

Executive Summary of

Building LEA and Regional Professional Development Capacity

First Annual Evaluation Report

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BUILDING LEA AND REGIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY: FIRST ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT

Executive Summary

The North Carolina RttT professional development plan, led by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), is an expansive and multi-faceted effort to increase student achievement by updating the knowledge and skills of the public education workforce. This professional development initiative aims to address the challenge of preparing educators throughout the State for the changes driven by the new Common Core State Standards and North Carolina Essential Standards; the increased use of data to inform classroom and school decisions; rapid changes in the technologies and digital resources available for teaching and learning; the new teacher and administrator evaluation processes; increased emphasis on formative assessment to inform instructional decisions; and increased emphasis on differentiating professional development needs for individual educators with different backgrounds. All of the major NC RttT initiatives depend upon professional development; none of them will be successful unless North Carolina's educators are well-prepared and supported as they work to implement these changes in their schools and classrooms.

The challenge – engaging the state's 100,000 teachers and 2,400 principals in professional development that will enable them to extend their knowledge and improve their professional practices in order to increase student achievement overall and close achievement gaps among student groups – is formidable. All of this is to be accomplished within the four-year period of the grant across a large and diverse State with many small, rural, and resource-limited local education agencies (LEAs) that continue to struggle under the weight of recession. In addition, the plan is expected to result in a statewide professional development infrastructure that can be sustained after RttT funding ends.

The RttT professional development evaluation is being conducted with full recognition of the enormous challenges being addressed by the RttT Professional Development Implementation Team and the deep commitment of the members of the Team to do so. The Evaluation Team's intent for this report is to provide data-driven information that can support reflection about and improvement of the RttT professional development effort.

Four general questions guide the overall evaluation effort:

- 1. State Strategies: To what extent did the state implement and support proposed RttT professional development efforts?*
- 2. Short-Term Outcomes: What were direct outcomes of State-level RttT professional development efforts?*
- 3. Intermediate Outcomes: To what extent did RttT professional development efforts successfully update the NC education workforce?*
- 4. Impacts on Student Performance: To what extent are gains in student performance outcomes associated with RttT professional development?*

This report focuses on Question 1 and provides some initial data related to Question 2. The questions about intermediate outcomes and impacts on student performance cannot be addressed until local professional development programs are implemented; those questions will be covered in future evaluation reports.

This report consists of five sections:

- I.** An overview of the RttT plan for building local professional development capacity;
- II.** Initial evaluation data about the RttT professional development activities through the Summer of 2011 (with a focus on the Summer Leadership Institutes), and recommendations for future implementations of these activities;
- III.** An overview of the data being collected for the overall, four-year evaluation of the outcomes and impacts of the RttT professional development activities;
- IV.** A summary of baseline data already collected as part of the overall outcomes and impact evaluation, with some recommendations for professional development based on these data; and
- V.** A summary of the next steps for the RttT professional development evaluation, including activities for which close collaboration with the NCDPI Professional Development Implementation Team will be required.

This executive summary will summarize the key points from each section, with a focus on data-driven recommendations. The full report details the methodology and findings that led to each recommendation.

In addition to the statewide professional development initiative, the overall RttT plan includes professional development activities housed under other RttT-funded initiatives. These activities are designed to address specific groups of educators: principals, educators in the lowest-achieving schools, educators in selected STEM schools, online teachers of NCVPS STEM courses, and new teachers entering low-performing schools. The evaluations of these activities will be covered in other reports.

I. The RttT Plan for Building Local Professional Development Capacity

The core strategy of the NCDPI statewide professional development plan is to guide and support capacity-building in LEAs and charter schools to ensure that they can provide high-quality professional development. The overall plan is built around annual cycles comprised of summer institutes, formative support for LEA and charter school Professional Development Leadership Teams, and additional face-to-face support sessions provided by the NCDPI Professional Development Implementation Team in collaboration with the Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) and centrally developed resources (online workshops, webinars, support materials, etc.) that can be incorporated into local professional development programs. Through implementation of this Annual Professional Development Cycle, NCDPI aims to both guide and support the development of local professional development through a high-quality, systemic, blended approach for effective professional development, defined as job-embedded, research-driven, data-informed, professional community-based, and aligned to the RttT initiatives.

