



# North Carolina Progress Report Fall 2011



U.S. Department of Education  
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Fall 2011 Progress Report, revision as of February 2012

## **Race to the Top Program Review Process**

As part of the Implementation and Support Unit's (ISU) commitment to supporting States as they implement ambitious reform agendas, the U.S. Department of Education (Department) re-examined its grant monitoring process and developed the *Race to the Top Program Review process*. The Program Review process is designed to not only address the Department's responsibilities for fiscal and programmatic oversight, but is also intended to identify areas in which Race to the Top grantees need assistance and support to meet their goals.

The Program Review process is anchored around ongoing conversations between the Department and grantees and includes multiple components: Onsite Program Reviews, Monthly Progress Updates, the Annual Performance Review (APR), Progress Reports, State-specific Summary Reports, a Comprehensive Annual Report, and Stocktake meetings with the Secretary of Education and ISU leadership.

## **Progress Reports**

Drafted by the ISU during fall 2011 and submitted to States in January 2012, the Progress Report summarizes a State's grant outcomes as of the drafting of this report, including progress in meeting its benchmarks and timelines and characteristics of implementation. The Progress Report for each State is based on information provided through monthly Progress Updates, the onsite program review, the APR, and other relevant qualitative and quantitative data. The Progress Report is not intended to be a formal public document (i.e., it will not be posted on the Department's website), but instead provides the ISU's feedback to grantees on progress to date to inform future conversations and highlight both areas of success and areas needing additional attention and support. Since the report is considered correspondence between the Department and Grantees, like almost all similar documents, it is subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

*Please note, the report may not reflect updated information, including amendment requests that have been approved or revised within a few weeks prior to the submission date on the front of the report. The Department considers the Progress Report to be a living document and will strive to incorporate such amendments in future iterations.*

## **Progress Report Sections**

### **Section 1: Summary of Performance and Progress Evaluation**

For each sub-criterion in which the State included projects in its Race to the Top plan, this page summarizes the State and the U.S. Department of Education's rating of performance and progress on goals/objectives. The State's rating is populated based on the most recent Progress Update, which may be from onsite review materials or from monthly calls. The Department's rating is based on an analysis of the information the Department has to date as of the writing of this report (see 'quality of implementation and rationale for Department's performance rating').

A sub-criterion may be considered not applicable (N/A) for several reasons, including: (1) The State has not yet submitted a Progress Update on the sub-criterion (i.e., a conversation is scheduled for a future monthly call); (2) The State's plan addressed the sub-criterion as a reform 'condition' but no project plans are associated with it (e.g., (A)(1)); (3) The State's plan includes a project that is relevant to the sub-criterion, but is primarily connected to and discussed in a different sub-criterion (e.g., (B)(2) may be reported as 'N/A' because the State's project(s) related to transitioning to high-quality, college- and career-ready standards and assessments is reported in the (B)(3) sub-criterion).

Ratings are based on a four-point scale on which ‘green’ represents good and refinement and systematic implementation is required; ‘yellow’ indicates that substantial attention is required and some aspects are good; ‘orange’ indicates that substantial attention is required and some aspects need urgent attention; and ‘red’ indicates that urgent and decisive action is required.

## **Section II: Narrative and Assessment of Performance and Progress by Relevant Sub-criterion**

### **Overview**

- **State’s self-described goals for this sub-criterion**

This section is populated based on the list reported in the State’s most recent Progress Update.

- **Relevant projects**

This section is populated based on the list reported in the State’s most recent Progress Update and/or based on the project names in the State’s approved Race to the Top Budget.

- **Key accomplishments**

This section summarizes key accomplishments for the sub-criterion that are discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections. This section may include accomplishments articulated by the State in its Progress Update(s) or other conversations and/or accomplishments recognized by the Department.

- **Key challenges**

This section summarizes key challenges for the sub-criterion that are discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections. This section may include challenges articulated by the State in its Progress Update(s) or other conversations and/or challenges recognized by the Department.

### **Department’s Analysis of Performance and Progress**

- **State’s progress against scope of work and goals (by project)**

This section includes State-reported data from sources including the APR and Progress Update(s) as well as notes from monthly calls, additional conversations, and the State’s approved application and Scope of Work to summarize the State’s progress against its approved plan for each project in the sub-criterion.

