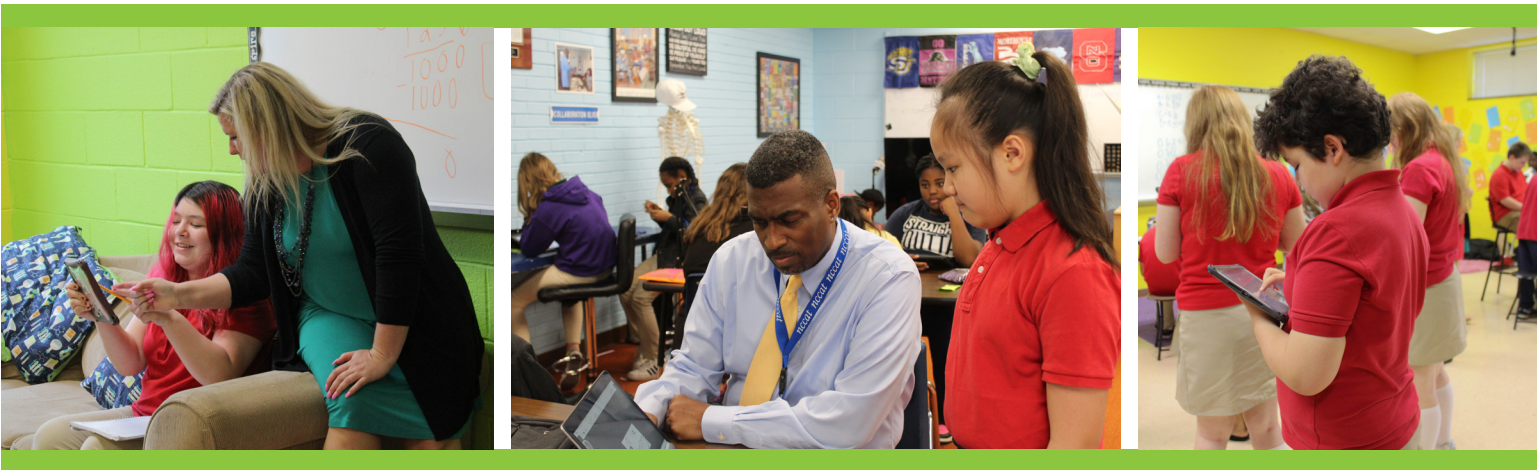**digiLEARN**
DIGITAL LEARNING INSTITUTE

2018 Digital Scholars Initiative:

Empowering Teachers, Fostering Innovation, Creating Impact

2018 Digital Scholars Initiative

Personalized learning helps students become active participants in the creation of their own learning goals and teaches them how to collaborate with others, think critically and solve problems effectively – skills they will need no matter their future career. But personalized learning only works when teachers, who are on the front lines with students every day, are equipped with the resources and support they need to be innovative in the classroom.

Teachers agree. A 2016 digiLEARN survey of 1,327 teachers revealed that 85 percent "believe digital tools that provide immediate, ongoing information about student understanding will increase learning." Unfortunately, most teachers also said they feel they lack the skills and knowledge they need to effectively incorporate digital tools and personalized learning practices in their classrooms.

At digiLEARN, we strongly believe an investment in teachers is an investment in students. That's why we started the Digital Scholars Initiative — to create opportunities for teachers and schools to accelerate innovation and build effective personalized learning models for all students, but especially for students from economically disadvantaged areas. Digital Scholars are teachers who take on invaluable leadership roles at their school and district levels while remaining practicing classroom teachers. Scholars receive release time, personalized professional development, and extended employment so they can:

*   learn how to lead other educators,
*   use their classrooms as Learning Labs for other teachers to observe and learn new instructional practices,
*   and collaborate with researchers and other teachers to design solutions to help their schools innovate and design new learning models.

This spring, the Digital Scholars Initiative launched its pilot year of the program at Rowan-Salisbury Schools in the southwestern region of North Carolina. District leadership identified three teachers – Anthony Johnson, an elementary science and social studies teacher; Sally Schultz, a middle school math and science teacher; and Rebecca Glenn, a high school English teacher – to be the first cohort because of their expertise in digital and personalized learning.

Throughout the year, staff from digiLEARN and program partner Getting Smart worked with the cohort and the district to establish a professional learning community among the three teachers, provide personalized professional development for each Scholar, and offer planning and administrative support to facilitate Learning Lab classroom visits of each Scholar's classroom. Learning Labs allowed teachers from throughout the district to observe instruction in a Scholar's classroom and receive coaching from the Scholar afterward.

