

Consortium for
Educational
Research and
Evaluation–
North
Carolina

North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies

Final Summative Activity Report

Author:

Kathleen M. Brown
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

August 2014

Consortium for
Educational
Research and
Evaluation–
North
Carolina



Table of Contents

Executive Summary 2

 Summary of Findings for the Final Activity Report 2

 Additional Final Observations 3

Introduction..... 4

 North Carolina’s Regional Leadership Academies 4

 Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA) 4

 Piedmont Triad Leadership Academy (PTLA) 5

 Sandhills Leadership Academy (SLA) 5

 Purpose of the Regional Leadership Academies Evaluation 6

 Purpose of this Report and Methodological Approach 6

Findings..... 8

 Research Question 1: Are the RLAs Following “Best Practices” for Recruiting and Selecting
 Future Leaders for High-Need Schools in North Carolina?..... 8

 Selectivity 10

 RLA Selection Processes..... 11

 Results of the Selection Process 11

 Research Question 2: Are the RLAs Following “Best Practices” for Training Future Leaders
 for High-Need Schools in North Carolina?..... 13

 Cohorts and Internships 14

 Curricula and Seminars 16

 Support Systems: Coaching, Mentoring, and Supervising 18

 Program Evaluation and Improvement..... 19

 Research Question 3: Do RLA Graduates Find Placements in Targeted Schools/Districts? ... 19

 Research Question 4: How do RLA Costs Compare to Other Alternatives for Preparing
 Leaders for High-Need Schools in North Carolina? 24

Summary of Findings and Final Observations..... 29

 Summary of Findings 29

 Additional Final Observations 29

References..... 30

**NORTH CAROLINA REGIONAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMIES:
FINAL ACTIVITY REPORT**

Executive Summary

Developing school leaders who are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to effectively lead low-performing schools has become a critical goal for local education agencies (LEAs)¹ intent on dramatically improving student outcomes. North Carolina's Race to the Top (RttT) plan acknowledges the pressing need for high-quality leadership in low-achieving schools; the component of the plan that focuses on ensuring equitable distribution of high-quality teachers and leaders identifies, among other things, a need for "increasing the number of principals qualified to lead transformational change in low-performing schools in both rural and urban areas" (NCDPI, 2010, p.10). To accomplish this goal, North Carolina has established three Regional Leadership Academies (RLAs), each of which has laid out a clear set of principles about leadership in general, leadership development in particular, and leadership development for high-need schools most specifically.

The purpose of this final activity report is to provide summative evaluation results to the extent possible at this point in the initiative's implementation. This report is the fourth and last report in a series of reports on North Carolina's Regional Leadership Academies.

North Carolina's Regional Leadership Academies

The policy objective of the RLA initiative is to increase the number of principals qualified to lead transformational change in low-performing schools in both rural and urban areas (i.e., to prepare approximately 185 turnaround leaders). North Carolina RttT funds support three RLA programs that serve collaboratives of partnering LEAs:

- Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA) established in 2010 (one year before RttT funding was available) and serves 14 LEAs in northeast North Carolina;
- Piedmont Triad Leadership Academy (PTLA) serves four LEAs in north-central North Carolina; and
- Sandhills Leadership Academy (SLA) serves 13 LEAs in south-central North Carolina.

Summary of Findings for the Final Activity Report

- All three RLAs use what are considered by some experts as "best practices" for leadership preparation programs as organizing principles in designing and delivering their individual principal preparation programs.

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

- Fidelity of implementation of program designs (i.e., the degree to which the interventions have been delivered as intended) has been strong (e.g., each RLA has recruited and prepared over 60 “turnaround principal” candidates).
- Participants in every cohort in each RLA have found internship placements in targeted schools and LEAs (i.e., higher-poverty, lower-performing schools than the North Carolina state average, though not always schools on the list of the 5% of lowest-achieving schools in the state).
- The year-long internship experience for the principal candidates, which included both mentoring and coaching, is a distinguishing feature of the RLA programs that the candidates, mentor principals, and superintendents all believe will enhance their effectiveness as principals.
- Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 graduates have found employment in higher-poverty, lower-performing schools and LEAs (19 as principals, 77 as assistant principals, 8 as central office leaders, and 9 as teacher leaders/facilitators).²
- Eighteen of the 178 RLA participants (10%) are working in schools that are part of the state’s Turning Around the Lowest Achieving Schools (TALAS) initiative, and 22 of the 178 participants (12%) are working in Focus schools.³ Of the 61 TALAS schools located in the RLA regions, the 18 RLA participants are working in 15 (25%) of them (six of which also are identified as Priority Schools). Sixty-five percent of all RLA participants are working in schools that fall within the state’s 3rd and 4th school poverty quartiles.
- Data on the longer-term impacts of the RLAs are not yet available.

Additional Final Observations

The timing of the RLA graduations and graduates’ limited placements in principal positions to date have constrained the Evaluation Team’s ability to examine the longer-term effects of the graduates on school improvements. Recent research has begun to shed light on the ways that principals’ effects on the performance of their schools, including value-added measures, principal evaluations, teacher turnover, and other measures, may be done (Grissom, Kalogrides & Loeb 2012). As more RLA graduates assume principalships, these techniques should be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program on helping the state to reach the overall objectives for RttT—improving student performance and teaching quality.

² Though not all are in principalships, their employment as assistant principals or in other administrative roles may lead to principalships. Not all employment is in initially-targeted schools that participate in the state’s RttT-funded Turning Around Lowest-Achieving Schools initiative.

³ Title I-eligible schools that are contributing to the state’s achievement gap.

Introduction

North Carolina's Race to the Top (RttT) plan acknowledges the pressing need for high-quality leadership in low-achieving schools. The component of the plan that focuses on ensuring an equitable distribution of high-quality teachers and leaders identifies, among other things, a need for "increasing the number of principals qualified to lead transformational change in low-performing schools in both rural and urban areas" (NCDPI, 2010, p.10). To meet this need, the state's RttT proposal includes the development of Regional Leadership Academies (RLAs), programs that are "approved for certifying principals [and] designed to . . . provide a new model for the preparation, early career support, and continuous professional development of school leaders" (NCDPI, 2010, p.10).

North Carolina's RttT funds support three RLA programs, each of which serves collaboratives of partnering Local Education Agencies (LEAs).⁴ One RLA (Northeast Leadership Academy, NELA) was established one year before RttT funding was available, and two others (Piedmont Triad Leadership Academy, PTLA and Sandhills Leadership Academy, SLA) were created following a selection process that included proposal submission to a selection committee composed of North Carolina educational leaders.

The North Carolina RttT RLAs directly address their partnering LEAs' needs to recruit, prepare, and support turnaround leaders in challenging school contexts. The goal of the RLAs is to provide talented individuals who have the tools they will need to effectively lead high-need schools. Following a rigorous selection process, the RLAs provide candidates with full-time internships, contextualized leader development opportunities, intensive coaching, and ongoing support. The RLAs are designed to be consistent with literature on executive development, adult learning theory, and educational leadership (e.g., Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Hale & Moorman, 2003; New Leaders for New Schools, 2009).

The program meets North Carolina regulations regarding alternative principal licensure. A brief description of each of the RLAs follows.

North Carolina's Regional Leadership Academies

Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA)

The first RLA, NELA, began serving North Carolina's northeast region during the fall of 2010. NELA is based at North Carolina State University's (NCSU) College of Education (as part of the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation) and serves the following 14 partner LEAs: Bertie, Edgecombe, Franklin, Granville, Halifax, Hertford, Martin, Nash-Rocky Mount, Northampton, Roanoke Rapids, Vance, Warren, Washington, and Weldon City (total of 70,348 students enrolled). It was established to serve a cluster of low-achieving rural schools.

- NELA operates a two-year preparation program that involves full-time study during Year 1 and full-time study—including a full-time, year-long internship—during Year 2.

⁴ LEA is North Carolina's term for traditional school districts and charter schools.

North Carolina Leadership Academies: Final Summative Report
August 2014

- Successful NELA candidates are granted North Carolina Principal Licensure and a Master of School Administration (MSA), conferred by NCSU.
- NELA participants make a three-year commitment to work in participating northeastern North Carolina schools.

Piedmont Triad Leadership Academy (PTLA)

PTLA is based at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) and is a partnership between the Piedmont Triad Education Consortium (PTEC) and the following four LEAs: Alamance-Burlington, Asheboro City, Guilford, and Winston-Salem/Forsyth (total of 150,616 students enrolled).

