



Challenge: Help Lift North Carolina's Lowest Performing Schools

Moving schools off the bottom and up the performance slope takes energy, focus, and the right research-based approaches. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) took on this challenge in a new way in 2010 with a special initiative to Turn Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools (TALAS). By 2012, NCDPI, working through its Federal Programs Division and TALAS, tapped into expertise and support from the Southeast Comprehensive Center (SECC) to continue and enhance its overall school improvement efforts.



Strategy: Provide Research-Based Tools and Practices

Building on relationships and school improvement work over many years, staff from the U.S. Department of Education-funded SECC helped NCDPI leaders devise plans and implement assistance for targeted districts and schools. Federal Race to the Top (RttT) funds contributed to the effort.

"The center took the lead in making sure we had the very best advisers coming to the state and districts to provide assistance," said George Hancock, former NCDPI coordinator for School Improvement Grants.

As part of its overall assistance, the SECC:

- ▶ Aided implementation of the North Carolina Indistar school progress monitoring system and helped customize the web-based tool's indicators of effective practice.
- ▶ Provided the latest research on increasing learning time and on other state education agencies' experience blending turnaround support for schools and districts in areas such as coaching, monitoring, and online training.
- ▶ Served on panels reviewing schools' improvement plans and helped redesign the process to convene panels prior to funding decisions to prompt deeper interaction with school leaders about their strategies.

"We're very focused on the practice side, and our school and district leaders were appreciative of seeing the research side offered by the center. It added an additional layer of credibility to the work of our field coaches," said Alessandro Montanari, former NCDPI Program Coordinator for District and School Transformation. "They also helped tremendously with professional development on Reaching ALL Students for Success, which featured breakout sessions on high-yield strategies and processes to achieve academic excellence with particular subgroups such as English language learners and African-American males." Refer to the [NCDPI District and School Transformation Overview](#). In addition, SECC conducted literacy professional development for 200 TALAS school leaders.



SECC education specialists meet with NCDPI counterparts to hone school improvement strategies. Photo Credit: SECC



Impact: Schools Make Gains

SECC experts continued to work with NCDPI leaders to help the agency better coordinate efforts in its recently integrated federal and division school improvement offices to more rigorously plan work and monitor results. The approach is helping to focus and streamline the assistance to provide maximum benefit for districts and schools.

By 2013–14, after 4 years of TALAS, findings from the [Consortium for Educational Research and Evaluation – North Carolina](#) “clearly indicate that North Carolina’s lowest-achieving schools in 2009–10 improved their performance.” The research noted that the results suggest the value of the needs assessments and school improvement plans developed in the initiative’s first year.

According to the [Executive Summary](#) from the consortium study (Outcomes and Impacts of North Carolina’s Initiative to Turn Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools by Henry, G. T., & Guthrie, J. E. [2015], Vanderbilt University), “North Carolina has carried out an effort to transform low-performing schools that is more ambitious than those of all other states that received RttT funding.”



Changes: New System, Better Resource Use, and Targeted Services

SECC will assist NCDPI as a thought partner in developing a new system of support and in leveraging its resources to more efficiently provide services to low-performing schools and districts.

For more information, please contact
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