOC) Assessments<sup>5</sup></b>					
<b>Reading<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>-0.39</b>	<b>-1.07</b>	<b>-1.17</b>	<b>-1.86</b>	<b>-0.99</b>
<b>Math<sup>7</sup></b>	<b>-0.35</b>	<b>-0.78</b>	<b>-1.36</b>	<b>-1.20</b>	<b>-1.26<sup>8</sup></b>
<b>Science<sup>9</sup></b>	<b>-0.42</b>	<b>-0.20</b>	<b>-1.73</b>	<b>-2.22</b>	<b>-1.26</b>

**Sources:** State/LEA and school test performance from the N.C. Department of Public Instruction; 2013–14 data from the N.C. Department of Public Instruction School Report Cards. Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/reporting/leaperformancearchive/>

**Notes:**

1. In this analysis, the z-score indicates how many standard deviations above or below the state average L.I.F.T.’s performance falls. For example, a z-score of -1.0 would mean L.I.F.T. schools’ proficiency rates were one standard deviation below the state average.
2. North Carolina began using new end-of-year state assessments in the 2012–13 school year, resulting in lower proficiency statewide. Project L.I.F.T. initiatives were implemented in L.I.F.T. schools beginning in 2012–13.
3. The state began using a new five-level proficiency scale, which effectively lowered the on-grade-level proficiency thresholds for students across all assessments, in the 2013–14 school year.
4. The state began administering end-of-year tests for science in 2013–14, so a composite proficiency rate including science is incalculable for grades 3 through 8 before 2013–14.
5. From 2009–10 to 2011–12, Algebra I and English I assessments were administered. In 2012–13 and 2013–14, Math I and English II were administered. EOC results for all schools from 2009–10 to 2011–12 include re-tests. Re-tests were not administered beginning in 2012–13.
6. Reading proficiency is a composite of English I and II proficiencies.
7. Math proficiency is a composite of Algebra I and Math I.
8. This analysis excludes Math I assessments administered to students at the four L.I.F.T. middle schools.
9. Science proficiency is based on proficiency in Biology I.

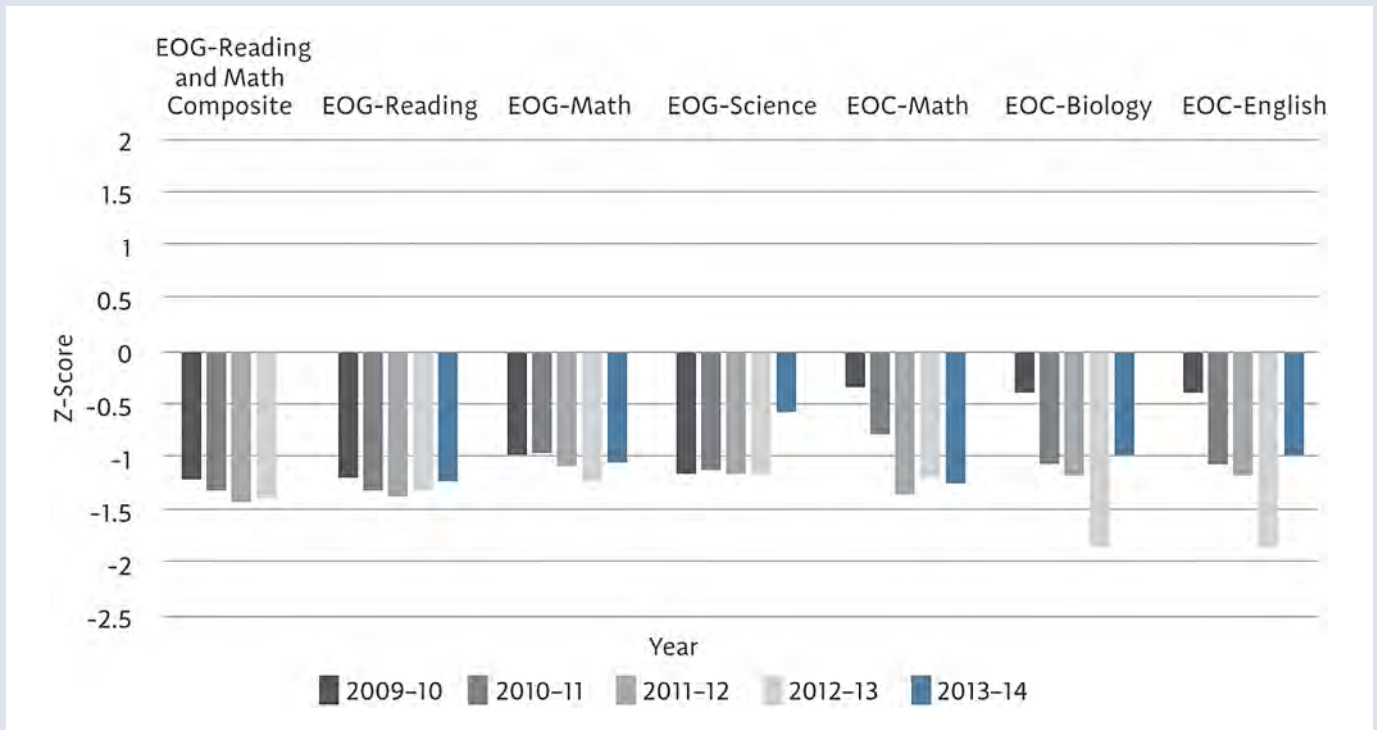
\* In March 2014, the State Board of Education adopted a system of five achievement levels representing tiered levels of proficiency. The state previously had only four of these so-called “cut scores.” The new Level 3 identifies students who are prepared for the next grade but do not meet the college- and career-readiness standard. Students achieving at the