- **Continuous improvement: Methods, tools, processes used to assess progress and quality**

This section primarily utilizes the State’s response to question two in the Progress Update protocol – *What methods, tools, and processes is the State using to determine the progress toward the goals and performance measures and the quality of implementation of the activities described for this application sub-criterion?*—to provide context for how the State is considering continuous improvement. In some instances, this section may also include additional methods, tools, and processes the Department is aware of from additional communication with the State.

- **Mid-course corrections or relevant amendments**

This section is dynamic because the relevance of this section varies. This section may include information from amendment approval letters to describe how changes to the State’s plan, approach, or timelines

impact implementation to date. Additionally, this section may include proposed amendment requests to indicate potential changes that may come in the future. This section may also include mid-course corrections to implementation that the Department is aware of based on responses provided by the State in Progress Reports or through additional conversations.

- **Quality of implementation and rationale for Department's performance rating**

This section is the Department's analysis of the State's quality of implementation to date. The Department's analysis for each sub-criterion is grounded in the State's approved plan for the sub-criterion (i.e., scope of work, budget narrative, application, approved amendments) and the information the Department has to date about the progress and quality of the State's implementation to date against this plan. The Department anticipates that these ratings will change over time given that the Progress Report will be updated to reflect progress and quality against the relevant milestones and commitments for the most recent time period under review.

In assessing progress and quality, the Department considers a variety of sources including: the State's APR, including budget expenditure data and narratives provided by the State contained therein; Progress Updates and accompanying monthly call notes; and additional records and correspondence from ongoing communication between the State and the Department. As appropriate, this section may also reference the rationale provided by the State for its self-assessment.

**Other**

As applicable, this section includes information that may be relevant to the sub-criterion but does not directly apply to the progress or quality of implementation.

**NORTH CAROLINA RACE TO THE TOP PROGRESS REPORT: YEAR ONE**

**SECTION I: Summary of North Carolina Performance and Progress Evaluation**

Criteria	Performance and Progress on Goals/Objectives in Race to the Top Plan <sup>1</sup>			Page	
	State	Department			
<b>A. State Success Factors</b>					
(A)(1)	Articulating State’s education reform agenda and LEAs’ participation in it		N/A		
(A)(2)	Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, & sustain proposed plans		Green May 2011	Yellow October 2011	3
(A)(3)	Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps		N/A		
<b>B. Standards and Assessments</b>					
(B)(1)	Developing and adopting common standards		N/A		
(B)(2)	Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments		N/A		
(B)(3) <sup>2</sup>	Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments		Green May 2011	Green October 2011	8
<b>C. Data Systems to Support Instruction</b>					
(C)(1)	Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system		N/A		
(C)(2)	Accessing and using State data		Yellow August 2011	Yellow October 2011	12
(C)(3)	Using data to improve instruction		Yellow September 2011	Yellow October 2011	15
<b>D. Great Teachers and Leaders</b>					
(D)(1)	Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals		N/A		
(D)(2)	Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance		Green July 2011	Green October 2011	18
(D)(3) <sup>3</sup>	Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals		Green October 2011	Yellow October 2011	22
(D)(4)	Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs		Green July 2011	Green October 2011	26
(D)(5) <sup>4</sup>	Providing effective support to teachers and principals		<i>Forthcoming November 2011 monthly report</i>		
<b>E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools</b>					

<sup>1</sup> Ratings are based on a four-point scale on which Green = good and refinement and systematic implementation is required; Yellow = substantial attention is required and some aspects are good; Orange = substantial attention is required and some aspects need urgent attention; and Red = urgent and decisive action is required.

<sup>2</sup> The State’s work in this area includes a portion of the (D)(5) scope and budget.

<sup>3</sup> In its October 2011 Progress Update, the State provided individual ratings for each project in this sub-criterion. Four were rated ‘green’ and three were rated ‘yellow.’

<sup>4</sup> The portion of the State’s work in (D)(5) that is directly related to (B)(3) is included in the (B)(3) discussion.

