North Carolina's Race to the Top Initiative

An Evaluation Update

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NORTH CAROLINA'S RACE TO THE TOP INITIATIVE:
AN EVALUATION UPDATE AND INDICATIONS OF PROMISING PRACTICES

The Race to the Top Evaluation

The Consortium for Educational Research and Evaluation–North Carolina (CERE–NC)[1] is conducting the evaluation of North Carolina's Race to the Top (RttT) initiatives. The roles of the RttT Evaluation Team are to (1) document the activities of the RttT initiatives; (2) provide timely, formative data, analyses, and recommendations to help the initiative teams improve their ongoing work; and (3) provide summative evaluation results toward the end of the grant period to determine whether the RttT initiatives met their goals and to inform future policy and program decisions to sustain, modify, or discontinue initiatives after the grant-funded period.

The Four Pillars of Race to the Top

North Carolina's RttT application included proposals for multiple initiatives designed to address one or more of the four pillars (areas of focus) upon which the RttT program was developed. These pillars and the North Carolina initiatives proposed to address each one are outlined here.

Pillar 1. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

The goal for this pillar is to identify the state's persistently lowest-achieving schools and support districts in turning them around, in order to improve educational opportunities for students in those schools.

North Carolina's proposal included the following initiatives in this area:

- Expansion of District and School Transformation efforts; and

- Development of networked STEM thematic schools.

Pillar 2. Great Teachers and Leaders

The goals for this pillar include increasing teacher and principal effectiveness, along with improving their equitable distribution statewide.

North Carolina's proposal included the following initiatives related to *educator effectiveness*:

- Revision and expansion of the teacher and principal evaluation processes;

- Incorporation of student growth measures to provide additional information on teacher effectiveness; and

- Provision of performance incentives for effective teachers in the lowest-achieving schools.

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[1] 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.

North Carolina's proposal included the following initiatives related to achieving *a more equitable distribution of effective educators* statewide:

- Alternative preparation programs for effective school leaders provided by Regional Leadership Academies;

- Creation of a New Teacher Support Program to strengthen the development of novice teachers in the lowest-performing schools;

- Development of Virtual Public School blended learning STEM courses to expand curriculum offerings and provide effective instruction when teachers for a subject are not available locally;

- Support for state and local strategic staffing initiatives to encourage the movement of effective teachers into lower-performing schools;

- Development of a North Carolina Teacher Corps and expansion of Teach for America in eastern North Carolina to increase the number of effective teachers employed in low-income rural areas and high-need urban schools;

- Monitoring and reporting on the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs; and

- Expansion of statewide professional development in support of RttT goals and initiatives (including online professional development and the Distinguished Leadership in Practice program).

Pillar 3. Standards and Assessments

This pillar focuses on the state's adoption of rigorous standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace.

North Carolina's proposal included the following initiative in this area:

- Transition to new standards and assessments statewide (supported by professional development).

Pillar 4. Data Systems to Support Instruction

The purpose of this pillar is to support construction of data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals in ways that help them improve their practices.

North Carolina's proposal included the following initiatives in this area:

- An increase in the use of data statewide for decision-making (to be supported by the North Carolina Education Cloud and by professional development); and

- Development of an online Instructional Improvement System for educators, students, and parents (now called Home Base).

Race to the Top Goals

North Carolina's proposal included broad student-focused goals, under the theory that each initiative, if successful, would contribute to improvements in these student-focused outcomes. These goals are in the areas of: (a) student achievement; (b) graduation rates; (c) college readiness: and (d) college enrollment. The official four-year targets for these four goal areas are included in the table on the next two pages (Table 1). The proposal did not include specific, measurable goals for each individual initiative.

Table 1. Approved North Carolina Priority Goals for Race to the Top

State RttT Goal	Measure	Baseline 2009-10	Targets / Actual Results to Date 2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
1. Student Achievement ** In the 2012-13 school year, new assessments aligned to new standards (including the Common Core) will be implemented in NC. This introduction of new assessments may require the adjustment of these targets to ensure ambitiousness and feasibility.*	% of All Students Proficient - Grade 4 Reading		74.6%	77.6%	80.6%*	83.6%*
	(State End of Grade test; a proxy for NAEP Grade 4 Reading)	*71.6%*	*71.6%*	*71.6%*		
	% of All Students Proficient - Grade 4 Math		85.0%	87.0%	89%*	91.0%*
	(State End of Grade test; a proxy for NAEP Grade 4 Math)	*83.0%*	*83.8%*	*85.1%*		
	% of All Students Proficient - Grade 8 Reading		72.5%	75.5%	78.5%*	81.5%*
	(State End of Grade test; a proxy for NAEP Grade 8 Reading)	*69.5%*	*69.8%*	*71.1%*		
	% of All Students Proficient - Grade 8 Math		86.9%	89.9%	92.9%*	95.9%*
	(State End of Grade test; a proxy for NAEP Grade 8 Math)	*83.9%*	*84.4%*	*85.2%*		
2. Graduation Rates** *** Targets for this measure have been updated since the initial RttT application to reflect actual, rather than projected, 2009-10 baseline data; the targets are now more ambitious.*	4-Year Cohort Rate		76%	79%	82%	85%
		74.2%	*77.9%*	*80.4%*	*82.5%*	
3. College Readiness[2]	Average SAT Composite in Reading & Math (% students taking)***		1,005 (66%)	---	---	---
		1,004 (64%)	*1,001 (67%)*	*997 (68%)*	*1001 (62%)*	

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[2] The North Carolina State Board of Education has approved an additional measure for this category—the WorkKeys Composite—which is a measure of the percent of Career and Technical Education graduates who achieve a Silver certificate or better, but addition of this measure has not yet been approved by the United States Department of Education.