*Continued on page 50*



new Level 3 in 2013–14 would not have been proficient under the scale in use in 2012–13. For more information, see <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/policyoperations/assessbriefs/assessbrief5levels14.pdf> and <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/newsroom/news/2013-14/20131003-01>

Figure A: Z-Scores for Project L.I.F.T. versus statewide proficiency rates



Sources: State/LEA and school test performance from the N.C. Department of Public Instruction; 2013–14 data from the N.C. Department of Public Instruction School Report Cards. Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/reporting/leperformancearchive/>



**Communicating results.** Whether or not L.I.F.T. meets its aspirational goals, it will have to report to the community on its progress. With such clearly stated goals, L.I.F.T. funders wrestle with the idea that L.I.F.T. may be viewed as unsuccessful if those goals are not met within the five-year funding period. As a practical matter, the full impact of L.I.F.T. will not be known in five years. Students who started school as kindergartners in L.I.F.T.'s first year will not even be in middle school when L.I.F.T. funding ends. In hindsight, establishing short-term benchmarks in addition to the loftier long-term goals may have better positioned L.I.F.T. to measure progress and communicate its successes. Moreover, the fact that only a minority of West Charlotte High School students actually attend its L.I.F.T. feeder schools throughout elementary and middle school affects the context in which the maximum benefits of the L.I.F.T. initiative are understood.

**Changing state proficiency standards.** Perhaps most significant to the L.I.F.T. narrative is having to tell its achievement story in the context of changing measurements of student learning. That the meaning of one of the 90-90-90 goals—the goal of 90 percent proficiency in math and reading—has changed since L.I.F.T. was implemented is a nuance that observers may not easily grasp. The changes in state testing instruments and measurement standards effectively raised the proficiency bar for L.I.F.T. and all North Carolina students. L.I.F.T. could strive for that new, higher bar or recalibrate its original goal based on the new bar. In either case, L.I.F.T.'s challenge will be to communicate that story broadly and clearly without compromising on its original goal.

**Declining budget.** The L.I.F.T. funding design has created another challenge. Intended to promote sustainability planning, the L.I.F.T. budget declines over the five-year funding period. In the first half of L.I.F.T. implementation, the L.I.F.T. board shifted funding across the four intervention areas to reflect its strategy priorities, particularly regarding Talent and Time. With the L.I.F.T. funding declining in the last half, the board has less flexibility to shift funds among the intervention areas, and increasingly will have to work with the district on planning sustainability of the most effective and successful components of the L.I.F.T. strategy.