(E)(1)	Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs	N/A		
(E)(2)	Turning around the lowest- achieving schools	Green June 2011	Yellow October 2011	29
Competitive Preference Priority	Emphasis on STEM	Yellow August 2011	Yellow October 2011	33

**SECTION II: Narrative and Assessment of Performance and Progress by Relevant Sub-Criterion**

(A)(2)

State Success Factors	Performance and Progress on Goals/Objectives in Race to the Top Plan	
	State	Department
(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans	Green May 2011	Yellow October 2011

**OVERVIEW**

**North Carolina’s self-described goals for this sub-criterion**

- Ensure that all North Carolina Race to the Top initiatives are implemented effectively, with fidelity to the original application, and in alignment with the State’s policy mandate for public education.
- Ensure that North Carolina Race to the Top implementation is managed purposefully.
- Develop PK-12 technology infrastructure to provide cost-effective and robust networking infrastructure for local educational agencies (LEAs).
- Deploy NC Cloud infrastructure and service delivery platform to provide digital resources and tools to support all Race to the Top initiatives.
- Provide ongoing evaluations to inform continuous improvement of Race to the Top initiatives and summative analyses to inform future program, policy, and funding decisions.

**Relevant projects**

- Race to the Top Management
- NC Cloud
- Evaluation of Race to the Top Initiatives

**Key accomplishments**

- North Carolina built a foundation for managing the overall Race to the Top effort during year one by creating a Race to the Top Management Office within the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI) and establishing a project oversight structure for Race to the Top initiatives.
- The State built capacity to implement its broad Race to the Top reform agenda including hiring additional staff at the State Education Agency (SEA).
- NC DPI entered into a contract with a consortium of universities to conduct an evaluation. The State plans to use the data and analysis provided to inform continuous improvement of Race to the Top initiatives and guide future policy and funding decisions in the State.
- After an extensive process of requirements gathering and engaging with vendors and LEAs, the State Board of Education (SBE) reviewed and approved the draft NC Education Cloud Blueprint.

**Key challenges**

- Building capacity at the SEA was a challenge for North Carolina during year one. Existing staff was already managing an extensive workload, and lengthy internal hiring processes led to delays in staffing-up for Race to the Top implementation.
- The time-consuming statewide procurement process constrained North Carolina’s ability to execute contracts as planned, in turn delaying the State’s ability to obtain support from external partners to move forward with planned activities.
- The State has also said that the quantity and speed of the reform effort is a challenge both for logistics and for behavioral change at all levels of the system.

- The State expressed an ongoing communications challenge with maintaining momentum around Race to the Top given the pattern of budget cuts facing the State, higher education, and LEAs.

## **DEPARTMENT’S ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS**

### **North Carolina’s progress against scope of work and goals (by project)**

- *Race to the Top Management*: North Carolina made progress toward its goals of ensuring that Race to the Top initiatives are implemented effectively and managed purposefully. As of October 2011, the State reported that 91 of the 115 positions outlined in its plan were filled.<sup>5</sup> During year one, the State also proposed and was approved to create additional positions to support implementation including four specifically for project management and oversight at NC DPI and the SBE.

During year one, the State established the North Carolina Race to the Top Project Management Office (PMO) within NC DPI to oversee the nine initiative areas in the State’s Race to the Top plan.<sup>6</sup> The PMO worked to identify project leads for each initiative area and established a structure for coordination among Race to the Top initiatives and SEA offices. Project leads and the Race to the Top Director met weekly to discuss accomplishments and issues, work collaboratively, and address needs and concerns related to the projects. In order to manage external partners, the State created and began using protocols for vendor accountability in spring 2011.

After approving year one scopes of work for participating LEAs in November 2010, North Carolina required LEAs to create comprehensive scopes of work integrating their Race to the Top plans and goals alongside other State and local reforms and sources of funding across the four-year grant period. Between fall 2010 and early summer 2011, the State provided direction and support to LEAs in this process through online templates and webinars, as well as face-to-face meetings in collaboration with North Carolina’s Regional Educational Service Alliances (RESAs). As of November 3, 2011, the majority of revised participating LEA scopes of work had been approved.<sup>7</sup> The State is still working to approve revised plans from three of the 115 districts and nine of the 27 currently participating charters.

