



School Leadership Program Highlights:

North Carolina State University

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Introduction

The School Leadership Program (SLP), housed in the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement, provides grants to support the development, improvement and expansion of programs designed to provide high-needs schools with high-quality leaders. Since 2009, the program has supported 41 programs, located in 24 different states, in their efforts to recruit, train, and mentor effective school leaders. Several institutions of higher education, including North Carolina State University (NC State), have received this grant and implemented it to train and support principals in high-need schools. In this edition of the SLP Highlights, we share the significant impact the SLP program had on the development of principals throughout the state of North Carolina through the NC State leadership academies.

North Carolina: SLP Funds a Statewide Model for Excellent Principal Preparation

Setting the Stage

Prior to being awarded an SLP grant, educational leadership faculty at NC State had been working with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to design a principal preparation program for rural schools. This grant helped identify the needs of rural schools in North Carolina by working with a consortium of the fourteen lowest-performing school districts in the state.

After identifying their needs, the SLP grant allowed the NC State leadership faculty, led by Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli, to implement the Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA)—a two-year, Master degree leadership training program that works to connect future leaders with the communities they will serve and with other future leaders. NELA uses evidence-based practices, such as a cohort model and an internship anchored in community programs like food banks and local Chambers of Commerce, to enhance school-community partnerships.

NELA also focuses on literacy, math, digital media, age-appropriate remediation, flipped classrooms, equity, cognitive development, and unpacking the curriculum. The program exposes participants to creative and innovative ways to support teachers.

NC State's leadership academies were envisioned as a solution to the stubborn problem of recruiting and retaining strong leaders for historically low performing, hard-to-staff schools. Since the first cohort graduated in 2012, NELA has produced 32 principals and 57 assistant principals with an additional eight graduates in other leadership roles, spread across the 14 rural school distri

"Some folks talk about coming out here [rural areas] to help our schools but they seldom deliver or stay long enough to make an impact, but not NC State. You all are helping us in impactful ways. ... Most importantly - helping us get the right leaders in place."

~ Partner Rural District Superintendent

Strong Leaders Create Strong Schools

Funding from the SLP program clearly makes a difference in North Carolina, especially for the most vulnerable students who need excellent principals to improve their high-needs schools.

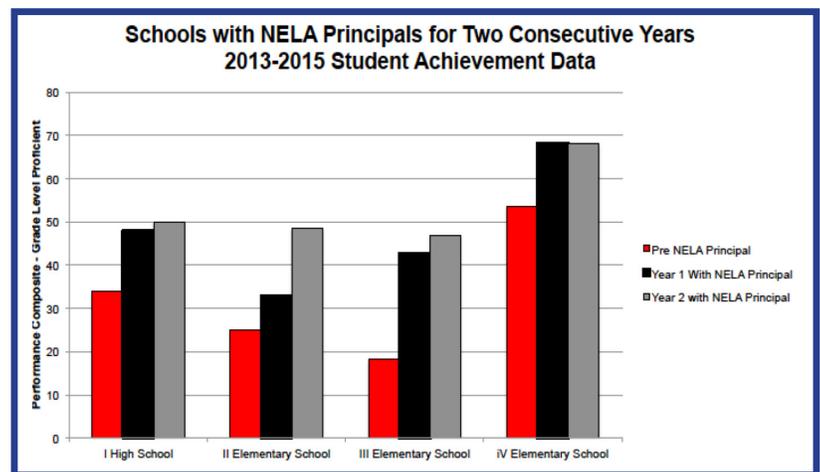
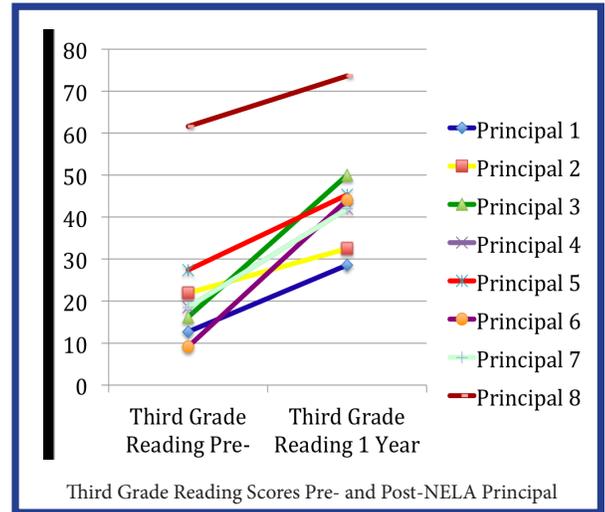
According to recent research, it takes a new principal approximately five years to positively impact the school's performance (Seashore Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010). Graduates of the SLP-funded NELA program, however, have documented notable improvements in student achievement during their first year as a principal.