**Sustainability planning.** The L.I.F.T. board and CMS are in the early stages of planning about how to continue L.I.F.T. initiatives beyond the five-year funding period. L.I.F.T. is working with the county commissioners, who allocate county education funding to sustain certain L.I.F.T. initiatives, including the year-round calendars, and replicate others, such as the L.I.F.T. Academy, district-wide. The Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners has approved funding for CMS to begin sustainability implementation work in the 2015–16 school year. The L.I.F.T. board has also accelerated discussions regarding L.I.F.T.'s sustainability given the prospect of losing L.I.F.T.'s strongest advocate within CMS, Ann Clark, who intends to retire in 2016, and facing the unknowns of a new superintendent.

**Race, poverty, and student achievement.** Another challenge lies in the concerns of some community members who recall forced busing from the 1970s to 1990s, and the

**As a practical matter, the full impact of L.I.F.T. will not be known in five years.**

resulting desegregation of Charlotte schools. Though these voices laud Project L.I.F.T. for its commitment to and investment in the West Charlotte corridor and acknowledge the potential impact of the L.I.F.T. interventions, they challenge Charlotte philanthropists to do more to address the fact that low student achievement correlates with student poverty, which is tied to race. For these critics, desegregation is the only sustainable long-term solution for improving the academic performance of poor, minority students. The L.I.F.T. funders also recognize the deleterious impact that schools segregated by race has on educational achievement and socialization for all students, but are unwilling to watch generations of children fail in school while waiting for the community to desegregate its schools. “We have to do something. We think it’s worth trying even if we don’t know if we’ll succeed,” says Anna Spangler Nelson, L.I.F.T. co-chair. But the L.I.F.T. funders may consider the opportunities L.I.F.T. creates to initiate community conversations on equity in education and the impact of race and poverty on student achievement.







## EARLY LESSONS

**T**hough Project L.I.F.T. is only halfway through its five-year funding period, the funders, district, and others have already gleaned some important early lessons from its planning and implementation.

**The business of turning around low-performing schools is hard and thoughtful work that takes time.** The CMS Study Group spent considerable time researching and developing a strategy to improve graduation rates and student outcomes in the West Charlotte corridor. A year of planning preceded actual implementation of the L.I.F.T. strategy in the L.I.F.T. learning community, and included a successful lobbying effort for legislative changes that would pave the way for L.I.F.T. to implement year-round calendars in some schools. Improved graduation rates and growth in student achievement suggest that the investments in planning and strategy are yielding results and that Project L.I.F.T. is succeeding. The development of teachers and leaders who are excited and energized by their work, inspiring stories of students and parents whose lives have been changed because of L.I.F.T., and the replication in CMS of L.I.F.T. initiatives offer further evidence of its positive impact. But at its midpoint, much work remains to meet L.I.F.T.'s well-publicized achievement goals. Because of the complexity of the L.I.F.T. design, determining direct causes of successes to date has been challenging. At this point, lessons about how to implement an initiative like L.I.F.T. are among the clearest.

**Taking a learning stance generates many benefits.** Since the funders always intended that L.I.F.T. would be a learning process, they launched it, in partnership with the school district, with a learning stance. A seven-month study process increased the funders' understanding of how funding decisions affect educational outcomes, the district's responsibilities and operations, and what is required to bring

about change. In design and implementation, L.I.F.T. has experimented, trying both evidence-based practices and promising ideas to see what works in changing education outcomes for low-income and minority students. This openness to learning has reaped layers of benefits. For the funders, the continuous learning process leads to adjustments in the L.I.F.T. implementation strategy, and more generally informs their education philanthropy and funding decisions with other grantees working to improve education outcomes and opportunities. For the district, L.I.F.T. provides a way to pilot and incubate both evidence-based practices and bold but new ideas to see what affects student outcomes and may be replicated.

