Preparing Turnaround Principals via Race-to-the-Top Initiative: Lessons Learned from Regional Leadership Academies

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Abstract

Great schools need great leaders! In fact, according to recent research by Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom and Anderson (2010), "To date we have not found a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership (p.9)." As such, North Carolina's Race-to-the-Top (RttT) grant earmarked approximately $17.5 million to "increase 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, the state established three Regional Leadership Academies (RLAs) "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). This article describes the independent evaluation of this initiative including the recruitment, selection, training, placement, and expenditure processes associated with each of the three academies.

Keywords: Principal Preparation, Turnaround Principals, Race-to-the-Top Initiative, Alternative Licensure Programs, Evaluation

Introduction

Developing school leaders who are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to effectively lead and turnaround low-performing schools has become a critical goal for local education agencies (LEAs) intent on dramatically improving student outcomes. Four years ago the state of North Carolina was awarded one of only twelve federal Race to the Top (RttT) competitive grants, bringing nearly $400 million to the state's public school system. Approximately $17.5 million of these funds were specifically earmarked to "increase 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 in North Carolina, the state established three Regional Leadership Academies (RLAs), each of which 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 RLA programs were "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).

As such, the policy objective undertaken via North Carolina's RLAs was to recruit and prepare over 180 "turnaround principals" serving more than 30 of the 100 counties across the state. The RLAs were created independently to meet the school leadership needs of three vastly different and very distinct regions of North Carolina (including "large, urban" and "small, rural"); thus, each RLA developed a unique program with its own partnerships, program philosophy, curriculum, coursework, and fieldwork.

One RLA (Northeast Leadership Academy, or NELA) was established one year before RttT funding was available to serve as a pilot program, 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 NC RttT RLAs serve collaboratives of partnering local education agencies (LEAs) and directly address the need to recruit, prepare, and support leaders of transformational change in challenging school contexts. This approach aligns with Orr, King, and LaPointe's (2010) research that the most comprehensive and sustainable programs are collaborations that result in the development of customized programs that met district needs by design—from start to finish.

The RLAs provide talented individuals with the tools they need to lead high-need schools. Following a rigorous selection process, they provide 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., Brown, 2006; 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. See Appendix A for a fuller description of each RLA, including demographics.

Leadership Preparation

The importance of strong school leadership, particularly in low-achieving schools, has long been recognized by researchers and practitioners alike (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). As Crawford (1998)

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noted and others have substantiated (Grissom, 2011; Ouchi, 2009; Portin, Knapp, Dareff, Feldman, Russell, Samuelson, & Yeh, 2009), "Almost all educational reform reports have come to the conclusion that the nation cannot attain excellence in education without effective school leadership" (p. 8). And yet, the majority of school districts nationwide have found it difficult to recruit and retain school principals (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006). As Hess and Kelly (2005) so aptly explained: "School principals are the front-line managers, the small business executives, the battlefield commanders charged with leading their team to new levels of effectiveness. In this new era of accountability, where school leaders are expected to demonstrate bottom-line results and use data to drive decisions, the skill and knowledge of principals matter more than ever" (p. 1). Hess and Kelly also concluded that "school improvement rests to an unprecedented degree on the quality of school leadership," (p. 1) even though, Duke, Grogan, Tucker, and Heinecke (2003) pointed out that "leadership during this age of accountability has become more stressful, more political, more complex, and more time-consuming" (p. 212).

Understandably, policymakers have become increasingly concerned about a pending shortage of qualified individuals to fill principal positions in the nation's schools (Gates, Ringel, & Santibanez, 2003), especially in the very schools most in need of outstanding leadership (i.e., schools with higher concentrations of poor and minority students, low per-pupil expenditures, low student test scores, and low principal salaries). In North Carolina, McFarland and Preston (2010) reported that, 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). These conditions create challenges for school districts when they attempt to recruit and retain principals and teachers who will accept offers and remain long enough to make a difference in student learning outcomes.

At the same time, an array of scholars have asked whether traditional approaches to preparing and licensing such principals are sufficient (Elmore, 2000; Fordham Foundation, 2003; Murphy, 2001; Murphy, Moorman, McCarthy, (2008); Tucker, 2003). To this point, Knapp and his colleagues found that conventional leadership preparation programs have not attracted enough high-quality candidates to work in high-poverty, low-performing schools, which are traditionally the schools that are the hardest to staff (Knapp, Copeland & Talbert, 2003). Likewise, Darling-Hammond and her colleagues asserted that recruiting committed candidates and comprehensively preparing them for the unique realities of leading in challenging contexts are keys to stabilizing principal turnover in addition to fostering high-quality teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, Lapointe & Orr, 2010).

As a result, a premise of innovative, alternative models like North Carolina's Regional Leadership Academies is that preparing individuals to become effective school leaders in high-need schools requires much more than traditional pre-service training, licensure, and placement. Rather, the making of an effective turnaround leader is an intricate process of learning and reflection, socialization into a new collaborative community of practice, and assumption of a new role identity that assumes responsibility for and assures learning for all students (Crow & Glascock, 1995; Daresh, 2002). Unique circumstances warrant specialized contextual knowledge and unique dispositions on the part of the leader to move schools from negative trajectories to positive ones. Through deliberate and strategic partnerships, leadership educators and practitioners can work together to develop curriculum, deliver instruction, and oversee field-based clinical practice and internships that provide the foundation for active-learning, job-embedded experiences aligned to the goal.

The conceptual framework for NC's model was developed from research literature and recommendations from reports on how to improve the preparation of school leaders (Brown, Benkovitz, Muttillo, & Urban (2010); Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007). This research suggests that certain practices in leadership preparation should produce higher quality school leaders. According to the Wallace Foundation (Mitzgang, 2012) and Jacobson, McCarthy, and Pounder (2015), exemplary preparation programs yield more highly effective leadership graduates when they utilize the following criteria: (a) research-based content that clearly focuses on instruction, change management, and organizational practice, (b) coherent curriculum that links all aspects of the preparation experience around a set of shared values, beliefs, and knowledge about effective organizational practice, (c) rigorous selection process that gives priority to under-served groups, particularly racial/ethnic minorities, (d) cohort structures that foster collaborative learning and support, (e) school-university collaborations that create a seamless and coherent program for students, (f) field-based internships that allow individuals to apply their new knowledge and skills while under the guidance of expert leaders, (g) supportive organizational structures that support student retention, engagement, and placement, (h) systematic process for evaluating and improving programs and coursework, (i) low student-faculty ratio (i.e., 20-1) and active, student-centered instruction, (j) faculty members who make significant efforts to identify, develop, and promote relevant knowledge focused on the essential problems of schooling, leadership and administrative practice, and (k) on-going professional growth opportunities (Cosner, Tozer, Zavitknovsky, & Whalen, 2015; Darling-Hammond, et al, 2007; Jackson & Kelly, 2002; Jacobson, & Cypres, 2012; Levine, 2006; Merchant & Garza, 2015; Myung, Loeb, & Horng, 2011; Orr, 2007; Orr, 2011). In essence,

developing effective principals entails continuing beyond completion of pre-service preparation programs, placement as school leaders, and support during novice practice years (Browne-Ferrigno & Fusarelli, 2005; Daresh, 2002).

Methods

North Carolina's RttT proposal included a commitment to an independent evaluation of each initiative (http://cerenc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/0-FINAL-Summative RLA Report -8/6/14.pdf). The roles of the RttT Evaluation Team were 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.

