

Consortium for
Educational
Research and
Evaluation—
North
Carolina

North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies

Final 2012 Activity Report

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary..... 3

Introduction..... 5

 Purpose of the Regional Leadership Academies Evaluation 5

 Purpose of this Report and Methodological Approach..... 6

North Carolina’s Regional Leadership Academies 6

 Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA)..... 7

 Piedmont Triad Leadership Academy (PTLA)..... 7

 Sandhills Leadership Academy (SLA) 8

Evaluation Procedures 9

 Data 9

 Administrative Data 9

 Survey 10

 Observations 10

 Interviews..... 10

 Method 10

 Connections to Previous Evaluation Work..... 11

Findings 11

 Research Question 1a: Do RLAs effectively recruit, relative to the alternatives? 11

 Recruitment in Comparable Programs..... 11

 RLA Recruitment..... 12

 Assessment of Recruitment Efforts..... 14

 Research Question 2: What impact does each RLA’s selection criteria have on program effectiveness?..... 15

 Selectivity 15

 RLA Selection Processes 16

 Results of the Selection Process 20

 Research Question 1b: Do RLAs effectively train, relative to the alternatives? 21

 □ Cohorts and internships..... 21

 □ Curricula and seminars..... 21

North Carolina Leadership Academies: Final 2012 Report

March 2013

Support Systems: Coaching, Mentoring, Supervising	45
Program Evaluation and Improvement	50
Research Question 3: Do RLA graduates find placements in targeted schools/districts?	53
Research Question 4: Are RLAs Cost-Effective Relative to Alternative Programs?	56
Conclusions and Next Steps	57
References.....	59

NORTH CAROLINA REGIONAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMIES: FINAL 2012 ACTIVITY REPORT

Executive Summary

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

North Carolina's Regional Leadership Academies

The policy objective of the RLA initiative is to increase the number of principals qualified to lead transformational change in low-performing schools in both rural and urban areas. NC RttT funds support three RLA programs that serve collaboratives of partnering LEAs:

- Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA) – Established in 2010 (one year before RttT funding was available) and serving 14 LEAs in Northeast North Carolina;
- Piedmont Triad Leadership Academy (PTL) – serving four LEAs in North-central North Carolina; and
- Sandhills Leadership Academy (SLA) – serving 13 LEAs in South-central North Carolina.

Findings

RLA Program Quality (Recruitment, Selection, and Training)

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).

- Observational data and document analyses provide converging, consistent evidence that all three RLAs have utilized these central program features as organizing principles in designing, delivering, and deliberating their individual principal preparation programs, and that the fidelity of the implementation of their program designs has been strong.
- Data also indicate that the RLAs have been designed so that their content (i.e., core concepts to be taught), pedagogy (i.e., the means by which learning is facilitated), and experiences

(i.e., the nature of coursework and fieldwork) reflect best practices for developing candidates into leaders who can facilitate high-quality teaching and learning for all children.

- Quality levels vary slightly, but, relative to the alternatives (e.g., traditional North Carolina MSA Programs), the RLAs are much more deliberate, effective, and successful in developing and incorporating critical, research-based features into their programs (rigorous recruitment and selection; cohort-based experiences; an action-research, case-study curriculum focus; full-time, year-long clinical residency experience; weekly full-cohort, continued learning during the residency year; multifaceted support structure; job placement and induction support; and dynamic feedback and improvement loops).

Data on the long-term and distal outcomes of the RLAs are not yet available. The Evaluation Team will seek to assess the impact the RLAs have on principal preparation for high-need schools over the course of the remainder of the RttT grant period (through 2014).

RLA Graduate Placement

- Generally speaking, Cohort 1 participants in each RLA found internship placements in targeted schools and LEAs (i.e., struggling, low-performing schools).
- In addition, Cohort 1 graduates also landed jobs in target schools and LEAs. On average, their employing schools hosted student bodies in which:
 - More than two-thirds (67.6%) receive free or reduced-price lunch;
 - The proportion of at- or above-grade level English I/Reading scores hover around 57.75%; and
 - The proportion of at- or above-grade level Algebra I/Math scores hover just below the 65% mark.

Next Steps

The ongoing evaluation will probe deeper into five specific program areas:

1. *Sustainability*. How prepared is each RLA sustain this project after the grant funding ends?
2. *Recruitment*. How do RLAs recruit candidates who follow non-traditional pathways to principalship?
3. *Mentor selection and training*. What is each RLA doing to ensure good intern/mentor/school site matches? What ongoing training do mentor principals receive?
4. *Induction support*. What is each RLA doing to provide ongoing support, mentoring, and advice through job placement?
5. *Common Core State Standards*. What is each RLA doing to continue to address the Common Core?

Introduction

The importance of strong school leadership, particularly in low-achieving schools, long has been recognized by researchers and practitioners alike. As Crawford (1998) notes, “Almost all educational reform reports have come to the conclusion that the nation cannot attain excellence in education without effective school leadership.” Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) add, “Just as leaders can have a positive impact on achievement, they can also have a marginal, or worse, a negative impact on achievement.”

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

Purpose of the Regional Leadership Academies Evaluation

North Carolina’s RttT proposal also includes a commitment to independent evaluation of each initiative.¹ The roles of the RttT Evaluation Team are to (1) document the activities of the RttT initiatives; (2) provide timely, formative data, analyses, and recommendations to help the initiative teams improve their ongoing work; and (3) provide summative evaluation results toward the end of the grant period to determine whether the RttT initiatives met their goals and to inform future policy and program decisions to sustain, modify, or discontinue initiatives after the grant-funded period.

As part of this overall evaluation effort, over the next three years, the Evaluation Team will document RLA activities and collect data about participation in, satisfaction with, and the impact of RLA activities through observations, surveys, focus groups, and interviews with RLA participants and facilitators, as well as analysis of longitudinal education data on students, teachers, leaders, and schools. The study will provide detailed information about the implementation and impact of the RLAs. in order to determine if the initiative as implemented has had the intended outcomes on school leader practice, their schools’ culture/climate of achievement, and, potentially, teacher and student performance.

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

Research Question 1: Do RLAs effectively (a) recruit and (b) train, relative to the alternatives?

¹ The evaluation is being conducted by the Consortium for Educational Research and Evaluation–North Carolina (CERE–NC), a partnership of the SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, the Carolina Institute of Public Policy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University.

Research Question 2: What impact does each RLA's selection criteria have on program effectiveness?

Research Question 3: Do RLA graduates find placements in targeted schools/districts?

North Carolina's RLAs will be supported for four years by RttT funding, but there is no guarantee of funding beyond the grant period. Thus, in addition to these questions, the evaluation of the RLAs includes a fourth question:

Research Question 4: Are RLAs cost-effective relative to the alternatives?

Purpose of this Report and Methodological Approach

The purpose of this first activity report is to start to address the first three evaluation questions by describing the program components of each RLA in detail.² The report begins with an overview of each of the three RLAs (including information about partners, outcomes, and timelines), followed by a description of the methodology and procedures the Evaluation Team used to determine each RLA's fidelity of implementation to the aspects outlined in the original Request for Proposals (Appendix A).³ Based on reviews of the literature on leading transformational change and principal training programs, the Team selected qualitative methods as the primary methods of analysis.

To determine the extent to which each RLA meets or exceeds expectations based on their initial design proposal (i.e., the extent to which the enacted program matches the espoused theory), the report then investigates each RLA's fidelity to implementation elements. Finally, the report outlines a plan for the ongoing evaluation, as well as the next steps required to enact that plan.

North Carolina's Regional Leadership Academies

The policy objective of the RLA initiative is to increase the number of principals qualified to lead transformational change in low-performing schools in both rural and urban areas. NC RttT funds support three RLA programs serving three regions of North Carolina. One RLA (Northeast Leadership Academy, or NELA) was established one year before RttT funding was available, and two others (Piedmont Triad Leadership Academy [PTLA] and Sandhills Leadership Academy [SLA]) were created following a selection process that included proposal submission to a selection committee composed of North Carolina educational leaders.

² This report was preceded by another RttT evaluation report, *Regional Leadership Academies Cost Effectiveness Framework*, which outlined the plan for addressing the fourth evaluation question (<http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/rttt/reports/2012/rla-report.pdf>).

³ The RFP was designed jointly by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) and the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation (ZSR). The RLAs are supported by RttT funds. It is important to note that the development of one of the three RLAs—the Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA)—was not actually in response to this RFP. NELA began operations as a pilot program one year prior to North Carolina's receipt of RttT funds. As a result, there is an ongoing question as to whether and to what extent the RFP language pertains to NELA.

North Carolina Leadership Academies: Final 2012 Report

March 2013

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. The first RLA, NELA, began during the fall of 2010 in North Carolina's northeast region and involves a Master of School Administration (MSA) program designed by North Carolina State University (NCSU) to serve a cluster of low-achieving rural schools. The locations of the other two RttT RLAs were determined through an RFP process and were designed to prepare principals to lead low-performing and other high-need schools. 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, 2008).

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

Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA)

NELA is based at the NCSU College of Education and serves the following 14 partner LEAs: Bertie, Edgecombe, Franklin, Granville, Halifax, Hertford, Martin, Nash-Rocky Mount, Northampton, Roanoke Rapids, Vance, Warren, Washington, and Weldon City (total of 70,348 students served).

- 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 an 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 will receive continuing early career support through 2014. Cohort 1 internships were supported by NC RttT funds. Most (76%) Cohort 1 members are now employed as educational leaders in the surrounding LEAs (12 of the 21 as assistant principals, 1 as instructional coach, 1 as transformation coordinator, 2 in LEA-level positions, and 5 as classroom teachers, most of whom have taken on additional teacher-leader responsibilities).
- Cohort 2 members were selected and inducted in the fall of 2011. These 21 participants are completing their internship during the 2012–13 academic year. They will complete the NELA program in May 2013 and will have career support through 2014.
- Cohort 3 (21 participants) was selected and inducted in the fall of 2012 and will complete the program in May 2014.
- NELA participants make a three-year agreement to work in northeastern NC schools.
- NELA has been established by and embedded within the NCSU's College of Education's Friday Institute for Educational Innovation.

Piedmont Triad Leadership Academy (PTLA)

PTLA is based at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) and serves the

Piedmont Triad Education Consortium (PTEC) and the following four LEAs: Alamance/Burlington, Asheboro City, Guilford, and Winston-Salem/Forsyth (total of 150,616 students served).

- 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 will receive continued career support through 2014. Nearly all (95%) of the 21 participants are now employed as educational leaders in the area (16 of the 21 as assistant principals, 3 as learning team/curriculum facilitators, 1 as an LEA-wide instructional coach, and 1 as a classroom teacher).
- Cohort 2 (20 participants) was selected and inducted in the summer of 2012. They will complete the program in June 2013 and will receive continued career support through 2014.
- Cohort 3 will be selected in the summer of 2013 and will complete the program in June 2014.
- 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)

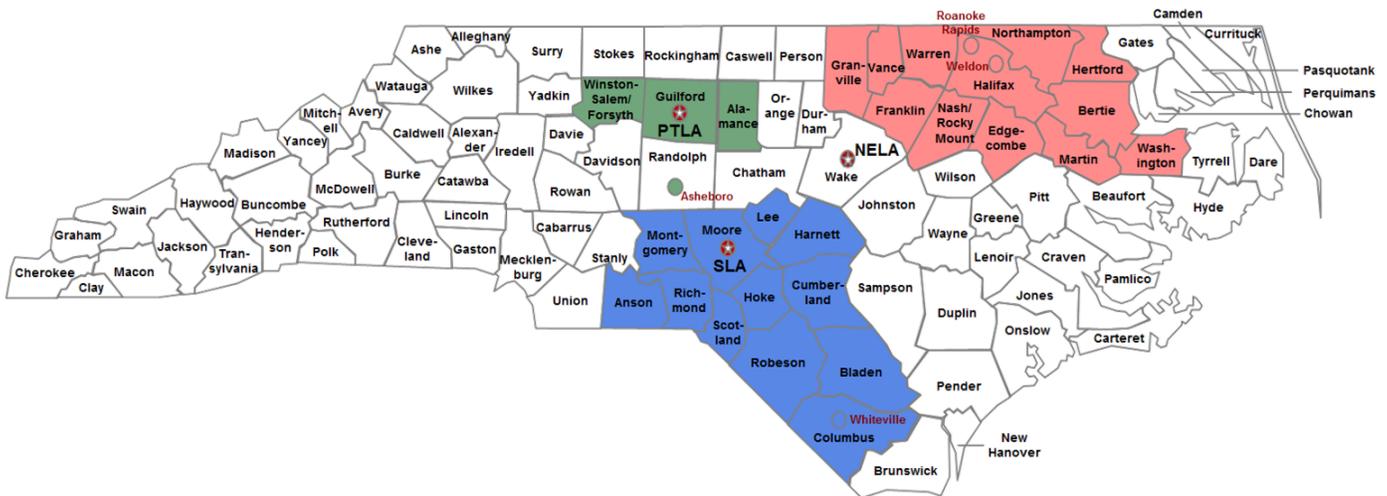
SLA was founded by the Sandhills Regional Education Consortium (SREC) and serves the following 13 LEAs: Anson, Bladen, Columbus, Cumberland, Harnett, Hoke, Lee, Montgomery, Moore, Richmond, Robeson, Scotland, and Whiteville City (total of 158,979 students served).