**Trust and leadership in public-private partnerships are critical elements for success.**

Public-private partnerships of this scale and ambition are relatively rare. With few models to emulate, anticipating every need and potential pitfall can present challenges separate from an initiative's focal activities. The L.I.F.T. public-private partnership is succeeding because it is grounded in a high level of trust between its funders and the district's top leadership team. From the beginning, the funders sought to work in an active partnership with the district; they wanted to do more than just provide funds for district-led initiatives or impose new programs on the district to implement. Hence the funders brought CMS to the planning table and engaged district leaders in their learning process. The district leadership helped educate the funders on specific reform strategies, but also listened to and helped them develop their own ideas. This consistent commitment and active partnership provided the foundation for a strong relationship that has helped the initiative weather significant implementation challenges, including four turnovers in the district's superintendent and some initial lapses with administrative processes. The individual commitment of a few key L.I.F.T. leaders, including L.I.F.T. learning community Superintendent Denise Watts, L.I.F.T. board Co-Chairs Anna Spangler Nelson and Richard "Stick" Williams, and current CMS Superintendent Ann Clark, has also fueled the initiative in ways not documented by any planning, financial, or administrative reports.

**It's not all about the money.** Often in high-profile philanthropic ventures, the money is the main headline, but it's not the clearest lens for understanding the work or goals. With L.I.F.T., the early focus on the amount of money pooled by the funders laid the groundwork for criticism when the initiative has faltered and created some envy among other CMS schools. The \$55 million commitment created expectations among community members about the changes in the northwest corridor that could be achieved, but L.I.F.T. has necessarily had to maintain a tight focus on improving educational outcomes of its students. Accordingly L.I.F.T. has had to adapt its branding and communications approach to counter the perspectives and expectations created by the initial attention to the \$55 million. The focus on the amount also obscures significant dynamics undergirding decision-making in L.I.F.T. Given the finite funding, the L.I.F.T. board has faced hard decisions about funding priorities and investments. The board has also been challenged to balance innovation and experimentation with



sustainability planning. The likelihood of sustaining any of the L.I.F.T. initiatives may have been greater if what L.I.F.T. chose to fund had been recognized by the district at the outset as sustainable with district funds after the \$55 million were gone. But this could have circumscribed L.I.F.T.'s ability to experiment and innovate, so it was not a primary criterion for decision-making.

**Upfront investments in planning reap later dividends.** Funders took a deliberate initial approach, creating a study group that engaged philanthropists, district leaders, and prominent citizens with roots in the West Charlotte corridor in a seven-month inquiry. While the L.I.F.T. strategic framework developed by the funder-district partnership provided an overall structure for implementation planning, hindsight reveals where additional planning may have yielded different results. First, L.I.F.T. stakeholders recognize that a year planning period with a complete team, rather than a one-person staff, may have improved implementation and accelerated the attainment of project goals. Second, having good implementation models enhances the likelihood of success. Unlike the Talent and Time initiatives, the Technology and Parent and Community Engagement initiatives have seen some uneven and not easily measured results. The lack of clarity in strategic planning of these two pillars stems in part from a lack of good models to emulate. Finally, hindsight reveals opportunities that L.I.F.T. missed or overlooked, especially including city and county government representation in L.I.F.T. leadership. Their support of L.I.F.T. will likely be critical to sustain and expand its most promising initiatives.

**Both short- and long-term goals have value.** L.I.F.T.'s "90-90-90 goals" have inspired and resonated with the funders, school staff, district leadership, and the broader community eager to halt the academic decline of Charlotte's northwest corridor. But the reality is that the full impact of L.I.F.T. will not be known in five years. Investments made in the early elementary years lay the groundwork of long-term impact, but students who started in L.I.F.T. schools as kindergartners will be in only the fourth grade at the end of L.I.F.T.'s initial five years. High student mobility and feeder patterns also make it hard to measure the initial impact, when L.I.F.T. elementary students don't continue as L.I.F.T. middle and high schoolers. And while graduation rates have improved significantly in L.I.F.T.'s two and a half years, more significant dividends are expected as programmatic investments gain traction. L.I.F.T. needed aspirational goals to inspire and motivate stakeholders, but the well-publicized 90-90-90 goals have established lofty expectations that risk L.I.F.T. being viewed as a failure if these goals are not achieved— despite all of L.I.F.T. successes. Clearly defined and publicly communicated short-term goals may have been a way to balance realistic expectations against aspirational goals.