This evaluation was informed by a variety of data sources, including document reviews, observations, interviews, focus groups, surveys, accounting data, and administrative data. Each RLA followed its own path to implementation, and evaluators were engaged in collecting and analyzing data related to that process since March 2011. The following evaluation questions guided the evaluation of the NC RttT RLAs:

1. Do RLAs effectively recruit relative to the alternatives?
2. Do RLAs effectively select relative to the alternatives?
3. Do RLAs effectively train relative to the alternatives?
4. Do RLAs effectively place graduates in targeted schools/districts?
5. Are RLAs cost-effective relative to the alternatives?

Administrative Data

In an effort to describe the characteristics of RLA internships and job placements, the evaluators obtained school-level administrative data from a longitudinal database maintained by the Carolina Institute for Public Policy (CIPP) and assembled from NCDPI administrative records. These data include school characteristics—school level (elementary, middle, or high), type (traditional or charter), region, and locale classification (i.e., urbanicity)—as well as demographic characteristics of the student population (free or reduced-price lunch, race/ethnicity, students with disabilities, and English language learners).

Survey

Evaluators designed a biannual participant survey describing actions and traits that are specific, evidence-based recommendations for quickly and dramatically improving student achievement in high-need, low-performing schools (Papa & English, 2011). The purpose of this survey, administered each December and June, was to track RLA participants' level of exposure to, experience with, and development of the following key elements via their Leadership Academy: 1) Self-efficacy and optimism (i.e., rejection of status quo-failure, acceptance of responsibility), 2) Open-mindedness and pragmatism (i.e., contextual knowledge and adaptation, ability to apply theory to practice), 3) Resiliency and energy (i.e., persistent determination to improve student learning), and 4) Competence and skill sets (i.e., instructional leadership that builds rapport and capacity, knowledge of literacy, change processes, and human motivation). The response rate from 189 participants was close to 90%.

Observations

Evaluators observed each RLA's selection processes and candidate cohort experiences, including internships and mentoring/coaching efforts. These activities helped evaluators understand the support and guidance provided to each RLA participant. Evaluators conducted a total of 89 formal RLA observations (for over 240 hours) and attended and/or presented at 28 formal RLA meetings between March 2011 and March 2014. The goal of the evaluation was to visit each RLA at least once a month and to observe a variety of activities (e.g., site visits, guest panels, specialized trainings, weekly content seminars, Advisory Board meetings, mentor principal meetings, LEA selection processes, induction support sessions, conference presentations, etc.).

Interviews

Between March 2011 and March 2014, evaluators interacted with and interviewed the RLA Directors, Executive Coaches, and the majority of participants from each RLA (n=200+) on a bimonthly basis. Evaluators also interviewed a random, convenience-sampled selection of mentor principals and participant supervisors from each RLA during this same timeframe. Formal and informal conversations occurred during every formal observation and meeting (n=110+). Likewise, information was gathered daily via phone calls, emails, and listserv updates. A standardized format was not used for these discussions. Instead, open-ended questions were the norm. Most conversations were related to either how the RLA was progressing overall and/or specifically how the exercise at hand related to the participants' preparation to be leaders in high-need schools. Detailed notes were recorded and

analyzed after each exchange. These activities helped evaluators gather a wide range of perspectives on the RLAs for qualitative analyses.

Creswell's (2009) mixed-methods approach was most appropriate for this evaluation, given the multiple data collection methods and mixed modes of analysis. Evaluators analyzed each RLA's recruitment and selection efforts, curricular and pedagogical techniques, induction and support strategies, and RLA internal evaluation methods. Artifacts (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 were recruited, selected, trained, placed and inducted.

Findings

Research Question 1: Do RLAs Effectively Recruit Relative to the Alternatives?

Yes, the RLAs do effectively recruit relative to the alternatives. They have each engaged in careful recruitment processes to ensure that program participants have 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 are willing to make multiyear, post-academy commitments to work in said schools and LEAs.

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. A team of RttT grant-funded Executive Directors and Coaches, in conjunction with 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. Table 1 provides a comparative overview of criteria used by each RLA, by alternative preparation programs, and by traditional Master's in School Administration (MSA) programs in North Carolina to recruit candidates into their individual pre-service leadership programs.

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

Recruitment Criteria	NELA	PTLA	SLA	Other Alternative Prep 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[+])

Notes:

^=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 past three years (n=962). Overall, the recruitment and advertisement efforts for each RLA have been good and the RLAs have yielded a fairly high number of applicants (whether of sufficient high quality and quantity to fill necessary slots in the schools is yet to be determined).

Research Question 2: Do RLAs Effectively Select Relative to the Alternatives?

Selectivity. The selection process of each RLA yielded fairly selective and competitive acceptance rates (189 participants selected from a total of 962 applicants. See Table 2 and Appendix B for detailed descriptions of each RLA's selection process). The RLA's overall acceptance rate of less than 20% is comparable to nationally recognized programs such as NYCLA (15%) and NLNS (7%). It is also much lower than 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 not a valid way of tracking such numbers. Note that, aside from "opportunity costs," the RLA experience is completely free to participants.

Table 2. Number of RLA Participants 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%

*NELA's cohorts went through a multi-tier selection process that required Superintendent endorsement prior to application. PTLA's and SLA's cohorts went through a multi-tier selection process that required Superintendent endorsement after selection. Thus the acceptance percentages are slightly skewed and actually lower than the combined 19.6% reported.

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). Of the three RLAs, NELA's is the most university-centered. This is appropriate as participants are applying for and will receive an MSA degree from NCSU. The selection processes for PTLA and SLA are more decentralized (i.e., more decisions are made at the LEA level). Each RLA made modifications based on experiences with Cohorts 1 and 2 coherent with Cosner et al.'s (2014) recommendation for continuous improvement to refine programs. Of the three RLAs' selection criteria, one is not necessarily better than the other. All three contain some similarities and some differences, all three use multiple measures, and all three allow for deeper analyses into applicants' qualifications. However, 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. For example, most colleges and universities (not all, as there are exceptions across the nation) only require standard paperwork (e.g., resume, transcripts, letters of recommendation, GRE/MAT scores, background check and perhaps a statement of purpose). In person, face-to-face interactions and/or interviews are rare and are not required for application and/or admission. MSA faculty members usually review the materials via a standard rubric, and assign points based on minimum qualifications such as years of classroom teaching experience (without regard to and/or knowledge of whether that educational experience was deemed good or bad, effective or detrimental).

Table 3 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 program. As noted, the RLA selection criteria are more robust and rigorous relative to the alternatives.

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

Selection Criteria	NELA	PTLA	SLA	Other Alternative Prep Programs (e.g., NYCLA, NLNS)	NC Tradi-tional 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	^	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.

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: more than half are Caucasian (58%), over two-thirds are female (71%), and more than a third (38%) are African-American. Half (50%) possess 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 are less likely to have master's degrees (28% compared to the RLA Cohort 2 average of 50%) but this is not surprising since NELA culminates with a MSA degree. Relative to the RLA average, a larger proportion of the SLA participants are Caucasian (71% compared to the RLA average of 58%). A larger proportion of the PTLA participants are African-American (48% compared to the RLA average of 38%) and have advanced degrees (68% compared to the RLA average of 50%).