- 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 will receive continued career support through 2013. All 20 participants (100%) are now employed as educational leaders in the area (4 of the 20 as principals, 1 as director of grades 3–5, and 15 of the 20 as assistant principals).
- Cohort 2 was selected and inducted in the summer of 2012. They will complete the program in June 2013 and will receive continued career support through 2014.
- Cohort 3 will be selected in the summer of 2013 and will complete the program in June 2014. They will receive continued support through 2015.
- 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.

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 is a unique program with its own partnerships, program philosophy, curriculum, coursework, and fieldwork. Figure 1 shows the LEAs that are partnering with each RLA. Each RLA has followed its own path to implementation, and evaluators have been engaged in collecting and analyzing data related to that process since April 2011.

Figure 1. Regions Served by the North Carolina Regional Leadership Academies



Evaluation Procedures

Data

The evaluation is informed by a variety of data sources, including document reviews, observations, interviews, focus groups, surveys, accounting data, and administrative data. Data sources used for this report are detailed here.

Administrative Data

In an effort to describe the characteristics of RLA internship and job placements, the Evaluation Team 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

The Team designed a biannual participant survey (Appendix B) describing actions and traits that are specific, evidence-based recommendations for quickly and dramatically improving student achievement in high-need, low-performing schools. The purpose of this Qualtrics survey, administered each December and June, is to track RLA participants' level of exposure to and experience with these key elements via their Leadership Academy.⁴ Note that the survey is bound by (and participants are protected by) Institutional Review Board protocols regarding research on human subjects. As such, not all RLA participants remembered and/or chose to participate in the survey (52/62=84% return rate).

Observations

Evaluators observed each RLA's selection processes and candidate cohort experiences, including internships and support efforts. These activities helped evaluators understand the support and guidance provided to each RLA participant. Evaluators conducted a total of 57 formal RLA observations (for over 150 hours) and attended and/or presented at 19 formal RLA meetings between March 2011 and November 2012. The goal of the evaluation is 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.). Please see Appendix C for the Evaluators' Observation Log.

Interviews

Between March 2011 and November 2012, evaluators interacted with and interviewed the RLA Directors, Executive Coaches, and the majority of participants from each RLA ($n = 130+$) several times. 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 ($n = 75+$). 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 the participants' preparation to be leaders in highneed 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.

Method

Creswell's (2009) mixed-methods approach is 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.)

⁴ See RttT evaluation report, *Turning Around North Carolina's Lowest Achieving Schools (2006-2010)*, https://publicpolicy.unc.edu/research/TurnaroundSchoolReport_Dec5_Final.pdf.

March 2013

and observational data were analyzed using relevant qualitative methodologies and computer software when appropriate. These activities helped evaluators understand how candidates are recruited, selected, inducted, and trained. Please see Appendix D for the Scope of Work and Logic Map of this initiative.

Connections to Previous Evaluation Work

In an earlier study, the Evaluation Team explored the cost-effectiveness of the RLAs relative to extant comparable leadership development programs using Levin and McEwan's (2001) ingredients-based approach to cost-effectiveness analysis.⁵ This analysis provided a basis for value comparisons between RLAs and other models included in this report.

Findings

This section includes findings for each of the specific evaluation questions outlined earlier. Note that Research Question 1: *Do RLAs effectively recruit and train, relative to the alternatives?* has been separated into Research Question 1a: *Do RLAs effectively recruit, relative to the alternatives?* and Research Question 1b: *Do RLAs effectively train, relative to the alternatives?* In this way, the constructs of recruiting and training can be examined separately.

Research Question 1a: Do RLAs effectively recruit, relative to the alternatives?

Leveraging lessons learned from the New York City Leadership Academy (NYCLA), the New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS) programs, the University of Illinois at Chicago's Program in Urban Educational Leadership (with Steve Tozer), and similar programs across the county (including site visits, program observations, and collaborative insights), the RLAs have each engaged in careful recruitment and selection processes to ensure that program participants have the expertise, commitment, and dispositions to serve as transformational school leaders. As such, each RLA has worked together with its partner LEA leaders to identify and recruit individuals who, in their assessment, 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, each RLA employs a plan for the deliberate, aggressive recruitment of outstanding school leadership candidates. A team of LEA members, in conjunction with the RttT grant-funded Executive Directors and Coaches, 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.

Recruitment in Comparable Programs

NYCLA is one example of a well-funded, well-established alternative school leader preparation program that relies heavily on their prestigious Board of Directors, public relations division, and national consulting business to consistently share organizational information and engage in

⁵ See RttT evaluation report, *Regional Leadership Academies Cost Effectiveness Framework*, <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/rttt/reports/2012/rla-report.pdf>.

outreach. In addition to hosting numerous information sessions for potential candidates, NYCLA developed an online newsroom where interested parties can view their newsletter and read the latest updates, public relations articles, and news releases about the Leadership Academy, their alumni, and participants. Through these efforts, NYCLA actively and aggressively recruits potential participants from New York and from across the nation.

Institutions of higher education across the state of North Carolina are examples of more traditional school leader preparation programs. Typical recruitment efforts for local colleges and universities consist of informational websites, brochures, and word-of-mouth testimonials from recent attendees and graduates. Occasionally, when a new MSA program is designed and/or adopted, there are some public announcements, but, for the most part, applicants to these programs self-identify and are passively admitted.

RLA Recruitment

By contrast, the process of identifying outstanding candidates for each of the RLAs benefited from initial publicity (e.g., RttT announcements, newspaper accounts, and various public relations press releases throughout the year). Likewise, LEA and school-based administrators approached potential candidates they considered to be promising leaders and encouraged them to submit interest materials (i.e., the “tapping” process in LEAs, in which people are encouraged to apply based on their performance). Articles online and in print continue to help spread the news regarding each program. In addition, each RLA instituted its own program-specific methods of recruitment (see below) to support their intentional recruitment of a different type of educator for school leadership (i.e., experienced teachers with strong teaching and leadership skills who are committed to educational change). As a result of all of these exposures and efforts, a large number of people expressed interest and completed the application process over the past two years (124 participants selected from a total of 656 applications yields an overall acceptance of 19%).

For example, NELA’s Executive Directors held two-hour information sessions in Rocky Mount in January for potential cohort members. They made local, state, and national presentations, provided timely information for numerous local newspaper articles, and encouraged pertinent postings to LEA websites. NELA also designed and continues to monitor a very thorough and well-developed website, where “NELA in the News” is highlighted, along with NELA’s purpose and goals (vision and mission), program components, main features, academy resources, and an abundance of digital storytelling clips by participants.⁶ Likewise, NELA is proactive in recruiting potential candidates from Teach For America.

As one NELA Executive Director stated:

We work very closely with the Teach For America Alumni Director to help identify and recruit TFA alumni to NELA. The TFA alumni (with the exception of one individual who was recommended by the State Board) had to also be recommended by their

⁶ <http://go.ncsu.edu/nela>

March 2013

superintendent.⁷ This purposeful identification of TFA alumni who had already made a commitment to stay in education after their TFA commitment, yielded a high number of TFA alumni in the cohort. (NELA Executive Director)

NELA's Executive Directors also took the lead for the RLAs by submitting three different proposals for interactive presentations at national conferences. In November 2011, all three of North Carolina's RLAs presented at the University Council for Educational Administration's (UCEA's) annual convention in Pittsburgh. Likewise, in November 2012, the Executive Directors and a few Cohort 1 graduates and/or Coaches from each RLA took part in a critical dialogue entitled *Just Getting Started: Lessons from Race to the Top Funded School Leaders* at UCEA's annual convention in Denver (Appendix E). And in April 2013, the RLAs are hoping to present a paper, entitled *How Race to the Top Funds Are Helping to Prepare Tomorrow's Leaders Today*, at AERA's annual meeting in San Francisco. NELA's Executive Directors also took the lead in organizing the first combined RLA Learning Exchange conference in November 2012 (held at the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University). The purpose of the conference was to provide a time and space for all three RLAs (participants and coordinators alike) to share learning experiences and design elements that will lead to improving subsequent cohorts and provide a statewide network of support for RLA graduates.

Similarly, PTLA implemented a website to spark interest, provide basic information, and publicize anticipated participant compensation, benefits, and incentives.⁸ PTLA also distributed LEA email blasts and posted LEA website notices and advertisements in all four partnering LEAs. They offered LEA-based interest sessions, facilitated by PTLA Advisory Group representatives, which were open to all, including those who work outside of the LEAs and outside education. To recruit for Cohort 2, PTLA Leadership Team members and respective PLTA Cohort 1 interns attended and participated in all four LEA information sessions held between October 2011 and January 2012. In addition to these, the PTLA Executive Director facilitated external development and public relations efforts throughout the year by contacting LEA relations offices to help promote PTLA. She worked with the media and UNCG on stories, emailed updates to key informants, and strategically worked on some Board of Education presentations, around which media often congregate (Appendix F). For example, on June 12, 2012, the Guilford County PTLA Cohort 1 members were recognized by their Board of Education, and the new Cohort 2 members were welcomed. It aired on the LEA's Cable 2 station. Other opportunities that were created include a Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools videotaping, a presentation by the Executive Director and four interns to the 14 superintendents in the Piedmont Triad Education Consortium (PTEC), a presentation at the North Carolina ASCD Conference in February 2012, and national presentations at the UCEA conference in Pittsburgh in November 2011 and in Denver in November 2012. PTLA is currently working on a brochure and creating a new video.

The feedback from the PTLA Executive Director was the following:

⁷ Because it was the pilot RLA program, and as noted above, NELA actually started before North Carolina was awarded RtT funding. As such, NELA Cohort 1 members were not recruited by NELA but had to be recommended by their superintendents instead.

⁸ <http://www.ptla-nc.org/index.html>

I am also excited to share that we will be presenting at the National ASCD Conference in March 2012 (Chicago) on the “PTLA Way.” We will be taking all of our Cohort 2 members along with some of our Cohort 1 graduates who are now practicing administrators. Our presentation team will include Dr. Lillie Cox, Alamance-Burlington Schools Superintendent, NC Principal of the Year Principal Patrice Faison (of Page High School and former principal of Oak Hill Elementary last year), Dr. Craig Peck, UNCG professor, and me (PTLA Executive Director). Each of us will share our story of how we are collaboratively preparing future principals of high-needs schools through our RttT grant funding in North Carolina and district partnerships. Our cohort members will also participate in the second half of the presentation by facilitating small groups where they will share their principal intern story. We are very hopeful that our work will draw more national interest to North Carolina! (PTLA Executive Director)

SLA likewise recruited potential candidates via Advisory Committee meetings, superintendent meetings, information on the SLA website,⁹ and a brochure distributed to all LEA personnel in the 13 partnering LEAs. Communication with LEA superintendents is strong. The Executive Director attends all SREC superintendents’ meetings to provide an update on SLA progress, and superintendents participate in the SLA intern’s mid-year and end-of-year conferences. SLA interns promoted their RLA in their respective LEAs, and each make Board of Education presentations throughout the year to shed more attention on SLA. A video is currently under development for use in Board of Education meetings and other presentations, highlighting the work of SLA interns on the job this year. In addition to this, several press releases announced the application process and cohort members selected, while several other articles in the NCCAT newsletter and local newspapers described SLA plans, activities, and accomplishments. In her presentation to the local school board, one SLA participant from Cohort 1 explained:

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 participant)

Assessment of Recruitment Efforts

Overall, the recruitment efforts for each RLA are to be commended. Advertisement has been good, and the RLAs have yielded a fairly high number of applicants (whether of sufficient high quality and quantity to fill necessary slots is yet to be determined). Incentives for participants include tuition toward a Master’s degree or certificate in School Administration, release time to participate, hiring preference with the participating LEAs, travel costs for site visits, early career support, and program materials. According to one participant:

The fact that they are paying for my schooling and I can still get my salary made it more affordable for me to do. It would have been more difficult for me to pursue administration without this program. (PTLA participant)

Having said that, there is a question as to whether individuals with leadership experience in other contexts (i.e., besides education and/or beyond the partnering LEAs) are actively recruited, and,

⁹ <http://www.SandhillsLeadershipAcademy.com>

March 2013

if so, then how, when, and where? In other words, how broad, far-reaching, and expansive the recruitment efforts of each RLA should or could be remains a question.

For example, consistent with the model outlined in their RFP, SLA stated that they “will recruit a diverse and talented group of at least 20 and as many as 25 teachers during each of the next three years, who are currently employed in participating LEAs and aspire to become school principals ... Cultivating leadership among teachers currently employed in the region represents an attempt to nurture and develop ‘home grown’ school administrators who are committed to their communities and agree to serve as a building-level administrator in the region for a minimum of four years after completing the SLA.” It is clear from the evaluation that this has actually happened. In comparison, PTLA stated in its RFP that “targeted recruitment of candidates from demographically underrepresented populations will help ensure the program is representative of the state’s diversity.” It is clear from the reported demographic figures in Table 2 (next section) that this has also happened. PTLA’s RFP indicated further that “the program ‘may’ also serve exceptional candidates who follow non-traditional pathways to the principalship. Such candidates will be identified by working collaboratively with Leadership Greensboro and similar organizations in other partner LEA communities, to identify emerging local leaders from a variety of areas and encouraging them to apply for the PTLA.” It is unclear whether and to what extent this has actually happened yet. In response, PTLA’s Executive Director offered the following clarification:

PTLA and its district partners have thus far found its experienced educator candidate pool (with over 165 applying each year) to be exceptionally talented, diverse, and committed to leading high-need schools. Therefore, we have seen no reason thus far to conduct targeted recruitment for candidates drawn from other non-educational settings.

