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Executive Summary of

Local Strategic Staffing in North Carolina

A Review of Plans and Early Implementation

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LOCAL STRATEGIC STAFFING IN NORTH CAROLINA: A REVIEW OF PLANS AND EARLY IMPLEMENTATION

Executive Summary

Education experts and researchers agree that effective teachers are critical to the academic success of students, but all too often, students who struggle the most do not have access to effective teachers. Concern about the uneven access of low-performing, poor, and minority students to effective teachers is a foundational component of the United States Department of Education's Race to the Top (RttT) program, which encouraged applicants to propose ways in which states could work to counter this persistent trend. In response, North Carolina's proposal offered several state-level initiatives for achieving a more equitable distribution of effective educators statewide, including support for locally-developed strategic staffing plans, or plans that *aim to distribute an education unit's more effective educators¹ into its lowest-performing schools.*

Many of the individual Detailed Scopes of Work (DSWs) crafted by Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to demonstrate how they will use RttT funds to support RttT goals outline strategies for maintaining or developing strategic staffing plans. An overriding goal of the evaluation of these LEA-level strategic staffing plans is to determine whether and to what extent they collectively or individually contribute to an increase in the presence of effective teachers in the lowest-performing schools in LEAs with these plans. Specifically, the intent of this evaluation is to:

- Identify, classify, and describe all LEA-level strategic staffing initiatives in operation across the state that support RttT goals (whether funded in whole or in part by RttT, or by some other source or sources);
- Provide qualitative and, where possible, quantitative assessments of the impact of RttT-supported staffing initiatives on outcomes related to the distribution of effective teachers in low-performing schools;
- Provide evidence for policy makers and other stakeholders that they can use to improve the design and implementation of these plans; and
- Provide recommendations for continuation, expansion, or termination of these plans at the conclusion of the RttT period.

This report begins the process of assessing the impact of local strategic staffing plans on moving individual LEAs toward a more targeted and thoughtful distribution of their most effective educators, as well as the advisability of continuing these plans at the end of the RttT period. The report provides a categorized overview of all of the plans proposed in the LEA DSWs, as well as a detailed description of the most comprehensive of these plans.

Also included is initial information about a state-supported but locally-focused strategic staffing strategy: the provision of technical assistance to selected LEAs to support their development of targeted recruitment and retention strategies.

¹ For this report, effectiveness is broadly defined as any measure that differentiates educator impact on students.

Criteria for Identifying Comprehensive Strategic Staffing Plans

Three criteria were developed from a review of available literature and extant examples of strategic staffing initiatives to aid in the identification of comprehensive strategic staffing plans in North Carolina: (a) the plan focuses on low-performing schools or student populations, (b) the plan differentiates teachers through some measure of their effectiveness, and (c) the plan incorporates some type of incentive to increase the number of more effective teachers in low-performing schools.

Findings

Based on a review of the most recent set of LEA DSWs, there are currently 18 LEAs with plans that exhibit characteristics of all three criteria—11 funded partially or wholly by RttT and 7 funded entirely by another source. In addition, there are 55 plans that meet either one or two of these criteria. While there are some similarities across plans, overall the plans are quite different.

Conclusions

There are several notable trends and possibilities revealed by this report's first scan of the strategic staffing landscape in North Carolina:

1. *Emergence of second-generation strategic staffing*: Instead of a limited, financial incentive-only approach and an exclusive focus on teachers and administrators, many of the plans reviewed for this report incorporate complex incentives structures tied to school improvement goals, along with inclusion of a broader range of school staff members.
2. *Potential for sustainability*: Very few plans rely exclusively on RttT funds (indeed, many plans across the state use no RttT funds at all), which bodes well for their possible continuation after the grant period ends. However, many of the plans rely on other funding sources that also are short-term; very few LEAs appear to have developed specific plans for sustainability after short-term funding ends.
3. *Growing diversity in strategic staffing approaches*: While they share some similar characteristics, most of the plans described in this report avoid taking a one-size-fits-all approach and instead appear to be tailored to meet local needs.
4. *Opportunities for sharing across LEAs*: The importance of customized plans notwithstanding, the apparent variety in the maturity and complexity of plans suggests that many LEAs with emerging plans may benefit greatly from investigating the more fully developed plans in other LEAs. As mentioned in the RttT proposal, LEAs may benefit from sharing and discussing their plans.
5. *Opportunities for in-depth study*: A side benefit of the diversity of the local strategic staffing plans is that their feasibility and effectiveness can be compared to inform the development of future strategic staffing efforts.

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