Table 4 includes descriptive statistics for all three Cohorts combined. In comparison to the Principal Fellows program in North Carolina, the RLA participants tend to be slightly older (36 versus 33), more racially diverse (38% Black versus 20%), 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 NC are master's degree-granting programs.

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

Research Question 3: Do RLAs Effectively Train Relative to the Alternatives?

The three essential features of effective leadership preparation programs are: (1) having a program philosophy that clearly articulates a 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 et al., 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 et al., 2005; Taylor, Cordeiro, & Chrispeels, 2009; Young, Crow, Ogawa, & Murphy, 2009):

- Rigorous recruitment and selection
- Full-time, year-long clinical internships
- Cohorts (including weekly, full-cohort, continued learning during the internship year)
- Curricula and seminars (including an action-research, case-study curriculum focus)
- Support systems (including multi-faceted coaching, mentoring, and supervising)
- Dynamic feedback and improvement loops
- Structures for evaluation and improvement
- Job placement and induction support

The actual structure of the RLAs includes four to six weeks of summer intensive study followed by ten months of full immersion K-12 internships. Throughout the course of the year, interns attend classes, presentations, seminars and school visits weekly with their cohort members and RLA supervisors to learn, reflect, process, discuss, question and discover.

Cohorts and Internships

Similar to NYCLA and NLNS, all three NC 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. For example, according to Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, and Norris (2000), adult learning is best accomplished when it is part of a socially cohesive activity structure that emphasizes shared authority for learning, opportunities for collaboration, and teamwork in practice oriented situations. As a result of such experiences, feelings of support, motivation, persistence, and group learning are enhanced while individual learners build knowledge, creativity, and problem-solving skills from multiple perspectives.

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 the direction of an experienced principal who is "deemed successful and effective" in generating school improvement.[1] This practice is quite different from most traditional MSA programs across the state of North Carolina (and even nationwide),[2] in which most students complete part-time, hourly internships in addition to and on top of their regular, full-time, day job.

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[1] Note that these quotation marks were added by the evaluator as a point of question.
[2] NC Principal Fellows are an exception to this generalization.

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 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 NC Standards for School Executives. Internship responsibilities often involve direct work with NCDPI's effort to turn around the lowest-achieving schools.

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 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 his/her 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, 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 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 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 as cited in Orr et al., 2012). Such features, whether in traditional MSA programs or in alternative RLAs, usually combine both coursework and field experience with the program's curriculum threaded throughout both (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 are also 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.

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 ensuring 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 is usually 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 offerings, 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 (e.g., strategically grouping four participants with strong, domineering, need-to-control and micromanage personalities on the same team) 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 them for their first principalship. Throughout each RLA, the emphasis on high-need schools and the skills and strategies needed to turn around low performance is prominent and palpable. For a full description of each RLA's training program, see *North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies: Final 2012 Activity Report* (http://cerenc.org/wpcontent/uploads/2011/10/ RLA_First-Year-Report-03-04-13.pdf).

Support Systems: Coaching, Mentoring, 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) 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, targeted at advisement in the daily functions of 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 (i.e., RLA Directors, Coaches and some additional university professors) 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." See Appendix C for a detailed description of each RLA's coaching, mentoring and supervising support system.

This additional induction support from the coaches and mentors, involving ongoing professional development, is provided to the first- and second-year school leaders 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 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 is obvious from 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.

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 4: Do RLAs Effectively Place Graduates 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 the Leadership Academy in conjunction with participating LEAs, to determine appropriate matches of aspiring leaders to the schools in which they are placed. Table 5 indicates that interns from each of the three cohorts, and from each of the three RLAs, have been placed in high-needs schools where, on average, two-thirds (66.2%) of the student populations are eligible for free or reduced lunch (versus the NC state average of 55.9%), where overall average Reading/English I scores are less than 63% (versus the NC state average of 71.2%), and where overall average Mathematics/Algebra I scores hover around the 72% mark (versus the NC 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	*Cohort 2*	*Cohort 3*	
% Students Free/ Reduced 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%*
School Size	NELA	550	668	520	579
	PTLA	579	739	679	666
	SLA	615	711	662	663
	RLAs	*581*	*706*	*620*	*636*
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%*
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%*

According to the original RFP for the RLAs, the expectation is that "successful candidates will be placed and serve in high-needs schools" (i.e., higher-poverty and lower-performance than the North Carolina state average). Table 6 indicates that graduates from the first two cohorts from each of the three RLAs have been placed in leadership positions. Table 7 indicates that graduates from the first two cohorts from each of the three RLAs are serving in high-need schools.

Table 6. RLA Graduate Job Placements

Cohort	NELA Graduates	PTLA Graduates	SLA Graduates	RLAs
Cohort 1 – June 2012	*n*=21	*n*=21	*n*=20	*n*=62
	6 Principals	3 Principals	8 Principals	17 Principals
	8 Assistant Princ	14 Assistant Princ	7 Assistant Princ	29 Assistant Princ
	3 Central Office	1 Central Office	1 Central Office	5 Central Office
	2 Teach/Facilitator	1 Teach/Facilitator	0 Teach/Facilitator	0 Teach/Facilitator
	2 Left RLA Region	2 Left RLA Region	4 Left RLA Region	8 Left RLA Region
Cohort 2 – June 2013	*n*=21	*n*=20	*n*=21	*n*=62
	0 Principals	0 Principals	2 Principals	2 Principals
	18 Assistant Princ	13 Assistant Princ	17 Assistant Princ	48 Assistant Princ
	1 Central Office	2 Central Office	0 Central Office	3 Central Office
	2 Teach/Facilitator	5 Teach/Facilitator	2 Teach/Facilitator	9 Teach/Facilitator
	0 Left RLA Region	0 Left RLA Region	0 Left RLA Region	0 Left RLA Region
TOTALS (as of March 2014)	*n*=42	*n*=41	*n*=41	*n*=124
	6 Principals	3 Principals	10 Principals	19 Principals (15%)
	26 Assistant Princ	27 Assistant Princ	24 Assistant Princ	77 Assistant Princ (62%)
	4 Central Office	3 Central Office	1 Central Office	8 Central Office (6%)
	4 Teach/Facilitator	6 Teach/Facilitator	2 Teach/Facilitator	12 Teach/Facilitator (10%)
	2 Left RLA Region	2 Left RLA Region	4 Left RLA Region	8 Left RLA Region (6%)

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Table 7. RLA Job Placements: Free and Reduced Lunch, School Size, English, and Mathematics Scores

Placement Site Characteristic	RLA	Job Placements		RLAs
		Cohort 1	*Cohort 2*	
% Students Free/Reduced 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%*
School Size	NELA	480	572	526
	PTLA	692	804	748
	SLA	770	724	747
	RLAs	*647*	*700*	*674*
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%*
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%*

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 NC state average of 55.9%), where the proportion of at- or above-grade level Reading/English I scores hover around 62.6% (versus the NC 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 NC state average of 82.8%). The range of scores and the range of growth in these schools are great. These data are in line with high-poverty, high-need, low-performing schools.

A portion of NC RttT's funds have been available to stimulate and strengthen the state's efforts to turn around their lowest achieving schools (TALAS). The TALAS initiative targets the bottom 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%. A total of 118 schools met one of these two criteria. In addition, North Carolina's District and School Transformation (DST) team works with the lowest 10% of districts in the state (n=12). Since their objectives intersect, the RLAs work closely with some of theses schools and districts.