- PTLA operates a one-year preparation program that involves full-time study—including a full-time, year-long internship.
- Successful PTLA graduates are granted North Carolina Principal Licensure and can earn up to 24 credits toward a UNCG Post-Masters Certificate in School Administration or an MSA degree from the Department of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations.
- PTLA participants commit to three years of service in partnering LEAs upon program completion.

Sandhills Leadership Academy (SLA)

SLA was founded by the Sandhills Regional Education Consortium (SREC). Partners include Fayetteville State University (FSU), the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP), and the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching (NCCAT). SLA serves the following 13 LEAs: Anson, Bladen, Columbus, Cumberland, Harnett, Hoke, Lee, Montgomery, Moore, Richmond, Robeson, Scotland, and Whiteville City (total of 158,979 students enrolled).

- SLA operates a one-year preparation program that involves full-time study—including a full-time, year-long internship.
- Successful SLA graduates are granted North Carolina Principal Licensure and can earn up to 18 graduate-level credits at UNCP or FSU.
- SLA participants commit to serving in the Sandhills region (which includes NCDPI's Region 4 counties, plus Anson County) for a minimum of four years following program completion.

The RLAs were created independently to meet the school leadership needs of three vastly different and very distinct regions of North Carolina (regions that include LEAs ranging from large and urban to small and rural); thus, each RLA is a unique program with its own partnerships, program philosophy, curriculum, coursework, and fieldwork. Each RLA has followed its own implementation path, and evaluators have been engaged in collecting and analyzing data related to each path for three years (since March 2011).

Purpose of the Regional Leadership Academies Evaluation

North Carolina's RttT proposal includes a commitment to an independent evaluation of each initiative.⁵ 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.

As part of this overall evaluation effort, the Evaluation Team documented RLA activities and collected data about participation in, satisfaction with, and the impact of RLA activities through a variety of data sources, including reviews, observations, surveys, focus groups, and interviews with RLA participants and facilitators; in addition, the Evaluation Team analyzed longitudinal accounting and administrative data on students, teachers, leaders, and schools. The study provides detailed information about the implementation and impact of the RLAs in an effort to determine the extent to which the initiative as implemented has had the intended outcomes on school leader practice, their schools' culture/climate of achievement, and teacher and student performance.

The evaluation of the North Carolina RttT RLAs is guided by the following evaluation questions:

- *Research Question 1: Are the RLAs following "best practices" for recruiting and selecting future leaders for high-need schools in North Carolina?*
- *Research Question 2: Are the RLAs following "best practices" for training future leaders for high-need schools in North Carolina?*
- *Research Question 3: Do RLA graduates find placements in targeted schools/districts?*
- *Research Question 4: How do the RLA costs compare to other alternatives for preparing leaders for high-need schools in North Carolina?*

Purpose of this Report and Methodological Approach

The purpose of this final activity report is to provide summative evaluation results to the extent possible at this point in the initiative's implementation. Program components of each RLA were described in detail in three previous formative reports: the *Regional Leadership Academies Cost-Effectiveness Framework* outlined the Evaluation Team's plan for addressing the fourth evaluation question,⁶ the *North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies Final 2012 Activity*

⁵ The evaluation is being conducted by the Consortium for Educational Research and Evaluation–North Carolina (CERE–NC), a partnership of the SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, the Carolina Institute of Public Policy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University. Because one of the three RLAs is housed at the Friday Institute, no members of the consortium who are associated with the Friday Institute participated in this evaluation.

⁶ http://cerenc.org/wpcontent/uploads/2011/10/RLA_cost_effectiveness_framework_3-1-12.pdf; please see the Evaluation Team's preliminary report on cost analysis for early assessments of the cost of this initiative (Forthcoming; will be posted at <http://cerenc.org/rttt-evaluation/overall-impact/> by Fall 2014).

Report addressed each RLA's fidelity of implementation to the aspects outlined in the state's original RttT proposal,⁷ and the *North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies Final 2013 Activity Report* addressed the first three evaluation questions based on data collected to date.⁸

Evaluators analyzed each RLA's recruitment and selection efforts, curricular and pedagogical techniques, induction and support strategies, and internal evaluation methods. Artifacts (e.g., planning documents, presentations, dissemination materials, curriculum plans, scopes and sequences, websites, news articles, etc.) and observational data were analyzed using relevant qualitative methodologies and computer software when appropriate. These activities helped evaluators understand how candidates are recruited, selected, inducted, and trained. More details about data and methodology are included in the reports cited above.

⁷ http://cerenc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/RLA_First-Year-Report-03-04-13.pdf

⁸ http://cerenc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/RLA-Year-2-Report_03_06_2014.pdf

Findings

This section includes findings for each of the four evaluation questions outlined above. Note that Research Questions 1 and 2 have been altered from their original forms in previous reports to better reflect the data available at this point in the implementation. The original RQ 1 (*Do RLAs effectively recruit and train, relative to the alternatives?*) has been modified slightly to highlight each RLA's use of best practices for recruiting and selecting future leaders rather than to assess conclusively longer-term program effectiveness. The original RQ 2 (*What impact does each RLA's selection criteria have on program effectiveness?*) has been modified slightly to highlight each RLA's use of best practices for training future leaders rather than to assess conclusively longer-term program effectiveness, since there is as yet not enough data available.

Research Question 1: Are the RLAs Following “Best Practices” for Recruiting and Selecting Future Leaders for High-Need Schools in North Carolina?

The RLAs do appear to effectively recruit and select relative to alternative programs in North Carolina and nationwide. They each have engaged in careful recruitment and selection processes to ensure, to the extent possible, that program participants will develop the expertise, commitment, and dispositions to serve as transformational school leaders. Each RLA has worked together with its partner LEA leaders to identify and recruit individuals who, in their judgment, are deeply committed to improving low-achieving schools and who have made multiyear, post-academy commitments to work in those schools and LEAs.

Recruitment

In line with widely recognized alternative principal preparation programs (e.g., New Leaders for New Schools and New York City Leadership Academy), each RLA employs a plan for the deliberate, aggressive recruitment of outstanding school leadership candidates. The RttT grant-funded Executive Directors and Coaches, in conjunction with a team of LEA members, developed and conducted broad-based recruitment and selective admissions processes that have resulted in the identification and selection of RLA participants who present demonstrable leadership skills and personal academic excellence.⁹ For example, formally, most of the RLA participants held some form of prior leadership role in their schools as experienced department chairs, as committee chairs, and/or as lead teachers. Informally, most of the RLA participants were known for being effective teachers, for motivating others, and for taking initiative.

Table 1 (following page) provides a comparative overview of criteria used by each RLA, by alternative preparation programs, and by traditional MSA programs in North Carolina to recruit candidates into their individual pre-service leadership program. As noted, the RLAs do recruit effectively, relative to the alternatives.

⁹ For a full description of each RLA's program-specific method of recruitment, please see *North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies: Final 2012 Activity Report*, pp. 12-16 (http://cerenc.org/wpcontent/uploads/2011/10/RLA_First-Year-Report-03-04-13.pdf) and *North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies: Final 2013 Activity Report*, pp. 14-16 (http://cerenc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/RLA-Year-2-Report_03_06_2014.pdf).

Table 1. RLA Recruitment Criteria in Comparison to Other Leadership Preparation Programs

Recruitment Criteria	NELA	PTLA	SLA	Other Alternative Preparation Programs (e.g., NYCLA, NLNS)	NC Traditional MSA*
1. Established reputation (i.e., known entity, word of mouth, graduates, etc.)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Brochures and informational materials	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	^
3. “Tapping” process in LEAs in which people are encouraged to apply	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	^
4. Website information	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5. Email blasts and LEA updates	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	^
6. Local, state and national presentations	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	^
7. Newspaper accounts, media coverage and various public relations press releases throughout the year (including promotional videos)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	^
8. Collaboration with partnering LEAs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	^
9. LEA based information sessions	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	^
10. Superintendent endorsement	Yes	Yes	Yes	^	No
11. Superintendent meeting updates	Yes	Yes	Yes	^	No
12. School Board presentations	Yes	Yes	Yes	^	No
13. Partnerships with organizations (e.g., NC Education Consortiums, Teach For America, Historically Black Colleges/Universities, etc.)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	^
14. Commitment (initially and ongoing) to changing, improving, and transforming schools	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	^
15. Willingness to make multi-year, post-academy commitment	Yes	Yes	Yes	^	^ (PFs [†] do)

Notes:

*MSA=Master’s in School Administration

^=The extent to which certain programs do and/or do not implement these recruitment criteria varies widely from none (i.e., not at all) to some.

†PF=North Carolina Principal Fellows agree to a 4-year leadership commitment post-graduation.