**At the midpoint, some things seem to be working.** Though L.I.F.T. is still in pursuit of its 90-90-90 goals, data and qualitative feedback suggest that strategies in the Talent and Time pillars are having their intended effect. Together, strategies focused on recruiting, retaining, developing, and rewarding talented teachers and leaders

have reduced teacher vacancies year to year, and increased the number of teachers applying for L.I.F.T. school positions and the number of effective teachers staying in L.I.F.T. schools year after year. In addition, the L.I.F.T. Academy has helped increase West Charlotte High School's graduation rate with such success that the district is looking to expand the L.I.F.T. Academy concept to some of its other Title I schools. These successes partly reflect the amount of investment and focus L.I.F.T. has devoted to the Talent and Time pillars and affirm the potential for collective investments to effect large-scale change.

**A consistent and strategic communications strategy is critical and worth funding adequately.** From the beginning, the L.I.F.T. funders recognized the importance of including the West Charlotte corridor community in discussions about the education reforms planned for its schools. The funders intentionally solicited feedback from the community and in so doing gained goodwill. But uneven public relations and communication efforts since L.I.F.T. was implemented have allowed its achievements to be overshadowed by media attention to the dollar amount behind L.I.F.T. and the 90-90-90 goals. In addition, a few vocal critics have successfully aired a message in the media that because L.I.F.T. is not tackling the root causes of poverty or segregated schools, it will inevitably fail. As previously suggested, L.I.F.T. had few good models for effective community engagement, and it made greater resource investments in the Talent and Time pillars. But L.I.F.T. will have to find ways to overcome these early shortcomings to effectively communicate its successes and garner the northwest corridor and broader community's support for sustaining its activities.

Charlotte leaders have an opportunity to use the L.I.F.T. initiative to address entrenched issues of race and poverty in the city. L.I.F.T. critics charge that strategies centered solely on improving segregated schools cannot possibly address the root causes of poverty and low academic achievement. L.I.F.T.'s supporters counter that while schools cannot solve these problems completely, they can make a massive, measurable difference in the lives of poor and minority children. At a time when many Americans are wrestling with how to address entrenched issues of race and poverty, funders, district leaders, and community members can use L.I.F.T. as a catalyst to initiate constructive community conversations about race, poverty, and equitable opportunities for students and families citywide.



## CONCLUSIONS

L.I.F.T. is a work in progress. In its annual evaluation report for year two, RFA noted that school turnaround initiatives take time to implement fully, and making substantial academic gains across multiple subject areas requires years of ongoing, consistent implementation of the key elements of the turnaround model.<sup>43</sup> The incremental successes that the L.I.F.T. board and school staff see occurring in their schools and with students drive them toward the 90-90-90 goals. The L.I.F.T. funders and district are starting to have discussions about the sustainability of L.I.F.T. initiatives. Knowing that L.I.F.T.'s critical district partner and champion, Ann Clark, will leave the district after a 16-month tenure as superintendent has accelerated sustainability planning. Unknowns about the district's next superintendent are a familiar concern, but at this point L.I.F.T. has laid a foundation with its schools and CMS that is more easily built upon than undone. L.I.F.T. will continue its evaluation process, looking to see what works and what doesn't. In the meantime, it strives to share what it has learned with its own neighbors and other districts and communities watching what happens in the West Charlotte corridor.