- 24 of the 118 DST schools (20%) and 6 of the 12 DST districts (50%) (i.e., Edgecombe, Halifax, Hertford, Northampton, Warren, Weldon) are located in the NELA region.
- 23 of the 118 DST schools (19%) and 0 of the 12 DST districts (0%) are located in the PTLA region.
- 14 of the 118 DST schools (12%) and 2 of the 12 DST districts (17%) (i.e., Anson, Robeson) are located in the SLA region.
- 61 of the 118 DST schools (52%) and 8 of the 12 DST districts (67%) are located in the three RLA regions.

Table 8 indicates the number of RLA interns and graduates that are currently working in TALAS schools and/or NC Focus schools. 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. 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 the achievement and lack of progress over a number of years of one or more subgroups of students.

Table 8. RLA Intern and Job Placements (as of March 2014): Number of NC DST/TALAS and Focus Schools

	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 2 in Focus
Total Cohort Members	*8 in TALAS** *6 in Focus*	*9 in TALAS* *8 in Focus*	*1 in TALAS* *8 in Focus*
Total Schools	**6/24 TALAS (25%)[^]** **5 Focus**	**8/23 TALAS (35%)[^]** **8 Focus**	**1/14 TALAS (7%)[^]** **7 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 5: Are RLAs Cost-Effective Relative to Alternative Programs?

The larger RttT Evaluation Team is preparing a cost-effectiveness analysis of the RLAs, relative to extant comparable leadership development programs. This analysis will be part of a separate report (expected to be completed Fall 2014) that will include cost-effectiveness analyses of several other RttT initiatives. When completed, this analysis will provide a basis for value comparisons between RLAs and other models.

From an initial, cursory assessment, yes, the RLAs are cost-effective relative to alternative programs. Without a full-time paid internship of $40,000 a year, 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 (total of $93,000 with full-time paid internship and costs split between candidates themselves and the state of North Carolina which heavily subsidies in-state, public institutions of higher education). The cost for each North Carolina Principal Fellow graduate (who likewise obtain a MSA degree and principal licensure) is approximately $100,000. The costs for each RLA are comparable. For example, 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 runs 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 of the nationally recognized, highly touted alternative programs are significantly (10 to 50%) higher. For example, the cost per New Leaders for New Schools graduate is at least $130,000. Similarly, the cost per New York City Leadership Academy graduate is more than $150,000. For a fuller description of each RLA's budget please see the *Regional Leadership Academies Cost Effectiveness Framework*, (http://cerenc.org/wpcontent/uploads/2011/10/RLA cost effectiveness framework_3-1-12.pdf).

RLA Outcomes

Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, Lapointe and Orr (2010) note that, historically, principal preparation programs have been heavily weighted toward technical considerations: organizational management, administrative requirements, logistical and legal matters. At the same time, much less attention has been given to questions of teaching and learning. Likewise, few programmatic resources have been dedicated to explicit considerations regarding issues of power and privilege, and how they lead to disparate educational opportunities and access (Oakes, Lipton, Anderson & Stillman, 2012). Yet, according to Marshall and Oliva (2010), deconstructing the ways that economic, racial, and political conditions shape schools' potential to interrupt patterns of inequality is central to cultivating schools that advance principles of social justice.

The RLAs are actually doing this. They are intentionally and singularly focused on training a new kind of leader for high-needs schools (i.e., candidates knowingly and willingly committed to equity, candidates with a sense of urgency and personal accountability for student learning, candidates with the will and the skill to turnaround failing schools). Schools entering turnaround (i.e., demonstrated low student achievement for multiple years) face significantly more challenges than typical schools in the state (McFarland and Preston, 2010). Unique circumstances like these warrant specialized contextual knowledge and unique dispositions on the part of the leader to turn the tide from negative trajectories to positive ones. All three RLAs are deliberately

working to equip their candidates with instructional leadership skills, with resiliency skills, and with transformational change skills. Throughout each RLA, the emphasis on high-need schools and the strategies needed to turnaround low performance is prominent and palpable.

For example, when asked to rate themselves on four school turnaround leadership traits (Papa & English, 2011), at two different times (December and June), on average, all RLA Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 graduates indicated an increase in their internal beliefs (see Tables 9 and 10). Note that, even though these were self-reports and averaged scores, the trend in the data does indicate that RLA participants grew in these four areas during the second half of their Leadership Academy experience (i.e., interns were surveyed in December and then again in June; unfortunately, no baseline data were collected the previous July to show a year's worth of development). However, most RLA graduates did see themselves moving from the "developing" stage of each turnaround trait to the higher "proficiency" stage. The RLAs are to be commended for helping their participants grow in their internal beliefs, determination, and sense of efficacy.

Table 9. Change in Self-Rating (December 2011 versus June 2012) on School Turnaround Leadership Traits, Cohort 1

Trait	NELA	PTLA	SLA
Self-efficacy and optimism (rejection of status quo/failure, acceptance of responsibility)	2.42–2.93 (+0.51)	2.92–3.57 (+0.65)	2.71–3.63 (+0.92)
Open-mindedness and pragmatism (contextual knowledge and adaptation, ability to apply theory to practice).	1.95–2.93 (+0.98)	2.77–3.43 (+0.66)	2.36–3.50 (+1.14)
Resiliency and energy (persistent determination to improve student learning)	2.53–3.40 (+0.87)	3.31–3.86 (+0.55)	3.14–3.69 (+0.55)
Competence and skill sets (instructional leadership that builds rapport and capacity, knowledge of literacy, change processes, and human motivation)	2.26–3.33 (+1.07)	2.77–3.64 (+0.87)	2.57–3.50 (+0.93)

Table 10. Change in Self-Rating (December 2012 versus June 2013) on School Turnaround Leadership Traits, Cohort 2

Trait	NELA	PTLA	SLA
Self-efficacy and optimism (rejection of status quo/failure, acceptance of responsibility)	2.63-3.45 (+0.82)	2.72-3.25 (+0.53)	3.20-3.81 (+0.61)
Open-mindedness and pragmatism (contextual knowledge and adaptation, ability to apply theory to practice).	2.89-3.20 (+0.31)	2.56-3.10 (+0.54)	2.80-3.52 (+0.72)
Resiliency and energy (persistent determination to improve student learning)	2.95-3.80 (+0.85)	2.89-3.40 (+0.51)	3.33-3.81 (+0.48)
Competence and skill sets (instructional leadership that builds rapport and capacity, knowledge of literacy, change processes, and human motivation)	2.42-3.20 (+0.78)	2.11-3.20 (+1.09)	2.80-3.62 (+0.82)

Scale: 1=No Evidence, 2=Developing, 3=Proficient, 4=Accomplished, and 5=Distinguished

Note: Because NELA is a two-year program, NELA participants were initially surveyed after three semesters and a summer's worth of academy experience. Because PTLA and SLA are one-year programs, PTLA and SLA participants were initially surveyed after one semester and a summer's worth of academy experience. The difference in timing and exposure may or may not have impacted these self-reported scores in growth and development.

