

Consortium for  
Educational  
Research and  
Evaluation–  
North  
Carolina

*Executive Summary of*

## Race to the Top in North Carolina, 2010-2012

A Summary of Formative Findings

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February 2013

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## **RACE TO THE TOP IN NORTH CAROLINA, 2010-2012: A SUMMARY OF FORMATIVE FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

In November 2012, the State reached the mid-point of its four-year implementation of the ambitious and multi-layered package of initiatives described in its Race to the Top (RttT) scope of work. The tasks are complex and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) has made great strides toward full implementation of the initiatives. Reaching this mid-point provides RttT leadership with a valuable opportunity to reflect on its successes and review its initial implementation plans, with an eye towards making mid-course improvements that will ensure successful completion of the scope of work. This memorandum acknowledges all of the important work that has taken place and serves as an opportunity to provide the State with a framework for identifying areas for improvement over the remaining two years of implementation.

The memorandum summarizes formative assessments provided by the RttT Evaluation Team<sup>1</sup> to North Carolina RttT implementers for initiative work conducted between November 2010 and June 2012. The goal of the Evaluation Team's formative assessments is to provide timely data, analyses, and recommendations to help the initiative teams improve their ongoing work. Formative assessment is one of three components of the RttT Evaluation Team's work; other components include documentation of the activities of RttT initiatives and summative evaluations to determine whether or not the RttT initiatives met their goals and to inform future policy and program decisions. While all three components are often included in initiative evaluation reports, this memorandum focuses exclusively on the formative aspects of previously-released evaluations of individual RttT initiatives.

### **Method and Data Sources**

To date, ten of the RttT Evaluation Team's fifteen formal reports have focused on individual RttT initiatives and have included either initiative-specific formative evaluation findings or findings that contribute to the larger formative assessment of overall RttT implementation.<sup>2</sup> These ten reports—grouped below by RttT pillar—inform the contents of this memorandum:

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<sup>1</sup> The Consortium for Educational Research and Evaluation–North Carolina (CERE–NC) conducts the evaluation of North Carolina's RttT initiatives. CERE–NC is a partnership of the Carolina Institute for Public Policy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University, and the SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

<sup>2</sup> The Evaluation Team also has released five technical briefings and baseline reports (available at: <http://cerenc.org>), but since these reports do not contain formative findings or focus on specific initiatives, they are not included in this summary. They include: a technical report on using high-tech recording systems in classroom observations (October 2011), a baseline report on characteristics of STEM schools in North Carolina (December 2011), an initial technical report on value-added modeling (February 2012), a baseline report on local strategic staffing plans (September 2012), and a second expanded report on value-added modeling (October 2012).

- **Equitable Supply and Distribution of Teachers and Leaders**
  1. *Regional Leadership Academies Cost-Effectiveness Framework – (RLA) – March 2012*
  2. *North Carolina Teacher Corps Start-Up and Teach for America Expansion: Initial Findings on Recruitment, Training, and Placement – (NCTC) – Under Review*
  3. *North Carolina New Teacher Support Program (NC NTSP): First Annual RttT Evaluation Report – (NTSP) – Under Review*
- **Professional Development**
  4. *Building LEA and Regional Professional Development Capacity: First Annual Evaluation Report – (PD-Y1) – January 2012*
  5. *Distinguished Leadership in Practice (DLP): First Annual RttT Evaluation Report – (DLP) – September 2012*
  6. *Building LEA and Regional Professional Development Capacity: Second Annual Evaluation Report (Includes Race to the Top Online Professional Development Evaluation: Interim Report) – (PD-Y2 [and OPD]) – Under Review*
- **District and School Transformation**
  7. *Turning Around North Carolina’s Lowest Achieving Schools (2006-2010) – (DST) – September 2011*
  8. *STEM Affinity Networks: Year 1 Report – (STEM-Y1) – April 2012*
  9. *STEM Affinity Networks: Year 2 Report – (STEM-Y2) – Under Review*
- **Local-Level Implementation and Spending**
  10. *Local Education Agency Race to the Top Expenditures: An Initial Analysis – (Local) – September 2012*

### Major Formative Assessment Themes

The Evaluation Team reviewed the formative findings in each of the ten reports and identified four thematic categories of findings that appear across two or more of the reports:

***Implementation Capacity, Implementation, Local Support, and Planning for 2013 and Beyond.***

When taken collectively, these findings provide a comprehensive summary of the development of promising practices supported by RttT, as well as of areas in which RttT implementers may benefit from additional reflection and planning.

### ***Implementation Capacity***

*Reports Informing this Category: (NCTC, NTSP, PD-Y1, PD-Y2, OPD, DLP, DST, STEM-Y1, STEM-Y2)*

#### *Summary of Formative Findings to Date*

The State continues to move toward stronger management of all of the initiatives funded by RttT. To this point, the State has implemented the RttT initiatives using two different models—one in which NCDPI has primary responsibility for developing, managing, and implementing an initiative (e.g., District and School Transformation), and one in which NCDPI shares development and implementation responsibilities with one or more partners, sometimes vesting a partner with most of those responsibilities (e.g., development of the Education Cloud).

Through its application of the first model, NCDPI has demonstrated a capacity to propose, develop, and manage a wide array of new initiatives and, in so doing, has lowered historical barriers to collaboration between departments and programs within the agency. Under the second model, management also has been strong in most cases; the few initial co-managerial difficulties that arose during the first year of implementation are now largely resolved.

