

BOOSTING NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL TURNAROUND EFFORTS

Southeast Comprehensive Center Aids State Education Agency School Improvement Initiative

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The Challenge: Help Lift North Carolina's Lowest Performers

Moving schools up the performance slope takes energy, leverage, and the right research-based approaches. In 2010, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction launched an initiative to "Turn Around the Lowest Achieving Schools" (TALAS). The Southeast Comprehensive Center (SECC) partnered with the state education agency (SEA) to support the effort, which was backed partly by Race to the Top funds from the U.S. Department of Education.



The Strategy: Provide the Best Research-Based Tools and Practices

Building on relationships and knowledge gained throughout the years, SECC experts worked to inform and guide NC DPI leaders by offering a range of support targeting school and district management and progress monitoring, e.g., SECC staff:

- Aided implementation of the NC Indistar school monitoring system to help track progress in low-performing schools qualifying for federal School Improvement Grant funds; assisted with customization of the Web-based monitoring tool's indicators of effective practice
- Provided literacy professional development for 200 TALAS school leaders; appeared during multiple years on panels reviewing schools' improvement plans; provided research findings on how other state agencies blend support for schools and districts
- Examined data to determine best approaches for identifying sustainable school improvement practices; collaborated on redesigning the school improvement plan review process to hold panels prior to funding to encourage and allow time for school leaders to respond to questions and more deeply consider plans based on reflection; provided information on sustainability planning and alignment of processes for school improvement



Impact: Schools Make Gains

By 2013–14, after four years of TALAS, research clearly indicates that the state's lowest achieving schools improved their performance, according to a study from the Consortium for Educational Research and Evaluation–North Carolina (Henry, Guthrie, & Townsend, 2015). The study noted that student growth improved in the first year and was sustained throughout the program, and that the results may indicate the value of the needs assessments and school improvement plans developed in the initiative's first year.



System Change: Planning Gets More Rigorous, Integrated

The SEA integrated its federal and division of school improvement offices to better coordinate efforts, plan work more rigorously, and monitor results more efficiently.

Reference

Henry, G. T., Guthrie, J. E., & Townsend, L. W. (2015). *Outcomes and impacts of North Carolina's Initiative to Turn Around the Lowest Achieving Schools*. Retrieved from http://cerenc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/0-FINAL-Final-DST-Report-9-3-15.pdf?_sm_au_=iVvFLZJ4MWRNVQPj

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The Southeast Comprehensive Center is a partnership of SEDL, Regional Education Laboratory Southeast (REL SE), American Institutes for Research (AIR), and RMC Research Corporation (RMC).