Responses on the biannual survey indicate that the majority of Cohort 1 members left a position in education (most as classroom teachers) to become RLA participants. Further evaluation will explore these recruiting issues.

Research Question 2: What impact does each RLA’s selection criteria have on program effectiveness?

Impact is difficult to assess at this early stage of the initiative, and a more complete response to this research question may not be possible until more extensive measures of program effectiveness are available (e.g., after a critical mass of cohort members have completely transitioned from their programs and into leadership positions in their schools). What can be assessed at this point, however, are the degree to which the programs have been selective, and the mechanisms through which that selectivity occurs.

Selectivity

The recruitment and selection process of each RLA yielded fairly low and competitive acceptance rates (Table 1). These rates are comparable to nationally recognized programs such as NYCLA and NLNS. They are also much lower than traditional MSA programs in North Carolina, some of which yield 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) and an

acceptance rate of 72% in 2012 (56 recipients from 78 applicants). In fairness to 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.

Table 1. Number of Candidates who Applied Versus Number of Participants who were Accepted

RLA	2011–12 Cohort 1 Acceptance Rate	2012–13 Cohort 2 Acceptance Rate
NELA	24/38 = 63%*	21/41 = 51%*
PTLA	21/173 = 12%	20/169 = 12%
SLA	20/110 = 18%	21/125 = 17%

* For NELA’s Cohort 1, 38 individuals were recommended by their superintendents. Twenty-four were admitted and 21 graduated. NELA dismissed three of the participants from the program. From a quality assurance perspective, they were not performing at an acceptable level. NELA’s Cohort 2 went through the multi-tier selection process. Even at that, NELA has a significantly higher acceptance rate than PTLA and SLA. With such a smaller initial candidate pool, two questions surface: 1) Is NELA able to identify enough high-quality candidates? and 2) What can/is being done to increase the number of candidates who apply to NELA?

NYCLA’s written application requires a description of the candidate’s education and professional experience, essays, and the submission of professional recommendations. Admissions criteria require a master’s degree with a minimum 3.0 GPA and a minimum of five years of work experience, with at least three years in a paid position as a K–12 teacher. After reviewing the online applications, NYCLA invited candidates who advanced to the next phase of the selection process to participate in both group and individual interviews that include roleplaying exercises, a review of past educational and professional experiences, and submission of writing samples. To be selected, candidates must meet the following criteria: 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; and professional integrity.

RLA Selection Processes

Likewise, 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). Of the three, NELA’s is the most university-centered. This makes sense since participants are applying for and will receive an MSA degree from NCSU. (Note that NELA’s Cohort 1 participants were actually chosen by the superintendents in the partnering LEAs before Race to the Top funding.) The selection processes for PTLA and SLA are more decentralized (i.e., more decisions are made at the LEA level). Each RLA has made modifications based on experiences with Cohort 1. For example, the Advisory Committee of SLA has tweaked their procedures in an attempt to bring more uniformity to the process. 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 an applicant’s 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

March 2013

and universities (not all, as there are exceptions across the nation) only require standard paperwork (e.g., criminal background check, resume, transcripts, letters of recommendation, GRE/MAT scores, 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).

NELA process. In stark contrast to these 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 roleplay 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 (Appendix G) 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.

March 2013

Here is one powerful testimonial from a PTLA Cohort 1 Principal Mentor regarding PTLA's selection, induction, and mentoring processes:

PTLA has done a fine job selecting top-notch aspiring leaders in surrounding school districts. I have been very fortunate to mentor [candidate], principal intern from the first cohort of the PTLA program. The work ethic, educational values, heart and compassion behind every thought process [candidate] brings to the table is irreplaceable. The drive she has motivates me to expose her to every experience possible as a school leader. As a mentor/mentee team, we reflect individually and collectively often on day to day practices. PTLA advisors are very visible in the schools, extremely responsive to the needs of the intern and overall success of the program. Most importantly, the PTLA advisors are not far removed from the principal's seat and can provide real-life practical coaching to the intern. The PTLA program is designed in such a way that interns get a true depiction of school leadership while they are learning in the university classroom setting. This program is to be commended for their work in molding school leaders of tomorrow. I am honored to be a part of the development of PTLA and its partnership with UNCG.

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). See Appendix H for SLA's Local District Selection Processes for Cohort 1. 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 (Appendix I). 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:

- Activity 1: Review and Response to a Videotaped Lesson
- Activity 2: Participation in a Group Scenario
- Activity 3: Written Response to a School-Related Question
- Activity 4: Presentation on Closing the Achievement Gap
- 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 Consortium for Educational Research and Evaluation—North Carolina

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.

Results of the Selection Process

Overall, the RLA selection process for Cohort 1 ($n = 62$) yielded a fairly diverse group of participants. Two-thirds (68%) are female, half (50%) are Caucasian, two-fifths (42%) are African-American, half (54%) possess a master’s degree already (seven in education, five in reading, four in school administration, four in special education, and the rest in a range of subjects from Curriculum and Instruction to counseling), and one-third (32%) were elementary education majors during their undergraduate studies, while one-sixth (15%) were English majors. Generally speaking, NELA participants are slightly younger (33 years old compared to the RLA Cohort 1 average of 37 years old), more likely to be female (76% compared to the RLA Cohort 1 average of 68%), and less likely to have master’s degrees (33% compared to the RLA Cohort 1 average of 58%). This is not surprising since NELA is a two-year principal preparation program leading to an MSA degree. More of the SLA participants are Caucasian (66% compared to the RLA Cohort 1 average of 50%), and more have advanced degrees (75% compared to the RLA Cohort 1 average of 58%). See Table 2 (following page) for descriptive statistics relating to Cohort 1.

Participant self-assessments and program staff assessments of selected cohort members reflected many of the selection criteria noted above:

I want to go back and to do what I’ve always known I was here to do, and that is to serve—serve students, serve the community, and serve teachers. (PTLA participant) I am just so glad that I got accepted. My whole career in education I’ve been working with high-needs schools, so this was an obvious next step for me. (PTLA participant) I felt confident in how well the schools I’ve been in have prepared me; I’ve learned so much. I was excited [to be selected]. It’s a great chance for me to build on what I’ve already learned and to grow in education. (PTLA participant)

For me, the passion bled through [during the selection process]. You can see that they are there for the right reason. They have a passion about them to be a change agent, and that’s what showed through for me. (PTLA Executive Coach)

Table 2. Demographic Data for RLA Cohort 1

Demographic Characteristic	All Cohort 1 Interns (52/62 = 84% response rate)	NELA (21/21 = 100% response rate)	PTLA (15/21 = 71% response rate)	SLA (16/20 = 80% response rate)
Age range	25–54	25–48	27–48	28–54
Age median	37	33	37	36
Male	32%	24%	33%	38%
Female	68%	76%	67%	63%
Black	42%	52%	50%	27%
White	50%	33%	43%	66%

Asian	3%	10%	0%	0%
American Indian	3%	0%	7%	7%
Other ethnicity	2%	5%	0%	0%
Master's degree	58% (29/52)	33% (7/21)	67% (10/15)	75% (12/16)

Note: Response rates are less than 100% because RLA participants were given the option not to participate in the survey, per IRB regulations.

Research Question 1b: 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 those 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*

□ *Cohorts and internships*

- Cohort-based experiences
 - Weekly, full-cohort, continued learning during the residency year
 - Full-time, year-long clinical residency experiences

□ *Curricula and seminars*

- An action-research, case-study curriculum focus
 - *Support systems (coaching, mentoring, and supervising)*
 - Multi-faceted support structures
 - Dynamic feedback and improvement loops
 - *Structures for evaluation and improvement*
 - *Job placement and induction support*

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

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 cohort models is provided by Davis et al. (2005), Dorn, Papalewis, and Brown (1995), Muth and Barnett (2001), and numerous other researchers.

Likewise, all three RLAs require a full-time, year-long, paid, clinical internship experience, under the dedicated support of a “carefully selected on-site principal mentor with extensive successful school leadership experience” (RFP, p. 3) 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.¹⁰ This practice is quite different from most traditional MSA programs across the state of North Carolina (and even nationwide),¹¹ in which most students complete part-time, hourly internships in addition to and on top of their regular, full-time, day job.

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

- Ongoing reflection, supported by an experienced and effective supervisor or mentor;
- Projects meaningfully related to the complex and integrated nature of principal work (rather than discrete tasks or activities not centered on improving instructional practice);
- 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). See Appendix J for a list of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 internship placement schools.

It is worth noting, however, that provision of a full-time internship component consistent across all placements was not made available to all Cohort 1 interns. First, two Cohort 1 interns (from the same LEA) were not actually full-time, due to other job obligations and responsibilities. Both of these Fellows initially had superintendent support for full release for the internship year, but when the superintendent was unable to find “suitable” replacements for the Fellows by the end of the first year (late summer, 2011), he rescinded their 100% release, instead agreeing to only a

¹⁰ Note that these quotation marks were added by the evaluator as a point of question.

¹¹ NC Principal Fellows are an exception to this generalization.

March 2013

60% release. The partnering LEA's inability and/or unwillingness to release these members to intern full-time may turn out to be an isolated event, but such precedent should be a concern. A second concern for all three RLAs is the consistency with which principal mentors and internship sites are initially identified and then actually matched with potential interns. Both of these issues will be discussed in greater detail later in this report.

The purpose 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” (NCDPI, 2010, p. 10). To learn how to do this, is it important that RLA participants spend time in such schools (so that they work within similar contexts, within similar expectations and constraints, and with similar populations of students, teachers, parents and community members)? This notion is debatable, as some advocates might argue that the mentor/principal match is more important than the internship/site match. In other words, the actual school placement (i.e., school that is struggling versus one that is achieving) might not be as critical as the leader with whom the intern works, watches, learns from, and eventually emulates. This idea is open for further discussion, especially as there is a lack of data to resolve the issue. In the meantime, descriptive statistics from Cohort 1's and Cohort 2's internship placement schools indicate that, for the most part, all three RLAs have been successful in getting most of their interns placed in high-need schools that are, generally speaking, in turnaround mode (i.e., positive change in performance composite scores over the past three year). On average, Cohort 1 interns were placed in schools where more than two-thirds (71%) of the students receive free or reduced-price lunch, and English I/Reading scores hover around 58%. Note, however, that Algebra I/Math scores hover just below the 70% mark in these schools. On average, Cohort 2 interns were placed in schools where a little less than two-thirds (63.4%) of the students receive free or reduced-price lunch, and English I/Reading scores hover around 61%. Again, Algebra I/Math scores hover around the 70% mark in these schools. Of particular note is the fact that PTLA placed 7 of 21 Cohort 1 interns in DST schools.

Looking back and charting demographic and test score data (summary statistics, Appendix K; raw statistics, Appendix L), most internship schools reveal a trend of good, steady, positive growth (albeit small, in many cases). Some schools attained phenomenal growth (e.g., 51.3% increase in English I/Reading scores in one school and 40.4% increase in Algebra I/Math scores in another), while others revealed little to no growth (e.g., less than 5% increase). Some schools revealed percentage gains of more than 10% to 15% in one subject but not in the other. A few of the schools at which RLA participants interned actually reported a three-year trend of negative growth (e.g., 12.2% decrease in English I/Reading scores in one school, and 21.0% decrease in Algebra I/Math scores in another). This is a concern. The “assumption” is that an “experienced, successful” leader and an “effective, accomplished” mentor principal is leading by example, transforming status quo practices, and getting results (i.e., making a transition to new ways of providing instruction and learning opportunities for students). It begs another question: Is that school and that school leader really the best place and mentor for that intern at that time? Would a different placement be a better match? One suggestion from the evaluation is for the Executive Directors of each RLA to review, disaggregate, and analyze similar school data before and during the “intern/mentor/placement site” process.

For the most part, the placements seem logical, but a few are questionable, particularly when the mentor principal has been at a negative growth school for the past three years. (Note that the

churn in principal placement often means that a number of these low-performing schools actually have relatively new, stronger school leaders who were recently moved there to turn the school around.) Potential questions moving forward include: (1) Are interns mentored by principals confident of their own abilities to demonstrate effective practices for improving teaching and learning? (2) Do current mentor selection, training, and evaluation practices ensure that aspiring principals receive high-quality mentoring? (3) Are mentors providing interns the experiences to master the leadership competencies essential for improving schools and raising student achievement? (4) Are mentors provided with the support necessary to be effective? (5) Do mentors have significant influence in decisions about interns' successful completion of a preparation program and issuance of the school administrator license?

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 actionlearning 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.

