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Executive Summary of

Turning around North Carolina's Lowest-Achieving Schools:

Initial Findings on the School Leader Professional
Development Series

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TURNING AROUND NORTH CAROLINA'S LOWEST-ACHIEVING SCHOOLS: INITIAL FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL LEADER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES

Executive Summary

The Consortium for Educational Research and Evaluation–North Carolina is evaluating the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) District and School Transformation (DST) Division's federally funded Race to the Top (RttT) Turning Around North Carolina's Lowest Achieving Schools (TALAS) Initiative. One goal of this evaluation is to assess the main intervention strategies that DST employs to improve low-performing schools.

As part of the TALAS initiative, DST offers three primary professional development strategies to assist schools identified as TALAS-eligible: (1) the School Leader Professional Development Series, (2) coaching (leadership and instructional), and (3) Local Education Agency (LEA)- and school-level professional development. The purpose of this report is to present findings from one of these main strategies, the School Leaders Professional Development Series.

The School Leaders Professional Development Series is a year-long program of six two-day sessions, offered regionally to TALAS-eligible personnel who serve primarily as school-level leaders. The Evaluation Team reviewed artifacts (e.g., agendas, presentations, and other session materials) from the first five sessions in the series, observed session six of the series, and administered a survey to those who attended the Summer 2012 sessions to gauge their perceptions of the series.

Evaluation Findings

Implementation

DST conducted six regionally-based professional development sessions between June 2011 and June 2012. Sessions were attended predominantly by principals and assistant principals; however, other school personnel attended when the content of the specific sessions was relevant to their function. Overall, these DST professional development sessions reached 96 schools across 36 LEAs.

Results from the RttT Professional Development survey administered to the 196 participants of the Summer 2012 sessions of the School Leaders Professional Development Series showed that 77% of the respondents were principals or assistant principals and the remainder were other school- or Local Education Agency-level staff (e.g., lead teachers, curriculum specialists, reading coaches, technology facilitators, etc.). Of those completing the survey, 40% attended four or more sessions over the course of the series.

Quality and Relevance of the DST PD sessions

The quality and relevance of the School Leaders Professional Development Series provided to participants of the TALAS initiative was determined primarily through a professional development observation and the administration of a professional development survey.

RttT Professional Development Observation

Data from the observed session show that DST successfully provided high-quality professional development to its participants. All of the eleven individual segments that comprised the observed professional development session were rated at the highest two levels: Level 5: Exemplary Professional Development (64%) and Level 4: Accomplished, Effective Professional Development (36%). Facilitators engaged the participants in a variety of activities including hands-on activities, discussions, and reflections in whole-group, small-group, and individual formats. A review of artifacts from the previous five sessions in the series strongly suggests that the quality of their content, style, and facilitation mirrored that of the sixth session.

RttT DST Professional Development Survey

The majority of participants reported that the professional development provided to them through the DST School Leadership Professional Development Series helped them understand and plan to address applicable components of the United States Department of Education Reform Models. The survey questions that generated the most agreement from participants with respect to the degree to which the professional development was most effective were those that asked about the professional development's impact on participants' ability to re-evaluate the impact of school practices and procedures on learning. The survey questions that generated the least agreement from participants were those that asked about the professional development's impact on their understanding of how to partner to provide social-emotional and community-oriented services and supports. Participants also were asked to rate the importance of reform model components to their school's transformation efforts. Overwhelmingly, respondents agreed that the components were critical to this process. Lastly, in the open-ended portion of the survey, participants reflected a need for more differentiated professional development content, improved professional development on literacy, and support for more information focused directly on student-level impact measures.

Recommendations

Data suggest that, overall, DST successfully constructed and delivered a high-quality professional development program to participants through its School Leaders Professional Development Series. Based on participant feedback, we recommend the following modifications to provide opportunities to further enhance the relevance and utility of the information provided.

- *Differentiate Professional Development Opportunities:* Provide differentiated professional development offerings on the basis of participants' leadership experience level as well as a school's level of student achievement progress while being served by DST.
- *Improve the Literacy Professional Development Opportunities:* Provide literacy-focused professional development with high-quality facilitators who have recent and relevant experience in sound, research-based practices, and offer differentiated literacy materials and processes for various school levels—elementary, middle, and high.

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Next Steps for the TALAS Professional Development Evaluation

The Evaluation Team will continue to assess the professional development offered by DST over the RttT grant cycle which concludes in 2014. The coaching provided through DST in selected LEAs is addressed in a separate report. This evaluation brief highlights the RttT School Leader Professional Development Series. Future work will continue to follow this strand of professional development and also will gather data on the coaching and local-level professional development provided to participating schools.

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