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*Executive Summary of*

# North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies

Final Summative Activity Report

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## **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)<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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).<sup>2</sup>
- 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.<sup>3</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

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