Even at that, questions remain. For example, are the RLAs responsible for student growth on self-reported impressions of leadership traits? Do final scores matter more, or does growth matter more? Exactly what types of transformational change are the RLA graduates leading? Is the value added from the RLA graduates greater than the impact from traditional program graduates? Unfortunately, data on the long-term and distal outcomes of the RLAs are not yet available. The Race to the Top grant was awarded for four years. Year 1 of the grant was earmarked toward design of the three programs and Years 2 to 4 involved the implementation phase (i.e., the preparation and graduation of 60 turnaround principals per academy). As noted in Table 6, the vast majority of graduates were placed in Assistant Principal roles with very few RLA graduates being named principals after Years 3 and 4. As such, hard impact data is not available yet. However, some intermediary outcomes from participants, from mentor principals, and from partnering superintendents indicate approval, satisfaction, endorsement and support for each of the RLAs. Also, some very early and preliminary indicators of effectiveness from NELA in particular reveal that the RLA graduates are having an impact on student test scores.

First, from the RLA interns and graduates themselves, there is a clear sense of gratitude coupled with a palpable sense of urgency to be transformational leaders committed to student learning. They feel empowered with "the will and the skill" to be true turnaround principals. Powerful comments from a few RLA participants

below 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 graduate 1 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 graduate 2 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]

Second, and similar to the RLA participants themselves, RLA mentor principals were impressed with the competency and wide range of skills provided, stating that "the program is designed in such a way that interns get a true depiction of school leadership." Another mentor was not only "impressed with the work ethic, educational values, heart and compassion behind every thought process [candidate] brings to the table" but 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 where MSA interns only get pieces of the experience versus full-time, hands-on real experience." 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. [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]

Third and 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, "This 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 "large urban" district) 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 "small rural" district). Even an Executive Director for Teach for America in North Carolina and the Executive Director of the state's Principal and Assistant Principal Association chimed in by declaring that the "RLA'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" and "This innovative program is deliberate, effective, and has proven successful in developing and incorporating critical, research-based practices into participants' school improvement efforts" respectively.

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]

Finally, early indicators of effectiveness collected by NELA (the one RLA with continued funding beyond Race to the Top) reveal that the RLA graduates are making rapid school improvements. Table 11 compares composite test scores for schools with NELA graduates as principals after one year (pre-post comparison).

Table 11. Composite Test Scores Comparison of 6 NELA Principals

	2012-2013 Composite Test Scores	2013-2014 Composite Test Scores	Percent Change
Elementary School A	12.7	18.8	+48%
Elementary School B	25.1	32.8	+31%
Elementary School C – 2nd	56.0	75.0	+34%
Elementary School D	18.2	42.6	+134%
Elementary School E – Math	18.0	39.0	+117%
Elementary School F	32.8	40.0	+22%
High School A – Math 1	10.5	25.0	+138%

For elementary schools, the composite test scores for 3rd grade are reported except for Elementary School C, which is a K-2 school and grade 2 is reported. Six [6] NELA graduates were principals in 2014-2014: 5 Elementary School Principals and 1 High School Principal. Sources: NCDPI School report Card for 2012-2013 data. Principal self-report data for 2013-2014 data. Percent change calculated using: New Value – old Value X 100%/Old Value.

According to a recent NELA Report (2014),

The student achievement gains of the NELA principals are particularly impressive when you take into account the research on time to turnaround and the effects of a novice principal on student achievement. First, research shows it takes approximately five years to put a teaching staff in place as well as fully implement policies and practices that will positively impact the school's performance (Seashore-Louis, et al., 2010) yet the NELA principals documented notable improvements during their first year.

Second, principal turnover has significant negative effects on the achievement of students attending high poverty schools (Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012). Research indicates that gains in student achievement in math are *lower* when a school has a new principal and the negative effect of new principals on student achievement is especially large when schools have a first time new principal (one without prior experience at other schools). The negative relationship between principal turnover (having a new principal) and achievement is stronger in failing schools, high poverty schools, and schools with more novice teachers (all of which are characteristics of the schools led by NELA principals) (Beteille,

Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012). Students in failing, high poverty schools with high concentrations of novice teachers have reading and math achievement that is .02-.06 standard deviations *lower* in years when they have a new principal.

The achievements of the NELA principals are particularly impressive when viewed with this research in mind. Typically, new principals experience a dip in scores, yet all the NELA principals had *improvements in student achievement scores*. A CALDER study suggests that the performance drop associated with new principals is larger at the schools hiring NYCLA Aspiring Principal Program graduates and these relative performance trends are not reversed until 3years later, and then only for English. (Clark, Martorell, Rockoff, 2009). A study by RAND (sponsored by New Leaders) found similar student performance dips for students who had one year with a New Leaders principal. Research clearly shows that principals are a key ingredient in the performance of their school, especially if that school enrolls a large number of low performing and/or poor and minority students. The research is also quite clear that new principals become more effective as they gain experience (Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012). Therefore, we anticipate an even greater annual impact on student achievement as the NELA principals gain more experience.

Summary Findings and Implications

In summary, all three RLAs utilize essential features of effective leadership preparation programs as organizing principles in designing and delivering their individual principal preparation programs. The content, pedagogy, and experiences reflect best practices for developing leaders who can facilitate high-quality teaching and learning for all children. 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., low-performing schools, 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 has consistently provided them with mentoring and coaching that the candidates believe will enhance their effectiveness as principals. Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 graduates have found employment in low-performing schools and LEAs (19 as principals, 77 as assistant principals, 8 as central office leaders, and 9 as teacher leaders/facilitators). On average (based on data from 2008-09 through 2011-12), their employing schools host higher numbers of lower-income students (68.2% receive free or reduced-price lunch versus the NC state average of 55.9%) and exhibit lower achievement rates (e.g., the Reading/ English I pass rate is 62.6% versus the NC state average of 71.2%; the Mathematics/Algebra I pass rate is 72.3% versus the NC state average of 82.8%). Data on the long-term and distal outcomes of the RLAs are not yet available.

Aspects to consider moving forward include: (1) How strong are the partnerships with certain LEAs (i.e., Are some LEAs more committed than others? Why? How?); (2) How much influence does each RLA actually have in the hiring process for individual LEAs? (i.e., Who hires whom? Why? How? When? Where?); and (3) Even though RLA participants are specifically prepared to lead in high-need schools, should every graduate be placed in a high-poverty, low-performing NC school? (i.e., Does the RLA graduate feel ready, willing, and able to assume a critical leadership position right now?). and 4) Since research indicates that it takes between three to six years to turn around failing schools (AIR, 2011) how should the RLA evaluation track/assess this? The answers to these and similar questions are beyond the scope of this evaluation.

Further evaluation should continue to monitor, observe, and track the placements of RLA participants and graduates and descriptive data regarding their schools should be collected, disaggregated, and analyzed. The timing of the RLA graduates and their 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 the principalship, these techniques should be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program on the overall objectives for the RttT funds – improving student performance and teaching quality. Future research directions include comparing and contrasting RLA graduates with traditional leadership preparation program graduates on specific school dimensions including student achievement and growth, teacher recruitment and retention, student drop-out and completion rates, and school climate/working condition indices. An analysis of each RLA component is also warranted to evaluate effectiveness and make continuous improvement.

Appendix A: 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 and serves the following rural 14 partner

LEAs (48% White, 49% Black, 2% Hispanic and only 14% of the population with Bachelor's degree or above): Bertie, Edgecombe, Franklin, Granville, Halifax, Hertford, Martin, Nash-Rocky Mount, Northampton, Roanoke Rapids, Vance, Warren, Washington, and Weldon City (total of 70,348 students served). It was established to serve a cluster of low-achieving rural schools.