RLA interns help direct the learning in each program by engaging openly and authentically in RLA activities, group discussions, role plays, scenarios, field experiences, etc. Interns are expected to work equitably with each other, to submit all artifacts and assignments by the deadlines, to be self-motivated investors in their own learning and the learning of their colleagues, to contribute to the learning of the organization/school/RLA, and to provide useful, timely, honest feedback to each other, the instructors, and the program as a whole. RLA interns are expected to develop the requisite competencies and dispositions, by seeking help, support, and guidance when they or the RLA faculty do not believe they are meeting the standards. They are also expected to develop a level of comfort with the normal and expected discomfort/anxiety experienced with each RLA's purposefully evolving and fluid pedagogy/program. RLA interns

March 2013

are to act professionally at all times in their actions, attire, and correspondences, and in their selfrepresentation in electronic media (e.g., Facebook, Ning, etc.).

RLA interns are expected to prepare for meetings with their mentor principal and their Executive Coach so that they make good use of the time and focus on learning goals, objectives, and deficiencies. RLA interns are expected to be open to feedback and avoid defensiveness in response to negative feedback. They should be deeply self-reflective, willing to experiment with new and unfamiliar approaches or ways of seeing, and regularly evaluate the mentoring relationship openly with the mentor or coach. 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. Right now, our school/district is busy with the Common Core, which will be fully implemented in our school system next year. (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)

Even though each RLA conducts mentor principal orientation sessions and ongoing trainings, as noted earlier, exactly how principal mentors are identified and chosen remains a question and a concern. For example, NELA’s Executive Directors create complex, color-coded spreadsheets of information on every school and principal in their partnering LEAs (including Teacher Working Conditions Survey results, school report card data, and word of mouth from superintendents, NCDPI personnel, and others with experience in the LEAs). They then carefully match interns with prospective sites. But, even at that, leadership turnover in these high-need schools and LEAs is so frequent that it makes careful planning difficult, even before taking the local politics at play into consideration.

According to PTLA’s Executive Director, “Each district looks at their high-need schools and chooses strong principals who will give the extra attention and time to the interns.” To be more specific, ABSS first looks at the strengths and weaknesses of both the PTLA participants and mentors and then looks at the needs of the schools. ABSS purposely tries to place interns with

high at-risk populations. In WSFCS, assistant superintendents evaluate their principals and review their high-need schools. After deciding which principals at these schools they deem most effective, PTLA interns are then matched according to “best fit” with possible mentors. In GCS, regional superintendents give a list of high-need schools and principals to the PTLA Advisory Team representatives. Interns are then matched with mentors based on the group’s knowledge and discussion.

SLA’s partnering LEA superintendents match their respective interns with what are supposed to be “strong, data-driven principals.” How that criteria is defined and operationalized, and who decides, is still ambiguous. As such, SLA often negotiates a fine line between centralized control at the SLA level and decentralized control at the LEA level (i.e., Southern Regional Education Consortium). Further evaluation will explore these processes. In the meantime, here are a few quotes from concerned RLA participants:

I wish I was able to be at my internship site full-time like the rest of my cohort members. I’m not getting the same experience. It’s hard trying to juggle what seems like two fulltime jobs. (NELA participant)

Due to changes within our district, I do not feel that I received the support I needed from the district. (NELA participant)

I had experience with establishing a culture of high expectation and a sense of urgency at the academy but in terms of the internship I would have liked more time on this. A clear vision from the administrative staff seemed vague to students and staff. (PTLA participant)

My internship has been a little frustrating mainly because in SLA we are learning so much about how to effect change, how to focus on student learning, you know, how to build internal capacity and a culture of high expectations but my [mentor] principal is not truly open to listening or doing things differently. He is not open to suggestions or my initiative. It’s been frustrating ... my Coach is helping me. (SLA participant)

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, 2009). A leadership preparation curriculum (whether traditional MSA programs or alternative RLAs) combines both coursework and field experience, and thus the program’s curriculum is threaded through both (Clark & Clark, 1996; Murphy, 2006; Taylor, Cordeiro, & Chrispeels, 2009; Young, Crow, Ogawa, & Murphy, 2009).

Similar to NYCLA and NLNS, all three of North Carolina’s RLAs offer a rigorous, actionresearch, 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 the NC Standards for School Executives and are tied to educational leadership literature and research. The curriculum and seminars for each RLA are also

March 2013

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. For example, Pat Ashley and her team members have presented to each RLA, and all RLA participants have learned about the Nine Best Practices and the Framework for Action. 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.” These data-based curricular offerings, According to UCEA (2012), each data-based curricular offering 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, and language);
- Require collaboration and interdependence;
- Develop confidence in leadership;
- Place both the professor and student in a learning situation;
- Empower learners and give them responsibility for their own learning; □ Shift perspective from the classroom to the school, LEA, or state level; and □ Have a reflective component.

During various stages in the program, RLA interns are placed in pre-arranged project teams. The composition of the teams maximizes the diversity of experiences, opinions, perspectives, personality types, and learning styles within a group. Purposeful pressure is placed on the teams as a mechanism to understand group dynamics, develop interpersonal skills, and learn interdependency. An important component for each RLA intern is the development of the skills necessary to work with individuals the leader did not choose and thus prepare 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 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 graduates indicated an increase in their internal beliefs (Table 3, following page).

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. 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? Do higher or lower starting scores reveal anything about the programs?

Table 3. Self-Rating (December 2011 versus June 2012) on School Turnaround Leadership Traits

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

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.

NELA’s curriculum and seminars. NELA’s program courses and experiences are customized to the specific context—in their case, rural, low-performing, high-poverty schools and communities emphasizing turnaround principles. Every NELA course contains an associated leadership application block, a developmental activity, and learning exchanges (in and out of state—visiting high-performing schools—especially since very few “turnaround schools” actually exist in the northeast region). NELA is aligned with constructivism and adult learning theory, tapping the wealth of adult experience and knowledge that when aligned with new knowledge, can foster deeper learning in adults (Mezirow, 1997). Participants experience some frustration and discomfort as they are placed into challenging situations to apply their new learning (hence the triad of support—the instructor/facilitator, Executive Coach, and mentor principal). To maximize learning, all parties must be willing to expose what they do not know, while building on what they do (learning is public); they must embrace failure and mistakes as opportunities for growth and learning; and they must actively invest in their own learning, the learning of others, and the

March 2013

learning of the organization as a whole. Within all of this, technology integration is a prominent feature. NELA Fellows receive an Apple computer and video equipment. Video cameras are used to record NELA activities and role plays for self-reflection and feedback and to create digital stories. Video is also used in various ways for coaching and feedback during the internship year.¹²

NELA's seven core learning experiences (courses linked to embedded field activities/action research projects) are designed to address the NC Standards for School Executives and include: Teacher Empowerment and Leadership, Human Resource Management, School Law for Administrators, Resource Support and Sustainability, School and Community Engagement, Administrative Leadership in Professional Learning Communities, Leading and Transforming School Culture, Contexts and Challenges of School Improvement, and a culminating Capstone Internship Experience consisting of a summative 360-degree assessment of previously completed course artifacts, coupled with coaching and mentoring feedback to create an individualized plan to remediate any remaining leadership deficiencies during the internship.¹³

NELA uses problem-based, action research and appreciative inquiry learning so that assignments are authentic and focused on skills leaders actually need. NELA incorporates situated learning and field-based experiences, data collection, field observation, field interviews, field surveys, and shadowing into every course through the required field experiences as well as the required artifact completion. Aspiring leaders thus have multiple experiences in each of the school levels and in community-based organizations. The NELA model is designed to develop school leaders who nurture communities of learning and inquiry in their schools. The goal is for program graduates to become highly trained change agents, who together form a critical mass that presents a coherent vision of LEA goals for improving student performance and engaging communitywide support. By incorporating data-based decision-making and best practices for school improvement efforts, NELA-trained school leaders understand how to create school environments conducive to driving student achievement in the 21st century. Feedback includes the following:

My mentor principal provides opportunities for me to engage in the supervision of datadriven instruction. (NELA participant)

We always use data in every decision we make. Before I was able to identify my Problem of Practice, I analyzed the school's EOG results for 10 years and I saw the trend. This really helped me start meaningful conversations with teachers. (NELA participant)

Although this is an area that remains a work in progress for many schools, I am witnessing a sincere effort by the administrative team to have those "crucial conversations" about classroom data. We discuss in PLCs students' performance and atrisk groups. (NELA participant)

I've worked with the leadership team and grade-level teams to design intervention strategies. (NELA participant)

¹² See <https://go.ncsu.edu/nela> for an overview of NELA's program.

¹³ See NELA Reading List and Resources at <https://ncsunela.wikispaces.com/Resources> and the individual web pages for each Fellow that constitute his/her e-portfolio.

My mentor principal and I wrote and were awarded a grant to employ a Reading Specialist at our school. We have numerous conversations of what strategies to use for our struggling students. (NELA participant)

In Year 1, NELA Cohort 1 participants were released from teaching for full-day learning experiences (on Tuesdays and occasional Saturdays during the fall semester, and each Tuesday and one or two Saturdays each month during the spring semester). Day-long sessions were usually held at the Gateway Technology Center in Rocky Mount; or, when extra space was needed for special events, at the Friday Institute in Raleigh; or, for learning exchanges, at school sites throughout the Northeast. NELA Directors worked with each school to match a retired master teacher as a dedicated substitute teacher. Participants experienced facilitative, experiential teaching, delved into case studies, role played authentic scenarios in “Operation NELA,” and engaged in 21st-century learning through scenarios in “SchoolNext” and through the use of flip cameras and digital stories for reflective practice (e.g., Self-as-Leader). Each participant has an Individualized Leader Development plan (a leadership learning IEP). Major assignments are designed to “give back” or “pay it forward” to the participating LEAs in the form of a useful resource. Every other Tuesday, participants were in the field completing authentic, fully embedded assignments. Experiences took place in the daily flow and life of a school that is in session. Instructional rotations and developmental projects at various levels of schooling helped participants examine developmentally appropriate teaching and learning (pre-K/early elementary, upper elementary, middle school, high school, career/college, and beyond). Feedback included the following:

YES! We are purposeful and consistent with our goals. We were informed about the areas we need to work on and are constantly reminded by the principal ... thus, our professional development is centered on those areas (i.e., disadvantaged groups and improving our reading scores). (NELA participant)

We are constantly reflecting on our PD opportunities in class and “Pay It Forward” activities to staff at internship sites and with our Cohort members. (NELA participant)

In Year 2, during the day-long sessions (on assigned Tuesdays and occasional Saturdays), NELA participants were engaged in structured discussions on core concepts, reflections on practice, situational leadership skills (through role plays of challenging situations, case studies, etc.), instructional leadership, and turnaround concepts. On alternating Tuesdays, participants went on school site visits to put their learning to work (e.g., productive PLCs, successful ELL programs). NELA emphasizes the practice of evaluating teaching and learning. The curriculum is designed to address the NC Standards for School Executives, as well as the participants’ standards-based Individual Leadership Development Plans that are assessed each semester. The actual content includes application of theory, turnaround concepts, rural school context, poverty, whole child, policy, two-tiered reflection, critical friends, systems thinking, inquiry, and action:¹⁴

¹⁴ As a side note, NELA embraces and has had limited success with a “Replenishing the Pipeline” feature, whereby the development of a succession plan for leadership is proactive. For example, as excellent teachers are pulled from the classroom to become leaders, the teaching corps is replenished by providing stipends to student teachers in participating schools—providing an opportunity to replenish the teaching vacancy during the internship year and potentially beyond.

March 2013

During my internship, my mentor principal involved me in the process of coordinating relevant curriculum and assigning students and teachers strategically to meet the goals of our School Improvement Plan. (NELA participant)

I have led PLCs with teachers in my internship site to analyze formative assessments and test data; there is a data “boot camp” planned for this semester. (NELA participant)

I am working with my mentor principal to move our school and our teachers from PLC in name to PLC in action. (NELA participant)

NELA Directors firmly espouse the theory that “seeing is believing and learning.” As such, cohorts attend and participate in local, state, and national conferences, engage in professional organizations, and visit high-performing, “getting it done” schools in and out of state that serve students of poverty in rural areas. Most travel is fully funded, but individuals do apply for grant funds to attend professional development conferences to help them meet designated learning standards described on their Individualized Leader Development Plans. All NELA participants are members of the North Carolina Association of School Administrators, and they attended the NCASA annual conference. Multiple Fellows attended the ASCD conference, while others attended various Community Learning Exchanges sponsored by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. During this past year, NELA participants participated in a federal policy institute in Washington DC at the Institute for Educational Leadership and attended the Digital Storytelling Workshop and School Data Conference. They have also learned leadership lessons from sessions with distinguished guests, including Governor Beverly Perdue, State Board of Education Chairman; Dr. William Harrison, State Superintendent of Schools; Dr. June Atkinson, the Director of District and School Transformation at NCDPI; Dr. Pat Ashley; and many others. As one NELA participant stated, “This has been a topic of discussion throughout our classroom instruction. We have visited high-performing schools and talked with staff and students where high academic expectations are essential to the success of the school.”