During the summer of 2011, NCDPI implemented its first set of two-day, RttT professional development institutes, which were facilitated by several NCDPI sections, including Curriculum and Instruction, District and School Transformation, Educator Recruitment and Development, and Exceptional Children. These Summer Leadership Institutes were conducted in six locations throughout the state and were designed for LEA-level and charter school teams. The purpose of the Institutes was to prepare local-level Professional Development Leadership Teams that will design, develop, and implement local professional development to help their K–12 teachers transition to the new standards. More specifically, as a result of attending the Institutes, participants were expected to:

- Determine expectations for the work involved in implementing local professional development programs;
- Demonstrate to local teachers how the NCDPI training fits with the local RttT Scope of Work and supports the state’s efforts with the new Common Core State Standards and North Carolina Essential Standards;
- Demonstrate how to access a series of online modules designed to help teachers build their capacity to understand the new Common Core State Standards and North Carolina Essential Standards; and
- Work with LEA and school leaders to develop a plan for rolling out the professional development to teachers prior to the 2012–13 school year.

Each day of the institute was divided into two types of sessions: *Content Sessions* (e.g., K–5 mathematics, grades 6–12 English language arts) and *LEA Planning Process Sessions*. NCDPI teams collaborated across departments to develop detailed plans and materials for each session and to prepare facilitators for each content area and facilitators for the LEA Planning Process Sessions. More than 2,200 educators attended the sessions in the six Institutes conducted statewide—an impressive number in a period of just 30 days.

II. Evaluation of Implementation of State-Level RttT Professional Development Activities

Data Sources

The evaluation of the Summer Leadership Institutes is based upon the following data:

- *Observations* conducted by two evaluators at each of the Institutes, following an observational protocol. Observations took place in 108 Content Sessions (at least 20 of each of the four major content areas) and 83 LEA Planning Sessions;
- *Participant interviews* conducted by the evaluators during each day of each Institute using a standardized, open-ended question format to obtain participants reactions to the Institute and suggestions for improvement;
- *Post-institute surveys*, which participants were asked to complete online after the Institute. The survey contain both forced-choice and optional open-ended items. It was designed by the NCDPI team that planned the Institutes and, unfortunately, did not meet standards for effective and reliable evaluation instruments and did not obtain information that would have

allowed detailed and useful analysis of the results. However, this report uses the data obtained as far as possible; and

- *Focus groups* with NCDPI staff involved in planning and conducting the Institutes, to gather information about the planning process and recommendations for improvements in the future.

Summary of Major Findings

- NCDPI has placed 15 highly-qualified Professional Development Leads in the field to work directly with the LEAs and charter schools to further local and regional professional development. This is an important step in implementing the RttT plans.
- The Institute planning and implementation was conducted by a cross-division team that brought together expertise from different groups within NCDPI. The individuals involved expressed pride in their accomplishment and see their collaboration as a model for LEA planning teams. The planning and implementation effort was intense and demonstrated a deep commitment from the NCDPI staff involved.
- A total of 2,212 educators attended the six Summer Institutes, and 1,457 (66%) of them completed the post-Institute survey. About half of the participants reported they were classroom teachers, 10% were school administrators, 18% district administrators, and 23% had other support roles, such as curriculum specialist, professional development coordinator or instructional technology director. The Summer Leadership Institutes comprised the largest field-based professional development activity ever conducted by NCDPI.
- Overall,¹ participants reported that the Institutes were valuable professional development experiences, and their comments contain praise for the NCDPI planning staff and the session facilitators. On the post-Institute survey, 83% of participants said the Institute was valuable or very valuable. In addition, more than 60% of the participants said they would be very likely to attend another Institute and recommend that colleagues do so. There was a high level of consistency across the final five Institutes. Participants from charter schools found the Institutes to be about as valuable as did participants from LEAs.
- Relatively equal proportions of participants who rated themselves as low on prior knowledge about the new Standards and participants who rated themselves as high on prior knowledge considered the Institutes to be valuable, suggesting that the Institutes appear to have been successful in addressing the needs of a range of participants. The group that rated themselves low in prior knowledge did find the Institutes to be more challenging.
- Overall, teachers rated the Institute as more valuable than did administrators and professional development coordinators, although both groups found it worth attending.

¹ The first Summer Leadership Institute, held in Asheville, was combined with a Superintendents' retreat. This overlap led to problems with session schedules, space, and other issues that were beyond the control of the NCDPI staff and interfered with their ability to carry out their plan. The ratings for this Institute showed far less participant satisfaction than did the ratings from the other five, which were very consistent with each other. Since the final five Institutes followed the designed plan that forms the basis for future professional development activities, the Evaluation Team excluded data from the first Institute from all analyses.