- NELA is a two-year program that involves part-time study during Year 1 and full-time study—including a full-time, year-long internship—during Year 2.
- Successful NELA candidates are granted NC Principal Licensure and a Master of School Administration (MSA), conferred by NCSU.
- NELA selected and inducted 24 members into Cohort 1 in the summer of 2010; 21 members of this group (87.5%) completed the program in May 2012 and are receiving continuing early career support through 2014. Cohort 1 internships were supported by NC RttT funds.
  - Most (81%) Cohort 1 members are now employed as educational leaders in the surrounding LEAs (six of the 21 as principals, eight as assistant principals, three in Central Office positions, two as teachers/facilitators, and two have left the NELA Region).
- Cohort 2 members were selected and inducted in the fall of 2011. These 21 participants completed their internships and the program in May 2013 and have career support through 2014.
  - Most (90%) Cohort 2 members are now employed as educational leaders in the surrounding LEAs (18 of the 21 as assistant principals, one in a Central Office position, and two as teachers/facilitators).
- Cohort 3 members were selected and inducted in the fall of 2012 and these 20 participants will complete the program in May 2014. They are completing their internships now.
- NELA participants make a three-year agreement to work in northeastern NC schools.
- NELA has been established by and embedded in Friday Institute for Educational Innovation, a division of NCSU's College of Education.

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 (67% White, 21% Black, 9% Hispanic and 26% of the population with Bachelor's degree or above): Alamance-Burlington, Asheboro City, Guilford, and Winston-Salem/Forsyth (total of 150,616 students served). It is a one-year program.

- Successful PTLA graduates are granted NC 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 selected and inducted 21 members into Cohort 1 in the summer of 2011; 21 members of this group (100%) completed the program in June 2012 and are receiving continued career support through 2014.
  - Most (86%) Cohort 1 members are now employed as educational leaders in the surrounding LEAs (three of the 21 as principals, 14 as assistant principals, one in a Central Office position, two as teachers/facilitators, and two have left the PTLA Region).
- Cohort 2 members were selected and inducted in the summer of 2012. These 20 participants completed their internships and the program in June 2013 and are receiving continued career support through 2014.
  - Most (75%) Cohort 2 members are now employed as educational leaders in the surrounding LEAs (13 of the 20 as assistant principals, two in Central Office positions, and five as teachers/facilitators).
- Cohort 3 members were selected in the summer of 2013 and these 22 participants will complete the program in June 2014. They are completing their internships now.
- PTLA participants commit to three years of service in partnering LEAs upon program completion.
- PTLA has been established by UNCG faculty in partnership with LEAs and a regional education consortium.

Sandhills Leadership Academy (SLA)

SLA was founded by the Sandhills Regional Education Consortium (SREC) and serves the following 13 LEAs, mostly rural (60% White, 31% Black, 5% Hispanic and only 15% of the population with Bachelor's degree or above): Anson, Bladen, Columbus, Cumberland, Harnett, Hoke, Lee, Montgomery, Moore, Richmond, Robeson, Scotland, and Whiteville City (total of 158,979 students served). It is a one-year program.

- Fayetteville State University (FSU), the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP), and the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching (NCCAT) are partners in SLA.

- Successful SLA graduates are granted NC Principal Licensure and can earn up to 18 graduate-level credits at UNCP or FSU.
- SLA selected 21 members and inducted 20 members into Cohort 1 in the summer of 2011; 20 members of this group (95%) completed the program in June 2012 and are receiving continued career support through 2013.
  - Most (90%) Cohort 1 members are now employed as educational leaders in the surrounding LEAs (eight of the 20 as principals, seven as assistant principals, one in a Central Office position, and four have left the SLA Region).
- Cohort 2 members were selected and inducted in the summer of 2012. These 21 participants completed their internships and the program in June 2013 and are receiving continued career support through 2014.
  - Most (90%) Cohort 1 members are now employed as educational leaders in the surrounding LEAs (two of the 21 as principals, 17 as assistant principals, and two as teachers/facilitators).
- Cohort 3 members were selected in the summer of 2013 and these 20 participants will complete the program in June 2014. They will receive continued support through 2015. They are completing their internships now.
- SLA participants commit to serving in the Sandhills region for a minimum of four years following program completion.
- SLA has been established by the SREC LEAs in partnership with two universities and NCCAT.

Appendix B
RLA Selection Processes

NELA process. In stark contrast to fairly typical, status quo selection processes, NELA now has a rigorous four-phase selection process that began with Cohort 2. Phase 1 involves a superintendent's nomination, followed by Phase 2, an admissions application into NCSU's College of Education and a faculty committee review. Phase 3 is an all-day Candidate Assessment Day in April, during which 30 to 35 finalists are invited to participate in a number of activities (e.g., public speaking, scenarios, school crisis memo, etc.) with Assessment Teams. For example, following introductions and an overview of the process, candidates are asked to role-play two different 8-minute conversations, one with a high school student who was sent to the principal's office and another with a teacher to discuss a snippet of teaching they witnessed (via a short teaching video clip). A concurrent activity includes a timed writing activity whereby candidates are given a scenario of a school crisis that occurred earlier in the day, and they now have a short time to compile a letter that will be sent home with all of the students at the end of the day. Other concurrent activities include the completion of two surveys (i.e., GRIT Survey Perseverance and Long Term Goal Trajectory and Sort McREL's 21 Leadership Responsibilities). To round out Assessment Day, candidates participate in a 20-minute School Improvement Team meeting simulation emulating a team's decision-making process, they have lunch with former NELA participants to ask logistical questions, and then wrap up the application process with one-on-one 30-minute interviews with evaluation teams, comprised of five members, including a high school student, a local teacher, a practicing principal, an NCSU faculty member or DPI specialist, and an LEA representative (e.g., area superintendent). Phase 4 is a comprehensive debrief and review of all finalists using an assessment rubric and then a final selection of 21 participants.

PTLA process. PTLA's rigorous cohort selection process is a two-phase process supported through its District-University Partnership and Advisory Team. Phase 1 of the process is led by LEA-level representatives in coordination with the PTLA Leadership Team (Executive Director, Executive Coaches, and Academy Coordinators). Each LEA, as the hiring agency for potential principals and assistant principals, conducts an interview and selection process to make its final cohort selections from a pool of individuals who have expressed interest in PTLA. The number of available slots is prorated according to LEA size (Guilford = 10, Winston-Salem/Forsyth = 7, Alamance-Burlington = 3, and Asheboro = 1). PTLA Leadership Team members make themselves available to participate on final selection committees and offer insights regarding successful characteristics of Cohort 1 members, as well as successful characteristics of mentor principals. In Phase 2, selected LEA candidates complete the UNCG admissions process for the appropriate, PTLA-related school leadership program. Candidates selected by the LEAs and admitted to UNCG now comprise Cohort 1 ($n = 21$) and Cohort 2 ($n = 20$) of PTLA. A description of each LEA's individual process follows:

In Asheboro, the application criteria include demonstrated leadership in schools or LEA, leadership potential, level of readiness for administrative position, quality of application materials, and potential/ability to complete PTLA successfully. Interview questions asked are: *Why administration? Give example(s) of demonstrated leadership and what was learned? How do/can change and conflict affect a school? Describe your communication and problem-solving styles? What does instructional leadership look like?* Applicants are asked to respond to scenarios about the following: (1) dealing with

an angry parent; (2) evaluating/coaching an underperforming teacher; and (3) handling a "sticky" student issue. The interview team includes the superintendent, two assistant superintendents, the Principal of the Year, and PTLA's Executive Director.