NELA provides “just in time” specialized training from local and national experts on a variety of relevant content areas and applicable topics. Additionally, trainings are available based on individual needs from the participants’ assessments. Specialized training topics to date include: Facilitative Leadership®, social justice, poverty, grant writing, Common Core, conflict resolution and critical conversations, self as leader, data boot camp, special education, positive behavior supports, teacher evaluation, core content, creativity and innovation, literacy, science, numeracy, action research, Understanding by Design, ASSISTments, local and federal educational policy, and others. From NCDPI, the NELA participants learned about early childhood education, exceptional children, AG, teacher evaluation, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Response to Intervention (RTI), and the NC data systems and assessments. They also learned about the art of storytelling, an appreciation of local history and wisdom (as opposed to deficit model), Llano Grande, and community asset mapping:

I attended several professional developments both in the academy and during my internship that dealt with strategies and techniques for improving instruction. Many of the strategies I learned, I was able to bring back to the teachers at the school for implementation. (NELA participant)

Through my Problem of Practice, I was able to work with third-grade teachers in datadriven instruction and professional learning communities, even though finding

adequate instructional time posed a problem. Through collaboration, we were able to implement effectively and demonstrate growth and student proficiency. (NELA participant)

As an organization at a land grant university, with its mission to engage in outreach to underserved areas, NELA created new and productive cross-agency collaborations. For example, NCDPI created customized professional development sessions specifically for NELA. NELA also worked with NCDPI's turnaround specialists and partnered with the North Carolina Principals and Assistant Principals Association (NCPAPA) to have NELA participants and their principal mentors go through a modified version of the Distinguished Leadership in Practice (DLP) program to strengthen the skills of existing leaders simultaneously with aspiring leaders and hopefully leverage even more strategic school improvements. NELA is also working to create linkages with other NCSU-funded projects in the region:

In my internship school, we deal with student discipline. We talk with students referred to the office by their teachers. At NELA, we had specialized training on Positive Behavior Intervention Support System. We also have OPERATION NELA, where we role play/talk about/discuss situations in schools involving students, teachers, etc. (NELA participant)

I have had both academy-based and internship-based experience in working in a safe, orderly, caring environment. Our classwork and activities have been based around school culture. I have also handled many discipline issues at my internship site using PBIS strategies. (NELA participant)

My theory of action focuses on creating a more conducive climate for student ownership and responsibility as it relates specifically to discipline. (NELA participant)

From top to bottom, everyone expects to establish a culture of high academic expectations. Mrs. H and the rest of the staff would meet regularly to talk about student testing data, identify proficient and non-proficient students, and help the non-proficient ones by implementing several strategies. (NELA participant)

The evaluation of the NELA participants is multi-faceted, including:

- Course-by-course evaluations;
- Intern self-assessment of state standards and competencies (end of each semester);
- Coaches' assessment of interns on state standards and competencies (three times during internship year);
- Mentor principal assessment of interns on state standards and competencies (two times during internship year); and
- Project Director's assessment of interns on state standards and competencies (end of each semester, including extended individual meetings to discuss with each Fellow their strengths and areas of needed growth).

Each intern has an electronic portfolio that provides documentation of each of these facets. Additionally, the portfolio contains evidences or artifacts for each standard, along with the interns' leadership development plans, weekly internship logs, monthly reports, and digital

March 2013

portfolios.¹⁵ It is important to note that, if NELA participants are not performing at the level expected, they can be (and three have been) released from the program. The same is true for PTLA and SLA. From a quality control perspective, this is a real strength. From a political/legal perspective, this exhausted an incredible amount of time and energy.

Over six to seven weeks in the summer, NELA participants engage in a “unique” intensive summer experience in a local community agency that surrounds the participant’s school. Placement is determined by individual participant interests and learning needs and involves grant writing and a stipend. Participants work with organizations that have a significant, positive impact in northeastern North Carolina. Through their internship experience, NELA members learn about the vision, mission, and daily operations of the organization; better understand how community organizations can work in conjunction with schools and other institutions to meet critical needs; and gain a deeper appreciation for the assets in the community that can be leveraged to support students. In addition, participants work with other leaders in organizations to design a plan for a community-based, school-affiliated initiative that addresses local needs, and then develop a viable grant proposal to support this initiative. No financial commitment from the organization is required. The NELA Community Internship was designed and delivered through a partnership between NCSU NELA, a NCSU 4H Extension Professor, and the Executive Director of the Rural School and Community Trust:¹⁶

I thoroughly enjoyed my first week of interning at the Cooperative Extension Office in Hertford County. They have so many resources and programs that I didn’t know existed. I will continue to utilize them for connecting the schools and community. I have also been placed on advisory boards for Communities in Schools and Turning the Tide on Poverty. These are two great programs that I hope will be sustainable. (NELA participant)

I had a blast at my internship this summer (with the Scotland Neck Recreation and Education Foundation). This is a summer feeding and recreation program for kids in the Scotland Neck area. I’m really missing being there every week. My two biggest accomplishments during my internship were creating a website so that the director, Mildred Moore, can better promote the center. The web address is <http://thesnerf.wordpress.com>. Second, I was writing and receiving a \$3,000 grant from the Halifax County Commissioners for recreation. I did create a digital story (titled “My SNERFy Internship Adventure”) with video footage and photos taken during my internship. This video highlights the happenings at the Scotland Neck Education and Recreation Foundation (SNERF) center at which I interned. (NELA participant)

I am working at the Union Mission of Roanoke Rapids. Just a few doors down the street is the System of Care (which I knew nothing about until this summer). Five NELA cohort members are working at System of Care. The Union Mission sponsored a Literacy Fair last Wednesday. Through my RRGSD school job, I was able to arrange meals for all the children who attended. I shared with the five System of Care friends about the literacy fair. They brought their children they serve. Each child decorated a bookshelf and got to take home at least 10 books. It was great for all of us to be together, working on a mutual project. This Sunday, our local paper printed an article about this Literacy Fair and how

¹⁵ These portfolios can be viewed at <http://go.ncsu.edu/nela>

¹⁶ <http://www.ruraledu.org>

all the organizations worked together to make it successful... To me, that's good stuff!
(NELA participant)

... continuous engagement with parents through school-sponsored events, working with community agencies to get them involved in our school and supporting our students, supporting community agencies that work with our students ... I've participated in school and community events throughout the year, including visiting many of the neighborhoods where our students live. (NELA participant)

NELA participants' second summer is spent in induction planning for their new leadership position and/or implementing a school improvement plan under the direction of NCSU faculty, Executive Coaches, and possibly in conjunction with LEA leaders and NCDPI personnel. During the planning summer, NELA participants work to analyze multiple sources of data in their schools in order to understand the current state and develop strategic plans for improvement. Participants work on school staffing, programs, and budgets in order to maximize the learning opportunities for students and staff. They also develop initial communication strategies with the entire school community:

I have been a member of the interview committee for applicants not only in the school level but also in the district level. (NELA participant)

There is a need for more hands-on learning in this area. It is difficult due to privacy issues surrounding personnel matters. (NELA participant)

I have been actively involved, engaged, and participating in selecting various staff members throughout this school year (i.e. 2nd grade replacement and remediation teachers). Each position is handled with care. My mentor takes every position seriously and seeks to find the "right" individual that will fit into the culture of the school. (NELA participant)

PTLA's curriculum and seminars. PTLA's blended school transformation curriculum of scenario-based classroom sessions, leadership skill building, and experiential learning engages principal interns in processes for professional and personal growth leading to overall school improvement and academic achievement for students in high-need schools. PTLA's year-long curriculum and seminars involve three and a half weeks of summer intensive sessions (in July) followed by 11 months (August through June) of full-time work and study—four days as an intern and one day in the classroom. Wednesday cohort seminar classes meet weekly at alternating school intern sites or at the UNCG Triad Center in Greensboro. The broad, underlying intent of PTLA's curriculum is to ensure that each program graduate:

1. Is a leader of learning in the school (all decisions and resources are aligned to the goal of improving student outcomes);
2. Develops the staff and promotes a culture of continuous, reflective professional learning;
3. Cultivates distributive leadership so that authority and accountability are linked;
4. Is a systems thinker and is able to frame problems and potential problems by being a reflective practitioner;
5. Is able to identify leverage points within the system to push change efforts that improve school outcomes;

6. Understands, reads, predicts, and prevents challenges to the school climate; and
7. Uses multiple forms of data to inform all decisions.

When initially designing its curriculum, PTLA surveyed 50 LEA-identified successful principals of high-need schools (60% return rate, with 30 of 50 surveys completed). PTLA asked these leaders five questions: (1) What are the recurring issues that a principal of a high-need school must address? (2) What are crisis situations that periodically confront a principal of a high-need school? (3) What are some challenges that face a principal who is new to a high-need school? (4) What knowledge, skills, and values are unique to being a successful principal of a high-need school? and (5) What are at least three things that principals of high-need schools MUST know but that are not taught in graduate school? After reviewing the responses from these 30 practitioners with real-world, day-to-day experience, PTLA then created (and continues to tweak) its curriculum.¹⁷

This is a real unique approach to thinking about how we prepare principals. This is a great opportunity to make a difference in our high-needs schools. Our investment in them and what they're going to give back to us is well worth it. (PTLA Executive Coach)

I think this is a step in the right direction in my journey. This is a passion for me because I love to see our students be better prepared for that next level ... I am passionate about the work because I can look at each student and see some of me in those students. (PTLA participant)

PTLA's daily, three-and-a-half week, summer intensive learning sessions start with an interesting and active day-long ropes course as an opportunity for PTLA participants to grow accustomed to one another and to build a unified bond. The mission of this initial Team QUEST experience is "to provide clients with exemplary experiences that empower people towards positive change through *transferable skills* and *sustainable processes* that improve communication, performance, and relationships." According to PTLA's Executive Director, the ropes course is an excellent initiating activity that fosters team building, decision making, and problem solving skills. Other summer intensive seminars are focused on leadership for teaching and learning and providing participants a rapid, deep immersion into the demands of the principalship. Primary learning themes for the summer include: principal job expectations and standards; instructional leadership; the social, cultural, and legal context of high-need schools; and personal leadership development. During the summer and throughout the semester seminar sessions, over 100 guest practitioner panelists presented; among the presenters were mentor principals, assistant principals, and LEA personnel including partner superintendents. For example, Pat Ashley and NCDPI's DST team led four sessions of teaching on the Nine Best Practices/Framework for Action model. Building and facilitating effective professional learning communities (PLCs) was a key component explored. As one PTLA participant reported:

PTLA is a great opportunity that provides us a lot of leadership training, especially for high needs schools. I think that's the target. For me personally, that's my passion ... working with those high-needs students and helping them fulfill their academic potential to the max. And, the opportunity to get that training to lead high-needs schools to success was definitely a hope for me. (PTLA participant)

¹⁷ <http://www.ptla-nc.org/>

In August, PTLA participants begin their internships and attend weekly cohort sessions. These cohort sessions, which meet every Wednesday throughout the school year, include contentspecific modules (e.g., writing a personnel disciplinary memo, school discipline, engaging in “difficult conversations,” etc.) as well as opportunities for participants to explore and address challenges and issues at their placement sites. Selected weekly cohort sessions are held at rotating, school-based sites in order to maximize learning opportunities for the students. Other weekly seminars are held at UNCG’s School of Education or the Triad Center. The fall semester curriculum incorporates courses on the rights, recruitment, retention, and evaluation of teachers with a focus on instructional management and human resources. Additionally, the internship seminar focuses on change/turnaround schools, using and sharing data to drive improvement (14 practices/characteristics), reviewing research and identifying key lessons and insights, and learning how to hold high-risk conversations in a way that solves problems and builds relationships. The spring semester curriculum delves into courses focused on the cultural and political dimensions of school, whereby PTLA interns examine the structures and processes of school governance, including the impacts of LEA, state, and federal policies, and the influence of special-interest groups with attention to policy development, student advocacy, reform implementation, and community analysis and outreach. The internship seminar focuses on leading school change, improvement, and turnaround. Key intern takeaways involve developing skills related to change/turnaround leadership; gaining content knowledge related to school change, improvement, and turnaround; and realizing opportunities for reflection on their internship progress:

I’ve had experience serving on the interview committee, rating candidates, and calling for telephone references. I’ve collaborated with CHANGE and PTA, attended parent/curriculum nights, and solicited business support for school. (PTLA participant)

PTLA has prepared me for the unique challenges of educational leadership by developing my understanding and application of the six leadership domains (Strategic, Instructional, Cultural, Human Resource, Micro-Political, and Managerial) while focusing my own passion to make a difference for all students, especially students at risk. (PTLA graduate)

During the course of the year, PTLA participants complete six very intentional, interdisciplinary projects addressing the following issues: (1) student learning and development; (2) teacher performance and empowerment; (3) school operations; (4) working with the school community (a multimedia project addressing equity and community awareness); (5) school culture and climate; and (6) school improvement. When PTLA participants were asked about their exposure to and experience with supervising data-driven instruction, building professional communities, and using formative assessments (including shared decision making and engagement), their responses indicated opportunities to “lead team meetings,” “participate in School Improvement Teams,” “work with RTI and EOG Blitz, and “intern in a PBIS school.” Others concurred and even offered some helpful suggestions:

I did a lot of work with the academy and the internship on professional communities and distributive leadership. I needed more exposure to curriculum and assessment with regards to the Common Core. (PTLA participant)

This year, I am interning at a school that is a very interesting experience. The school got the SIG grant last year. They are going through transformation, they have extended

March 2013

school year, extended school day ... a lot of great things going on there, a lot of great learning opportunities. I've been very fortunate to be there. (PTLA participant)

Full-day cohort sessions, some held onsite at internship schools, typically include dedicated time for the host intern and his/her mentor principal to offer and discuss information about their school, and also time for interns to reflect on their progress using the PTLA reflection process. Each PTLA intern is responsible for a 60- to 90-minute teaching and learning session, including an overview and a presentation by the mentor principal regarding his/her personal and professional journey as a principal (challenges, successes, core beliefs, etc.). Class and intern site visits bring relevance to theory and practice. In Year 1, all 21 internship site schools were visited by the completion date of the program. Related standards and competency descriptions throughout the year included:

- NC Standards for School Executives;
- PTLA Learning Outcomes;
- NCDPI District and School Transformation Framework for Action (FFA)—"The Process of School Improvement: Nine Best Practices";
- Public Impact (2008) "School Turnaround Leaders: Competencies for Success"; and
- Academy of Urban School Leadership (AUSL) Framework for High Performing Schools ("PASSAGE").