State RttT Goal	Measure	Baseline 2009-10	Targets / Actual Results to Date			
			2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
3. College Readiness (cont.)	Average ACT Composite (% students taking)***	---	---	---	18.3	18.4
				18.2 (100%)		
	% of AP exams taken on which students scored 3 or above (% of students taking AP exams)***		60% (11%)	62% (13%)	64% (15%)	66% (17%)
		57.6% (10.4%)	*61.8% (10.6%)*	*61.8% (11.3%)*		

*** Language for these three goals has been modified or added since the initial RttT application to more clearly identify the specific indicator/data being referenced and/or to reflect policy updates.

Legislation passed in 2011 requires the administration of the ACT statewide, which impacts the representativeness of the SAT as a college readiness measure. USED has approved the inclusion of the ACT be included as a measure for college readiness and the State Board of Education has approved the targets noted above.

State RttT Goal	Measure	Baseline 2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
4. College Enrollment[3]	% of high school graduates who enroll in post-secondary education programs ****		67%	68%	70%	72%
		66.0%	*64.0%*	*61.3%*		

**** The 2010-11 target for this measure has been updated (increased) since the initial RttT application to reflect actual, rather than projected, 2009-10 baseline data (NCES, 2008).

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[3] The North Carolina State Board of Education has approved a fifth **State Goal** category—**College Course Completion**—but addition of this goal has not yet been approved by the United States Department of Education.

Summaries of Evaluations to Date of the Initiatives Supporting Each Pillar

This section briefly describes each of the main Race to the Top initiatives and summarizes evaluation findings and recommendations for those initiatives for which evaluation data are available. These summaries include initiative implementation data collected through 2012-13. Since the evaluations thus far have concentrated primarily on the quality of implementation and participation in the initiatives, the recommendations have focused on ways to improve implementation or increase participation. The summaries do not include evaluations of initiative impacts on students or teachers; as the data on students and teachers from the 2012-13 school year become available, the evaluation reports will shift from reporting on progress and implementation to reporting on outcomes and impacts of the initiatives. In addition, future reports will present options for sustaining initiatives that have demonstrated effectiveness.

Though each initiative was described in the original proposal as supporting one specific pillar, several initiatives impact multiple pillars. In the summaries below, some of these cross-cutting initiatives have been included under pillars that are different from the ones under which they appeared in the original proposal; each of these is noted below. A summary of the impact of local-level RttT expenditures is included below as well.

Pillar 1. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

District and School Transformation

Rationale for the initiative. Since the mid-1990s, the state has intervened in its lowest-performing schools and districts. The state identified a persistently low-achieving sub-set of these schools for additional intervention with RttT support.

Brief description of the initiative. The mission of the Turning Around Lowest-Achieving Schools (TALAS) initiative is to improve student achievement in the lowest-achieving five percent of the state's elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as graduation rates in high schools with 4-year cohort graduation rates below 60%. In addition, DST works with twelve of the lowest-achieving school districts in the state to strengthen their ability to support effective school reform. Central instruments of reform are a planning process focused on key school functions, professional development, and sustained coaching at the district, school, and classroom levels. DST also coordinates with other components of the RttT grant designed to improve low-achieving schools, including efforts to recruit, prepare, and support new leaders and teachers.

Time period covered in reports: School years 2006-07 through 2011-12.

Most important findings and recommendations to date:

- Finding: The RttT-supported TALAS initiative builds upon and extends the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's (NCDPI's) pre-existing District and School Transformation (DST) Program, which intervened in low-achieving schools for four years before RttT started (2006-2010). The Evaluation Team began its work by reviewing these pre-RttT efforts. The level of improvement across schools served by the DST Program prior

to RttT varied, but on average, target schools improved significantly more than similar schools serving similar students.

- Finding: The pre-RttT improvement was brought about not via implementation of an externally developed "model" but through a process designed to meet the needs of the individual schools that was closely monitored by the pre-RttT DST Program. The process included: (a) a mandatory planning process structured by the program's "Framework for Action" and supported by program personnel; (b) professional development designed to support the implementation of the plan; and (c) school and classroom-level coaching designed to support implementation and guide adaptation of the plan as needed to meet improvement objectives.

- Finding: In almost all cases, the process began with replacement of the principal, as well as some staff members. The process was comprehensive and led to the re-establishment of school functions (including a culture of accountability and commitment), development of teachers' and administrators' knowledge and skills, better management of instruction and instructional time, and support for external linkages between the district, parents, and the community.

- Finding: Over the first two years of the RttT period (2010-11 and 2011-12), TALAS schools' Performance Composites improved substantially more than did those in all schools statewide, and schools in the 12 districts where TALAS also had intervened at the district level improved more than those with school-only intervention, suggesting that TALAS's school-level interventions are making a notable difference in performance improvement, and that the district-level interventions are increasing these positive effects.

- Finding: Before TALAS intervention, connections—such as those between teachers and administrators within these schools or between the school and the district—had been missing or weakly developed. TALAS's district interventions include: strengthened accountability, trust and engagement within schools to focus on student achievement; provided guidance, instruction, and assistance to build knowledge and skills necessary to improve performance; and supported and monitored effective practices, assessment of outcomes, and use of assessment results to improve practices.

- Key Recommendations:
  - The State Board and NCDPI leadership should maintain TALAS's practice of staffing the program with school administrators and teachers who have track records of success in schools facing challenges similar to those faced by the TALAS target schools;
  - The State Board and NCDPI leadership should support TALAS in forcing the replacement of principals and teachers who fail to improve in response to professional development and coaching;
  - To assure that effective principals and teachers are available to replace those who fail to improve, NCDPI and RttT leadership should review the components of the overall RttT plan designed to help recruit, prepare, and support leaders and teachers for such schools to assure that they are focused appropriately to support DST's turnaround efforts;

- o To help institutionalize its successful district-level intervention process, DST should create a District Framework for Action analogous to the one used to guide planning at the school level; and

- o In preparation for the end of RttT funding, DST leadership should consider how to best allocate continuing resources for turning around low-performing schools, particularly focusing on whether it is better to serve fewer schools with more resources allocated per school, particularly at the classroom level, or to continue to serve the current number of schools at the maximum intensity level that resources will allow.

