



Sandhills Leadership Academy serves thirteen school districts in the Sandhills region of North Carolina. To address the demand for well-prepared principals for high need schools in the region, the Sandhills Regional Education Consortium applied for and received a three-year \$6.1 million Race to the Top grant for the purpose of developing a regional leadership academy. **Sandhills Leadership Academy** is a full-time, year-long leadership academy that prepares talented educators to become highly effective school leaders of high need schools in the Sandhills region. The North Carolina State Board of Education approved the regional leadership academy concept and the alternate principal licensure process, making SLA the licensure agent for its graduates.

The Sandhills Leadership Academy scope and sequence is based on the Standards for North Carolina School Executives. We partner with Fayetteville State University, UNC-Pembroke, and North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching. Executive interns receive their regular salary for 11 months during the year-long program, including a full-time internship at the elbow of a mentor principal. They receive coaching throughout a two-year induction period—first as an intern and then in the first year of employment as a school administrator.

The interns I have had the honor to host are very bright and highly motivated to see that students succeed no matter the child's background, and are well prepared to step into the role of school principal at the end of the program. – Kim Robertson, Principal, Elizabeth Cashwell Elementary School, Cumberland County Schools

Rigorous Selection Process

Sandhills Leadership Academy has selected 20 - 21 teachers during each of the three grant years to serve as executive interns. The application process is a two-tiered process—school district and regional. Each participating school district can recommend up to four candidates for each cohort to participate in a regional selection process. 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
- ✚ Demonstration of success in leading adults in schools

School district candidate selection process elements agreed upon for 2013-14 cohort selection include:

- ✚ Rubric Cover Sheet
- ✚ Letter of interest
- ✚ Resume
- ✚ NCDPI application
- ✚ Interview

The two-day regional selection process elements include:

- ✚ Presentation
- ✚ Written Response
- ✚ Teacher Video
- ✚ Panel Interview
- ✚ Group Scenario

Districts commit to interviewing graduates for positions in high-need, priority, or turnaround schools, and graduates commit to serving in the region for a minimum of four years beyond program completion.

Our Vision:

At the heart of the Sandhills Leadership Academy is our vision ... to prepare a cadre of highly effective school leaders for high need schools in the Sandhills Region.

Our Mission:

Sandhills Leadership Academy 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.

Key Features of Sandhills Leadership Academy

- ✦ **Rigorous Selection Process**
- ✦ **Cohort and Team/Group Approach**
- ✦ **Intensive Weeks**
 - ✦ Three-Week Summer Intensive prior to residency year
 - ✦ One-Week Winter Intensive
 - ✦ One-Week Summer Intensive at end of residency year
 - ✦ Specialized Trainings (two days) throughout the residency year
- ✦ **Year-Long Internship and Residency**
 - ✦ Full-Time Internship with trained mentor principals selected by superintendents
 - ✦ Executive coaching for two years provided by experienced and successful practitioners
 - ✦ Switch Month in a different school district, experiencing new leadership style and district culture
 - ✦ Weekly Residency Sessions facilitated by experienced, successful practitioners
 - ✦ Technology based – Edmodo, LiveBinders, Twitter, Facebook, Diigo
 - ✦ Just in time learning with national and state leaders facilitating learning in all NC School Executive Standard areas
 - ✦ Supportive SREC Superintendents Council and SLA Advisory Team

Listening while the SLA interns share their personal reflections and watching as they demonstrate what they have learned during their sessions at Carthage has been a learning experience for me. It has caused me to become a more reflective practitioner this year and a more effective principal for the future. – Deborah Guyton, Principal, Bladenboro Primary School

Evaluation

Evaluation processes for the Academy are ongoing. Dr. Kathleen Brown serves as evaluator of the RLAs and collects ongoing data. SLA surveys executive interns and graduates to determine needs and to receive feedback for program improvement. We anticipate a record of increased student achievement in a 3-5 year timeline. Our graduates stand out among their peers, and superintendents are placing them where they have the greatest need.

We have hired every intern to date—including one as principal of a high school—and all of them are amongst our most thoughtful, energetic leaders. – Dr. Aaron Spence, Superintendent, Moore County Schools

We are pleased that **95 percent** of our graduates from Cohorts 1 and 2 were hired as administrators the year following graduation. Currently, 10 of our 41 Cohorts 1 and 2 graduates are serving as principals and 26 as assistant principals. One graduate is serving as a Director of Grades 3-5 and two are serving as instructional coaches.