The State also took steps to establish and maintain relationships with key stakeholders, including LEAs. To guide the development of the NC Cloud, NC DPI collaborated with more than 100 local leaders who serve on the LEA Shared Services Advisory Committee and project-focused LEA working groups. The State also ensured involvement of educators in the development of its expanded evaluation system through Measures of Student Learning Design Groups, comprising approximately 800 educators from across the State. Further, North Carolina established routines to continuously include stakeholders in oversight processes such as SBE meetings, the Governor’s Education Transformation Commission (GETC) and its subcommittees, and the Superintendent’s quarterly educator group.

The State also implemented a variety of communications strategies to build understanding and support among stakeholders. To specifically inform audiences about Race to the Top, the SEA created videos, including a Race to the Top overview video, a “Teachers are the Key” video describing teachers’ role in the success of the initiative, and an overview of the Summer Institutes that are posted on the NC DPI Web site. The State also created a Race to the Top Weekly Update email to

<sup>5</sup> As of October 28, 2011, one of the 91 had not formally started.

<sup>6</sup> According to North Carolina’s organizational chart, these nine initiative areas are: Educator Effectiveness, Instructional Improvement System, Standards and Assessment, STEM, Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools, Professional Development, NC Education Cloud, Evaluation, and Virtual and Blended Courses.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/rttt/lea-charter/>. Accessed on November 3, 2011.

inform stakeholders statewide about the current and upcoming activities related to the State's plan. Currently more than 1,300 teachers, administrators, and other partners receive this update.

- *NC Cloud:* During year one, North Carolina took steps to build a foundation for statewide technology initiatives, including the NC Cloud. In creating the NC Cloud, the State aims to improve service reliability, increase efficiency, and decrease long-term IT costs for all districts, regardless of differences in local funding. Since the system is 'opt-in,' in order to actualize the potential for the cost efficiencies from a centralized networking infrastructure, the State took steps to make sure the system will meet the needs of its users.

North Carolina engaged in extensive planning and development for the NC Cloud in coordination with LEAs; the State established LEA working groups and focus groups and conducted a 300-question survey with more than 120 LEAs to assess local positioning related to technology infrastructure. Additionally, the State established the NCEdCloud Shared Services Advisory Committee comprising two members (e.g., superintendents, assistant superintendents, chief technology officers, instructional technology directors, and charter school IT directors) from each of the State's eight regions. These efforts enabled the State to account for the needs of educators as well as district and school technology staff as it determined system requirements and created documents to drive the creation of an NC Cloud.

The State also worked with national peer groups (such as the International Society for Technology in Education and the State Education Technology Directors' Association) to discuss issues such as privacy, total cost of ownership, support, scaling, and replication. NC DPI began initial coordination of the Cloud and other technology initiatives, including working with the Instructional Improvement System (IIS) planning team vendor. This coordination is critical, since IIS instructional content and assessment delivery will be connected to the NC Cloud infrastructure. Additionally, the SBE reviewed and approved the draft NC Education Cloud Blueprint in October 2011, which provides additional details on the goals, guiding principles, findings from the requirements gathering phase, strategies, deliverables, and overall work plan to fully deploy a statewide service platform in the 2013-14 school year.

- *Evaluation of Race to the Top Initiatives:* During year one, the State completed initial activities that will inform formative and summative evaluations of Race to the Top initiatives going forward. NC DPI contracted with a consortium of universities to conduct an evaluation that will inform continuous improvement of Race to the Top initiatives and guide future policy and funding decisions. The Race to the Top Evaluation Team includes staff from the SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University and the Carolina Institute for Public Policy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The Race to the Top Evaluation Team coordinated with initiative leads to develop evaluation plans, establish timelines for reports, and determine key research questions. Evaluators collected baseline data that will enable them to track progress on Race to the Top initiatives and guide ongoing evaluation.