The RLA process of intentionally identifying and recruiting outstanding candidates (i.e., experienced teachers with strong teaching and leadership skills who are committed to educational change) benefitted from strategic exposure tactics and publicity campaigns in partnering LEAs. As a result of these efforts, a large number of people expressed interest and completed the application process over the first three years (189 participants selected from a total of 962 applications yielded an overall acceptance rate of less than 20%). Overall, the recruitment efforts for each RLA are to be commended. Advertisement has been good and the RLAs have

yielded a fairly high number of applicants (though whether of sufficiently high quality and quantity to fill necessary slots in targeted schools is yet to be determined).

Selectivity

The recruitment and selection process of each RLA yielded fairly selective and competitive acceptance rates (Table 2. The overall acceptance rate of 19.6% (189 accepted from 962 who applied) is comparable to nationally-recognized programs such as NYCLA (14%) and NLNS (7%) (Fenton & Murphy, 2011). NELA’s cohorts went through a multi-tiered selection process that required superintendent endorsement prior to application. PTLA’s and SLA’s cohorts went through a multi-tiered selection process that required superintendent endorsement after selection. Thus the acceptance percentages are slightly skewed and actually lower than the combined 19.6% reported. For example, superintendents recommended 38 individuals for NELA’s first cohort. Twenty-four were admitted and twenty-one graduated. NELA dismissed three of the participants from the program who, from a quality assurance perspective, were not performing at an acceptable level. NELA’s Cohort 2 went through a revised, multi-tier selection process. Even so, NELA still had a significantly higher acceptance rate than either PTLA or SLA (51% versus 12% and 27%, respectively). For NELA’s Cohort 3 (2013-14), the superintendents from the 14 partnering LEAs were asked to send only their very best and brightest. NELA worked closely with the superintendents to identify the characteristics of candidates that would be a good fit. As a result, the program directors believe they started with a better and deeper pool for that cohort, relative to the two previous cohorts. Twenty participants from a pool of twenty-eight were selected.

However, the overall selection rate for the RLAs still is much lower than those for traditional MSA programs in North Carolina, some of which have few applicants (less than 25 applicants for 20 slots) and/or report high acceptance rates (75% or higher). The Principal Fellows Program in North Carolina (NC PFP) had an acceptance rate of 56% in 2011 (60 recipients from 107 applicants), an acceptance rate of 72% in 2012 (56 recipients from 78 applicants), and an acceptance rate of 60% in 2013 (33 recipients from 55 applicants). The average acceptance rate for the NC PFP over the past three years has been 63%. In fairness to all of these programs, a larger number of potential participants do inquire, but after asking about minimum requirements (e.g., tuition costs, prior teaching experience, undergraduate GPA, etc.), decide not to formally apply. Unfortunately, there is currently no valid way of tracking such numbers. Note that, aside from “opportunity costs” (e.g., gas, meals), the RLA experience is completely free to participants.

Table 2. Number of Participants who were Accepted Versus Number of Candidates who Applied

RLA	2011–12 Cohort 1 Acceptance Rate	2012–13 Cohort 2 Acceptance Rate	2013–14 Cohort 3 Acceptance Rate
NELA	24/38 = 63%*	21/41 = 51%*	20/28 = 71%*
PTLA	21/173 = 12%	20/169 = 12%	22/197 = 11%
SLA	20/110 = 18%	21/79 = 27%	20/127 = 16%

* With a notably and consistently smaller initial candidate pool, two questions surface: 1) Is NELA able to identify enough high-quality applicants/candidates?; and 2) What can be/is being done to increase the number of candidates who apply to NELA?

RLA Selection Processes

Each RLA created “an innovative selection process that is fair and rigorous, assesses more than a candidate’s experience and education, and adds a new component that enables interviewers to measure a candidate’s core beliefs” (Huckaby, 2012, p. 31). For a full description of each RLA’s program-specific selection process, please see *North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies: Final 2012 Activity Report* (pp. 16-21) and *North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies: Final 2013 Activity Report* (pp. 16-21).

Of the three RLAs’ selection criteria, one is not necessarily better than the others. All three are similar in some ways and different in others, all three use multiple measures, and all three allow for deeper analyses into an applicant’s qualifications. Also, in comparison to the selection processes of most university-based principal preparation programs nationwide, the RLAs collectively are much more deliberate and intentionally focused, more intricately involved, and more thorough in their selection criteria. The RLA selection criteria are more robust and rigorous, relative to the alternatives.

Table 3 (following page) provides a comparative overview of criteria used by each RLA, by alternative preparation programs, and by traditional MSA programs in North Carolina to select candidates into their individual pre-service leadership programs. As noted, the RLA selection criteria are more robust and rigorous relative to the alternatives.

Results of the Selection Process

Overall, the RLA selection process for Cohorts 1, 2, and 3 ($n=189$) yielded a fairly diverse group of participants. While more than half were Caucasian (58%), over two-thirds were female (71%), and more than one third (38%) were African-American. Half (50%) possessed a master’s degree already (in a range of subjects from education to reading, administration, special education, and even counseling). One-third (36%) were elementary education majors during their undergraduate studies. NELA participants were less likely to have master’s degrees (28% compared to the RLA Cohort 2 average of 50%). Relative to the RLA average, a larger proportion of the SLA participants were Caucasian (71% compared to the RLA average of 58%). A larger proportion of the PTLA participants were African-American (48% compared to the RLA average of 38%) and had advanced degrees (68% compared to the RLA average of 50%).

Table 4 (second page following) includes descriptive statistics for all three Cohorts combined. In comparison to North Carolina’s Principal Fellow program, the RLA participants tended to be slightly older (36 versus 33), more racially diverse (58% White versus 77% and 38% Black versus 20% Black), and slightly more likely to already have a master’s degree (50% versus 40%). In some regards, this makes sense, since the PF program and traditional MSA programs in North Carolina are master’s degree-granting programs.

Table 3. RLA Selection Criteria in Comparison to Other Leadership Preparation Programs

Selection Criteria	NELA	PTLA	SLA	Other Alternative Preparation Programs (e.g., NYCLA, NLNS)	NC Traditional MSA*
1. Application form (including transcripts, scores, and criminal background check)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Resume of professional experience (some minimal requirements)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3. Letters of recommendation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	^
4. Purpose statements/Letters of interest	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	^
5. Writing sample/educational essay	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	^
6. Master's degree with minimum 3.0 GPA	No	No	No	Yes	No
7. Superintendent's nomination	Yes	Yes	Yes	^	No
8. A homework assignment (e.g., 2- to 3-minute videotaped presentation on "Why I want to be a leader in a high needs school")	No	Yes	Yes	^	No
9. Completion of self-assessment surveys (e.g., grit/perseverance/passion and leadership responsibilities)	Yes	No	No	^	No
10. Assessment Day (including role play, timed writing activity, scenario-based simulations, team decision making process, presentations, and response to scenarios)	Yes	Yes	Yes	^	No
11. Group Q&A sessions and interviews with panel of LEA partners	Yes	Yes	Yes	^	No
12. One-on-one Interviews	Yes	Yes	Yes	^	No
13. Commitment to closing the achievement gap, professional resilience, strong communication, willingness/ability to be self-reflective, possession of instructional knowledge/expertise, commitment to continuous learning, professional integrity	Yes	Yes	Yes	^	^
14. Commitment to multi-year, post-academy employment/leadership position	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Note: ^=the extent to which certain programs do and/or do not implement these selection criteria varies widely from none (i.e., not at all) to some.

Table 4. Demographic Data for RLA Cohorts 1, 2, and 3

Demographic Characteristic	All Cohort Interns	NELA (Cohorts 1, 2, and 3)	PTLA (Cohorts 1, 2, and 3)	SLA (Cohorts 1, 2, and 3)
<i>Age Range</i>	25-59	25-53	25-59	27-54
<i>Age Median</i>	36	35	37	37
<i>Male</i>	29%	26%	33%	27%
<i>Female</i>	71%	74%	67%	73%
<i>Black</i>	38%	42%	48%	24%
<i>White</i>	58%	53%	49%	71%
<i>Asian</i>	1%	3%	0%	0%
<i>American Indian</i>	1%	0%	0%	3%
<i>Other Ethnicity</i>	2%	2%	3%	2%
<i>Master's Degree</i>	50% (95/189)	28% (18/65)	68% (43/63)	56% (34/61)

Research Question 2: Are the RLAs Following “Best Practices” for Training Future Leaders for High-Need Schools in North Carolina?¹⁰

The three essential features of effective leadership preparation programs are: (1) having a program philosophy that clearly articulates a viable theory of action; (2) having a strong curriculum focused on instruction and school improvement; and (3) having well-designed and integrated coursework and field work (Orr, O’Doherty, & Barber, 2012). Each RLA has committed to designing and implementing a fully comprehensive leadership preparation program that incorporates these features by including the following research-based program elements (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Taylor, Cordeiro, & Chrispeels, 2009; Young, Crow, Ogawa, & Murphy, 2009):

- *Rigorous recruitment and selection*
- *Cohorts and internships*
 - Cohort-based experiences
 - Weekly, full-cohort, continued learning during the internship year
 - Full-time, year-long clinical internship experiences
- *Curricula and seminars—An action-research, case-study curriculum focus*
- *Support systems (coaching, mentoring, and supervising)*
 - Multi-faceted support structures

¹⁰ Note: Research Questions 2 and 1b are answered out of order to preserve a review of the RLAs that follows internal initiative continuity: recruitment (RQ 1a), followed by selection (RQ 2), followed by training (RQ 1b).