As two PTLA participants said:

Many of the site-based principals spoke on this topic (culture of high expectations). The RttT workshops gave valuable information as well as our coaches. (PTLA participant)

I feel that all children are able to succeed as long as we are able to find those resources and put the right people in place to help them move forward in the right direction. (PTLA participant)

In addition to weekly meetings, PTLA participants attend and participate in numerous external professional development opportunities including the following: Interactive Q&A session with Dr. Bill Harrison; 360 assessments and feedback with Dr. Larry Coble; RttT District and School Transformation with Dr. Pat Ashley from NCDPI (four sessions); School Executive evaluation training with Dr. Cheryl Fuller (three sessions); End-of-Year PD-Celebration with Dr. June Atkinson; the NCASCD conference in Pinehurst, NC (four principal interns with PTLA leaders); Quality Assurance Committee meetings (two interns with PTLA leaders); and the ASCD conference in Philadelphia, PA (all 21 principal interns with PTLA leaders). Likewise, all PTLA interns have participated in and/or led professional development sessions and presentations in their schools/LEAs. Through these professional development opportunities and others, PTLA participants grew in their awareness of and the need to acknowledge and act on behalf of the students in their buildings:

The vision of high expectations seemed to be expected of the students; however, staff expectations were inconsistent based on the relationship between the staff members and administration. (PTLA participant)

In order to even the playing field for select students who struggle, many resources were not offered to families and students that could have made a lasting impact on students. (PTLA participant)

In September, three Cohort 2 principal interns attended a NCASCD-sponsored workshop, "School Improvement Framework." Steve Ventura from The Leadership and Learning Center facilitated the day-long workshop in Asheville, NC, which focused on strategies to sustain school improvement. Practical, hands-on activities guided participants through the use of Data Teams (collection and organization of student performance data based on specific criteria), critical questions to guide Professional Learning Communities, the use of formative assessment and feedback, power strategies as well as discussion on Assessment for Learning. Dr. Meg Sheehan is coordinating PTEC and other workshop scheduling for all Cohort 2 members to attend and later present to the cohort during seminar sessions. (PTLA Executive Director)

Throughout the program, PTLA participants read, review, discuss and dissect numerous turnaround-related empirical, theoretical, and foundational studies. Their reading list includes the following:

- *Rigorous Curriculum Design* by Ainsworth (2011)
- *On Becoming a Leader* by Bennis (2009)
- *Standards and Assessments: The core of Quality Instruction* by Besser (2011)
- *What They Don't Tell You in Schools of Education About School Administration* by Black & English (2002)
- *Reframing the Path to School Leadership* by Bolman & Deal (2010)
- *Public School Law* by Cambron-McCabe, McCarthy, & Thomas (2008)
- *Getting It Done: Leading Academic Success in Unexpected Schools* by Chenoweth & Theokas (2011)
- *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard* by Heath & Heath (2010)
- *Poverty is NOT a Learning Disability* by Dresser & Dunklee (2009)
- *Teaching with Poverty in Mind* by Jensen (2009)
- *School Leadership that Works* by Marzano, Waters, & McNulty (2005)
- *What Every Principal Needs to Know about Special Education* by McLaughlin (2009)
- *Turnaround Principals for Underperforming Schools* by Papa & English (2011)
- *Crucial Conversations* by Petterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler (2002)
- *Lincoln on Leadership* by Phillips (1992)
- *The Principal's Companion* by Robbins & Alvy (2009)
- *Culturally Responsive Standards-Based Teaching* by Saifer, Edwards, Ellis, ko, & Stuczynski (2010)
- *Results Now* by Schmoker (2006)
- *Culturally Proficient Leadership* by Terrell & Lindsey (2009)

- *What Great Principals Do Differently* by Whitaker (2002)

PTLA's intensive second summer sessions focus on final preparations of administrative assignments for July 1. Emphasis is placed on rigorous reviews of principal roles and responsibilities, leadership, the culture of poverty, school turnaround, and transformation model components of success. A final 360 assessment is conducted and reviewed for all principal interns to determine areas of growth and areas of needed improvement that might still be identified. Formative assessments of PTLA interns include: assignments and duties; Coble 360 degree assessment of general leadership skills, completed by email by those who have been led by PTLA participants; individual growth plans (IGP) for each participant aligned with state principal standards; and internship monthly goal setting. Summative assessments include the portfolio of work completed throughout the program.

One additional, "unique" curriculum feature is the PTLA triad/quad visits, whereby each triad/quad of interns visits each of their three to four schools by early April, spending approximately three hours at each site. The site host determines a focus (or problem to address) for the day. An example is instructional rigor, for which interns examine student work from a variety of classrooms and make suggestions for improvement. Another example is school safety, for which interns conduct a thorough walkthrough, note observations, and make suggestions for improvement. A third example might be quality of assessments, for which interns examine common formative assessments or other teacher-made assessments and provide feedback and suggestions for improvement. The collaborative, reflective practice around that focus is similar to a PLC. Visiting interns are prepared to ask lots of questions, give feedback, and address dilemmas. The "theory versus practice" issues provide context to understanding school improvement, and the "reflection" issues mirror an aspect of PTLA's curriculum intent.

SLA's curriculum and seminars. SLA exists to advance the field of school leadership by producing principals with an urgent focus on getting results quickly and a belief in and personal responsibility for every student to achieve at a high level, to be globally competitive for work and postsecondary education, and to be prepared for life in the 21st century. SLA incorporates a three-week summer intensive, a full-time year-long internship, weekly full-day residency sessions, and two additional intensive weeks (December and June). At the heart of SLA is its vision (i.e., to prepare a cadre of highly effective school leaders for high-need schools in the Sandhills region). According to the Executive Director, they "plan with the end in mind."

Since the goal of SLA is to "transform the way we prepare our leaders so we can transform the way we impact children and our future," this RLA often highlights how it is different from traditional programs across the state and the nation. The destination in its journey is not just about getting where it's going, it's about the intentionality of the process along the way. For example, rather than a tightly coupled university affiliation and college professors, SLA is led by five high-quality Executive Coaches with expertise in the field of education (practitioners who have specifically lived the work of school turnaround). These SLA coaches attended the NYCLA facilitator training and are very intentional in planning and investing in each member of the cohort. Together, they participate in every module delivery and role model examples of team teaching and collaboration for the SLA participants:

I am given assignments after most professional development opportunities that require me to practice what I have just learned in the PD. Coaches look over the work and

provide feedback. If there is a PD that I am working at the school, the coach and mentor principal are both available to assist me as needed. (SLA participant)

Our coach comes to our school and invests much time and effort to keeping me and my mentor on track. It is reassuring and comforting to know we have someone in our corner that understands school change. (SLA participant)

SLA's three-week summer intensive curriculum (in July) and two additional weeks of study (in December and June) were also designed collaboratively with NYCLA. The first week is spent apart from family and friends at NCCAT in Cullowhee, NC. This very full, "full-time" experience allows the participants to bond, to work collaboratively, and to immerse themselves in the work at hand. A sense of seriousness and urgency is established, as well as trust, openness, and deep connections. The rest of SLA's curriculum is based on a performance matrix that is aligned with the NC Standards for School Executives. A simulated school scenario reflects the realities of an actual principal around weekly themes of analysis of data; standards, curriculum, and assessments; and the social context of schooling. SLA participants assume the role of principal in the scenario school for problem-based and action-based learning via in-baskets, emergencies, data analysis, angry parents, teacher observations, team leader responsibilities, feedback sessions, etc. Working in teams is a significant component. Three guest leaders, including Dr. William Harrison, Chairman of the NC State Board of Education, Dr. Lori Bruce, NCDPI Title I Consultant, and Dr. Sarah McManus, NCDPI Director of NC FALCON Learning Systems, participated in summer intensive sessions:

I enjoyed getting a taste of some of the actual things that we may face in a day. It helped me to take off the teacher lens and realize that there is much more going on in a school than what I experience between my four walls and the 20 students that I work with directly. (SLA participant)

Making the distinction between urgent and important is something that I will definitely take with me to my school ... prioritizing is a necessity! (SLA participant)

I was reminded today that every decision that I make directly impacts my schools, the staff, the faculty, and the students and their learning. Again, working in the not-urgent but important area, [I am] reminding myself to keep the vision and purpose of my school in mind as I make decisions. (SLA participant)

SLA is powerful, meaningful learning. I appreciate the integrity of the program! I really enjoyed how I was challenged this week ... I have so much to learn! (SLA participant)

SLA's scope and sequence and monthly themes for internship sessions continue to focus on the NC Standards for School Executives and provide "just-in-time learning" for what principals need to know and be able to do to effectively lead turnaround schools in North Carolina. SLA's content and practices are research-based. The following monthly themes spiraled throughout the year as needed to prepare principals in training: August and January—Standard 3: Cultural Leadership; September—Standard 4: Human Resources Leadership; October and June—Standard 1: Strategic Leadership; November, December, and May—Standards 2 and 8: Instructional and Academic Achievement Leadership; February—Standards 6 and 7: External and Micro-Political Leadership; and March, April, and June—Standard 5: Managerial and Strategic Leadership. Themes for SLA include: foster teamwork and collaboration; build relationships of trust—lead with the heart; develop a hunger for learning—passion to learn; have

March 2013

a dream/vision—begin with the end in mind; dreams fuel the passion, and passion plus perseverance can equal success; lead by example—walk the talk; teamwork makes the dream work—ordinary people doing extraordinary things; the power of stories; help light the fuse—people are sticks of dynamite—power is on the inside, but nothing happens until we light the fuse; empower others—encouragement, recognition, support; positive attitude—don’t multitask people—don’t pass up an opportunity to thank those people who are “packing your parachute”—show appreciation; embrace opportunities; and be authentic! As one SLA participant said, “Building a culture of high expectations for all, including students and staff is the component that makes the difference.”

Rather than a traditional classroom, SLA interns spend some weekly residency sessions at Pinckney Academy in Moore County; these sessions focus on key leadership skills/topics and working through tough issues in simulated contexts and case studies. Other cohort gatherings involve participating in and learning from a number of offsite organizations and agencies. Each intensive week encompasses real-life problems that inspire meaningful learning and problem-based, action learning focused on analyzing student data to guide transformation. As their learning lab, SLA interns are immersed in schools and have visited several turnaround schools in the Sandhills region. Likewise, SLA interns also visited SAS to learn about data-guided instruction and the multiple uses of EVAAS, and attended various professional development offerings and additional conferences hosted by NCPAPA, NCASA, NCDPI, UNCP, and Fayetteville State. Networking within these professional organizations helps SLA interns stay abreast of current issues in education:

Every week we have speakers and coaches that provide professional development that consistently focuses on improving instruction and the quality of education that our students receive. (SLA participant)

I have attended professional developments that were both academy and internship-based (e.g., coaching, evaluating, turnaround strategies, school visits, etc.). The academy does a great job in providing us the opportunity to receive the latest updates on various topics that we will encounter as administrators. In my school that I intern at, I participate in staff development that is geared towards the goals of the school. (SLA participant)

Systematic communication is necessary for all aspects of the internship. Therefore, I am in constant communication with a community that can be described as impoverished. It has allowed me to look through a new lens and develop the communication skills necessary to communicate efficiently and effectively with a sub-group that I had not previously had the experience of working with. (SLA participant)

Over the course of the 2011–12 school year, state and regional speakers and presenters to SLA included the following: Dr. William Harrison, Chairman of the State Board of Education, talked with SLA participants about the importance of establishing guiding principles, vision, and passion to lead their work; Dr. Cheryl Fuller, formerly from NCDPI and now a consultant, guided SLA interns in unpacking the 21st-century standards and what this looks like in highly effective schools and classrooms; Dr. Max Thompson, Project Director of Learning Focused, trained SLA interns in high-impact strategies for school improvement during real-time visits to classrooms; Richard Schwartz, local attorney, led multiple sessions on educational law and legislative policy updates; Don Lourcey explained NC Virtual Schools; Dr. Pat Ashley from NCDPI spoke about LEA and school transformation; Kathy Kennedy from Moore County Consortium for Educational Research and Evaluation–North Carolina