According to the State's APR, \$32,000 of the approximately \$1.3 million budgeted for year one of the Evaluation project was drawn down as of June 30, 2011. Based on meetings with NC DPI project teams throughout year one, the State received a comprehensive scope of work from the Evaluation Team on June 30, 2011. While the planning phase took longer than anticipated, baseline analyses were successfully completed and the State believes it is on track to proceed with studies on implementation during year two.

### **Continuous improvement: Methods, tools, processes to assess progress and quality**

North Carolina uses its work plans for each initiative that include detailed deliverables with expected dates of completion, as its primary mechanism for assessing progress. The State also ensures that work is on track and in support of the overall State reform goals through regular meetings of initiative leads, project coordinators, and internal and external collaborative planning and steering groups. Furthermore, NC DPI's accountability to the GETC and SBE through monthly presentations and input from advisory committees and working groups provide an additional routine for ongoing feedback.

For projects being carried out with significant contractual support from other State entities or vendors, detailed contracts, vendor monthly reports, and structured team processes are in place to manage completion of deliverables.

As the State moves into year two, it expects that periodic reports of formative and summative evaluation results from the Evaluation will provide data to assess quality of implementation across reform areas in its Race to the Top plan.

### **Mid-course corrections or relevant amendments**

During the first year of implementation, the State recognized that more staff was needed to address project management and oversight support needs, in addition to the positions included in its Race to the Top application. North Carolina requested and was approved to amend its project budget to add three positions within the Race to the Top PMO, one at the SBE, and one within the Office of the Governor to coordinate and support implementation.

### **Quality of implementation and rationale for Department's performance rating**

In its responses for the May 2011 onsite review, North Carolina stated: *"The quality of its implementation to date in this sub-criterion area has been very high. All facets of the (A)(2) work have involved large efforts to assemble and mobilize staff, create high functioning processes to manage the work and ensure meaningful collaboration across multiple partner groups, and engage multiple stakeholder constituencies...The [Race to the Top] team has so far been able to overcome the unavoidable challenges and minor setbacks inherent in such a process."*

The Department is pleased that the State has made progress toward many of the goals set out in North Carolina's application and scope of work by establishing project management and oversight processes, engaging key stakeholders, and conducting planning and development for the NC Cloud. The work completed in year one represents a foundation that will improve the State's ability to successfully carry out its Race to the Top reform plans. According to the State's APR, as of June 30, 2011, 97.8 percent of K-12 students in the State and 99.3 percent of students in poverty<sup>8</sup> in the State are served by LEAs participating in Race to the Top.<sup>9</sup>

However, the Department also has some concerns based in part on the challenges staffing and executing contracts due to time-consuming statewide hiring and procurement processes. North Carolina also experienced challenges moving several of its initiatives from the high-level plans included in its application to implementation. In particular, the State requested and was approved to amend several plans (e.g., the Instructional Improvement System, NC Teacher Corps, NC Virtual and Blended Courses) to use school year 2010-11 as a more in-depth development phase. The Department appreciated the opportunities the amendment process provided to learn more about the State's theories of action in various reform initiatives. However, the Department found that there were often delays in receiving information on revised approaches in part as a consequence of the various entities involved in the State's complex approval process. While the Department often received notice that an amendment was

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<sup>8</sup> According to the State's APR, data provided for students in poverty includes pre-kindergarten students.

<sup>9</sup> The Department was notified on November 3 that one participating charter school included in the State's participation as of June 30, 2011, has since withdrawn. The figures provided above do not reflect this withdrawal.

upcoming, in some cases, additional months passed until such requests were formally submitted and in some cases, formal requests are still pending submission to the Department. Given the aforementioned hiring and procurement timelines, the Department looks forward to working with the State to mitigate additional delays as a result of the amendment submission timelines.

The Department has a heightened awareness that any additional changes may put the State at higher risk of not being able to accomplish future activities according to schedule and within the grant period. In particular, the time associated with the State's hiring and procurement processes continues to set back the additional support requested to build the necessary capacity to carry out several projects and thus may inhibit the State's ability to adhere to revised schedules.

The scope of the NC Cloud and its interconnectedness to the State's overall plan and relation to other developments in the education technology field pose risks to future years of implementation. However, the steps taken in year one to survey LEAs and create structures for ongoing engagement should help to mitigate some of this risk.

