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Executive Summary of

North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies

Final 2013 Activity Report

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NORTH CAROLINA REGIONAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMIES: FINAL 2013 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)¹ 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 (i.e., to prepare approximately 185 turnaround leaders). 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 (PTLA)—serving four LEAs in north-central North Carolina; and
- Sandhills Leadership Academy (SLA)—serving 13 LEAs in south-central North Carolina.

Findings

- All three RLAs utilize essential features of effective leadership preparation programs as organizing principles in designing and delivering their individual principal preparation programs. The content, pedagogy, and experiences reflect best practices for developing leaders who can facilitate high-quality teaching and learning for all children.
- Fidelity of implementation of program designs (i.e., the degree to which the interventions have been delivered as intended) has been strong (e.g., each RLA has recruited and prepared over 60 "turnaround principal" candidates).

¹ LEA is North Carolina's term for traditional school districts and charter schools.

- Participants in every cohort in each RLA have found internship placements in targeted schools and LEAs (i.e., low-performing schools, though not always schools on the list of the 5% of lowest-achieving schools in the State).
- The year-long internship experience for the principal candidates has consistently provided them with mentoring and coaching that the candidates believe will enhance their effectiveness as principals.
- Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 graduates have found employment in low-performing schools and LEAs (19 as principals, 79 as assistant principals, 8 as central office leaders, and 9 as teacher leaders/facilitators).² On average (based on data from 2008-09 through 2011-12, prior to the new 2012-13 assessment results), their employing schools host high numbers of lower-income students (68.2% receive free or reduced-price lunch) and exhibit low achievement rates (e.g., the Reading/English I pass rate is 62.6%; the Mathematics/Algebra I pass rate is 72.3%).

Recommendations

RLA directors should focus more time and attention on:

- Working more assertively with LEAs to ensure that the leaders who matriculate from the programs are placed in and then supported in their efforts to lead transformational change in high-need schools; and
- Critically reviewing the recruitment, training, and matching processes of mentors and coaches for the principal candidates, as well as replacement plans for mentors and coaches who are not effective.

Next Steps

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

1. *Sustainability*. How prepared is each RLA to sustain this project after the grant funding ends?
2. *Mentor selection and training*. What is each RLA doing to ensure good intern/mentor/school site matches? What ongoing training do mentor principals receive?
3. *Induction support*. What is each RLA doing to provide ongoing support, mentoring, and advice through job placement?

Targeted Findings for the Final Report

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). To that end,

² However, their employment often is as assistant principals or in other administrative roles that may lead to principalships, and is not always in initially-targeted schools that participate in the state's RttT-funded Turning Around Lowest-Achieving Schools initiative.

the final report will present some student testing results for schools with RLA-prepared principals and assistant principals (as well as other measures of principal effectiveness) to estimate preliminary evidence of the RLAs on student achievement (e.g., via comparisons of and contrasts between average three-year growth trajectories in these schools prior to and after RLA hires).

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