Friday Institute Education Brief
Teaching for the Long Haul: Professionalizing Career Pathways for North Carolina Teachers

Background and Purpose
In 2016, the North Carolina General Assembly provided support for school districts across North Carolina to propose and implement pilot advanced teaching roles programs that would allow highly effective classroom teachers to take on leadership roles in their schools and reach more students. Six districts were chosen to develop pilot programs attuned to their local needs. The Friday Institute conducted a formal three-year evaluation of these six pilots to answer several "whether" questions (for example, whether the pilot programs helped improve student outcomes). In addition, with the support of The Belk Foundation, the Friday Institute completed “deep dive” closer-look investigations with three of the pilots—an urban district with past experiences with teacher leadership programs, a rural district new to teacher leadership and a rural-urban mixed district with some past experience. These deep dives helped to answer “how” and “why” questions about why some aspects of the pilot programs led to improvements in recruitment and retention, stabilization of school culture and gains in student outcomes, while some aspects did not. By sharing these “deep-dives”, we hope that policymakers, advocates and practitioners, particularly those in school districts that are considering implementing advanced teaching roles programs, will find the stories, observations and learnings provided in this closer look to be helpful as more districts begin to develop their own advanced teaching roles programs.

Lessons from Across the Three Districts
Several observations from our deep dives appeared to be true for all three districts and therefore seem likely to be relevant for any district that is considering development of an advanced teaching roles program.

Overall Strengths
- Earning leadership status is a rigorous and rewarding process for most teachers;
- Program structure can lead to enhanced vertical alignment of curricula;
- Interactions among teachers are more frequent and stronger
- Lead teachers help fill gaps even in experienced colleagues’ training and support;
- Early academic outcomes are promising; and
- Teachers value having leadership roles that allow them to stay in the classroom.
Overall Challenges

• Application rigor is not the same as application appropriateness;
• Initiative success often is personnel-dependent;
• Clear communication matters;
• Implementation success takes time;
• Program expansion may extend cross-district fiscal inequities;
• Successful Lead Teacher support for beginning teachers is not automatic; and
• Programs introduce new time management challenges.

Overall Lessons Learned

• Lessons Related to Initiative Planning:
  o Districts—and to some degree, schools—need both flexibility and internal consistency;
  o Initiatives must include a plan for sustainable funding;
  o Districts benefit from external design and implementation support; and
  o Initiatives should be integrated into a district's larger set of plans.

• Lessons Related to People:
  o Successful school-level implementation requires collaboration and trust;
  o Leadership stability is essential;
  o School-level administrators need training and support;
  o Teachers need training and support, too; and
  o Lead teachers are not administrators

District-Level Lessons
We also include in the main report some strengths, challenges and lessons learned that appeared to be less universal but that likely still will be relevant for other districts that are thinking about developing their own programs.

Closing Thoughts
Providing opportunities for districts to develop and implement teacher leadership programs appears to be a good move for our state. It is not, however, a move that can be made lightly and with only a short-term vision. We hope that the stories shared in this closer look will help other districts and the state as a whole to build the strong, sustainable and successful teacher leadership programs that our teachers and their students both need and deserve.

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