- Dynamic feedback and improvement loops
- *Structures for evaluation and improvement*
- *Job placement and induction support*

The degree to which each RLA addresses the first of these elements (recruitment and selection) has been addressed in previous sections, and the degree to which each RLA addresses the final element (job placement and induction) will be addressed in a later section.¹¹

The RLAs are intentionally and singularly focused on training a new kind of leader for high-need schools (i.e., candidates knowingly and willingly committed to equity, candidates with a sense of urgency and personal accountability for student learning, and candidates with the will and the skill to turn around failing schools). This type of leadership is critical, especially since schools entering turnaround (i.e., those with demonstrated low student achievement for multiple years) face significantly more challenges than typical schools in the state. McFarland and Preston (2010) report that in North Carolina,

on average, turnaround schools had significantly lower performance composites and graduation rates, and slightly lower percentages of teachers with full licensure than typical high schools. Suspension rates, the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and the percentages of non-white students were all significantly higher in turnaround schools (p.2).

Unique circumstances like these warrant specialized contextual knowledge and unique dispositions on the part of the leader to move schools from negative trajectories to positive ones. All three RLAs are working deliberately to equip their candidates with instructional leadership skills, resiliency skills, and transformational change skills. In each RLA, the emphasis on high-need schools and the strategies needed to turn around low performance is prominent and palpable. For a full description of each RLA's program-specific training process, please see *North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies: Final 2012 Activity Report*.

Cohorts and Internships

Similar to NYCLA and NLNS, all three North Carolina RLAs offer cohort-based experiences. By participating in cohorts of 20 to 21 peers, NELA, PTLA, and SLA participants engage in the development of meaningful professional learning communities for aspiring school leaders. Evidence of the advantages of such cohort models is provided by Davis et al. (2005), Dorn, Papalewis, and Brown (1995), Muth and Barnett (2001), and numerous other researchers. Likewise, all three RLAs require a full-time, year-long, paid, clinical internship experience, under the dedicated support of a carefully selected on-site principal mentor with extensive successful school leadership experience and a leadership academy supervisor/Executive Coach. To do this, NELA, PTLA, and SLA interns are released from their normal work duties and are afforded the opportunity to experience and participate in the entire cycle of a school year under

¹¹ Fidelity of implementation of each of the other elements is addressed in the *North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies: Final 2012 Activity Report*, pp. 21-55 and in the *North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies: Final 2013 Activity Report*, pp. 21-24.

the direction of an experienced principal who is “deemed successful and effective” in generating school improvement.¹² This practice is quite different from most traditional MSA programs across the state of North Carolina (and even nationwide),¹³ in which most students complete part-time, hourly internships in addition to and on top of their regular, full-time, day job.

A high-quality, rigorous internship that is aligned to the program’s coursework and supervised by experienced and effective school leaders is “critically important to helping principal [candidates] learn to implement sophisticated practices” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007 p. 17). Such internships are characterized by:

- Ongoing reflection, supported by an experienced and effective supervisor or mentor;
- Projects meaningfully related to the complex and integrated nature of principal work (rather than discrete tasks or activities not centered on improving instruction);
- Integration with coursework, strengthening transfer of learning from classroom to application in the field of knowledge and skills;
- Alignment with guiding standards (ELCC and ISLLC) and program values; and
- Ongoing, individualized assessment to support development.

As such, the year-long, full-time paid internships *is* the most notable, defining characteristic that separates the RLAs from the other, more traditional MSA principal preparation programs. A transformative internship experience is clearly critical to the success of these program models, rendering the coursework more valuable because it is tightly interwoven with practice (i.e., providing authentic, active learning experiences in school settings). This is not surprising, as research suggests that most adults learn best when exposed to situations requiring the application of acquired skills, knowledge, and problem-solving strategies within authentic settings (Kolb & Boyatzis, 1999).

As the primary component and distinguishing feature of the RLA experience, these internships are designed to engage participants in meaningful, long-range, school-based activities and initiatives (e.g., assisting teachers with interventions, leading professional development, supporting instruction, etc.). They allow aspiring school leaders to solidify their knowledge by applying it to authentic situations (Cordeiro & Smith-Sloan, 1995; Murphy, 1993, 2002) and by facilitating growth in their educational orientation, perspectives, concepts, language, and skills (Crow & Matthews, 1998) with a focus on improving student achievement and other important school improvement goals. In addition to assisting their internship principals in various leadership tasks, RLA participants complete data-driven problems of practice and several other authentic internship leadership development projects aligned to program outcomes and the North Carolina Standards for School Executives. Internship responsibilities often involve direct work with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction’s (NCDPI’s) effort to turn around the state’s lowest-achieving schools.

¹² Note that these quotation marks were added by the evaluator as a point of question.

¹³ NC Principal Fellows are an exception to this generalization.

Logic models and objective performance measures are established for each internship project. Interns are assessed based on their ability to achieve their performance target during the action-learning project. For example, an intern might be asked to work with a team of teachers on a grade level or in a subject area for a semester to increase student achievement. The intern would need to implement what s/he had learned about data-driven instruction, instructional strategies, distributed leadership, developing a culture of continuous improvement, and other learning in working with the teacher team. Baseline data (pre- and post-) might be used as one measure to assess the effectiveness of the intern's work. Much like medical students learning from attending doctors, RLA interns work with site principals to use data to diagnose the causes of a particular school problem, research best practice solutions, develop and implement reforms intended to treat the problem, use new data to assess the effectiveness of the treatment, and develop next steps based on these assessments.

During the year-long internship, RLA interns are expected to take the initiative to learn all functional areas of school and make themselves useful both by contributions to “big picture” instructional improvement efforts and by the inevitable “grunt work” that is a part of a principal's daily work. RLA interns are expected to demonstrate both flexibility and the humility of being a learner in a new environment. As such, weekly, monthly, and biannual evaluations are completed for and with each intern in conjunction with her or his mentor principal, RLA executive coach, and superintendent. Feedback from participants included the following:

In our internship, we identify a problem of practice; when we feel the sense of urgency, we commit ourselves to the problem and implement some strategies to help solve the problem. We create new goals not only for students but also for teachers to work on.
[NELA participant]

After she (my intern) had been here for a few months, she just took off and became a second assistant principal. She now moves through the building and everyone knows her. . . . They partner with her, they trust her, they respect her, they work with her. . . . It's been amazing to watch her [my intern] grow. She had instructional leadership skills when she came. What she's done is develop those skills. [PTLA Mentor Principal]

SLA has been a life-changer for me. It helped me find my passion. Being in school every day with a powerful mentor principal really helped me make the transition from classroom teacher to building-level leader. He (my mentor) guided me gradually. My coach also believed in me. She pushed me and was honest with me and told me where I needed to grow. She really helped me find my identity as an administrator. [SLA graduate]

Curricula and Seminars

The central features of effective leadership preparation programs are “a program philosophy and curriculum that emphasizes leadership of instruction and school improvement,” “a comprehensive and coherent curriculum” aligned to research-based leadership standards, and the integration of program features that are centered on a consistent model of leadership and are mutually reinforcing (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, La Pointe, & Orr, 2010). A leadership preparation curriculum (whether traditional MSA programs or alternative RLAs) combines both coursework and field experience, and thus the program's curriculum is threaded through both (Clark & Clark, 1996; Murphy, 2006; Taylor, Cordeiro, & Chrispeels, 2009; Young, Crow,

Ogawa, & Murphy, 2009).