From March through August, The Friday Institute at North Carolina State University partnered with digiLEARN to evaluate of the program's pilot year. We are excited about our initial findings, which show that:

*   Our Rowan-Salisbury Digital Scholars are master teachers that have a deep understanding of and highly advanced skills for using digital and personalized instructional strategies that lead to improved outcomes for students.
*   Learning Labs are a promising strategy for spreading effective digital and personalized learning instructional practices.
*   Teachers who visit Learning Labs gain useful knowledge, instructional ideas and inspiration, along with in-depth support from Scholars to implement new instructional strategies in their own classrooms.

This fall, Digital Scholars will expand to include Durham Public Schools in Durham, North Carolina. We are excited to take what we've learned at Rowan-Salisbury to impact even more students and teachers. Enclosed is a summary of key data from our ongoing research, which included interviews with our Scholars, surveys from the teachers who visited their Learning Labs and surveys of students from each Scholar's class.

About The Digital Learning Institute (digiLEARN): The Digital Learning Institute (digiLEARN) is a national nonprofit dedicated to accelerating digital learning for all ages, with a goal of increasing personalized learning options for students, expanding opportunities for teachers and improving the ecosystem for education entrepreneurs. It serves as the front line for development of new learning models, tools, and content needed to help every learner succeed. Former North Carolina Governor Bev Perdue founded digiLEARN in 2014 and serves as the organization's chair.

Empowering Teachers, Fostering Innovation, Creating Impact

- According to our digiLEARN Scholars, one of the best things about being a Digital Scholar is the **opportunity to spread knowledge to and collaborate with** other teachers. All three Digital Scholars said they were excited that teachers in their school and from across their district could observe the **innovative practices** they had put together, get ideas and begin to try implementing the practices in their own classrooms.
- To our Scholars, personalized learning means **meeting students where they are** with their knowledge and skills, and then creating personalized paths that help students succeed. A key component of personalized learning includes **giving students a voice** in their learning — choosing what they need to learn, how they learn and how they can demonstrate what they have learned.
- Digital tools make personalized learning more possible. One scholar said, "(digital technology) is essential for personalized learning," and another said, "it would be much harder to do personalized learning without digital tools."

Impact on Students

Scholars shared a number of ways they see how personalized learning is impacting their students:

- School-wide standardized test scores have increased.
- Student motivation has increased, and the students work harder.
- Behavior problems have decreased, and student engagement, confidence and attendance has increased.
- The school-wide climate has changed

Innovative Classroom Techniques

Scholars are using innovative classroom techniques, which include:

- Using individual learning contracts and playlists
- Administering pre-tests to assess each individual student's level of knowledge
- Assigning digital work so students can go at their own pace, like videos
- Administering surveys to learn about individual student learning preferences
- Allowing students to choose assignments or projects so they pick how they want to show their learning

Photo by Yasmin Bendaas, EdNC

Visiting Teachers

Teachers who visited a Digital Scholar's classroom for a Learning Lab said they were **surprised by the level of focus** they saw in students. They also noticed the ways that the classroom set-up and organization of activities differed from a traditional classroom, which included:

- students working collaboratively in small groups
- students having different areas of the classroom to work in
- the number of different activities going on simultaneously around the room
- how quickly students set up in the different parts of the classroom and began working
- students' comfort and competency with using and explaining how to use Google Drive
- students' autonomy

Finding Inspiration

Visiting teachers said they were inspired by:

- student collaboration
- the Scholars' blended teaching methods
- project-based learning "that drives student interest"
- students' level of engagement
- students' comfort and competency with using and explaining how to use Google Drive, playlists and other tools
- students' ability to self-pace and asses their learning
- "true" teacher facilitation of learning

Immediate Changes

Based on their observations, visiting teachers noted specific changes they could make to their practice and classroom to facilitate greater use of digital technology and personalized learning. Examples they noted:

- providing instructions via a digital platform
- flipping lessons
- giving students the opportunity to take assessments independently (instead of as a group)
- flexible seating
- hands-on assignments
- using completely digital playlists instead of printed ones
- using project-based learning more often

Students

The majority of students in the Scholars' classrooms felt they **learned more**, **enjoyed learning more** and **took more responsibility for their learning** when digital tools were used for self assessment and learning. Surveys completed by 128 students showed that:

- 82 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they learned more when digital tools were used in the classroom, and 79 percent felt they enjoyed learning more. 73 percent said they felt they learned faster.
- 80 percent of students also reported they were more likely to complete in-class assignments when they used digital technology, and 71 percent said they enjoyed in-class assignments more.

"I like using technology because if you use hands-on (devices) like your iPad you can do and learn way more things and faster."

"What I like about using digital technology is that I get to finish and understand more."

"It's like a sheet of paper that's infinite."

Click here for a video of the students in action.