Typically, new principals experience a dip in scores (Grissom, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2015), yet SLP-funded NELA principals all had improvements in student achievement scores. Reading scores were especially strong in schools led by NELA graduates.

Indeed, 83% of NELA first-year principals met or exceeded growth in high-needs, Title I schools versus only 75% of experienced principals across all schools in the state reaching the same level of performance. Schools led by principals who were prepared through the NC State NELA program have continued to experience positive gains in student achievement for two or more years post-graduation.

Thanks to the funding provided by the SLP grant, NC State graduates are making rapid school improvements.

Research is quite clear that new principals become more effective as time goes on (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Seashore Louis et al., 2010). Therefore, these principals, thanks to the SLP funding, will have an even larger annual impact on student achievement as they gain more experience.



Profiles in Leadership: Keith Parker, Principal at Martin Millennium Academy



“Unless we find a way to get qualified people to serve in rural and urban areas, we are not going to move and change the educational trajectory for our kids of color and kids that live in poverty.”

The experiences of NELA graduates bear out the virtue of having strong educational leadership preparation. Keith Parker, a NELA alumnus and principal at a public school in rural North Carolina, has experienced a number of positive changes at the school he leads, including rising literacy rates. Keith attributes these changes in large part to the knowledge and skills he developed through the NELA program.

Parker explains his time in the NELA program explored cognitive learning, literacy, math, digital media, remediation specifically for high school students, flipped classrooms, and unpacking the curriculum. The program also exposed participants to creative and innovative ways to support teachers.

“The program makes a really intentional effort to prepare fellows for the soft skills of the job as a school administrator and the importance of cultural leadership,” Parker said. “You have to be the school’s cheerleader, you have to be able to rally the troops and build consensus. The program puts a lot of emphasis on how to manage and get along with people, how to build coalitions and teams for student success.”

~Keith Parker, Principal, Martin Millenium Academy

This SLP-funded program also supports principals post-graduation through several mechanisms. Every NELA alumnus has an executive coach who continues to mentor graduates for up to three years after the program ends. Additionally, the program provides post-graduation workshops designed to support administrators working in challenging, complicated districts. Principal Parker lauded this level of support and pointed to it as one of the many ways NELA prepared and continued to support him in the principal's office.

Quality Leadership Preparation Matters

Over the last 15 years, evidence has mounted to demonstrate the importance of school leadership.

Leaders affect every aspect of schooling. Indeed, research suggests that leadership not only matters, it is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning.² Additional research suggests that principals, through their actions, can be powerful multipliers of effective teaching and leadership practices in schools.³

Developing educational leaders who can effectively shape teacher practice to serve all children well is essential. The empirical research base on leadership preparation and development has expanded over the last decade, providing preparation providers with a clearer understanding of how to improve the preparation experiences of educational leaders. In particular, research has offered key insight into best-practices concerning recruitment and selection of candidates for preparation, the structure and delivery of preparation, the induction of novice leaders, professional development for practicing leaders, and how to support an effective pipeline spanning preparation and practice.⁴

The School Leadership Program has offered preparation programs the opportunity to build state-of-the-art programs that meet the leadership needs of the schools and districts they serve. Just as principals can be powerful drivers of student outcomes, educational leadership preparation programs can be powerful drivers of leadership outcomes. Fully funding these program grants can impact students throughout the United States and provide them with excellent school leaders.

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This edition of SLP Highlights, developed by Margaret Thornton and Marcy Reedy, is part of a UCEA's School Leadership Program Series. The intent of the series is to highlight the effective work accomplished by grantees of the School Leadership Recruitment and Support Program. Based at the University of Virginia, the University Council for Educational Administration is an international consortium of research universities with graduate level leadership programs. UCEA members are marked by a distinguishing commitment and capacity to lead the field of educational leadership and administration.

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