Similar to NYCLA and NLNS, all three of North Carolina's RLAs offer a rigorous, action-research, case-study focused curriculum that engages participants in addressing issues similar to those they will face on the job (e.g., working through relevant data, problem identification, consideration of alternative solutions, and decision-making). The projects and cases are aligned with standards and are tied to educational leadership literature and research. The curriculum and seminars for each RLA also are coordinated with the NCDPI District and School Transformation (DST) Initiative to ensure consistency and coordination when working in the same LEAs to turn around the lowest-achieving schools. The integrated curriculum of the RLAs is quite different from the standard course-by-course curriculum of more traditional leadership preparation programs. Even with proper sequencing, the content in many of these MSA classes can be outdated and irrelevant, and taught in isolation by professors far removed from the field who emphasize theory over practice. The RLA First Year Report and RLA Year 2 Report include more complete descriptions.

In contrast, weekly full-cohort, continued learning seminars during the internship year provide "just-in-time learning" for immediate problems and continue to develop aspiring leaders' skills. Workshops, seminars, and classes are based on adult learning theory principles and are co-led by a blended faculty of academics and practitioners (teams of university faculty, exemplary LEA leadership practitioner scholars, and others with extensive school leadership experience), which helps to ensure an integration of research-based knowledge and practitioner knowledge. The RLA experience for participants also includes site visits to high-performing, high-poverty schools, to provide concrete models of leadership approaches and school cultures that produce strong achievement results with student populations similar to those in which the participants will be placed. The curriculum for each RLA is constantly being evaluated and revised with help from advisory groups, practicing principals, and community leaders, and through comparisons to other traditional and non-traditional, alternative principal preparation programs. As such, each RLA's curriculum is a pertinent, timely, malleable document as opposed to being an archaic, stagnant, extraneous program of study. Once again, such flexibility usually is not present within traditional preparation programs. Each RLA is strategic and methodical in developing its participants and in ensuring that they engage in "powerful learning experiences." Each data-based curricular offering, according to UCEA (2012), should:

- Be authentic, meaningful, relevant, and problem-finding;
- Involve sense-making around critical problems of practice;
- Explore, critique, and deconstruct from an equity perspective (race, culture, language);
- Require collaboration and interdependence;
- Develop confidence in leadership;
- Place both the professor and student in a learning situation;
- Empower learners and give them responsibility for their own learning;
- Shift perspective from the classroom to the school, LEA, or state level; and
- Have a reflective component.

During various stages in the program, RLA interns are placed in pre-arranged project teams. The composition of the teams maximizes the diversity of experiences, opinions, perspectives, personality types, and learning styles within a group. Purposeful pressure is placed on the teams as a mechanism to understand group dynamics, develop interpersonal skills, and learn interdependency. An important component for each RLA intern is the development of the skills necessary to work with individuals the leader did not choose and thus prepare her or him for her or his first principalship.

Support Systems: Coaching, Mentoring, and Supervising

All three RLAs benefit from a multifaceted, sustained structure of support involving Leadership Academy Directors and Supervisors, Executive Coaches, mentor principals with extensive school leadership experience, and multiple, highly-qualified instructors at various stages throughout their program. The supervisors, coaches, mentors, and instructors are each carefully selected and provided with initial training and ongoing development. Most (if not all) of the Executive Coaches are retired principals and superintendents (presumably effective during their tenure, though criteria are unclear) deployed to work with interns based on specific, individual, developmental needs. The Executive Coaches serve in supportive, supervisory roles as external sources of confidential and expert advice. The in-school mentor principals play a different role, focusing mainly on daily advisement during the internship. The mentor principal is a source of advice and information regarding LEA matters and helps guide the action research projects. Finally, for transitional and early-career support, graduates from each RLA work with Leadership Academy faculty in seminar settings and one-on-one mentoring meetings after job placement. For example, SLA's Advisory Committee decided that, in addition to monthly full-cohort meetings, "Cohort 1 members who have positions of principal or director will receive monthly visits from their coach (same coach as last year) and will always have access to their coach by email/phone."

This additional induction support in the form of ongoing professional development from the coaches and mentors is provided to the new school leaders in their first and second years to address immediate problems of practice. During this two-year induction period, RLA graduates/assistant principals/principals continue to engage with their cohort, coaches, mentors, and supervisors in furthering their leadership skills even after they assume school leadership roles. RLA graduates learn new ways to practice and reflect and, in the process, new strategies for enriching leadership in their schools in ways that have an immediate impact on teaching practices and student learning.

This highly supportive and reflective approach, whereby aspiring school leaders gain both the interpersonal and intrapersonal lessons of leadership, is a major difference between traditional MSA programs and alternative programs like North Carolina's RLAs. Ongoing support and mentoring post-graduation is a key component for new leaders, and one that is critically absent from traditional programs. The induction of new principals is best achieved when it addresses the needs of principals in their different developmental stages. As such, RLA's induction and mentoring programs are designed to enhance professional effectiveness and foster continued growth during a time of intense learning. The RLAs are committed to systematically supporting and challenging new leaders to reflect on their practice, to promoting new principals' heightened job performance, and to developing personal learning goals.

Program Evaluation and Improvement

Dynamic feedback and improvement loops involving systematic evaluations of curriculum offerings, seminar sessions, guest presentations, site visits, professional development opportunities, conference attendance, internship placements, assignments, mentoring, and coaching techniques all ensure continuous and evidence-driven RLA improvement. It became obvious over the course of this overarching evaluation that each RLA engages in a *daily* process of individual program evaluation and improvement. Due to the nature of the work, most adjustments are based on observational and subjective data (e.g., feedback, reflection, timing, etc.) as opposed to concrete, statistical objective data. In particular:

- NELA’s curriculum development and revision occurs on a regular basis to align program purposes and content to new developments in the field; to refresh content, readings, and learning experiences; and to check on potential program drift that can occur over time. The Executive Directors of NELA meet every Monday morning to debrief the previous week, share updates, review scope and sequence, and process observations and evaluations from a multitude of sources (e.g., specialized trainings, classes, site visits, professional development opportunities, interns, Executive Coaches, and mentor principals). Content is reviewed and refined along with instructional strategies, timing, and presenters. For example, the instructor, sequencing of content, and delivery method for NELA’s Understanding by Design training was tweaked and modified based on experiences and feedback from the previous year. This type of continuous reflection and refinement happens daily.
- PTLA’s Leadership Team also meets weekly to debrief, revise, tweak, and plan. A key driving force of PTLA has been the consistent sense of a committed partnership between PTLA’s Executive Director, coaches, UNCG faculty, and the four LEAs involved. Since each LEA’s superintendent serves on the PTLA Board, issues are resolved at a higher level, buy-in is attained, and “things” appear to be shepherded through the system much easier and quicker. Likewise, PTLA’s Advisory Group meetings are notable, concrete indicators of PTLA’s collaboration with LEA partners in support of the ongoing efforts of the program (e.g., interviewing and hiring, internship responsibilities and roles, application planning, and selection of candidates). Advisory Group discussions on intern growth and progress have been rich with photos and videos supporting data documents, and decisions regarding internship sites and principal mentors were also made in collaboration.
- Monthly meetings with SREC superintendents, quarterly meetings with SLA Advisory Committee members, and weekly ongoing interactions with mentor principals and LEA staff continue to provide SLA valuable data and feedback on its processes and activities for improvement purposes. SLA leaders also meet weekly. They are committed to the growth and development of their executive interns through lessons learned.

Research Question 3: Do RLA Graduates Find Placements in Targeted Schools/Districts?

The goal of the RLAs is to increase the number of principals qualified to lead transformational change in low-performing schools in both rural and urban areas. As such, RLA interns receive job placement support, provided by each RLA in conjunction with participating LEAs, to determine appropriate matches of aspiring leaders to the schools in which they are placed. Table 5 (following page) indicates that interns from each of the three cohorts, and from each of the

three RLAs, have been placed in high-need schools (i.e., overall, schools with higher poverty and lower performance rates than North Carolina state averages). On average, two-thirds (66.2%) of the student populations are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (versus the state average of 55.9%), the overall average Reading/English I proficiency rates are less than 63% (versus the state average of 71.2%), and the overall average Mathematics/Algebra I proficiency rates hover around the 72% mark (versus the state average of 82.8%).