Targeted findings for the final report:

- Assess the contributions of coaching to the overall DST set of interventions, including analysis of the degree to which specific coaching strategies account for its effects.

- Provide a rigorous summative assessment of the overall impact of DST interventions over the four-year RttT grant period, with special focus on student achievement and high school graduation rates.

STEM Anchor and Affinity Schools

(In the state's application, this initiative was described under the ***Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools*** pillar but has since been considered a separate and distinct initiative.)

Rationale for the initiative. In its RttT application, the state contended that turning around the lowest-achieving districts and schools requires more than just intervention at the building level; as important is working to change the educational opportunities available to students. The STEM Anchor and Affinity Schools initiative was designed to address this lesson learned through the development of networks of innovative STEM-focused schools.

Brief description of the initiative. The RttT STEM initiative supports the following major activities in North Carolina: (1) Development of a network of 20 STEM schools across the state, each of which is focused on one of four major themes relevant to North Carolina economic development (health and life sciences, biotechnology and agriscience, energy and sustainability, and aerospace, security, and automation). Four of these schools are designated as anchor schools, serving as centers for building integrated STEM curricula and partnerships for the themed networks; (2) Provision of professional development and coaching to staff in the network schools; (3) Development of integrated STEM curricula for 9th through 12th grades in each of the four themes; and (4) Development of partnerships between schools, businesses, and Institutes of Higher Education for each of the four themes.

Time period covered in reports: School years 2010-11 through 2011-12.

Summary of most important findings and recommendations to date:

- Finding: The RttT STEM initiative has made progress toward its goal of serving minority and low-income students (who are traditionally underrepresented in STEM fields), with average populations of African-American and Hispanic students higher than those in other North Carolina high schools (44% vs. 38%), and average populations of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunches much higher (53% vs. 24%).

- Finding: While the STEM initiative implementation as a whole is on-track, some areas have moved further ahead (professional development) than others (networking and collaboration among schools with the same theme).

- Finding: Interviews in multiple STEM schools indicate that this initiative has increased student engagement.

- Key Recommendations:
  - Initiative leads should devote more attention to those larger comprehensive schools in which the implementation of the STEM programs has not progressed as quickly as it has in the smaller STEM-themed schools;
  - Initiative leads should devote more attention to incorporating cross-curricular STEM projects and extra-curricular STEM activities, developing each school's theme, and encouraging collaboration among schools and their partners within the theme-based networks; and

      o   Initiative leads should devote time and develop resources to help both teachers and students prepare for inquiry-based learning and other changes in STEM curricula.

Targeted findings for the final report:

- Provide comparisons of and identify any trends in baseline (2011-12) and end-of-initiative (2013-14) (a) school observations, and (b) student and staff survey and anchor school teacher and stakeholder interview responses to questions about immediate outcomes of the initiative for teachers, staff, and students (e.g., increased partnerships and networking with other schools, businesses, and colleges).
- Analyze changes in students' test scores in the participating STEM schools from the beginning to end (spring 2013) of the initiative.

Pillar 2a. Great Teachers and Leaders: Leadership

Regional Leadership Academies

Rationale for the initiative. Effective school leadership is the key to school improvement, but traditional principal preparation programs do not typically prepare principals for the specialized work of leading transformations of low-performing schools. The goal of the Regional Leadership Academies (RLA) initiative is to prepare approximately 185 principals who are qualified to lead transformational change in low-performing, high-need schools in both rural and urban areas.

Brief description of the initiative. Northeast Leadership Academy, based at North Carolina State University, serves 14 districts in Northeast North Carolina. Piedmont Triad Leadership Academy, based at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, serves four districts in North-Central North Carolina. Sandhills Leadership Academy was established by the Sandhills Regional Education Consortium (SREC) and serves 13 districts in South-Central North Carolina.

Time period covered in reports: School years 2010-11 through 2011-12.

Summary of most important findings and recommendations to date:

- <u>Finding</u>: 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.

- <u>Finding</u>: Fidelity of implementation of program designs has been strong, and each RLA has recruited and prepared 60+ "turnaround principal" candidates.

- <u>Finding</u>: Participants in every cohort in each RLA have found internship placements in targeted schools and districts (i.e., low-performing schools, though not always schools on the list of lowest-achieving schools).

- <u>Finding</u>: 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.

- <u>Finding</u>: Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 graduates have found employment in low-performing schools and districts, though often as assistant principals or in other administrative roles that may lead to principalships, and not always in initially-targeted TALAS schools. On average (based on data from 2008-09 through 2010-11), their employing schools host high numbers of lower-income students (67.6% receive free or reduced-price lunch) and exhibit low achievement rates (e.g., the English I/Reading pass rate is about 58%; the Algebra I/Math pass rate is about 65%).

- <u>Key Recommendations</u>: RLA directors should focus more time and attention on:
  - o Recruiting, training, and matching mentors and coaches for the principal candidates;
  - o Replacing mentors and coaches who are not effective; and

- o Working more proactively with school districts 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.

Targeted findings for the final report:

- Present student testing results (as well as other measures of principal effectiveness) for schools with RLA-prepared administrators to estimate preliminary evidence of RLA impact on student achievement.

- Provide updates on the number of new school leaders trained and their current positions, as well as information on the costs of the programs in terms of the number of school leaders prepared.

Distinguished Leadership in Practice

Rationale for the initiative. Improvements in principal preparation programs and the addition of new programs such as the Regional Leadership Academies help meet the demand for training a better-prepared new principal workforce but do not address the issue of improving support for current principals and principals trained in other states. The Distinguished Leadership in Practice (DLP) program, which is provided by the NC Principals and Assistant Principals Association (NCPAPA), is designed to support practicing principals in all types of schools, not just those in low-performing schools.

Brief description of the initiative. DLP is aligned to North Carolina performance evaluation standards (the North Carolina Standards for School Executives). DLP employs a blended professional development model that allows participants to examine the meaning and application of school leadership through a problem-based approach by participating in a series of face-to-face, regional, cohort-based sessions supplemented by online activities. Throughout the year-long experience, practicing North Carolina principals are led and coached through a continuous improvement process. The participating principals are provided with models of exemplary school leadership, allowing them to study the behaviors, attitudes, and competencies that define an effective school leader.