Schools explained the importance of relevant and rigorous curriculum and instruction; Glenda Jones from Lee County Schools provided plenty of helpful information and insights into human resource management; Fannie Mason from Scotland County met with the PTLA interns to discuss special children programs; Donna Aughbaugh and Rachel McBroom from NCDPI provided professional development in support of improved instruction and learning in North Carolina K–12 classrooms; Dr. Olivia Oxendine from UNCP described the aspects and benefits of the Comer model; Rachel Porter from NCDPI engaged the SLA participants in discussions concerning the Common Core; and Dr. Mike Renn from the Center for Creative Leadership explained the process of creating, designing, and delivering educational solutions. Panels of master principals and teachers were also utilized for the purpose of providing SLA interns with the best and brightest school leaders to learn from and the information necessary to be highly effective turnaround principals:

Rigor and depth have been a huge aspect of this program. Learning from experts in the field has been priceless. (SLA participant)

We have had speakers (i.e., presentations by lawyers and leaders in education) share the laws regarding all aspects of replacing personnel. We have also discussed the use of MIPs. (SLA participant)

I lead the second grade Professional Learning Team weekly in developing lessons aligned with the Common Core standards. (SLA participant)

I have helped my district lead the Social Studies Essential Standards training. This was to help them understand the similarities and differences between Common Core and Essential Standards. (SLA participant)

I have been able to create a data team at the school which I am working in. I am constantly examining the results of formative assessments and using this data to identify targeted objectives. We meet regularly with teachers to examine best practices and share strategies for success. (SLA participant)

I have been allowed to participate in the discussions of who should teach a class and why they should teach the class. (SLA participant)

I think more needs to be addressed on the issue of assistance for struggling students (including preventative interventions) at the academy level and in the internship position. We have a tutorial service. I understand the process, but I think our data needs to be linked with the acceleration of struggling students. (SLA participant)

Rather than a status quo curriculum and learning activities, SLA places a strong emphasis on technology learning and the use of 21st-century tools to lead schools. As such, all SLA interns use PLN, Web 2.0, Diigo, Dropbox, Edmodo, Twitter, Google Docs, Livebinders, PLN, QR Codes, Electronic Portfolio, and iPads. In fact, on the Group SLA Team, current and relevant article alerts are sent daily; these alerts address a multitude of issues, from relevancy in the Algebra I curriculum to national teacher evaluation policies to kindergarten readiness tests. Each SLA intern is encouraged to become a member of professional organizations such as NCPAPA and NCASA, and to use meetings and conferences as opportunities to deepen their knowledge, understandings, and support systems.

March 2013

Rather than traditional textbooks, SLA interns analyze research-based readings and engage in real-world applications (e.g., McREL Leader's Guides). They delve into action research and triangulating multiple sources of data, first determining the needs of a school and then working as instructional leaders/coaches to provide the structure and support systems necessary to see the work accomplished. Content areas of study include the growth and development of children, curriculum design, leadership and systems, personal development, and guiding principles. Interns are learning to lead instructional improvement, build strong teams, and support all learners. SLA is a cohort-based approach involving the triangulation of data, action research, understanding and applying case study research, weekly reflections, authentic team projects, walk-throughs, teacher observations and evaluations, and more. Portfolio and literature reviews are utilized throughout the course of the year to ensure that SLA interns are reflecting on their practice and key learning. Numerous articles/chapters and the following books have been read:

- Lisa Delpit's *Other People's Children*
- Paul Bambrick-Santoya's *Driven by Data*
- Joe McDonald and Nancy Mohr's *The Power of Protocols*
- Stone, Patton, Heen, and Fisher's *Difficult Conversations*
- Warren Bennis' *On Becoming a Leader*
- Peter Senge's *Schools that Learn: A Fifth Discipline*
- William Bridges' *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes—Revised*
- Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson's *Shaping School Culture: Pitfalls, Paradoxes, & Promises*
- Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and *First Things First*
- Chip Wood's *Yardsticks*
- Eric Jensen's *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*
- Daniel Duke's *Teacher's Guide to School Turnarounds*
- Robert Marzano's *Effective Supervision* and *The Art and Science of Teaching*
- Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe's *Understanding by Design*
- Nancy Mooney and Ann Mausbach's *Align the Design* As two SLA participants said:

Many of our readings have discussed the importance of creating a trusting culture throughout the school and using assertive accountability as a tool to not only motivate, but as a method of using one's strengths to help the school as a whole. (SLA participant)

Many of our readings have stressed the importance of creating a relevant curriculum based on the students with which we serve and using strengths of individuals within our school to help strengthen school effectiveness. We have also completed an assignment that allowed us to determine the effectiveness of specific materials used in our school. No opportunities to actually assign students and teachers strategically have been made available thus far. (SLA participant)

SLA participants also spent two intensive weeks in partnership with the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching (NCCAT). SLA's final week of the program is held in Ocracoke, where interns culminate their year of learning with a celebration for the new beginnings that await each of them—ready to walk the talk and lead by example. According to SLA's Executive Director:

The first week of the program in Cullowhee, NC, was a go up the mountain to “light the fire” so to speak—ignite the power on the inside and create a sense of urgency in each of us. We came down the mountain ready to make a difference in our schools ... The last week of the program on Ocracoke Island, NC, was a celebration of growth, development, and determination to be the difference in kids’ lives ... very meaningful and powerful!

The final intensive week included celebration, but it was also a time for the interns to take a lead in their learning. The theme for the week was “Leading Change,” and SLA interns had some exciting book studies to present and a session on Master School Scheduling by Dr. Mike Rettig, of Scheduling Associates. Books for Week 5 included: *Lincoln on Leadership: Executive Strategies for Tough Times*, by Donald T. Phillips; *Sacred Cows Make the Best Burgers: Developing Change-Driving People and Organizations*, by Robert Kriegel and David Brandt; *Leaders of Learning: How District, School, and Classroom Leaders Improve Student Achievement*, by Richard DuFour and Robert J. Marzano; and *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard*, by Chip Heath and Dan Heath.

SLA’s “Switch Month” is a “unique” program feature whereby interns move to a different school in a different county for the month of February. This idea was adapted from NYCLA. The purpose of the switch month is to give aspiring principals additional learning opportunities in their development as future leaders/principals. Specifically, the switch month allows aspiring principals to do the following:

- Observe a different leadership style, further adding to their leadership “toolbox” and repertoire;
- Be exposed to and analyze a different school context/environment with different demands and challenges, better preparing them to understand the context they may face as new principals;
- Practice entering into a new school environment. As a new principal, entry is critical. The more an aspiring principal can practice “entry,” the better prepared they will be (and fewer mistakes they will make) when entering their own schools; and
- Practice creating a transition plan for leadership and sustainability. Aspiring principals are required to fully prepare the switch month executive intern(s) entering the residency school

to take over key leadership roles s/he has assumed. Being able to create a transition plan for a leader’s departure is a key skill for a principal.

For one month, aspiring principals “switch out” of their internship school into a different context. Another SLA intern “switches” into the internship school, thus ensuring sustainability of work. SLA interns are expected to prepare each other for the work they will need to take over during the switch month. Some internship class time is devoted to sharing the context of the school and transition plan, as there should be limited disruption at the internship school. SLA interns are given an assignment on which to focus their work during the one-month switch. Mentor principals are also expected to complete a short “evaluation” of their switch intern. Executive Coaches remain in the internship school during the switch month, providing continuity and support for the schools, while providing SLA interns with a different Executive Coaching experience:

March 2013

During my switch month, I had the opportunity to work with the school counselor and psychologist in analyzing AIMS Web data to determine tiered interventions through the RTI process. (SLA participant)

Switch month was a great learning experience. I moved from a small, rural primary school to a large, urban middle school. Wow. The sense of urgency to improve teaching was amazing. It was interesting to actually feel the faster pace and be a part of the urgency to get teachers teaching and students learning. (SLA graduate)

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 in seminar settings and one-on-one mentoring meetings after job placement. For example, SLA's Advisory Committee decided that, in addition to monthly group meetings, "Cohort 1 members who have positions of principal or director will receive a monthly visit from their coach (same coach as last year) and will always have access to their coach by email/phone. It was decided that there would not be a written site visit report for interns in their second year. Executive Coaches will keep a log of visits for evaluation purposes."

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. A good example of induction support is SLA's proactive efforts to help newly hired assistant principals (i.e., 15 SLA Cohort 1 graduates) and their hiring principals "develop a job description that will address the school leadership needs of the school and continue to prepare the assistant principal for the role of the principal." Further evaluation will highlight the details of these support systems, as Cohort 1 just recently graduated.

NELA's directors, coaches, and mentors. Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli and Dr. Matt Militello are the Executive Directors for NELA. Dr. Lesley Wirt is the Program Coordinator and supports the work of the directors. They 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 parttime Executive Coaches are led by Andy Overstreet and include the following nine, highly experienced educators (each has 25+ years of hands-on, practical knowledge): Shirley Hart Arrington, Tom Benton, Carl Harris, Tom Houlihan, Henry Johnson, Andy Overstreet, John Parker, Joe Peel, and Tom Williams. These 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;

March 2013

- 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.¹⁸

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, Anna Brady; three UNCG faculty members, Dr. Brian Clarida, Dr. Craig Peck, and Dr. Rick Reitzug; and two full-time coaches, Executive Leadership Coach Dr. Meg Sheehan and Leadership Coach Pam Misher. The PTLA Executive Director and Leadership Coaches are also adjunct faculty members at UNCG. All six members have extensive schoolbased 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 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."

¹⁸ 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 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

March 2013

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 full-time Executive Director Dr. Donna Peters and four highly credentialed, part-time Executive Coaches, Dr. Deborah Jones, Ms. Cindy McCormic, Ms. Emilie Simeon, and Dr. Wayne Trogdon. 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 (Appendix M) 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 the program goes until June 20, 2013, and 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 (Appendix N) 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.

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. For example, one obvious area of concern for all three RLAs last fall was the Common Core. Comments below from RLA interns who were halfway through their programs (survey data from December 2011) indicate a clear need for more information and experience leading teachers with implementing the content of the Common Core State Standards and using assessments aligned with the Common Core State Standards:

I participated in district-initiated informational sessions. I have also participated in a NELA session on Common Core. I talk to teachers often about Common Core. I just need more hands-on experience ... I have not led anyone on its implementation. (NELA participant)

My mentor principal and I facilitated a Common Core and Essential Standards workshop for our teachers. I would like to learn more about the implementation to be able to assist teachers with implementing the Common Core Standards. (NELA participant)

I found information and training on the Common Core independent of the academy and internship ... could use more. (PTLA participant)

I need to understand the Common Core better. (SLA participant)

March 2013

The elements of the Common Core have not been implemented within the school I am currently working ... I need to know more. (SLA participant)

Given this type of feedback, each RLA responded (and continues to respond daily) by rethinking, reshuffling, and redesigning its curriculum, content, and instructional strategies. For example, six months later (June 2012), Cohort 1 members indicated a somewhat better, deeper understanding of Common Core:

I have had a tremendous amount of training on CCSS. I am very confident in my knowledge and ability to develop CCSS assessments. (NELA participant)

I have been participating in but not leading teachers with implementing the content of the Common Core. I am still working on it ... completed online training to prepare for Common Core and school leadership team. (PTLA participant)

I experienced creating assessments aligned with Common Core in my internship school and also used information provided from the SLA Coaches. (SLA participant)

I had experience implementing the content of the Common Core standards with teachers in the 2nd grade of my school. I also had extensive training in the Common Core Standards from my SLA Academy. (SLA participant)

This is obviously an ongoing process. As recently as October 2012, an SLA Executive Coach posted the following on SLA's Edmodo: "On the evaluation from last week, there were several comments about wanting more on Common Core. These three website will assist you as you talk with teachers." And another post stated: "New formative assessment plans developed by NC teachers aligned to the Common Core State Standards and the NC Essential Standards have been created to support the formative assessment principles outlined in NC FALCON. After logging into NC FALCON, the plans can be found under the heading 'Formative Assessment Plans.' Formative Assessment (FA) Plans are available for the following content and program areas (at various grade levels/subjects): Arts Education, Career and Technical Education, English as a Second Language, English Language Arts, Healthful Living, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, World Languages, [and] Pre-Kindergarten."

NELA's evaluation and improvement. 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 evaluation and improvement. 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 Consortium for Educational Research and Evaluation–North Carolina

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 Cohort 2 internship sites and principal mentors were also made in collaboration.

PTLA’s Fall and Spring assessment survey asks participants to rate the following:

- Overall quality of the PTLA Fall/Spring experience;
- Quality of instruction in terms of keeping you interested and engaged;
- Quality of panelists and guest speakers in terms of relevance and contribution to your development; and
- Quality of the curricular content in terms of relevance and contribution to your development.

Additional questions ask interns: What did you find particularly valuable about the PTLA Fall/Spring experience? What would you recommend changing about the PTLA Fall/Spring experience for future cohorts? What topics and skills do you believe need to be included or given additional attention during the next semester?

In response to this feedback and input from others involved (e.g., PTLA Board, Advisory Group, Leadership Team), a Curriculum Team was established in Spring 2012 to review PTLA’s first year of teaching and learning and to make adjustments to the year-long curriculum for Cohort 2. The team focused on the realignment of the Summer Intensive Program with Fall and Spring weekly sessions in conjunction with NC Executive Standards, NC school transformation, school turnaround best practices, Common Core State Standards, licensure portfolio requirements, and principal intern evaluations. PTLA continues to “tweak” the calendar based on evaluations, feedback, and guest speaker availability. This is an example of how PTLA’s curriculum is a living, malleable document that takes the following into consideration:

- Pre-program survey of LEA-identified successful principals of high needs schools;
- Ongoing surveys of participants (quality of the program, future learning needs);
- Weekly structured reflection sessions (leadership lessons learned, greatest challenges);
- Mid-year and end-of-year survey of mentor principals;
- Ongoing PTLA Advisory Group meetings;
- Weekly Leadership Team meetings; and
- Ongoing Quality Assurance Committee meetings.