Table 5. RLA Internship Placements: Free/Reduced Lunch, Size, English, and Mathematics Scores

Placement Site Characteristic	RLA	Internship Year			Average for Cohorts 1, 2, & 3
		Cohort 1 (2011-2012)	Cohort 2 (2012-2013)	Cohort 3 (2013-2014)	
% Students Free/Reduced-Price Lunch	NELA	68.7%	60.2%	62.5%	63.8%
	PTLA	75.8%	66.6%	72.4%	71.6%
	SLA	68.5%	63.3%	57.8%	63.2%
	RLAs	71.0%	63.4%	64.2%	66.2%
	State Avg.	55.9%	55.9%	55.9%	55.9%
School Size	NELA	550	668	520	579
	PTLA	579	739	679	666
	SLA	615	711	662	663
	RLAs	581	706	620	636
	State Avg.	710	710	710	710
Reading/English I Proficiency Rates	NELA	59.7%	64.8%	66.7%	63.7%
	PTLA	55.6%	60.9%	58.1%	58.2%
	SLA	64.6%	66.8%	69.3%	66.9%
	RLAs	59.9%	64.2%	64.7%	62.9%
	State Avg.	71.2%	71.2%	71.2%	71.2%
Mathematics/Algebra I Proficiency Rates	NELA	74.0%	74.8%	71.1%	73.3%
	PTLA	67.3%	71.1%	72.2%	70.2%
	SLA	70.1%	71.8%	78.6%	73.5%
	RLAs	70.5%	72.6%	74.0%	72.4%
	State Avg.	82.8%	82.8%	82.8%	82.8%

According to the original proposal for the RLAs, the expectation was that “successful candidates will be placed and serve in high-needs schools” (i.e., overall, higher-poverty and lower-performance than the North Carolina state average). Table 6 (following page) indicates that graduates from the first two cohorts from each of the three RLAs have been placed in leadership positions and that at least 16% or more of the RLA graduates (20 of 124, as of March 2014) have ascended quicker to the principalship than the state average (two years or less as an assistant principal versus four years). These first-time principals also are, on average, younger than other first time principals in the state (36 years old versus 41).

Table 6. RLA Graduate Job Placements

Cohort	NELA Graduates	PTLA Graduates	SLA Graduates	Overall
	<i>n</i> =21	<i>n</i> =21	<i>n</i> =20	<i>n</i> =62
Cohort 1 – June 2012	6 Principals 8 Assistant Princ 3 Central Office 2 Teacher/ Facilitator 2 Left RLA Region	3 Principals 14 Assistant Princ 1 Central Office 1 Teacher/ Facilitator 2 Left RLA Region	8 Principals 7 Assistant Princ 1 Central Office 0 Teacher/ Facilitator 4 Left RLA Region	17 Principals 29 Assistant Princ 5 Central Office 0 Teacher/ Facilitator 8 Left RLA Region
	<i>n</i> =21	<i>n</i> =20	<i>n</i> =21	<i>n</i> =62
Cohort 2 – June 2013	1 Principal 17 Assistant Princ 1 Central Office 2 Teacher/ Facilitator 0 Left RLA Region	0 Principals 13 Assistant Princ 2 Central Office 5 Teacher/ Facilitator 0 Left RLA Region	2 Principals 17 Assistant Princ 0 Central Office 2 Teacher/ Facilitator 0 Left RLA Region	3 Principals 47 Assistant Princ 3 Central Office 9 Teacher/ Facilitator 0 Left RLA Region
	<i>n</i> =42	<i>n</i> =41	<i>n</i> =41	<i>n</i> =124
Total (as of March 2014)	7 Principals 25 Assistant Princ 4 Central Office 4 Teacher/ Facilitator 2 Left RLA Region	3 Principals 27 Assistant Princ 3 Central Office 6 Teacher/ Facilitator 2 Left RLA Region	10 Principals 24 Assistant Princ 1 Central Office 2 Teacher/ Facilitator 4 Left RLA Region	20 Principals (16%) 76 Assistant Princ (61%) 8 Central Office (6%) 12 Teacher/ Facilitator (10%) 8 Left RLA Region (6%)

Table 7 (following page) indicates that, as was the case for interns, graduates from the first two cohorts from each of the three RLAs also are serving in high-need schools. Trends in the data for the past three years indicate that Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 graduates acquired jobs in schools that are struggling and where, on average, more than two-thirds (68.2%) of the students receive free or reduced-price lunch (versus the North Carolina state average of 55.9%), where the proportion of at- or above-grade level Reading/English I scores hover around 62.6% (versus the North Carolina state average of 71.2%), and where the proportion of at- or above-grade level Mathematics/Algebra I scores hover just above the 72% mark (versus the North Carolina state average of 82.8%). Although the range of scores and the range of growth in these schools are great, these data are in line with higher-poverty, higher-need, lower-performing schools across the state.

Table 7. RLA Job Placements by School Characteristics

Placement Site Characteristic	RLA	Job Placements		Overall
		Cohort 1	Cohort 2	
% Students Free/Reduced- Price Lunch	NELA	77.9%	60.8%	69.3%
	PTLA	74.7%	61.7%	68.2%
	SLA	67.4%	66.6%	67.0%
	RLAs	73.3%	63.0%	68.2%
	<i>State Avg.</i>	<i>55.9%</i>	<i>55.9%</i>	<i>55.9%</i>
School Size	NELA	480	572	526
	PTLA	692	804	748
	SLA	770	724	747
	RLAs	647	700	674
	<i>State Avg.</i>	<i>710</i>	<i>710</i>	<i>710</i>
English Proficiency Rates	NELA	55.9%	66.0%	60.9%
	PTLA	55.3%	67.8%	61.6%
	SLA	65.8%	65.2%	65.5%
	RLAs	59.0%	66.3%	62.6%
	<i>State Avg.</i>	<i>71.2%</i>	<i>71.2%</i>	<i>71.2%</i>
Mathematics Proficiency Rates	NELA	66.4%	75.1%	70.7%
	PTLA	68.9%	74.3%	71.6%
	SLA	76.3%	72.7%	74.5%
	RLAs	70.5%	74.0%	72.3%
	<i>State Avg.</i>	<i>82.8%</i>	<i>82.8%</i>	<i>82.8%</i>

Another way to examine high need is to consider how many schools fall into the quartiles of schools with the highest proportions of students in poverty. When examined in this manner, Table 8 (following page) indicates that the majority of participants (graduates from the first two cohorts and current Cohort 3 interns) from each of the three RLAs are serving in high-need schools. Sixty-five percent of the RLA participants are working in schools that fall within the 3rd and 4th quartile for percent poor (32% in 4th quartile and 33% in 3rd quartile); PTLA participants are serving in the most (70%), SLA participants are serving in 65%, and NELA participants are serving in 60%. The rationale behind certain placements and hires varies greatly from context to context, from individual to individual. Employment often is as assistant principals or in other administrative roles that may lead to principalships, and is not always in initially-targeted schools for a variety of valid reasons. Having said that, only one third of all RLA participants are currently working in schools that fall within the lower 1st and 2nd quartiles for percent of students in poverty.

Table 8: RLA Job and Intern Presence in Percent Poor by Poverty Quartile Schools

		4th Quartile (>78.6% high poverty)	3rd Quartile (61.9%-78.6% poverty)	2nd Quartile (44.8%-61.8% poverty)	1st Quartile (<44.8% low poverty)
Cohort 1	NELA Job Placements	7	7	4	1
	PTLA Job Placements	8	7	3	1
	SLA Job Placements	4	8	3	1
Cohort 2	NELA Job Placements	3	8	7	3
	PTLA Job Placements	7	4	5	4
	SLA Job Placements	6	9	5	1
Cohort 3	NELA Internships	8	3	7	2
	PTLA Internships	10	7	4	1
	SLA Internships	4	6	5	5
Combined	NELA Totals	18/60 = 30%	18/60 = 30%	18/30 = 30%	6/60 = 10%
	PTLA Totals	25/61 = 41%	18/61 = 29%	12/61 = 20%	6/61 = 10%
	SLA Totals	14/57 = 25%	23/57 = 40%	13/57 = 23%	7/57 = 12%
Grand Totals		57/178 = 32%	59/178 = 33%	43/178 = 24%	19/178 = 11%

A portion of North Carolina’s RttT funds has been available to stimulate and strengthen the state’s efforts to turn around the lowest-achieving schools. The Turning Around the Lowest Achieving Schools (TALAS) initiative targets the lowest-performing 5% of elementary, middle, and high schools, all of which have performance composites below 60% (based on 2009-10 data). TALAS also targets high schools with graduation rates below 60%. At the start of the RttT initiative, a total of 118 schools met at least one of these two criteria. In addition, North Carolina’s DST team works with the lowest 10% of LEAs in the state ($n=12$). Since their objectives intersect, the RLAs work closely with some of these schools and LEAs:

- 24 of the 118 DST schools (20%) and 6 of the 12 DST LEAs (50%) (i.e., Edgecombe, Halifax, Hertford, Northampton, Warren, Weldon) are located in the NELA region;
- 23 of the 118 DST schools (19%) (though none of the 12 DST LEAs [0%]) are located in the PTLA region;
- 14 of the 118 DST schools (12%) and 2 of the 12 DST LEAs (17%) (i.e., Anson, Robeson) are located in the SLA region; and
- Overall, 61 of the 118 DST schools (52%) and 8 of the 12 DST LEAs (67%) are located in the three RLA regions.