Time period covered in reports: School years 2011-12 through 2012-13.

Summary of most important findings and recommendations to date:

- Finding: NCPAPA is successfully implementing DLP as intended, in collaboration with NCDPI.

- Finding: Face-to-face and online sessions were of high quality and participants developed specific leadership knowledge and skills. The program's hybrid face-to-face plus online model provided participants with valuable access to expert facilitators as well as to their colleagues and is therefore a worthwhile approach for professional development.

- Finding: Initial analysis of North Carolina Educator Evaluation Rubric data shows that, over the course of their DLP year, participants experienced changes in their overall formal evaluation ratings similar to changes for other North Carolina principals.

- Key Recommendations: DLP leaders could continue to improve the program by:
  o Further differentiating and customizing learning activities for principals who serve in different types of schools, or who have different amounts of experience;
  o Adjusting program elements to align better with other demands of the principalship (e.g., better aligning DLP conversations, assignments, and programming with the school-year calendar);
  o Providing more opportunities for participant leadership;
  o Increasing time for collaboration and networking;

- o Continuing to improve online sessions by expanding the type and number of active and engaging online tools used, and by providing explicit information about the amount of time required for online sessions; and

- o Offering course credit toward advanced degrees, given the amount and depth of work involved in the program.

Targeted findings for the final report. Focus on participant outcomes based on analysis of the following data:

- Present trends in changes in evaluation ratings for principals who have participated in DLP and those who have not.

- Present trends in teacher turnover, student achievement, and Teacher Working Conditions survey results for schools whose principals participated in DLP, and compare changes in schools with DLP principals with changes in schools with principals who did not participate in DLP.

Professional Development for Leaders of TALAS Schools

(A component of the *District and School Transformation* initiative, described under the **Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools** pillar, above)

Rationale for the initiative. The success of school and district turnaround efforts requires ongoing support and training for current educators in those schools and districts. DST has expanded its professional development offerings to provide this support.

Brief description of the initiative. DST offers three primary professional development strategies to assist schools identified as DST-eligible: the School Leader Professional Development Series; coaching (leadership and instructional); and district- and school-level professional development.

Time period covered in reports: Summer 2011 through summer 2012.

Summary of most important findings and recommendations to date:

- Finding: DST provided high-quality professional development to participants and assisted them with understanding and planning to address applicable components of the United States Department of Education Reform Models

- Finding: Principals with prior successful experience, but new to a DST school, found the sessions of little benefit to improving their practice.

- Finding: Professional development designed to assist principals to support teachers' literacy instruction did not meet the needs of participants due to lack of school-level differentiation.

- Key Recommendations:
  o Provide differentiated professional development offerings on the basis of participants' levels of leadership experience as well as each school's level of student achievement progress; and
  o Improve literacy-focused professional development by engaging facilitators who have recent and relevant experience in sound, research-based literacy strategies and with materials tailored to the grade levels served at the schools.

Targeted findings for the final report:

- Report participation in DST School Leader Professional Development Series during the 2013-14 academic year and participants' perceptions of session quality and utility.

- Report the degree to which DST professional development components have impacted participants' knowledge and implementation of USED reform strategies.

Pillar 2b. Great Teachers and Leaders: Teaching

Measures of Student Growth in the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System

Rationale for and brief description of the initiative. Before RttT, the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System (NCEES) was comprised of five performance standards for teachers and seven for administrators that were equitable and transparent, but that did not consistently use explicit, valid, and reliable measures of student growth as one of the indicators of educator effectiveness. This initiative's goal is to implement a 6th and 8th standard, respectively, for the North Carolina teacher and principal evaluation instruments; these standards integrate student growth data into assessments of educators' effectiveness.

Time period covered in reports: School years 2011-12 through 2012-13.

Summary of most important findings and recommendations to date:

- Finding: Teachers' EVAAS scores (Standard 6) are significantly and positively related to each of the teacher evaluation ratings they receive from their principals for the first five standards; they are most closely related to Standard 3 (teacher's content knowledge) and Standard 4 (teacher facilitates student learning).

- Finding: Teachers' EVAAS scores (Standard 6) are significantly and positively related to students' perceptions of their teachers' pedagogy, academic press, and classroom management (as measured by student surveys); teachers' EVAAS scores (Standard 6) also are positively and significantly related to teachers' beliefs in their ability to improve their students' performance, as well as their beliefs about how well-prepared their students are for their tests.

- Finding: Principals tend to use EVAAS data to make school-based decisions—primarily decisions about student placements within classrooms—and to establish school-level dialogue about instructional practices that bring about student growth.

- Finding: Teachers indicate that they need more information about the use of EVAAS data to inform instruction and about how the Standard 6 rating is calculated from student growth data.

- Key Recommendations: Initiative leads should:
  o Broaden communication strategies to include more direct forms of communication with teachers and clear labeling of trial or pilot assessments; and
  o Expand training opportunities related to Standard 6 to include additional trainings on variables that inform a Standard 6 rating, how Standard 6 reflects student growth, and how to use EVAAS data to inform and improve instruction.

Targeted findings for the final report:

- Analyze stakeholder perceptions concerning the implementation of the NCEES and use of student growth data to inform instruction over time.

- Review best practices in data-driven instruction via interviews and case studies of early adopters.

- Calculate correlations between student growth measures and other teacher evaluation measures by subgroups (e.g., beginning verses experienced teachers and principals in high- vs. low-performing schools).

New Teacher Support Program

Rationale for the initiative. Before RttT, nearly half of all new teachers reported that they did not have time during the day to meet with their mentors, and that they did not teach the same content and/or in the same grade level as their mentors. Also, one in four were not even in the same building as their mentors, and one in eight did not receive additional support as new teachers. In addition, low-achieving schools experienced high teacher turnover rates, especially among new teachers. The North Carolina New Teacher Support Program (NC NTSP), operated by the UNC General Administration, is a comprehensive beginning teacher support program for first-, second-, and third-year teachers in the state's lowest-achieving schools.