SLA’s evaluation and improvement. 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, and the following tools are utilized:

March 2013

- Evaluations are completed by candidates, SLA Advisory Committee members, and LEA staff participating in the executive intern selection process;
- Executive interns complete daily evaluations during intensive weeks, and a summative evaluation is completed on the final day of the Summer Intensive Program. They also evaluate each residency session using Survey Monkey;
- Evaluations are completed by mentor principals on Day 1 of mentor principal training and on Day 2 training as well;
- The NC School Executive Evaluation process with self-assessment was modified and is utilized throughout the year for executive interns to document areas of growth. In Year 2, the NC School Executive Evaluation process is being utilized as it would be for assistant principals. In fact, executive interns have been entered into the McREL system as assistant principals in their respective LEAs. They are evaluated by their mentor principals, and goals are monitored by mentor principals and executive coaches. Progress is documented in the Executive Coach School Visit Reports and mid-year and end-of-year evaluations;
- Regular debriefings by SLA staff during the Summer Intensive and internship programs have been and will continue to be held, assessing facilitation delivery and curriculum and noting improvement strategies for subsequent years;
- Executive interns complete monthly evaluations around standard themes and have January mid-year evaluation conferences and end-of-year evaluation conferences with their superintendents;
- Change Style Indicator and Decision Style Profile assessments are administered and interpreted for executive interns in the fall. Skillscope 360 assessments are conducted the following fall when they are in their administrative positions, providing executive interns with valuable data for reflecting upon and understanding their leadership preferences and needs; and
- Executive interns complete an evaluation for Week 4 of Summer Intensive along with a final evaluation for the entire SLA experience.

Research Question 3: Do RLA graduates find placements in targeted schools/districts?

The goal of the RLAs is to increase the number of principals qualified to lead transformational change in low-performing schools in both rural and urban areas. As such, RLA interns receive job placement support, provided by the Leadership Academy in conjunction with participating LEAs, to ensure appropriate matches of aspiring leaders to the schools in which they are placed (see Appendices O, P, Q, and R). 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., high-poverty and low-performing NC schools).

From NELA Cohort 1, 12 of the 21 graduates are currently working as assistant principals (three in DST schools), one is working as an instructional coach, one is working as a transformation coordinator, and two are in LEA central office roles. The other six are working as classroom teachers who have agreed to take on additional teacher-leader responsibilities. Even though NELA graduates are individuals deeply committed to improving persistently low-achieving schools and will make a three-year, post-degree commitment to work in high-need schools in

northeast North Carolina, actually landing administrative positions has been a challenge for some. Each LEA signed a MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with NELA that stated that the LEA would “utilize Leadership Academy graduates as the first line of replacements for assistant principal and principal openings in LEAs’ high needs schools.” The fact that this has been difficult is worthy of note. Aspects to consider moving forward include: (1) the strength of the partnerships with certain LEAs could be improved (Are some LEAs more committed than others? Why? How?), (2) the politics of the region (Who hires whom? Why? How? When? Where?); and (3) the strengths and background of the NELA graduate (Does the NELA graduate feel ready, willing, and able to assume a critical leadership position right now?).

From PTLA Cohort 1, 16 of the 21 graduates are currently working as assistant principals (six in DST schools), three are working as learning team/curriculum facilitators, and one is working as an LEA-level instructional coach. One is working as a classroom teacher. The fact that 95% of PTLA Cohort 1 graduates are currently working in leadership roles testifies to the fact that the partnership and commitment by the four collaborating PTLA LEAs is active, involved, and strong. But, even at that, personnel and hiring issues can be both complicated and delicate, making placement issues difficult at times. For example, some LEAs prefer Assistant Principal or Central Office Administrative experience before hiring candidates as Principals. In addition to this, PTLA is also competing for leadership placements against local, well-regarded principal training programs (including another one at UNCG). Given this operational context, a University Supervisor shared that PTLA has had a successful year. Though they will of course keep working to improve on all aspects of their program in Year 2, the partner LEAs are pleased with Year 1 placement results. PTLA operates in an urban schooling context, including big LEAs in which PTLA graduates must compete for individual leadership jobs against tens to hundreds of competitors in a full, multi-level selection process with multiple stakeholders involved. By doing so, the Supervisor believes this helps to strengthen their candidates’ resolve, demonstrate their excellence, and insulate them (and PTLA) against charges of undue favoritism.

PTLA’s Executive Director has also given two presentations to the Piedmont Triad Education Consortium (PTEC) superintendents on PTLA, highlighting successes, challenges, and future grant sustainability interest/involvement of additional LEAs in the region. Conversations were facilitated to revitalize interest and support of PTLA, while re-emphasizing the goals and outcomes outlined by the RttT grant in terms of the hiring of PTLA graduates in assistant principal/principal positions. A unique PTLA feature this year is the interesting and positive dynamic of having seven schools with a Cohort 1 assistant principal and a Cohort 2 principal intern. Four of last year’s Cohort 1 principal mentors hired their PTLA intern as their assistant principal this year.

From SLA Cohort 1, four of the 20 graduates are currently working as principals, one is working as director of grades 3–5, and the other 15 are working as assistant principals (none in DST schools). The fact that 100% of SLA Cohort 1 graduates are currently working in leadership roles (including four principalships) in the Sandhills region attests to SLA’s strong collaboration with its well-established RESA. Although there is tangible commitment to leadership development by the 13 partnering LEAs and a real willingness to sustain SLA beyond RttT funding, these job placements did not happen without SLA coaxing and negotiating:

Everything I have learned in NELA has helped me as an AP. (NELA graduate)

March 2013

Our Operation NELAs have really helped me as an Assistant Principal 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)

I am leading alongside my principal. Common Core is difficult but we are making connections, partnering with community agencies, and making extended learning more like camp. (NELA graduate)

Last year, when I messed up, I was just the intern. No more. This year is for real! I’m on information overload. I’m rolling with the punches, handling multiple Operation NELAs at the same time! Through NELA I learned how to deal with things, how to manage my time and hone my organizational skills. This [the work last year] has prepared me the most for my new role as AP. All of the sayings and advice from our instructors and coaches keeps flooding back to my mind daily! (NELA graduate)

I am building relationships. I am rebuilding the culture. I am smiling, even in adversity. I so appreciate NELA’s extended coaching support. I am finding my job description and living within it. (NELA graduate)

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)

PTLA afforded me the opportunity to be familiar with creating a culturally responsive environment. I am ready to address the diverse needs of our staff, students, and parents. (PTLA graduate)

The preparation that PTLA provided has enabled me to hit the ground running as an assistant principal. The full-time internship provided me with the opportunity to understand what it would take to be an assistant principal so that when I became one, I could meet the needs of students and teachers immediately without having to “learn” the assistant principal position. (PTLA graduate)

The real-time experience that I was afforded as a PTLA cohort member was priceless. The on-the-job training and support that was provided by our coaches was essential in my confidence and ability to lead in a high-needs school. The lessons and conversations that we engaged in during class, seminar, and during coaching sessions were systematic and specific to leadership standards and areas that are needed to become an effective leader. The continued guidance and support has prepared me professionally as well as personally for the challenges and successes that come with being a change agent. (PTLA graduate)

There isn’t a situation that I’ve encountered thus far that I’m not prepared for. SLA equipped me with the tools I need to handle every situation. I am being strategic and intentional, I’m looking at the data and I’m growing my organization to impact children. (SLA graduate)

SLA pushed us to run toward our weaknesses and to jump outside the box, outside our comfort zone. As a result, I moved from being an elementary school teacher to being a high school assistant principal. This has given me an opportunity to really be an instructional leader. I am helping others with innovative teaching. (SLA graduate)

I feel like I was able to make a smooth transition into an AP position because I had a full year of hands-on, tough training with a lot of love, caring, and support. I learned skills for

21st-century learning. SLA has also been a great networking opportunity. (SLA graduate)

Trends in the data for the past three years indicate that Cohort 1 graduates landed jobs in schools that are struggling and where, on average, more than two-thirds (67.6%) of the students receive free or reduced-price lunch, where the proportion of at- or above-grade level English I/Reading scores hover around 57.75%, and where the proportion of at- or above-grade level Algebra I/Math scores hover just below the 65% mark. The range of scores and the range of growth in these schools are great. These data are in line with high-need, low-performing schools. Looking back and charting demographic and test score data, most job placement schools reveal a trend of good, steady, positive growth (albeit small in many cases). Some schools had phenomenal growth (+60.3% increase in English I/Reading scores in one school, and +50.0% increase in Algebra I/Math scores in another), while others have shown little to no growth (less than 5% increase). Some schools revealed percentage gains of more than 10% to 15% in one subject but not in the other. A few of the schools where RLA graduates landed jobs actually reported a threeyear trend of negative growth (12% decrease in English I/Reading scores in one school, and 15.4% decrease in Algebra I/Math scores in another). This is not necessarily as alarming for job placements as it was for internship placements. In fact, since the stated purpose 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” (NCDPI, 2010, p.10), one could argue that these are exactly the type of schools where RLA graduates should land job placements (e.g., DST schools).

Through their RLA experience, Cohort 1 members should now have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be effective leaders of change, using data to focus on results and reflect on practice. Having said that, several questions about the placement of RLA graduates still remain:

1. How much input, power, and influence does each RLA actually have in the hiring process for individual LEAs?
2. Even though RLA participants are specifically prepared to lead in high-need schools (a unique feature to this alternative preparation program), could/should each and every graduate be placed in a high-poverty, low-performing NC school?
3. Are all RLA graduates ready to assume the principalship role? Are all RLA graduates ready to assume the assistant principalship role? Why/why not?
4. Research indicates that it takes between three to six years to turn around failing schools. How could/should the RLA evaluation track/assess this?

The answers to these and similar questions are beyond the scope of this evaluation. Further evaluation will continue to monitor, observe, and track the placements of RLA participants and graduates. Descriptive data regarding their schools will also be collected, disaggregated, and analyzed. But, others in positions of authority and those with decision-making power will need to wrestle with and address such questions moving forward.

Research Question 4: Are RLAs Cost-Effective Relative to Alternative Programs?

As noted earlier, evaluators analyzed the cost-effectiveness of the RLAs relative to extant comparable leadership development programs using Levin and McEwan’s (2001)

ingredients-based approach to cost-effectiveness analysis.¹⁹ This analysis provided a basis for value comparisons between RLAs and other models.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Because data on the long-term and distal outcomes of the RLAs are not yet available, the purpose of this 2012 activity report is to start to address these evaluation questions by describing the program components of each RLA in detail.

The report first assessed fidelity of implementation to the aspects outlined in the original Request for Proposal, with the conclusion that the RLAs do appear to have been designed to be consistent with literature on executive development, adult learning theory, and educational leadership. Aspiring principals in each RLA have been led through a preparation program (aligned to the NC Standards for School Executives) designed around several research-based components (e.g., cohort-based experiences; full-time, year-long clinical residency experience; job placement and induction support; etc.).

With a better understanding of the high degree to which each RLA's actual implementation matches its initial proposed design, the Evaluation Team has created a framework for moving forward with the evaluation. The ongoing evaluation will continue to document fidelity of implementation and track intern and graduate placements, and in addition, it will probe deeper into five specific program areas:

1. *Sustainability*. Race to the Top funding ends in 2014. A required and competitive priority from the original RFP included a "commitment to and plan for project sustainability beyond the funding period." In their response, RLAs were asked to define sustainability measures. The question going forward is: How will each RLA sustain this project after the grant funding ends?
2. *Recruitment*. How broad, far-reaching, and expansive "should and/or could" the recruitment efforts of each RLA be? In other words, how do RLAs recruit candidates who follow nontraditional pathways to principalship? Do they want to? Why/why not?
3. *Mentor selection and training*. The original RLA RFP describes "multi-faceted support structures, involving a mentor with extensive successful school leadership experience, an LA supervisor, and potentially, an executive coach. Although the roles may be blended or otherwise modified according to the plan, all coaches, mentors, and supervisors will be carefully selected and provided with initial training and ongoing support ... Interns will complete full-time, year-long clinical residency experiences including the recruitment, training, and supervision of candidate mentors and coaches." As such, what is each RLA doing to ensure "good intern/mentor/school site matches?" What do mentor principals receive with regard to ongoing training?
4. *Induction support*. Job placement and induction support in the original RFP entails the RLAs "working with the participating school districts to ensure appropriate matches of aspiring leaders to the schools in which they are placed and to continue professional development

¹⁹ <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/rttt/reports/2012/rla-report.pdf>

through a two-year induction period, during which LA principals continue to engage with their cohort, mentor, and coach in furthering their leadership skills.” Therefore, what is each RLA doing to provide ongoing support, mentoring, and advice through job placement?

5. *Common Core State Standards*. At the last Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) meeting, the following question was asked: What is each RLA doing to continue to address the Common Core?

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