According to the State's APR, in total, \$17,590,613 was expended by June 30, 2011.<sup>10</sup> This is 20 percent of the approximately \$86.5 million<sup>11</sup> that was included in the State's initially approved budget.<sup>12</sup> In a narrative accompanying the budget information provided in the State's APR, hiring, contract negotiations, invoicing dates, and implementation delays were listed as reasons for the variance between the actual expenditures and budgeted total.

As a result of the delays that impacted the State's ability to accomplish its year one objectives effectively and efficiently, and concerns that timeline shifts may negatively impact future implementation, the Department rates North Carolina's performance and progress for sub-criterion (A)(2) "yellow" for year one. The Department looks forward to learning more about how the methods, tools, and processes the State identified to assess quality, particularly the formative evaluation results and regular meetings, drive decision-making and mid-course corrections, as needed, in future grant years.

## **OTHER**

- The State's initial application included full participation from each of the State's 115 LEAs. North Carolina did not initially consider charter schools that were Title I, Part A recipients as eligible LEAs for Race to the Top. Upon clarification from the Department, the State offered all eligible charters (based on the definition in the Race to the Top Notice Inviting Applications) an opportunity to participate. In addition to the same 115 LEAs included in its initial proposal, the State now has an additional 27 charters committed to participate in all aspects of the State's Race to the Top reform agenda.
- The State did not include college course completion baseline data or targets overall or by subgroup in its approved application. The State has been notified that, at minimum, a four-year target for all students is required and plans to submit targets for review soon.

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<sup>10</sup> According to the State's Expenditure Summary Table, \$13,270,854.83 of the \$17,590,613 was in funding subgranted to participating LEAs.

<sup>11</sup> This total includes \$50 million, or one-fourth of the funding to be subgranted to participating LEAs.

<sup>12</sup> To date the State's approved amendments reduced the total year one budget by approximately \$11.2 million to \$75,286,698.

(B)(3)

Standards and Assessments	Performance and Progress on Goals/Objectives in Race to the Top Plan	
	State	Department
(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments <sup>13</sup>	Green May 2011	Green October 2011

## OVERVIEW

### **North Carolina's self-described goals for this sub-criterion**

- Work in partnership with LEAs to build and reinforce educator and stakeholder support of the new standards and belief that the new standards will improve student outcomes.
- Ensure educator mastery of the standards and provide educators with the necessary tools to translate that knowledge into student outcomes.
- Ensure that stakeholders understand and use summative tests and related data effectively and appropriately.
- Support meaningful use of test data and help educators and students transition to using online testing.
- Align high school exit criteria and college entrance requirements to the standards.

### **Relevant projects**

- Transition to New Standards and Assessments

### **Key accomplishments**

- The State conducted six regional summer institutes on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and North Carolina Essential Standards, for 2,500 educators from participating LEAs and charter schools across the State. The summer institutes are one example of the multiple professional development opportunities that the State offered during year one to help administrators, educators, and professional development leaders better understand the new standards.
- The State created structures for ongoing engagement with educators around CCSS as part of its plan to fully implement them in the 2012-13 school year.
- The State created five online instructional modules as well as various instructional tools to assist LEAs during the transition to and implementation of the new standards.
- The State completed a Best Practices Guide for Online Assessments.

### **Key challenges**

- A major ongoing challenge for North Carolina in this initiative is obtaining buy-in from and providing support to educators as they adjust to the significant changes associated with transitioning to the CCSS.
- In conjunction with shifting to new standards and assessments, the State identified that LEAs have additional technological needs that will need to be met in order for the implementation of new standards and assessments to be effective (see discussion of NC Cloud in (A)(2) and Instructional Improvement System in (C)(3)).

## DEPARTMENT'S ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS

<sup>13</sup> The State's work in this area includes a portion of the (D)(5) scope and budget.

### **North Carolina's progress against scope of work and goals (by project)**

- *Transition to New Standards and Assessments:* Year one activities focused primarily on setting the stage for a successful transition to new standards. The State adopted the CCSS and developed and adopted North Carolina Essential Standards for all content areas not covered by the CCSS.