Brief description of the initiative. To support participating teachers, NC NTSP provides institutes prior to and shortly after the start of the school year, face-to-face and virtual instructional coaching, and professional development sessions. The goal of NC NTSP is to improve beginning teacher effectiveness, self-efficacy, and retention.

Time period covered in reports: School years 2011-12 through 2012-13.

Summary of most important findings and recommendations to date:

- <u>Finding</u>: Due to the prevalence of late hires and competing district/school induction and orientation sessions, there was disproportionately low attendance at the NC NTSP Summer Institutes in Years One and Two. Attendance was also low at NC NTSP professional development sessions in Years One and Two.

- <u>Finding</u>: In 2011-12, NC NTSP provided induction services to 33 beginning teachers in 13 low-achieving schools; in 2012-13 the program expanded to serve over 400 early-career teachers in over 60 low-achieving schools.

- <u>Finding</u>: Teachers who received NC NTSP services in 2012-13 rated the quality of NC NTSP instructional coaching and professional development (a) significantly higher than the quality of their school/district provided mentoring and professional development, and (b) significantly higher than comparison sample teachers rated their school/district-provided mentoring and professional development.

- <u>Key Recommendations</u>: To maximize the reach of the program:
  - New institutes currently under development on pre-school intervention components should be held regionally and broken into multiple, shorter sessions and/or delayed until after the start of the school-year; and
  - Professional development sessions should be held at multiple locations within regions, and program administrators should encourage more buy-in from schools and districts to increase participation.

Targeted findings for the final report:

- Report participation in NC NTSP treatment components in the 2013-14 academic year and participants' perceptions of program and mentor quality.

- Relative to novice teachers in similar comparison schools, estimate the effect of NC NTSP on teacher effectiveness (value-added measures), evaluation ratings, quality of instructional practices, retention, and self-efficacy (for both the 2012-13 and 2013-14 NC NTSP years).

North Carolina Teacher Corps

Rationale for the initiative. Test data show that high-minority/high-poverty schools are staffed by a greater proportion of ineffective teachers in all tested subjects and at all levels than are low-minority/low-poverty schools. Alternatively licensed teachers in selective programs like Teach for America that place teachers in those schools typically outperform their traditionally-prepared colleagues, but their presence is small and they also tend to leave the classroom after two years. To help increase the number of highly-qualified teachers in low-income rural areas and high-need urban schools, NCDPI developed a North Carolina Teacher Corps (NCTC).

Brief description of the initiative. NCTC recruits and trains in-state talent without traditional teacher licensure credentials for employment in teaching positions in high-need schools not served by Teach for America.

Time period covered in reports: School year 2012-13 through summer 2013.

Summary of most important findings and recommendations to date:

- Finding: Employment numbers are improving (from 22 in 2012-13 to 79 in 2013-14) but have not met targets (100 in 2012-13; 150 in 2013-14).

- Finding: The support provided by NCTC leadership to the NC Teacher Corps members—e.g., constructive feedback, resource provision, dedication, motivation, and overall positive attitude—has been strong and responsive.

- Finding: Corps member content-area knowledge is strong, but, as is true for many beginning teachers, their classroom management skills are limited.

- Key Recommendations: As the leadership and administration of NCTC is transferred to Teach For America in 2014:

  o Extend the length of the summer practicum experiences to provide corps members with more pre-teaching experience; and

  o For their summer teaching experiences, place corps members in schools that more closely reflect the challenging school environments in which most corps members find employment.

Targeted findings for the final report:

- Complete final assessment of intermediate outcomes (increases in corps member cohort size; indications of corps member retention/intent to return, relative to comparable teachers; corps member employment outcomes in target schools).

- Complete preliminary assessment of value-added impact of NCTC teachers relative to beginning teachers who enter the profession via other pathways (including TFA).

North Carolina Virtual Public School Blended STEM Initiative

Rationale for the initiative. Test data show that, before RttT, high-minority/high-poverty schools were staffed by a much greater proportion of ineffective science and math teachers than were low-minority/low-poverty schools (34% vs. 7% for science teachers, and 17% vs. 6% for Algebra I teachers). STEM teacher recruitment and retention are particularly challenging for these schools. In response, the North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS) developed several virtual, STEM-based courses to increase access to experienced STEM teachers in these schools.

Brief description of the initiative. The courses are targeted at students typically underserved in STEM areas (e.g., females, minorities, students from lower-income families) in schools with limited resources for providing extensive STEM curricula. Rather than offering the courses exclusively online, these courses are offered as *blended learning* courses—courses taught by both online and face-to-face teachers—with the goal of supporting the development of local teachers as they learn how to teach advanced STEM courses.

Time period covered in reports: School year 2012-13.

Summary of most important findings and recommendations to date:

- Finding: The courses are reaching the underserved students targeted by the initiative.

- Finding: Some of the relationships developed between face-to-face and online teacher partners have been constructive and may begin to be supporting the development of the face-to-face teachers as advanced STEM teachers.

- Finding: Course rigor (in terms of content, pedagogy, and support for student understanding of the relevance of what they are learning) was inconsistent across the first set of three courses, and both teachers and students generally were unprepared for the blended learning setting (e.g., several participating teachers expressed a need for more training in project-based teaching and learning, and many students struggled to adjust to the project-based learning environment).

- Key Recommendations: Initiative leads should:
  o Revise all existing courses to ensure the level of rigor expected for each course is met; and

  o Focus on and enhance teacher *and* student preparation for the blended, problem-based learning setting by providing both groups with explicit pre- and/or early-course training in how to maximize their involvement in this type of setting.

Targeted findings for the final report:

- Review second set of courses (on schedule to be offered in Fall 2013 and Spring 2014): Integrated Math II, Integrated Math III, and Agriscience.

- Present comparisons of the test scores of students who took the blended NCVPS Integrated Mathematics I course in Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 with students who took the same course in an online-only setting or a traditional classroom setting.