Recommendations Related to Summer Leadership Institutes

1. *Continue to encourage and strengthen cross-division work at NCDPI.* NCDPI staff valued the Summer Leadership Institute planning effort. To encourage and strengthen future efforts, they suggested that NCDPI leadership: (a) clarify leadership roles; (b) create and communicate a shared vision and purpose; (c) clarify timelines; (d) provide responses to requested input; (e) realistically plan for getting new staff on board; (e) conduct post-Institute debriefing sessions; and (f) foster continued intra-agency collaboration.
2. *Provide more and better information and guidance prior to Institutes.* Attendees recommended that detailed agendas, timelines, and expectations be clearly articulated and provided before the Institutes, along with materials to help them prepare to maximize the time at the Institutes. They also requested more clarification of the expected composition of local teams.
3. *Reorganize Content Sessions.* These sessions should be differentiated in the future so that there are sessions for those who are first learning about the new standards and assessments and sessions for those who are already at least somewhat knowledgeable. Participants also suggested dedicating more time for discussion and less time for presentations, during the Content sessions. It appears from the open-ended responses and observational data that participants were more satisfied with the balance in the math and science sessions than they were with the balance in the ELA and social studies sessions, so a comparison of the plans for each type of session might be useful. Finally, more focus should be placed on addressing the needs of administrators responsible for professional development policies and programs, but without reducing attention to the needs of the teachers who attend as members of the LEA leadership teams. Principals in particular indicated that they would have valued sessions on implementing the new Standards overall, rather than having to choose a specific content area session. Principals also would like time in role-alike sessions to share information and learn from their colleagues.
4. *Re-conceptualize LEA Planning Sessions.* Similarly, LEA Professional Development Leadership Teams desired more time to work as a team, with facilitation from NCDPI experts, and less time listening to presentations. They also desired materials that provide more specific guidance about constructing local professional development plans.
5. *Foster more collaboration across LEAs and charter schools.* Further attention should be paid to fostering content-area collaborations among LEAs and among charter schools that can continue after the Institute. Including role-alike groups during the Institute was one suggested approach. In future Institutes, further consideration should be given to grouping LEAs with other, similar LEAs, and charter schools with other, similar charter schools in planning sessions.
6. *Address concerns about ongoing, post-Institute support.* LEA and charter school teams both expressed a need for substantial ongoing support and additional resources for local use, as well as a schedule indicating when these would be received. NCDPI needs to assure them about the plans and schedule for providing these. Charter school participants in particular expressed concern about whether they would continue to receive the same level of support as the LEAs. They suggested further involvement of the NCDPI Charter Schools Department

and also suggested the creation of a network of charter schools with similar demographics for future collaborations.

7. *Incorporate greater attention to technology.* Participants requested more exposure to the web-based resources and tools, more emphasis on the Information and Technology Essential Standards, and more support for using web-based tools to support professional development and within- and across-LEA collaborations.
8. *Build on the strengths of the best resources.* The *Crosswalks* and *Unpacking Standards* resources received positive responses and should be used as models for the development of future resources. The *Call for Change* module and the Webinars leading up to the Institutes received a number of negative comments. Further feedback about these modules should be gathered and, if necessary, appropriate changes made. Participants would prefer that the information provided on CD or via the web be in modifiable (e.g., .doc or .rtf) format, rather than in .pdf format, so that they can adapt the materials for use in their local programs.
9. *Review approaches to addressing diversity.* Several participants raised concerns about a perceived lack of sensitivity to diversity in some presentations and materials.
10. *Improve locations and logistics.* The Institute locations, food, and hotel and meeting space accommodations received many negative comments and should be improved for future Institutes.

III. Baseline Data Collection for Evaluating the Impact of RttT Professional Development

The overall plan to evaluate professional development outcomes and impacts over the four years of the RttT grant includes an annual *Omnibus Survey* of a statewide sample of teachers and administrators, as well as a *longitudinal study* of a purposeful sample of schools. Along with other data, these tools will enable the evaluation team to provide both formative data during each year of the RttT grant and summative information to inform decisions about sustaining programs after the grant period ends.

The Omnibus Survey was designed to assess change across a wide range of constructs that may be influenced by the collective set of NC RttT activities, with items in several constructs corresponding to professional development activities. The Survey is comprised of 170 items across 23 dimensions, such as *teacher-leadership respect*, *teacher-teacher trust*, *teacher knowledge sharing*, and *teacher-student relationships*. Each respondent received a random sub-sample of the questions to decrease respondent burden.

The purpose of the longitudinal descriptive study is to provide detailed information concerning implementation of both state and local professional development initiatives and to determine the impact of those initiatives in diverse school settings across the state. The Evaluation Team developed a *purposeful sample* of schools that reflects the variation that occurs across the state to participate in the longitudinal descriptive study. The Team considers it essential that these schools are not identified to those outside of the Evaluation Team, so that they do not receive attention that is in any way different from that given to other schools across the State. The data collected from these schools each year will include administrative data (including student achievement data); surveys completed by central office staff, school leaders, and teachers; LEA and school leader interviews; teacher focus groups; and classroom observations.