## ENDNOTES

1. 402 U.S. 1 (1971)
2. Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools. (December 2009). *The best education available anywhere*. Retrieved from <http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/mediaroom/Documents/Charlotte-Mecklenburg%20Schools.PDF>
3. Project L.I.F.T., Charlotte Mecklenburg School Investment Study Group Project Summary, January 2011
4. Project L.I.F.T., Charlotte Mecklenburg School Investment Study Group Project Summary, January 2011, citing 2009–10 Charlotte–Mecklenburg Schools data.
5. Project L.I.F.T., Charlotte Mecklenburg School Investment Study Group Project Summary, January 2011
6. Project L.I.F.T., Charlotte Mecklenburg School Investment Study Group Project Summary, January 2011
7. The 90–90–90 goals, shown on the L.I.F.T. webpage at <http://www.projectliftcharlotte.org/>, reflect five outcomes originally stated in the year 1 implementation plan as: 90 percent of teachers and leaders meet standards for highly effective, motivated, and mission-aligned staff; 90 percent of students in West Charlotte corridor schools will achieve more than a year’s worth of academic growth in a year’s time; 90 percent composite proficiency rate at all Project L.I.F.T. schools; 90 percent of students on track to graduate through a 90 percent promotion rate at all grade levels; and 90 percent graduation cohort rate at West Charlotte High School.
8. In March 2014, the N.C. State Board of Education adopted a system of five achievement levels representing tiered levels of proficiency, instead of the previous four so-called “cut scores.” The new Level 3 identifies students who are prepared for the next grade but do not meet the college- and career-readiness standard. Students achieving at the new Level 3 in 2013–14 would not have been proficient under the scale in use in 2012–13. See <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/policyoperations/assessbriefs/assessbrief5levels14.pdf> and <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/newsroom/news/2013-14/20131003-01>
9. Collaboration Agreement, Project L.I.F.T., January 24, 2012.
10. Read Charlotte. (2015, February 3). Charlotte leaders launch \$5.5 million 3rd grade reading initiative [press release]. Retrieved from <http://www.fftc.org/document.doc?id=2522>
11. The staff expansion was incorporated into the CMS–L.I.F.T. memorandum of agreement, which provides that the CMS school board will employ and empower a zone superintendent for the West Charlotte High School feeder zone, a director of evaluations, and a human capital strategist, and L.I.F.T. will fully reimburse the school board for personnel salary and benefits. Collaboration Agreement, Project L.I.F.T., January 24, 2012
12. Norton, M., & Piccinino, K. (2014). *Project LIFT: Year two report*. Philadelphia, PA: Research for Action. Retrieved from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4HdLvUXv8hlc0k1akVPMUNISHM/view>.
13. Hanushek, E. A., Rivkin, S. G., & Kain, J.F. (2005). Teachers, schools, and academic achievement. *Econometrica*, 73(2), 417–458.
14. Allenbrook Elementary, Ashley Park PreK–8 School, Ranson IB Middle School, and Thomasboro Academy were the first L.I.F.T. schools to implement an Opportunity Culture.
15. West Charlotte High School and Bruns Academy implemented an Opportunity Culture in 2015–16.
16. Public Impact, Belk Foundation, Charlotte–Mecklenburg Schools, and Education Resource Strategies. (2014, January 9). The Belk Foundation helps Charlotte design schools to pay teachers more, extend great teachers’ reach, and meet students’ needs [press release]. Retrieved from <http://opportunityculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/CMS-Belk-ERS-PI-Press-Release.pdf>
17. Norton & Piccinino. (2014). *Project LIFT: Year two report*.
18. Figures are based on Project L.I.F.T. analysis of retention of teachers deemed “Irreplaceables”—the top 25 percent of teachers identified annually by L.I.F.T. staff and principals through forced ranking based on critical competencies and data (for instance, student test scores, leading indicators, parent attendance, etc.).
19. Technical corrections to the 2012 Appropriations Act included an exemption from the state’s calendar requirements in N.C.G.S. 155C-84.2. The bill allowed the L.I.F.T. learning community to adopt a calendar of at least 185 days covering at least nine calendar months, but prohibited the school district from funding any more than 185 instructional days. See Session Law 2012–145 (SB 187), Section 7A.11(e). Retrieved from <http://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2011/Bills/Senate/PDF/S187v7.pdf>
20. Bruns Academy and Walter G. Byers School operate on 180-day calendars.
21. Druid Hills Academy and Thomasboro Academy operate on 199-day calendars.
22. Research for Action presentation to the L.I.F.T. board, February 25, 2015.
23. Research for Action presentation to the L.I.F.T. board, February 25, 2015.
24. Research for Action presentation to the L.I.F.T. board, February 25, 2015.
25. For an evaluation of the OLPC XO initiative, see Beaver, J., et al. (2015). *Going one-to-one in urban schools: An evaluation of the XO Champions Initiative in Project LIFT elementary schools*. Philadelphia, PA: Research for Action.