The Alamance-Burlington School System (ABSS) developed similar materials to be used in its selection process: a candidate selection rubric, interview questions, a written exercise, a rubric for evaluating the written exercise, and a final selection rubric that combines the interview, written exercises, and interest materials into one overall assessment of the finalists. The interview process involves two steps, both of which take place on the same day. First, finalists participate in an interview conducted by a panel of ABSS officials and representatives from PTLA/UNCG (e.g., an Executive Coach, an instructor). Secondly, candidates then complete a brief written exercise that focuses on prioritizing and planning. For Cohort 1, 3 participants were selected from 24 original applications. For Cohort 2, 3 participants were selected from 27 original applications. Of those 27, 13 finalists participated in the full day of interviewing in February 2012.

In Guilford County Schools (GCS), the selection committee consists of two regional superintendents, along with the Chief Academic Officer, the Executive Director of Induction and Professional Development, the Strategic Planning and Project Management Officer, and the GCS Principal of the Year. PTLA's Executive Director also serves on the panel. All application materials are due by January 15 and include: a resume, a letter of interest, a list of references, and a letter of support. An initial review of applications is completed by the committee, and invitations to participate in Round 2 are sent. The second level of the process includes an online scenario-based prioritization activity and writing sample. Finalists are invited to participate in an interview process. Cohort 1 yielded 10 participants from 99 original applications (10%). Similarly, Cohort 2 yielded 10 participants from an initial pool of 95 applications (10.5%).

In Winston-Salem/Forsyth (WSFCS), the selection team includes the HR director, assistant superintendents for school administration, and mentor principals (one elementary and one secondary, preferably without applicants for the upcoming cohort). In Step 1, selection team members review applicants, and then meet and come to a consensus on the top 14 candidates to interview by early February. For Step 2, the top 14 are given a homework assignment one week prior to interviews: Prepare a 2- to 3-minute videotaped presentation on "Why I want to be a leader in a high needs school."

In Step 3, the top 14 candidates are interviewed by the team by the end of February, using a combination of behavioral and scenario-based questions developed in advance. To enhance this process, WSFCS developed a rubric for evaluating written application packets and will use this year's review of packets (2012) to further develop ideas for this rubric for subsequent years. Of the 14 finalists, 7 are chosen to participate in PTLA each year.

SLA process. SLA's rigorous selection process was similarly modeled after such programs as NYCLA and NLNS, which seek to identify candidates with the attributes required to successfully complete the program and to serve as effective school leaders. Representatives from 12 of the 13 partnering counties assisted with and were part of the Cohort Selection Process Team. The application process for SLA is a two-tiered process—LEA and regional. For Tier I (by the end of February), each participating LEA can recommend up to four candidates for each cohort class to participate in a regional selection process (i.e., 13 LEAs times 4 candidates equals 52 possible second-round applicants). Candidate criteria include: five years of teaching experience or equivalent; career status eligibility; consistent performance in the accomplished and distinguished levels on the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation; and demonstration of success in leading adults in schools. LEAs utilize a rubric developed by SLA Advisory Committee members to assist them in assessing candidate qualifications in each of the areas above. For Tier II (by mid-March), the SLA Advisory Committee utilizes the North Carolina School Executive Standards in the selection process by seeking potential for strategic leadership, instructional leadership, cultural leadership, human resource leadership, managerial leadership, external development leadership, and micropolitical leadership. The regional selection process includes:

o   Activity 1: Review and Response to a Videotaped Lesson
o   Activity 2: Participation in a Group Scenario
o   Activity 3: Written Response to a School-Related Question
o   Activity 4: Presentation on Closing the Achievement Gap
o   Activity 5: Question-and-Answer Interview with Panel

From Cohort 1, SLA learned to make the selection criteria for Cohorts 2 and 3 more specific, the selection process more standardized, and the selection rubric utilized in LEAs more uniform. LEA candidate selection process elements agreed upon and used for Tier I of Cohort 2's selection included: rubric cover sheet, letter of interest, resume, NCDPI application, and interview. In addition to the above, regional candidate selection process elements agreed upon and utilized for Tier II of Cohort 2's selection included: presentation, written response, teacher video, panel interview, and group scenario.

Appendix C
Support Systems: Coaching, Mentoring, Supervising

NELA's directors, coaches, and mentors. NELA's Executive Directors and Program Coordinator work well together and are responsible for the design and delivery, analysis and alignment, and purposefulness and coherence of NELA's program (including courses, essential questions, content, instructional strategies, and assessments). NELA's part-time Executive Coaches provide additional support and coaching to interns that complements and expands the intern's work with faculty and mentor principals. Coaches help NELA interns live their learning by walking interns through difficult processes. The role of the NELA Executive Coach is to: (1) participate in joint observations of teaching and debrief with the interns on how they can improve; (2) conduct role-playing of crucial and critical conversations with interns to inform them of ways to ensure that students and teachers are meeting the highest of standards; (3) improve the interns' leadership abilities by having individuals believe in themselves and develop the efficacy to find their own answers; and (4) help aspiring and novice leaders diagnose and solve the "Problems of Practice" themselves and thus build leadership capacity:

> Our NELA [Executive] Directors have consistently given me constructive feedback and extended all possible support that they can offer to help me. The school where I am interning in also has a very caring leader … I am getting hands-on experience as well as seeing an awesome mentor put things in practice. (NELA participant)
>
> How can I describe how our NELA directors, mentors, coaches, professors, and speakers all inculcated us to the very important role that is placed on our shoulders when were chosen to be NELAs? (NELA participant)
>
> I worked closely with an Executive Coach to ensure that I was implementing and applying practices learned in class. (NELA participant)

Expectations for NELA Executive Coaches include the following:

- Participate in Coaches' Training Sessions;
- Review with the intern their Individual Leadership Plan (ILP). Direct the revision of the ILP as needed and at least once per semester;
- Make weekly contact with their assigned intern (virtual, Skype, email, phone, or in person);
- Contact the mentor principal every other week (twice a month);
- Conduct two extended site visits (face-to-face) per month to shadow the intern. One of these visits should include a joint observation of teaching and/or the post-observation conference;
- Write a detailed evaluation of the intern's progress (monthly report);
- Participate in Coaches' Feedback Meetings (two per semester); and
- Provide feedback and advice to both the intern and the mentor principal as they experience the Distinguished Leaders in Practice activities.[1]

NELA's mentor principals are expected to be expert leaders who are reflective and willing to expose, share, and think through both what works and what does not in their schools. NELA looks for mentor principals who will: (1) continually seek improved practice for themselves, their staffs, their students, and the aspiring principal (i.e., the NELA intern); (2) help NELA interns live their learning during their field experiences and internship; (3) expose interns to all functional areas of a school with attention to "high-risk" incidents and issues; (4) ensure intern participation (a) on school improvement teams and in concrete school improvement efforts; (b) in supervision of instruction; and (c) in interpersonal, group, and organizational conflicts, politics, systems, and successful strategies to navigate these conflicts.

It is important to note here that NELA has had a difficult time identifying effective school leaders in the Northeast region with whom to match prospective interns. As a result, according to NELA's Executive Director, "We had two interns at some school sites … and we actually had interns that drove well over an hour each way (in one case, 1 hour and 45 minutes) to get to intern sites that had solid leaders." Just last week, NELA requested to move one intern from a disengaged mentor. In response, the superintendent then requested that all three interns in his LEA be changed as a result. Due to geographical challenges, political challenges, capacity challenges, and academic challenges (i.e., an overabundance of low-performing schools in the region), finding good mentor possibilities and site placements for NELA interns has been, and continues to be, an arduous process at times.