IV. Short-Term Outcomes: Baseline Data

For this report, five dimensions of the Omnibus Survey were identified as playing a pivotal role in understanding the evolution of the professional development component of RttT. These include:

- Quality of Professional Development
- Alignment of Professional Development
- Attention to Common Core State Standards
- Data-Driven Instruction
- Formative Assessment (This dimension was measured using a different scale and is analyzed separately)

Summary of Major Findings

- Overall, educators' ratings of their current experiences with professional development and professional development-relevant topics, as measured by the first four dimensions, varied somewhat across the eight regions of the State but were generally positive. The proportion of respondents in each region who expressed agreement or strong agreement (the top two responses on a seven-point scale) with positive statements related to each construct were: Quality of Professional Development, 59.6%–73.3%; Alignment of Professional Development, 53.7%–63.9%; Common Core, 69.7%–80.4%; and Data-Driven Instruction, 65.4%–78.2%. The highest ratings on each of these dimensions were given in Region 8 (the Western region).
- Across the first four dimensions, elementary teachers gave the highest ratings for the professional development they receive, followed by middle school teachers, with high school teacher giving the lowest ratings.
- Responses to items in the fifth dimension provide early evidence that adoption of some formative assessment strategies may be occurring inconsistently across regions.
- Data from the Teacher Working Conditions Survey (TWCS) was used to classify schools as providing low, medium, or high levels of professional development support. Responses on several TWCS items were very consistent with data from the professional development dimensions of the Omnibus Survey. That is, teachers at schools classified as “low” in meeting teachers' professional development needs on the TWCS gave the lowest ratings on Omnibus Survey items, while teachers at the “medium” professional development schools gave intermediate ratings, and teachers at the “high” professional development schools gave the highest ratings.
- From the longitudinal study interviews, principals reported having access to information about professional development and that they work with their teachers and staff to ensure that appropriate professional development is either provided through the school or district or is available through other means. They were concerned about funding and expected to make greater use of cost-effective online and blended approaches in the future.

- Principals reported that they used the *North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process* to inform professional development planning.
- Between one-third and one-half of the principals reported that their schools already had received some professional development on each of the new Standards, on formative and summative assessments, and on using data to improve instruction.
- Overall, principals were knowledgeable about professional development but were looking for guidance, resources, and support to help them make sure that effective professional development will be available for their teachers and staff.

Another dimension of the survey asked teachers to estimate how often they used each of a variety of formative assessment techniques with their students. Though there are no major findings to report from an analysis of the initial data, the results for this dimension will provide baselines for considering whether there is increased use of formative assessment as a result of professional development.

Recommendations

1. The state professional development effort should take advantage of, build upon, and enhance the effective processes for planning and providing valuable professional development opportunities that already exist in many schools and LEAs.
2. Careful attention needs to be paid to developing coherent professional development programs in which activities clearly relate and build upon each other to address major professional development needs. This is true at all levels of professional development: school, local, regional, and state.
3. Further attention needs to be paid to differentiating professional development for elementary, middle, and high school teachers, with a particular focus on high school teachers, who tend to rate the professional development they receive as being of less value than do teachers at the other levels.
4. There is growing interest in online professional development, collaboration, mentoring, and resources. The effective use of online technologies to enhance professional development, along with blended models of professional development, should receive increased attention in future years of the RttT professional development initiative.
5. Schools and districts range in the availability and quality of professional development they provide for their teachers. Schools and districts rated low in this area by their teachers on the TWCS and Omnibus survey need additional support to ensure that equitable access to high-quality professional development is available to all educators throughout the state.

V. Next Steps for the Professional Development Evaluation

The next steps of the professional development evaluation include the following:

1. Evaluation of the Distinguished Leadership in Practice Principal Institutes, with an interim report planned for Spring 2012.

2. Evaluation of the Online Professional Development Modules, Webinars, and Online Supports, also with an interim report planned for Spring 2012.
3. Continuation of the Omnibus Survey and Longitudinal Study during each year of the RttT grant.
4. Implementation of the Professional Development Participant Data Base, which is essential in order to track the overall impacts and outcomes of the RttT professional development initiative; this implementation will require close collaboration with NCDPI to quickly implement the needed system.
5. Improvement of surveys for the next round of professional development activities, to ensure that both the Professional Development Implementation Team and the Evaluation Team have reliable and valid data that allow for the disaggregation necessary to answer key evaluation questions. This work also will require close collaboration with NCDPI.
6. Evaluation of specific-purpose RttT professional development activities for principals, educators in the lowest-achieving schools, educators in selected STEM schools, online teachers of NCVPS STEM courses, and new teachers entering low-performing schools. The evaluations of these activities will be covered in other reports.

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