Incentives and Strategic Staffing Initiatives: Performance-Based Incentives

Rationale for the initiative. Because the state has struggled to attract and retain highly-effective teachers for the state's lowest-performing schools, the state dedicated RttT funds to a performance-based incentives program for those schools.

*Brief description of **performance-based incentives** initiative*. The performance incentive program awards incentives of $1,500 to all certified staff in the state's lowest-performing schools that made school-wide "high growth" (as defined by the state's ABCs accountability growth target system) during the previous academic year. Beginning in fall 2013, in addition to the school-level $1,500 incentives (now awarded for growth that "exceeds expected growth," as measured by EVAAS school-wide value-added composites), the initiative will provide an additional $500 annually to individual teachers in tested subject areas whose classes exceed expected growth as determined by teachers' individual value-added composite scores.

Time period covered in reports: School years 2010-11 through 2011-12.

Summary of most important findings and recommendations to date:

- Finding: In general, between 2010 and 2012, on average, bonus-*eligible* schools showed some improvement in student achievement, even though only a minority improved enough to make their teachers eligible for the incentive. In 2011, 23 of 118 eligible schools received bonuses. In 2012, 35 of 106 eligible schools received bonuses, and eight of those 35 also had been recipients in 2011.

- Finding: It is unlikely, however, that increases in student achievement over that time are associated with the performance incentive, because educators in bonus-winning and non-winning schools alike were virtually unaware of the performance incentive.

- Finding: Almost none of the teachers interviewed said that performance pay would change their teaching behavior because they see themselves as putting forth their best effort every day already.

- Finding: When given a choice between school- or individual-level incentives, about three-quarters of teachers supported a system of school-wide performance pay, and about one-quarter supported the idea of an individual-level incentive in place of a school-level incentive.

- Key Recommendation: Increase frequency and clarity of communication about performance incentives to RttT coordinators, principals, and teachers in eligible schools.

Targeted findings for the final report:

- Analyze test score trends in bonus-eligible and bonus-winning schools.

- Document teacher and principal knowledge, awareness, and perceptions of the incentive program as the program changes in 2013-14 to include an individual-level incentive.

- Compare teacher attitudes about, perceptions of, and awareness of the incentive across groups of schools, as defined by award status (never awarded an incentive, awarded one time, awarded two times).

- Explore the role incentives might play in school improvement efforts.

Incentives and Strategic Staffing Initiatives: State Strategic Staffing

Rationale for the initiative. Distribution of effective teachers and principals often is inequitable across districts; for example, high-minority/high-poverty schools often are staffed by a greater proportion of ineffective teachers than are low-minority/low-poverty schools. RttT funds a State Strategic Staffing Initiative (SSSI) that is intended to provide students in lower-performing schools with greater access to highly effective teachers.

*Brief description of the **state strategic staffing** initiative*. This initiative makes it possible for districts to provide a $5,360 voucher to teachers as a recruitment incentive for them to transfer to an eligible school. The voucher can be used for tuition support for one of several Master's degrees related to education, student loan payments, housing, or any combination thereof. In 2012-13, only 12 teachers received the vouchers.

Time period covered in reports: School years 2011-12 through 2012-13.

Summary of most important findings and recommendations to date:

- Finding: Districts did not use the SSSI vouchers as recruitment incentives.

- Finding: Respondents indicated that they felt limited in using the voucher as a recruitment tool for teachers outside their district, suggesting that the voucher is unlikely to overcome other important obstacles.

- Finding: Respondents were skeptical of the impact the voucher could make if used primarily within district, suggesting that moving teachers within a district would be a zero-sum gain.

- Key Recommendations:

  o Integrate state- and local-level recruitment and retention strategies with new faculty orientation and context-sensitive professional development; and

  o Consider repurposing some funding for retention incentives.

Targeted findings for the final report. To the extent that data allow, given the low participation rate to date:

- Present SSSI's impact on student outcomes, teacher leadership, teacher turnover rates, teacher retention, and school climate/culture.

- Analyze teachers', principals' and District Coordinators' perspectives on the extent to which the SSSI was used to improve teacher recruitment and retention. In addition, identify other tools participants used to recruit and retain teachers to high-need schools.

Incentives and Strategic Staffing Initiatives: Local Strategic Staffing

Rationale for the local initiatives. Distribution of effective teachers and principals often is inequitable not only *across* districts but also *within* districts.

*Brief description of **local strategic staffing** initiatives*. For this evaluation, district-level plans were identified that included one or more of the following criteria: (a) a focus on low-performing schools or student populations, (b) differentiation of teachers through some measure of their effectiveness, and (c) incorporation of some type of incentive linked to either criterion (a) or (b), or both.

Time period covered in reports: School years 2010-11 through 2011-12.

Summary of most important findings and recommendations to date:

- Finding: Over 70 districts currently support a variety of strategic staffing plans tailored to meet local needs—from very simple plans to very complex ones.

- Finding: Many of those plans: (a) incorporate complex incentives structures tied to school improvement goals, and/or (b) include a broad range of school staff members (beyond teachers and administrators alone).

- Finding: Very few plans rely exclusively on RttT funds; however, most of the plans rely on other funding sources that also are short-term, few districts have developed specific plans for sustainability after short-term funding ends.

- Key Recommendations: Encourage legislation that supports:

  o Local-level experiments with strategic staffing post-Race to the Top; and

  o Opportunities for districts to share their experiences with each other and with policy makers as they consider pay-for-performance and other strategic staffing policies for North Carolina.

Targeted findings for the final report:

- Update the complete list of districts with strategic staffing plans (RttT-funded or funded by other sources), including educator participation and movement statistics, when possible.

- Update in-depth descriptions of the most promising plans, and extract lessons learned (both positive and negative) from their implementation.

- Analyze plans devised for the districts served by a recruitment and retention technical advisor (Marstrats, LLC) retained by the State with RttT funds.