#### *Implications for Planning for the Future*

As the State approaches the mid-point of RttT funding, NCDPI should examine the current management structure of each of the initiatives for which it is directly responsible and determine which initiatives may benefit from management modifications that strategically engage partners in order to enhance the capacity that already has been built to this point. Additionally, NCDPI may consider examining management structures again towards the end of the grant in order to sustain capacity and progress beyond the life of the grant. In particular, NCDPI may benefit from examining the most successful and seamless of the collaboration models to this point (e.g., the Distinguished Leadership in Practice program) to determine whether any other initiatives could benefit from such partnerships.

### ***Updating the Education Workforce***

*Reports Informing this Category: (NCTC, NTSP, PD-Y1, PD-Y2, OPD, DLP, DST, STEM-Y1, STEM-Y2)*

#### *Summary of Formative Findings to Date*

State and local implementers have been able to launch many of the programs and projects outlined in the state's proposal, though delays and disagreements among partners about the implementation of some initiatives suggest that there is still room for improvement in some areas of planning, communications, and timely implementation.

To date, the single largest product of the various RttT initiatives has been provision of professional development in an effort to rapidly and effectively update the education workforce on such topics as the Common Core and Essential Standards. Preliminary evaluation results to

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this point indicate that most of these efforts have been successful. Overall, participants have reacted positively to most of the professional development activities, with ratings for most sessions indicating that they have been useful, informative, and on-point for addressing the targeted issues or problems. In addition, participants have appreciated the opportunities provided during many of these events for face-to-face networking; some participants have suggested that they might benefit from even more time to interact and collaborate with their counterparts in other schools and Local Education Agencies (LEAs).

*Implications for Planning for the Future*

Trainings and other forms of professional development have not always been uniformly effective across some of the RttT initiatives and might be strengthened by:

- Moving toward greater differentiation of materials and resources not only across but also within modules, to accommodate the wide array of experiences and backgrounds of participants;
- Making clear and consistent connections between specific initiative goals, broader policies and goals, and the immediate, on-the-ground training provided to participants; and
- Continuing to improve utilization of technology's capacity to stimulate deeper interactions among participants, as well as between participants and facilitators—there are numerous programs and resources available, but technology is not yet being used to its fullest potential or in ways that enhance practitioner learning and networking.

***Local Support***

<p><i>Reports Informing this Category: (NCTC, NTSP, PD-Y1, PD-Y2, DLP, DST, STEM-Y1, STEM-Y2, Local)</i></p>
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*Summary of Formative Findings to Date*

Perhaps the most complex and delicate task associated with RttT is encouraging local-level participation in the implementation of the State's initiatives while simultaneously supporting the seamless integration of local-level initiatives into the larger implementation process. Evidence to date suggests that the State's approach to administering the RttT grant has supported the grant's principle of local autonomy; programs and projects are being integrated at the local level in multiple ways.

Local capacity to implement both State- and LEA-initiated RttT projects remains varied across LEAs, however, and there are some concerns at the local level about ongoing support. In some cases, the indirect costs of implementation to LEAs and schools have been higher than anticipated, and current local resources may be insufficient to support the continued implementation of some RttT initiatives, both during the remainder of the grant period and beyond.

*Implications for Planning for the Future*

As the grant timeline shifts from start-up and early implementation to full implementation and sustainability, high-quality, ongoing implementation of RttT initiatives at the local level may require greater attention on the part of NCDPI and other partners to differences in LEA capacities. Plans for the final two years of the grant may benefit from modifications that incorporate more flexibility to address the fact that multiple stakeholders remain at different stages of implementation preparedness. When feasible, implementers should consider moving toward regional and even local customization of delivery of programs and projects.

***Planning for 2013 and Beyond***

*Reports Informing this Category: (RLA, PD-Y1, PD-Y2, DLP, DST, STEM-Y1, Local)*

The ultimate goal of a program like RttT is to identify the most successful initiatives supported by the grant and integrate them into the ongoing provision of educational services across the state. The mid-point of the grant is the optimal time for beginning to plan for continuation or discontinuation of RttT-funded initiatives when the grant period ends. The extended time required for full and effective implementation of some initiatives is becoming clearer, and stakeholders already are concerned about the sustainability of funding past the grant period.

In addition to preparing to assess which of the RttT-funded initiatives should be targeted for ongoing support and expansion after RttT, state implementers also should begin now to plan for identifying stakeholders whose ongoing engagement in each initiative will be most beneficial. Ensuring now the involvement of the right balance of participants at both the local and state levels will strengthen implementation after the grant ends.

Finally, the State should begin reviewing now the types of data it currently collects for each initiative, with a goal of determining whether those data will continue to be adequate for conducting post-RttT assessments of their ongoing impact. Such reviews will be especially important for those initiatives that are not yet fully operational (e.g., the Instructional Improvement System) and are not likely to provide enough data to generate meaningful conclusions about their impact by the time RttT ends.

It is clear that NCDPI and its implementation partners have made significant progress since the beginning of the grant period, and with careful planning and reflection at this critical mid-point, the prospects will remain bright for ongoing success.

**Moving from Formative to Summative: A Look Ahead**

RttT implementation has now entered its third year, and with the turning of that corner the Evaluation Team is beginning preparations for a series of final formative and summative reports, of which this memorandum is the first.

In October 2013, the Evaluation Team will update this memorandum with a final summary of the formative assessments generated for each RttT initiative, with a goal of providing feedback on

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the most promising practices across all initiatives. That report will be followed in November 2013 by an initial overall cost and sustainability analysis of the RttT initiatives.

Finally, in September 2014, the Evaluation Team will synthesize policy recommendations across initiatives. The Team then will conclude its work by providing a summative report on the preliminary impacts of the highest-priority initiatives, including professional development, efforts to turn around the lowest performing schools, and initiatives to increase the supply and equitable distribution of high quality educators.

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