

# The Northeast Leadership Academy



*Excellent Leaders. Effective Schools. Enriched Communities.*

## Great Schools Have Great Leaders.

The Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA) is an innovative school leader preparation program designed to develop 21<sup>st</sup> Century principals who drive improvements in student achievement in northeast North Carolina's rural, high-need schools.

## Partnerships with 14 local school districts

NELA graduates earn their Master in School Administration degree from NC State University and a North Carolina principal license.

## Radically Different

The rigorous, research-based program requires participants to demonstrate their leadership skills through solving authentic school problems. NELA teaches participants powerful mindsets and skill sets that are changing the trajectory of historically low-performing schools.

## Only Rural-Focused Leadership Program in NC

NELA is filling a pressing need. Almost one-third (32.3%) of America's schools are rural and nearly half (47.2%) of NC's students attend rural schools. Program experiences are customized to focus on turnaround principles for rural, low performing, high-poverty schools and communities. Classes and trainings are held at sites in northeast NC.

## Impact

*90% leadership placement rate.* NELA's high placement rates indicate the selection and preparation of leaders in schools in the northeast are desperately needed. In addition to the extraordinarily high overall placement rates, other indicators point to a highly effective program. Of the 2012 graduates, after only one year as assistant principals, six were named principals for the 2013-2014 school year.

## The NELA Program

### *Strategic Recruitment & Performanced-Based Selection*

Multi-step selection process that includes experiential events in which candidates must demonstrate their skills, knowledge and dispositions.

### *Personalized Leadership Training*

Multiple diagnostic tools, including input from mentor principals and coaches, are used to identify areas for improvement and to create comprehensive action plans.

### *Action Pedagogy*

An inquiry-action based approach, participants engage in instructional rotations at all levels of schooling to examine developmentally appropriate teaching and learning.

### *Making a Difference Locally*

Participants develop and deliver professional development for teachers, create resources for parents and teachers and write grant applications to fund needed programs locally.

### *Full-Time Summer Internship*

The program includes an intensive summer experience in the local community that surrounds the schools and participants learn to write grants that connect schools and the community.

### *Executive Coaching & Mentoring*

Paired with a school-based internship principal mentor and an executive coach (retired expert principals and superintendents), participants are supported over the internship year and beyond.

### *Specialized Training*

Participants experience a variety of specialized trainings that are beyond a set of anchor courses.

### *Distinguished Leadership in Practice (DLP)*

In partnership with NC's Principal and Assistant Principals Association, participants and their principal mentors go through DLP to strengthen skills of practicing school leaders simultaneously with aspiring leaders.

### *Full-Time, Yearlong Internship*

Yearlong, full-time internship in the second year of the program is focused on a data-driven problem of practice. A logic model is developed to measure and evaluate strategies that are employed.

### *Transitional Support*

Graduates convene post-job placement to continue learning, receive just-in-time support and build professional networks.



## Educate. Innovate. Inspire.

Great schools have great leaders. Leadership quality is second only to teacher quality in terms of its impact on student achievement. However, unlike many of our international competitors in education (i.e., Finland & Singapore), US educational systems seldom invest in leadership development and succession planning. Quality leadership matters and it matters most in our lowest-performing schools.

Research indicates that principals have nearly twice the impact on student achievement in the most challenging schools – specifically, high-poverty, high-minority, low-performing schools (like those in NELA districts). Unfortunately, the school systems most in need of highly effective leaders lack the capacity to develop and support the type of leaders their students deserve. High-poverty, low achieving school districts also have great difficulty attracting high quality applicants. Over the next 4 years 50% of the current principals will be eligible for retirement and therefore a targeted investment in building leadership capacity is a timely strategy that promises to yield significant returns in improved student outcomes.

Every significant leadership theory of the past 60 years has emphasized that developing effective educational leaders is fundamentally and irrevocably an interpersonal, relational process – one that requires face-to-face human contact, engagement in rigorous interactive experiences and deep reflection. NELA's theory of action and framework is built on research-based best practices contextualized for rural, northeast North Carolina. It is anchored in NC Standards for School Executives and a research-based vision of what an effective principal does to lead instructional improvement. What results is a fluid praxis; the participants' electronic portfolios provide evidence of the impact of such an approach. On the NELA website you can view the logic model and NELA participants' individual web pages which include examples of their work.

**"NELA is a model School Administrator training program unlike any other I have been associated with as a Superintendent. The program is growing the brightest and most highly skilled administrators in our county."**  
~ John Farrelly, Superintendent, Edgecombe County Public Schools

**"Being in a high poverty school district in the northeast, NELA is very important here and the tier one counties. The benefits in developing high quality administrators in the intense two year program address our needs as a school system."**  
~ Ron Melchiorre, Superintendent, Martin County Schools

**"NELA strives to keep our best leaders in this area where they can do the most good for our students."**  
~ Eleese Frederick, Superintendent, Halifax County Schools

**"The Nash-Rocky Mount Public School System has benefited tremendously from NELA and fully supports a continued strategic partnership as we work to develop and grow aspiring leaders within the district."**  
~ Anthony Jackson, Superintendent, Nash/Rocky Mount Public Schools

## Evaluation

Research indicates that it takes highly effective principals 3-5 years to implement dramatic improvements in student achievement. Therefore, while the full impact of NELA will not be available until the graduates have been principals for 3-5 years, data is being collected and analyzed on the program and its impact. In addition to having an external evaluator, NELA collects and monitors data on our Fellows throughout the program, beginning with selection. We reach out to alumni and instructors/mentors to collect feedback on the preparation and support provided by the program. Surveys, interviews, focus groups, and observations in the field all serve to inform NELA about our program effectiveness and the implications for program design. Each participant is an individual case study for which comprehensive, longitudinal data are collected and analyzed. Collectively, these cases provide rich data on program effectiveness.

**"I have observed NELA candidates in both their internships and new roles as school leaders. I know the difference their presence can make in a district that has previously struggled to simply find one sufficient well-qualified candidate."**  
~ Pat Ashley, Director of District & School Transformation, NC Dept of Public Instruction

**"I have never heard of a graduate program that better prepares students for the principalship than NELA. The graduates' skills and competencies enable them to carry a school forward."**  
~ Joe Peel, Mayor, Elizabeth City, NC

**"NELA's proven ability to build a leadership pipeline and train effective school leaders is critical to providing all students in North Carolina with an excellent education that prepares them for college and careers."**  
~ Robyn Fehrman, Executive Director, Teach for America, Eastern NC

**"This innovative program is deliberate, effective, and has proven successful in developing and incorporating critical, research-based practices into participants' school improvement efforts."**  
~ Shirley Prince, Executive Director, NC Principals & Assistant Principals' Association