Pillar 3. Standards and Assessments

Professional Development: Statewide Initiatives and Local Outcomes

> (In the state's application, this initiative was described under the **Great Teachers and Leaders** pillar)

Rationale for the initiative. Implementation of all of the new initiatives outlined in the RttT proposal requires significant ongoing training for all of the state's educators. The RttT Professional Development Initiative is an expansive and multi-faceted effort to increase student achievement by updating the knowledge and skills of the state's entire public education workforce (over 100,000 teachers and 2,500 principals).

Brief description of the initiative. This initiative supports several substantial policy changes, including: adoption of new Common Core State Standards and North Carolina Essential Standards; implementation of new standardized state assessments; increased use of data to inform classroom and school decisions; rapid changes in the technologies and digital resources available for teaching and learning; new teacher and administrator evaluation processes; an increased emphasis on formative assessment to inform instructional decisions; and a heightened emphasis on improving college and career readiness among all student groups.

Time period covered in reports: School years 2010-11 through 2012-13.

Summary of most important findings and recommendations to date:

- <u>Finding</u>: The State is fulfilling the requirements of the RttT professional development plan, with participants generally rating the activities as directly addressing their professional development needs and as providing valuable professional learning opportunities.

- <u>Finding</u>: Some progress has been made toward developing local and regional professional development capacity, but differences remain across districts of different sizes: smaller LEAs with fewer resources are engaging in more cross-LEA or region-based collaborations in their efforts to provide sustained professional development; and leaders of larger districts have tended to be less satisfied than their colleagues in smaller districts with state-level professional development activities and resources.

- <u>Finding</u>: Teachers are finding it challenging to translate RttT's comprehensive education reforms into classroom reality while also juggling other changes in state policies that impact their classrooms. For example, data from surveys and focus groups indicate that there has been a general decline in teachers' confidence that they are able to fully support the instructional objectives their students are expected to meet. In addition, survey results as well as classroom observations in a wide sample of schools suggest that, on average, they have not yet been able to improve their instructional practices. However, focus groups reveal that teachers and principals are hopeful about the impacts of new state standards on instruction and student outcomes.

- <u>Key Recommendations</u>:

    o State leaders should allocate funding for state-level, face-to-face, regionally-based professional development—a model similar to the Annual Professional Development Cycle developed for RttT—to support ongoing professional development for educators to continue to prepare and support them for all the major educational initiatives and transitions in the list above; and

    o NCDPI should continue to build on and support existing local systems (i.e., school-level Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), master teachers, district leadership teams, and Regional Education Service Alliances) to encourage sustained professional development efforts at district and school levels that consider the varying needs of districts of different sizes and locations.

Targeted findings for the final report:

- Focus on local professional development efforts to support RttT initiatives for the final year of RttT to: (a) provide an in-depth look at the implementation of RttT initiatives at the local level; and (b) examine how educators' networks impact the diffusion of information and implementation of RttT-supported reform efforts.

- Focus on short-term outcomes, intermediate outcomes, and impacts on student performance using data from the annual RttT Omnibus Survey study as a way to gauge changes in awareness, attitudes, knowledge/skills, and practices of educators across the State.

Professional Development: Online Professional Development

>   (In the state's application, this initiative was described under the **Great Teachers and Leaders** pillar)

Rationale for the initiative. North Carolina is a geographically large state with many rural districts, which can make comprehensive and timely delivery of cost-effective, high-quality professional development challenging. NCDPI initiated the development of online activities and resources to harness the potential of online learning and help build capacity for educators across the state.

Brief description of the initiative. The RttT online professional development (OPD) activities and resources include a collection of online modules (the North Carolina Education Online Learning Modules), a series of ongoing webinars, state and regional wikis, and additional web-based resources. NCDPI also developed a website (http://rt3nc.org) to help support the effective integration of the modules into local professional development efforts.

Time period covered in reports: School years 2011-12 through 2012-13.

Summary of most important findings and recommendations to date:

- Finding: During the first two years of implementation, over 70,000 principals, teachers, and other educators (about one half of all educators) enrolled in one or more RttT online module, and roughly 10,000 (about 7%) have attended one or more webinars. Despite variations in local implementation, most educators have responded positively to the quality and relevance of OPD, though responses are slightly less positive than they are for other forms of RttT professional development.

- Finding: District use of OPD offerings has varied in implementation format and quality, and these local variations have affected the quality of the experience. Though modules were designed for local teams or PLCs, data suggest that most educators complete the modules independently, many without feedback or support from a facilitator and/or peers.

- Key Recommendations:
  - o To establish sustainability after RttT, build multi-district and regional coalitions that share expertise and resources to develop OPD programs throughout the State, and leverage existing online professional development resources; and
  - o To ensure that every OPD experience aligns to standards for high-quality OPD—regardless of local implementation—provide more opportunities for meaningful, online peer interaction and collaboration across all online professional development offerings, provide greater differentiation of professional development content and activities to meet the specific needs of teachers of different content areas, grades, and levels of expertise, and build in standardized, state-supported mechanisms for quality assessment, feedback, and support that are not solely dependent on district resources.

Targeted findings for the final report:

- Focus on local online professional development efforts to support RttT initiatives to: (a) provide an in-depth look at the implementation of RttT initiatives at the local level; and (b)

examine how educators' networks impact the diffusion of information and implementation of RttT-supported reform efforts.

Pillar 4. Data Systems to Support Instruction

North Carolina Education Cloud

Rationale for the initiative. The presence of a robust and reliable technology infrastructure is essential not only for supporting the development of 21st century schools but also for supporting the effective roll-out of many of the RttT initiatives. The pre-RttT system of district-based acquisition and support of technology infrastructure was neither cost-efficient nor sustainable for all districts.

Brief description of the initiative. A portion of the RttT local spending allotments[4]—$34,639,376—was withheld from districts and eligible charter schools by the state to centrally procure local services for districts and charters through the North Carolina Education Cloud (NCEdCloud). NCEdCloud is a statewide initiative that leverages cloud technology to consolidate costs and provide a central location for data and learning materials—in other words, a secure central infrastructure that can be accessed remotely for software, data, and other computing needs that typically have been procured locally. NCEdCloud began in pilot stages during the second year of RttT, with full LEA infrastructure migration projected to be complete at the end of the grant period.