26. Based on allocations to schools.
27. Norton & Piccinino. (2014). *Project LIFT: Year two report*.
28. Research for Action has completed annual evaluations for the L.I.F.T. learning community's first two years. The 2012–13 evaluation is available at [https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B\\_KAbeAWPiQfMnBpNTZJazhvQ1U/edit](https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B_KAbeAWPiQfMnBpNTZJazhvQ1U/edit). The 2013–14 evaluation is available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4HdLvUXv8hlc0k1akVPMUN1SHM/view>.
29. The four-year cohort graduation rates for 2008–09 entering 9th-graders graduating in 2011–12 or earlier came from the searchable database of the Accountability Services Division, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, retrieved from <http://accrpt.ncpublicschools.org/app/2012/cgr/>
30. The four-year cohort graduation rates for 2011–12 entering 9th-graders graduating in 2014–15 or earlier came from the searchable database of the Accountability Services Division, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, retrieved from <http://accrpt.ncpublicschools.org/app/2014/cgr/>
31. N.C. Department of Public Instruction growth model results, provided by Project L.I.F.T.
32. Norton & Piccinino. (2014). *Project LIFT: Year two report*.
33. Research for Action presentation to the L.I.F.T. board, February 25, 2015.
34. Research for Action presentation to the L.I.F.T. board, February 25, 2015.
35. Research for Action presentation to the L.I.F.T. board, February 25, 2015.
36. Norton & Piccinino. (2014). *Project LIFT: Year two report*.
37. Norton & Piccinino. (2014). *Project LIFT: Year two report*.
38. Figures are based on Project L.I.F.T. analysis of retention of teachers deemed “Irreplaceables”—the top 25 percent of teachers identified annually by L.I.F.T. staff and principals through forced ranking based on critical competencies and data (for instance, student test scores, leading indicators, parent attendance, etc.).
39. N.C. Department of Public Instruction proficiency rates, provided by Project L.I.F.T. These percentages reflect composite scores for reading, math, and science.
40. Norton & Piccinino. (2014). *Project LIFT: Year two report*.
41. Norton & Piccinino. (2014). *Project LIFT: Year two report*.
42. N.C. Department of Public Instruction. (2104, April 24.) *Assessment brief: Understanding the five achievement levels*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/policyoperations/assessbriefs/assessbrief5levels14.pdf>; N.C. Department of Public Instruction. (n.d.) *Achievement level information*. Retrieved from <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/accountability/testing/shared/achievelevel/>
43. Norton, M., & Piccinino, K. (2014). *Project L.I.F.T.: Year two report*. Research for Action. See the executive summary, p. viii, citing Pont, B., Kools, M. & Zapata, J. (2014). *Improving schools in Wales: An OECD perspective*. The Organizations for Economic Cooperation and Development; Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allenswork, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. University of Chicago Press; Tucci, T. N. (2009, July). Whole-school reform: Transforming the nation's low-performing high schools. *Policy Brief* Alliance for Excellent Education. Retrieved from [http://www.oxydiane.net/IMG/pdf\\_PolicyBriefWholeSchoolReform.pdf](http://www.oxydiane.net/IMG/pdf_PolicyBriefWholeSchoolReform.pdf)