Table 9 (following page) indicates the number of RLA interns and graduates who are currently working or interning in TALAS schools and/or North Carolina Focus schools as of Spring 2014. A “Focus school” is a Title I school in North Carolina that, based on the most recent data available, is contributing to the achievement gap in the state. More specifically, a Focus school is: 1) a school that has the largest within-school gaps between the highest-achieving subgroup and the lowest-achieving subgroup or, at the high school level, has the largest within-school gaps in graduation rates; or 2) a school that has a subgroup or subgroups with low achievement or, at

the high school level, low graduation rates (e.g., less than 60 percent over a number of years). These determinations are based on achievement and lack of progress over a number of years for one or more subgroups of students.

Table 9. RLA Job and Intern Presence in TALAS and Focus Schools, Spring 2014

Cohort	Regional Leadership Academy			
	NELA n [#] =60	PTLA n=61	SLA n=57	
Cohort 1 Job Placements	3 in TALAS 2 in Focus	5 in TALAS 3 in Focus	0 in TALAS 1 in Focus	
Cohort 2 Job Placements	3 in TALAS 1 in Focus	2 in TALAS 1 in Focus	1 in TALAS 4 in Focus	
Cohort 3 Intern Placements	2 in TALAS 3 in Focus	2 in TALAS 4 in Focus	0 in TALAS 3 in Focus	
Total Cohort Members	8 in TALAS* (13%) 6 in Focus*	9 in TALAS (15%) 8 in Focus	1 in TALAS (2%) 8 in Focus	18/178 in TALAS (10%) 22/178 in Focus (12%)
Total Schools (in RLA region)	6/24 TALAS (25%)[^] 5 Focus	8/23 TALAS (35%)[^] 6 Focus	1/14 TALAS (7%)[^] 8 Focus	15/61 TALAS (25%) 19 Focus

[#] n=Total number of past and current cohort members, to date.

* One TALAS school in this region is also a Focus school; Cohort members in that school are double-counted.

~ NELA and PTLA placed more than one Cohort member in some TALAS and FOCUS schools; figures in **Total Schools** row do not double-count schools that hired or hosted more than one Cohort member.

[^] Percent of total number of TALAS schools in region with one or more Cohort members.

Research Question 4: How do RLA Costs Compare to Other Alternatives for Preparing Leaders for High-Need Schools in North Carolina?

The Evaluation Team is preparing a cost-effectiveness analysis of the RLAs, relative to extant comparable leadership development programs. A baseline cost analysis is part of a separate report that includes baseline cost analyses of several other RttT initiatives.¹⁴

In the interim, an initial, informal assessment based on the costs of the RLA programs to date may be instructive in understanding the costs of these programs. The average cost (split between the candidates and the state) of obtaining a MSA degree (from a North Carolina state-sponsored university) and principal licensure is \$53,000, or \$93,000 when a full-time paid internship is included. The cost for each North Carolina Principal Fellow graduate (who likewise obtains a MSA degree and principal licensure) is about \$100,000. The costs for each RLA are comparable: the cost per NELA candidate is around \$116,000 (including a year-long, full-time, paid internship, MSA degree, and principal licensure); the cost per PTLA candidate is about \$110,000 (including a year-long, full-time, paid internship, 24 graduate degree credits, and principal licensure); and the cost per SLA candidate is \$100,000 (including a year-long, full-time, paid internship, 18 graduate degree credits, and principal licensure). In contrast, the costs for some nationally-recognized, highly-touted alternative programs are higher (typically 10% to 50%, and perhaps even 100% higher in some cases). For example, the cost per New Leaders for New

¹⁴ Forthcoming; will be posted at <http://cerenc.org/rttt-evaluation/overall-impact/> by Fall 2014.

Schools graduate is at least \$130,000. Similarly, the cost per New York City Leadership Academy graduate is more than \$150,000 (Fenton & Murphy, 2011; Klein, 2007; Rainwater Leadership Alliance, 2010). The *Regional Leadership Academies Cost Effectiveness Framework* report contains a full description of each RLA's budget.¹⁵

¹⁵ [http://cerenc.org/wpcontent/uploads/2011/10/RLA cost effectiveness framework 3-1-12.pdf](http://cerenc.org/wpcontent/uploads/2011/10/RLA_cost_effectiveness_framework_3-1-12.pdf)

Intermediate Outcomes

Data on the long-term and distal outcomes of the RLAs are not yet available. However, some intermediate outcomes in the forms of participant, mentor principal, and partnering superintendent early assessments of the initiative's impact indicate approval, satisfaction, endorsement, and support for each of the RLAs.

Over the past three years of data collection (see the previous three RLA reports for a more complete description of the evaluation's methodology), the RLA interns and graduates consistently express a clear sense of gratitude, coupled with a palpable sense of urgency and an acceptance of their responsibility to be transformational leaders who are committed to student learning in struggling schools. They often express a sense of empowerment supported by the necessary "will and skill" to be successful turnaround principals. Powerful comments below from a few RLA participants are comparable and indicative of comments made by many of the RLA candidates over the past three years across all three Leadership Academies.

PTLA has been one of the most amazing experiences of my life. PTLA helped me develop my skills to lead a high-need school to success. I have gained the knowledge and developed my craft and leadership style to promote excellence and student achievement. I believe PTLA allowed to me become the type of servant, holistic leader that is needed to turn around low-performing schools. I feel confident and prepared as I carry out my daily managerial tasks while still being an instructional leader in my building, focusing on students' academic, personal, and emotional development. I feel capable facilitating professional development, evaluating and working with teachers, organizing scheduling processes, counseling students, communicating with all stakeholders, building collaboration and relationships, and developing processes to ensure a quality education for ALL students. Beyond that, PTLA is a network of resources and wonderful people that will support me through it all. For me, PTLA also stands for *People to Trust and Lean on at All times!* [PTLA Cohort 1 graduate and current Assistant Principal]

PTLA is about developing individuals who will be the moving force to turn failing schools around. The year-long internship in a high-needs school allows interns to identify specific strategies, techniques, and programs which drastically increase success quickly with sustainable results. I experienced an urgency of immediate action and learned how to quickly assess strengths and weaknesses of staff, procedures, and students within a school. Mentor principals share skills, strategies, and programs which have proven results over time. [PTLA Cohort 2 graduate and current Assistant Principal]

The program can really be described as a journey: A journey to discover our personal visions, what we believe about children and how they learn, and how we can transform schools and classrooms to nurture every child's talents and potential. [SLA graduate and current Assistant Principal]

Everything I have learned in NELA has helped me as an AP. Our *Operation NELAs* have really helped me this year to "think quick" when working with parents, students, gangs, and territorial issues ... I am using data to build relationships with kids and families. [NELA graduate and current assistant principal]

NELA affected our hearts and our minds. We are applying what we learned. We are removing the blinders, one kid at a time . . . giving voice, impacting and changing the way kids see and interact with the world. It's not all about test scores. [NELA graduate and current Principal]

Similar to the RLA participants, RLA mentor principals were impressed with the competency and wide range of skills the programs provided, stating that “the program is designed in such a way that interns get a true depiction of school leadership.” Another mentor not only was “impressed with the work ethic, educational values, heart, and compassion behind every thought process [candidate] brings to the table” but also found that that drive actually motivated her to be a better principal and to want to expose her intern “to every experience possible as a school leader.” Mentor remarks were consistently positive with regard to the RLA advisors as well: “They are very visible in the schools, extremely responsive to the needs of the intern and overall success of the program. Most importantly, the advisors are not far removed from the principal’s seat and can provide real-life practical coaching to the intern.”