Summary of the most important findings and recommendations to date. Because the initiative has yet to reach full roll-out, evaluation of NCEdCloud deployment is in the beginning stages. The evaluation will attempt to estimate the fiscal impact of the NCEdCloud initiative, as well as any indirect changes at the district level associated with the deployment of the NCEdCloud (e.g., district-level repurposing of employees to other functions).

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[4] See **RttT Local District and Charter School Allocations**, below.

Instructional Improvement System (Home Base)

Rationale for the initiative. The success and utility of the state's longitudinal data system depends upon a statewide technology infrastructure for data collection, analysis, reporting, and use by stakeholders. In order to provide educators with an integrated system in which they can find and use data to improve instruction and that provides tools and resources for teaching and learning, the state developed Home Base, a statewide instructional improvement and student information system for teachers, students, parents, and administrators.

Brief description of the initiative. When Home Base is fully operational, teachers will be able to use it to access student data, teaching and learning resources, assessment items, the teacher evaluation system, and professional development modules, as well as to collaborate with colleagues. Students will be able to access their schoolwork, grades, and learning activities, and they will be able to collaborate with classmates and receive teacher feedback on their work. Parents will be able to view their children's attendance and progress, and administrators can monitor data on students, teachers, and schools.

Summary of the most important findings and recommendations to date. The first full year of this initiative is the 2013-14 school year. As a result, the Evaluation Team will not be able to provide a full evaluation of its implementation during the Race to the Top grant period. The Team is providing evaluation planning services for the Home Base implementation team.

RttT Local District and Charter School Allocations

In the state's RttT application, funds set aside for local spending were provided to help districts meet RttT goals and participate in the initiatives, but they were not formally associated with a specific Pillar.

Rationale for the initiative. Increasing the likelihood of the effective implementation of all of the initiatives outlined in the RttT proposal required giving local districts the flexibility to create programs and structures that maximized the impact of RttT on their students and teachers. North Carolina allocated half of its $400 million RttT grant to all districts and eligible charter schools. From this allocation, as noted above, North Carolina pooled $34,639,376 to provide a computing infrastructure to serve local needs statewide—the North Carolina Education Cloud (NCEdCloud). After this pooling, the amount allocated directly to districts and eligible charter schools was $165,360,624.

Brief description of the initiative. The direct allocation provided districts with resources to support statewide RttT initiatives locally and to allow local flexibility in crafting local plans to achieve the objectives of RttT. Each district and participating charter school was required to develop and report their plans in detailed scopes of work (DSWs).

Time period covered in reports: School years 2010-11 through 2011-12.

Summary of most important findings and recommendations to date:

- Finding: Districts and eligible charter schools expended $72.73 million of their $165.36 million allotment (44%) over the first two years (2010-11 through 2011-12).

- Finding: $32.55 million (44.8%) was expended on technology-related categories (not including the $34.64 million pulled back for the NCEdCloud). Professional development accounted for the second-largest expenditure item at over $12 million.

- Finding: Districts coded a majority of their expenditures (70.4%) at the central office level, but the extent to which these expenditures in each LEA funded school-level activities and materials or activities and personnel in its district office is not clear.

- Finding: Twenty-eight districts and 1 charter school have spent at a faster pace than they projected in their Detailed Scopes of Work; 47 districts and 6 charter schools have spent at a slower pace than projected.

- Finding: Patterns of spending of RttT funds do not show a statistically discernible difference across districts based on initial 2010 district-level student achievement performance composites.

- Key Recommendations:
  - Require updated DSWs for districts that have not expended funds close to projected estimates; and
  - Consider reestablishing a dedicated professional development program report code to help track professional development expenditures.

Targeted findings for the final report:

- Evaluate the extent to which some local expenditure patterns are associated with better student outcomes; evaluate the extent to which the timing and the level of expenditures are associated with better student outcomes.

- Evaluate the role of technology in district and charter school plans and its relationship to student outcomes.

Next Steps: Moving into the Final Year of RttT Evaluation

For the first three years of the RttT grant, the Evaluation Team focused most of its energies on providing initiative-level formative evaluation. The primary goal was to support the work of the RttT Initiative Leads as they rolled out and implemented the various initiatives by informing decisions related to improving implementation. The findings and recommendations in this document reflect that formative work.

In the Evaluation Team's previous summary report, *Race to the Top in North Carolina, 2010-2012: A Summary of Formative Findings*,[5] the Team noted four cross-initiative implications of initiative-level findings to that point: (1) lessons from the most successfully managed initiatives can inform management adjustments across initiatives, including optimization of management for sustainability beyond RttT; (2) trainings and other forms of professional development across all initiatives can be strengthened through greater differentiation of materials and clearer connections between specific initiative goals and broader policies and goals; (3) differences in district-level implementation capacity can be addressed by exploring ways to increase options for local customization of initiative delivery; and (4) planning for continuation or discontinuation of all initiatives should be an ongoing part of the overall initiative management process. Many of the subsequent evaluation results reflected in the current document suggest that initiative implementers have begun to address many of these implications, but all four will continue to be relevant through the end of the grant.

Since the start of the 2013-14 school year, the work of the Evaluation Team has begun to shift from providing largely formative feedback to preparing summative evaluation analyses, with the purpose of determining (to the extent possible with available data) whether the RttT initiatives individually and collectively met their goals. As part of this summative work, the Team also has begun to examine the cost-effectiveness and potential for the sustainability of each of the initiatives post-RttT. These summative evaluations (which will include an overall, cross-initiative evaluation) will assess—from the perspective of students, teachers, leaders, and schools—the improvements that have occurred as a result of RttT initiatives (both collectively and individually), as well as the challenges that remain.

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[5] http://cerenc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/RttT-Overall-FormativeSummary-Memo_02-01-13.pdf

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