PTLA's directors, coaches, and mentors. PTLA's Leadership Team consists of a full-time Executive Director, three UNCG faculty members, and two full-time Executive Leadership Coaches. All six members have extensive school-based leadership experience, particularly in and with high-need schools. Functioning as a real team with complementary skills and synergy, together they participate in the design and delivery of all coursework and fieldwork experiences and actually role model examples of team teaching and collaboration for

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[1] See the link for Coaches on the NELA site (http://go.ncsu.edu/nela) for NELA's Preservice Rubric on Standards and Quarterly/Monthly Coach Reports.

the PTLA participants. Even though the roles and expectations for PTLA's Leadership Coaches are similar to NELA's, PTLA's coaches are actually dedicated full-time to the program and thus much more involved in daily operations. According to PTLA's Executive Director, "Executive coaching provided by our PTLA coaches is a vital component of PTLA, which supports the professional and personal growth needs of our principal interns. Individualized, one-on-one coaching opportunities allow for specific leadership growth planning, meaningful learning connections between the classroom and work experience, and debriefings of real-time leadership decisions and outcomes related to the roles and responsibilities of the principal of high-needs schools."

The Leadership Coach supports the PTLA internship experience. The process of coaching focuses on the personal development of the administrative intern and includes assisting the intern in assessing job role expectations, skills and knowledge needed to meet those expectations, and identifying personal strengths and developmental needs. The Coach's major responsibilities are:

- Conduct intern visits based on the determined schedule (average of 12-16 per week)
- Provide feedback (including support via email and telephone conversations)
- Document the visit
- Communicate intern progress with the PTLA Executive Director on a regular basis
- Assist in the overall development of the support plan within PTLA
- Serve on the PTLA Leadership Team
- Interact weekly with the cohort of interns during their one day per week seminar time.

PTLA's Leadership Coach expectations include:

- Support the professional development of the administrative intern.
- Encourage a balance in the internship between "stand back and observe" versus "hands on" experiences. The interns need to be pushed beyond their comfort zones but not forced into situations so difficult that they will be in over their heads. They must be exposed to a wide variety of leadership areas and issues but not spread so thin that their efforts are diffused and their learning is limited.
- Ensure the principal/mentor is spending more time talking with an intern than he or she would normally spend with an experienced assistant principal. Frequent conversations must take place in which the principal mentor helps the intern reflect on and learn from her/his professional experiences and in which the mentor openly reflects on and analyzes the effectiveness of her/his own experiences. Timely, constructive feedback throughout the year regarding the intern's professional performance is not only appropriate, but is required.
- Assist the intern as s/he is trying to develop her/his own style and philosophy for leading a high need school. What has worked for a coach in a particular school might not work for the intern in her/his placement.
- The coach will meet with the PTLA Executive Coach/Executive Director if s/he has concerns about the intern's performance and/or the mentor principal's commitment (or relationship) to the intern.
- The coach will assist in the final evaluation of the PTLA intern and will use the North Carolina Standards for School Executives as one component of the intern's overall evaluation.

PTLA's weekly Leadership Team meetings include ongoing planning efforts for curriculum refinement, intern development, program updates, LEA partnerships, training, data collection, and publicity. The team selects professors, guest panelists, and professional development presenters who demonstrate relevant, expert experiences matching the curricular needs of the interns. Many guest presenters are professional leaders from PTLA's LEA partners. In addition, the team evaluates individual intern and group development through seminar sessions, site visits, and one-on-one conferences to determine "next steps" in PTLA's teaching and learning sessions. A needs assessment in August and the valuable 360 feedback in the fall have been the foundation for PTLA's growth model. A fall semester electronic survey by the team gives PTLA additional data to consider for intern growth and program development.

PTLA's Leadership Team is experienced in turning around schools. They made a total of 114 site visits during the first semester to provide support and feedback to the interns. Each intern was visited a minimum of five times during the Fall 2011 semester. A minimum of seven visits per intern was set as a goal (and achieved) for the Spring 2012 semester. The PTLA Executive Director, Executive Coaches, and University Supervisors made an impressive total of 300+ visits to Cohort 1. PTLA's mentor principals are likewise expected to assess intern progress and address concerns, to provide numerous opportunities for the intern to observe and participate in activities that typify the principal's responsibilities, and to role model and encourage reflection on key leadership decisions. Mentor principals help interns expand their experience, skill, and knowledge during the internship, help interns to thoughtfully and intentionally move from the role of observer to participant, and, finally, help interns to serve as a facilitator and/or leader whenever appropriate. As one PTLA participant said:

What a great mentor! She's pulled me in, she is very team oriented; she's shown me different ways to

attack different problems. She's actually helped me hone my own skills by saying things like, "This is what you're really good at. Why don't you work on this or take over for this?" (PTLA participant)

SLA's directors, coaches, and mentors. SLA's organizational leadership consists of a full-time Executive Director and four highly credentialed, part-time Executive Coaches. The roles and expectations for SLA's coaches and mentor principals are similar to those for NELA and PTLA. Executive Coaches are assigned to work closely with executive interns and mentor principals throughout Year 1 and beyond. Each coach actively participates in every seminar session and visits schools every two weeks, with weekly communication between visits. The Executive Coach School Visit Report was developed to assist executive interns in processing internship experiences while making connections to the SLA standards, curriculum, and future leadership position:

> I appreciate the effort the coaching staff put into preparing and pacing the lessons this week. I keep reminding myself that I will be learning something each part of the way! I cannot comprehend the totality of what goes into the principalship, but I have 100% trust that I am getting the best preparation. I appreciate it! (SLA participant)

> Written work was required for each of the Executive Standards. Coaches provided timely and effective feedback on a regular basis. (SLA participant)

> My Coach visited me regularly at my school and provided high-quality support … SLA provided weekly residency sessions with our Coaches and I also received a monthly visit from [a] personal Coach. She would discuss concerns and offer advice to myself and [my] mentor principal about things that were going on in the school. (SLA participant)

> A sense of urgency has been instilled in each of us by our Coaches. In a turnaround leadership role, we do not have time to waste. We have read several articles that have discussed the use of accountability pressure through the use of data. (SLA participant)

In Year 1, all mentor principals participated in the NYCLA mentor principal training prior to SLA interns reporting to schools on August 15, 2011. Follow-up principal mentor training was scheduled for December. In Year 2, SLA tweaked this and is now conducting its own mentor principal training sessions on a more interim, local basis (once every three months to check in). In fact, a number of mentor principals are now attending certain SLA seminars (school law, personnel, and legislative updates). As a result, these experienced school leaders are growing and developing right along with their interns. Mentor principals meet with the Executive Coach assigned to their school on a monthly basis, and they complete Monthly Progress Reports on their interns to keep communication between the mentor principal and Executive Coach strong and productive for all concerned. Mentor principals' assessments of their interns' performance from the previous month is important as SLA monitors intern professional growth and development. The Sandhills Leadership Academy Mentor Principal Handbook is quite extensive; in addition to general information (vision, mission, goals and program overview), it includes specifics on mentor competencies, intern responsibilities, and ongoing assessments.

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