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Executive Summary of

North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies

Final 2012 Activity Report

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NORTH CAROLINA REGIONAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMIES: FINAL 2012 ACTIVITY REPORT

Executive Summary

Developing school leaders who are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to effectively lead low-performing schools has become a critical goal for local education agencies (LEAs) intent on dramatically improving student outcomes. North Carolina's Race to the Top (RttT) plan acknowledges the pressing need for high-quality leadership in low-achieving schools; the component of the plan that focuses on ensuring equitable distribution of high-quality teachers and leaders identifies, among other things, a need for "increasing the number of principals qualified to lead transformational change in low-performing schools in both rural and urban areas" (NCDPI, 2010, p.10). To accomplish this in North Carolina, the state has established three Regional Leadership Academies (RLAs), each of which has laid out a clear set of principles about leadership in general, leadership development in particular, and leadership development for high-need schools most specifically.

North Carolina's Regional Leadership Academies

The policy objective of the RLA initiative is to increase the number of principals qualified to lead transformational change in low-performing schools in both rural and urban areas. NC RttT funds support three RLA programs that serve collaboratives of partnering LEAs:

- Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA) – Established in 2010 (one year before RttT funding was available) and serving 14 LEAs in Northeast North Carolina;
- Piedmont Triad Leadership Academy (PTL) – serving four LEAs in North-central North Carolina; and
- Sandhills Leadership Academy (SLA) – serving 13 LEAs in South-central North Carolina.

Findings

RLA Program Quality (Recruitment, Selection, and Training)

The three essential features of effective leadership preparation programs are: (1) having a program philosophy that clearly articulates a theory of action, (2) having a strong curriculum focused on instruction and school improvement, and (3) having well-designed and integrated coursework and field work (Orr et al., 2012).

- Observational data and document analyses provide converging, consistent evidence that all three RLAs have utilized these central program features as organizing principles in designing, delivering, and deliberating their individual principal preparation programs, and that the fidelity of the implementation of their program designs has been strong.
- Data also indicate that the RLAs have been designed so that their content (i.e., core concepts to be taught), pedagogy (i.e., the means by which learning is facilitated), and experiences

(i.e., the nature of coursework and fieldwork) reflect best practices for developing candidates into leaders who can facilitate high-quality teaching and learning for all children.

- Quality levels vary slightly, but, relative to the alternatives (e.g., traditional North Carolina MSA Programs), the RLAs are much more deliberate, effective, and successful in developing and incorporating critical, research-based features into their programs (rigorous recruitment and selection; cohort-based experiences; an action-research, case-study curriculum focus; full-time, year-long clinical residency experience; weekly full-cohort, continued learning during the residency year; multifaceted support structure; job placement and induction support; and dynamic feedback and improvement loops).

Data on the long-term and distal outcomes of the RLAs are not yet available. The Evaluation Team will seek to assess the impact the RLAs have on principal preparation for high-need schools over the course of the remainder of the RttT grant period (through 2014).

RLA Graduate Placement

- Generally speaking, Cohort 1 participants in each RLA found internship placements in targeted schools and LEAs (i.e., struggling, low-performing schools).
- In addition, Cohort 1 graduates also landed jobs in target schools and LEAs. On average, their employing schools hosted student bodies in which:
 - More than two-thirds (67.6%) receive free or reduced-price lunch;
 - The proportion of at- or above-grade level English I/Reading scores hover around 57.75%; and
 - The proportion of at- or above-grade level Algebra I/Math scores hover just below the 65% mark.

Next Steps

The ongoing evaluation will probe deeper into five specific program areas:

1. *Sustainability*. How prepared is each RLA sustain this project after the grant funding ends?
2. *Recruitment*. How do RLAs recruit candidates who follow non-traditional pathways to principalship?
3. *Mentor selection and training*. What is each RLA doing to ensure good intern/mentor/school site matches? What ongoing training do mentor principals receive?
4. *Induction support*. What is each RLA doing to provide ongoing support, mentoring, and advice through job placement?
5. *Common Core State Standards*. What is each RLA doing to continue to address the Common Core?

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