

Mann, Carolina highs to start New Tech program this fall

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Collaborative, project-based learning. Real-world problem-solving. Creativity and critical thinking.

Those are the buzz words in science, technology, engineering and math education these days, and the keystones of a new program set to begin this fall at J.L. Mann and Carolina high schools.

The two schools will join the New Tech Network, a program used in 134 schools in 23 states and Australia, in which 97 percent of students graduate and 98 percent of graduates are accepted to college.

Applications are being accepted this month for ninth-graders to attend New Tech @ J.L. Mann, which will operate as a school-within-a-school, adding a grade each year through 12th grade.

It's not a magnet school, although students accepted into J.L. Mann's magnet program for science, math and technology will be eligible to apply, said Jeff McCoy, the Greenville County School District's educational technology director.

Carolina High's program will be implemented on a school-wide basis, also beginning with ninth grade this fall and adding a grade each year, he said.

"We've been looking at some innovative options for career and college readiness programs," McCoy said. "Ultimately we settled on New Tech because they've been in existence the longest, and the people we've talked with, the results we've seen have been kind of where we'd like to go, especially with Carolina."

New Tech was founded in Napa, Calif., in 1996 and is being used in two South Carolina schools – Cougar New Tech in Walterboro and Scott's Branch High in Summerton. Both schools joined the program at the beginning of the current school year with a \$2.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

"These first two New Tech schools, and those that will follow, will help transform the I-95 corridor into a corridor of innovation for education and economic development in the state," said Jacki Martin, director of the Center for Education Policy and Leadership at Furman University's Richard W. Riley Institute, which helped secure and implement the grant.

McCoy said Greenville has applied for several grants but hasn't received word on them yet. Because district offices were closed this week, district officials didn't have access to information about the cost of the programs planned for Mann and Carolina.

The New Tech program is being used in schools with a wide diversity of student backgrounds, according to McCoy.

But it also has been found to be successful in helping economically disadvantaged students, like many at Carolina High, which has a poverty index of 92.7. That's the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch or whose families receive government assistance.

Former U.S. Secretary of Education and Gov. Dick Riley, a member of board of directors for KnowledgeWorks, which New Tech is a subsidiary of, said the program can have a transformative impact on education in South Carolina.

"There is a critical need for STEM education in rural areas of the United States, and we expect the growth of New Tech Network schools in South Carolina to have a dramatic, positive impact on our region," Riley said.

"At New Tech schools, we see students working in teams, solving problems and taking responsibility for their learning. I am confident these students will become successful members of tomorrow's workforce."

Every freshman in Carolina High Academy's program will be provided with either a tablet or laptop computer, McCoy said.

Courses will be taught using integrated curriculum where students learn about the relationship of different subjects to each other and to a common theme, he said.

For example, World Bio will integrate world geography with biology, Digital Literacy will incorporate English 1 and introduction to computers, and Quantitative Thinking will incorporate physical science and Algebra 1.

Students will be able to take Advanced Placement and dual credit courses, as well as participate in internships with local businesses. Every student will have at least three college credits by the time they graduate, McCoy said.

Teachers will use a computer-based management system to access projects that have been created by New Tech. Teachers will be required to receive a year of professional development before beginning to teach the program, he said.

“We are changing the way we educate our students,” said Carolina Principal Michael Delaney. “They will have more control and choice over their education because the projects will bring relevance to the content. Students will investigate, explore and define meaning in their classes.”

New Tech @ Mann will start with 150 ninth-graders and include 600 students when fully implemented, McCoy said. Registration will be completed this month, he said.