When specifically asked, “If you have had other interns in an MSA program, in your opinion, how does the preparation of the MSA intern compare to the RLA intern?” examples responses included, “There is no comparison. Elbow learning is the process we need” and “SLA is more rigorous and has a far greater level of coaching support and of accountability.” Likewise, “PTLA provides intensive, relevant leadership training for high-quality educators to pursue the challenging task of leading today’s high-needs school” and “PTLA provides the component of ongoing support that insures the success of the graduates once they enter the role of administrator. That feature is an added benefit that is not available in traditional MSA programs.” Others concurred wholeheartedly with these perspectives:

No comparison. The SLA Internship is much better than any other internship I have supervised. One thing that stands out is the connection between the Coaches and the Intern and the Coaches and the building principal. Site visits and measures of accountability are higher than in any other experience. This is my 12th intern since becoming a principal, I currently have four in my building. [SLA Mentor Principal]

The administrative preparation program provided by NELA represents a major game changer for our local schools as we prepare an internal pipeline of future leaders. The interns are well prepared, well trained and bring a wealth of knowledge, understanding and tangible skills which allows each of them to immediately add value to the school communities they are assigned. Our district fully supports the NELA program and looks forward to our continued relationship. [NELA Superintendent]

Frequent and consistent support of the SLA Coach provides effective feedback, needs of the intern are addressed quickly and a focus plan for improvement is in place. In other words, interns have a clear understanding of weaknesses and are coached to make them, if not strengths, at the very least, no longer a weakness. They target skills needed to be worked on, they impart strengths in PD for our school which touches and changes many (students, teachers, coaches, principals). [SLA Mentor Principal]

Likewise, the RLA Superintendents commended the Leadership Academies for striving “to keep our best leaders in this area where they can do the most good for our students.” According to one

Superintendent, “The Nash-Rocky Mount Public School System has benefited tremendously from NELA and fully supports a continued strategic partnership as we work to develop and grow aspiring leaders within the district.” Superintendents associated with the RLAs “see leading a high-need school as a specialty within the principalship—the work is harder, more complex, more all-consuming, and it requires a different kind of leader” (Superintendent of a large urban LEA) and find the RLAs to be “a model school administrator training program unlike any other I have been associated with. The program is growing the brightest and most highly skilled administrators in our county” (Superintendent of a small rural LEA). An Executive Director for Teach for America in North Carolina stated that “NELA’s proven ability to build a leadership pipeline and train effective school leaders is critical to providing all students in North Carolina with an excellent education that prepares them for college and careers.” The Executive Director of the state’s Principal and Assistant Principal Association stated about NELA: “This innovative program is deliberate, effective, and has proven successful in developing and incorporating critical, research-based practices into participants’ school improvement efforts.” Other superintendents agreed:

[Our awareness of the need for this program is] why we raised our hand right away to help write this grant and develop this Leadership Academy program. We saw a real gap between what we needed in terms of knowledge, skills, abilities and the quality of candidates we were getting for principal and assistant principal positions for our high-need schools. [PTLA Superintendent]

NELA is a model School Administrator training program unlike any other I have been associated with as a Superintendent. The program is growing the brightest and most highly skilled administrators in our county. [NELA Superintendent]

We have hired every intern to date—including one as principal of a high school—and all of them are amongst our most thoughtful, energetic leaders. [SLA Superintendent]

Summary of Findings and Final Observations

Summary of Findings

- All three RLAs use what are considered by some experts as “best practices” for effective leadership preparation programs as organizing principles in designing and delivering their individual principal preparation programs.
- Fidelity of implementation of program designs (i.e., the degree to which the interventions have been delivered as intended) has been strong (e.g., each RLA has recruited and prepared over 60 “turnaround principal” candidates).
- Participants in every cohort in each RLA have found internship placements in targeted schools and LEAs (i.e., higher-poverty, lower-performing schools than the North Carolina state average, though not always schools on the list of the 5% of lowest-achieving schools in the state).
- The year-long internship experience for the principal candidates, which included both mentoring and coaching, is a distinguishing feature of the RLA programs that the candidates, mentor principals, and superintendents all believe will enhance their effectiveness as principals.
- Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 graduates have found employment in higher-poverty, lower-performing schools and LEAs (19 as principals, 77 as assistant principals, 8 as central office leaders, and 9 as teacher leaders/facilitators).¹⁶
- Eighteen of the 178 RLA participants (10%) are working in schools that are part of the state’s TALAS initiative, and 22 of the 178 participants (12%) are working in Focus schools. Of the 61 TALAS schools located in the RLA regions, the 18 RLA participants are working in 15 (25%) of them. Twenty-two RLA participants are working in 19 Focus schools located in the RLA regions. Sixty-five percent of all RLA participants are working in schools that fall within the state’s 3rd and 4th school poverty quartiles.
- Data on the longer-term impacts of the RLAs are not yet available.

Additional Final Observations

The timing of the RLA graduations and graduates’ limited placements in principal positions to date have constrained the Evaluation Team’s ability to examine the longer-term effects of the graduates on school improvements, although important intermediate outcomes can be reported from this three-year study of the North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies. Recent research has begun to shed light on the ways that principals’ effects on the performance of their schools, including value-added measures, principal evaluations, teacher turnover, and other measures, may be done (Grissom, Kalogrides & Loeb 2012). As more RLA graduates assume principalships, these techniques should be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program on helping the state to reach the overall objectives for RttT—improving student performance and teaching quality.

¹⁶ Though not all are in principalships, their employment as assistant principals or in other administrative roles may lead to principalships. Not all employment is in initially-targeted schools that participate in the state’s RttT-funded Turning Around Lowest-Achieving Schools initiative.

References

- Clark, D. C., & Clark, S. N. (1996). Better preparation of educational leaders. *Educational Researcher*, 25(8), 18–20.
- Cordeiro, P., & Smith-Sloan, E. (1995, April). *Apprenticeships for administrative interns: Learning to talk like a principal*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA.
- Crow, G., & Matthews, L. (1998). *Finding one's way: How mentoring can lead to dynamic leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., Meyerson, D., Orr, M. T., & Cohen, C. (2007). *Preparing school leaders for a changing world: Lessons from exemplary leadership development programs*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Meyerson, D., Lapointe, M., & Orr, M. (2010). *Preparing principals for a changing world: Lessons from effective school leadership programs*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Davis, S., Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., & Meyerson, D. (2005). *School leadership study: Developing effective principals—Phase one: Review of research*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.
- Dorn, S. M., Papalewis, R., & Brown, R. (1995). Educators earning their doctorates: Doctoral student perceptions regarding cohesiveness and persistence. *Education*, 116(2), 305–314.
- Fenton, B., & Murphy, M. (2011). New Leaders for New Schools: Data-Driven Instruction. *ASCD Express*, 5(8).
- Grissom, J.A., Kalogrides, D. & Loeb, S. (2012). Using student test scores to measure principal performance. *NBER Working Paper 18568*.
- Hale, E. L., & Moorman, H. N. (2003). *Preparing school principals: A national perspective on policy and program innovations*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Educational Leadership.
- Huckaby, D. (2012). Hiring for attitude. *School Administrator*, 7(69), 30–35.
- Klein, M. (2007). Principal training ‘leads’ nowhere. *New York Post*, November 11, 2007.
- Kolb, D. A., & Boyatzis, R. E. (1999). Experiential learning theory: Previous research and new directions. In R. J. Sternberg, & L. F. Zhang (Eds.), *Perspectives on cognitive learning and thinking styles*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- McFarland, J., & Preston, J. (2010). *Evaluating the effectiveness of turnaround efforts in low-performing high schools*. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina State Board of Education and North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

- Murphy, J. (Ed.). (1993). *Preparing tomorrow's school leaders: Alternative designs*. University Park, PA: University Council for Educational Administration.
- Murphy, J. (2002, April). Reculturing the profession of educational leadership: New blueprints. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 38(3), 176–191.
- Murphy, J. (2006). *Preparing school leaders*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Muth, R., & Barnett, B. (2001). Making the case for professional preparation: Using research program improvement and political support. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development*, 13, 109–120.
- New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS) (2009). *Principal effectiveness: A new principalship to drive student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and school turnaround*. New York, NY: New Leaders for New Schools.
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) (2010). *North Carolina RttT Proposal*. Raleigh, NC: Department of Public Instruction.
- Orr, M. T., O'Doherty, A., and Barber, M. (2012). *Designing Purposeful and Coherent Leadership Preparation Curriculum: A Curriculum Mapping Guide*. Charlottesville, VA: University Council for Educational Administration.
- Rainwater Leadership Alliance (2010). *A New Approach to Principal Preparation: Innovative programs to Share Their Practices and Lessons Learned*. Fort Worth, TX: Rainwater Charitable Foundation.
- Taylor, D.L., Cordeiro, P., & Chrispeels, J.H. (2009). Pedagogy. In M.D. Young, G.M. Crow, J. Murphy, & R.T. Ogawa (Eds.), *Handbook of research on the education of school leaders* (pp. 319-370). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Young, M. D., Crow, G., Ogawa, R., & Murphy, J. (2009). *The handbook of research on the education of school leaders*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Contact Information:
Please direct all inquiries to Kathleen M. Brown
BrownK@email.unc.edu

© 2014 Consortium for Educational Research and Evaluation–North Carolina



● Carolina Institute
for Public Policy



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL ●