During the summer of 2011, the State conducted six regional summer institutes on the Common Core and Essential Standards, providing professional development to approximately 2,500 educators from LEAs and charter schools across the State. These sessions provided an overview of the new standards that students must meet in order to be college and career-ready. The State also provided guidance to help participants understand the implications of the new standards as LEAs and charter schools begin developing their local curricula. Additionally, the State offered a series of professional development sessions on the Common Core and NC Essential Standards specifically for school administrators. In November 2011 as part of the (D)(5) monthly call, the Department learned that to date the State has created five online instructional modules for Standards and Assessments—The Call for Change, Developing Local Curricula, NC Professional Teaching Standards, Understanding the Standards, and Understanding Student Behavior I—and made the content available for educators' ongoing training on the standards transition. However, the State's (D)(5) Scope of Work specified that the development of 8 new modules would be completed by July 2011 focusing on supporting transition to new standards and 8 additional modules would be complete by October 2011. The State's (B)(3) scope of work references (D)(5) but does not specify the targeted quantity of modules. The Department anticipates receiving an amendment from the State to clarify these targets.

The State also created various instructional tools such as the Unpacking Standards document, Standards Crosswalk document, 2011 Facilitators Guide, and content-specific presentations materials to assist LEAs during the transition to and implementation of the CCSS. In fall 2011, the State provided content-specific "live chats" to provide support and fidelity checks with district teams and charter schools. The State also shared and posted a comprehensive map that clearly communicates the various phases for professional development offered to teachers, administrators, colleges and universities, and district teams during the 2011-2012 school year.

- *SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC):* North Carolina is a governing member of SBAC, which is developing Common Core-aligned assessments. There are members from North Carolina on the Test Administration, Validation and Psychometrics, Technology Approach, and Transition to Common Core SBAC workgroups.

To prepare LEAs for the transition to online assessments, both those that will be implemented through SBAC in school year 2014-15 as well as other opportunities through formative practices, the State developed and disseminated a Best Practices Guide. The guide included best practices for administrators, teachers, test administrators, test coordinators, and technology and instructional staff, as well as case studies highlighting successful practices from schools in the State that have already made progress in this area.

### **Continuous improvement: Methods, tools, processes to assess progress and quality**

North Carolina uses its work plans for each initiative that include detailed deliverables with expected dates of completion, as its primary mechanism for assessing progress. The State also ensures that work is on track and in support of the overall State reform goals through regular meetings of initiative leads, project coordinators, and internal and external collaborative planning and steering groups. Furthermore, NC DPI's accountability to the GETC and SBE through monthly presentations and input from advisory committees and working groups provide an additional routine for ongoing feedback. The State ensures

coordination between Race to the Top supports for standards and assessments and NC DPI's Accountability and Curriculum Reform Effort (ACRE) through planning and status meetings.

In order to refine its tools and guidance documents, North Carolina solicited feedback from business leaders and national experts and surveyed educators. Furthermore, in October 2011, the State began outreach with institutions of higher education (IHEs) to ensure consistency with K-12 and higher education implementation of CCSS and NC Essential Standards.

While the State notes that it is difficult to assess the impact of the material and supports deployed to date on student achievement, it is considering surveys of participants and feedback from various internal and external stakeholders throughout the design and development phases of professional development opportunities as important interim measures of quality. As the State moves into year two, it expects that periodic reports of formative and summative evaluation results from the Evaluation project will provide data to assess quality of implementation across reform areas in its Race to the Top plan.

#### **Mid-course corrections or relevant amendments**

Since the onsite review, through monthly reports and other conversations, the Department noted that several of the support deliverables (e.g., graphic organizer tool, unpacking documents for social studies elective courses) have been slightly delayed due to contract timing, prioritization, and reductions in contractor support. The Department plans to have further conversations with the State, including the December monthly call's sub-criterion focus in this area, to fully understand the impact of these shifts and will determine next steps accordingly.

#### **Quality of implementation and rationale for Department's performance rating**

In its response for the May 2011 onsite review, North Carolina stated: *"Implementation to date has been of a high level of quality. In design and development phases we have provided opportunities for feedback from various internal and external stakeholders/partners (including drafts posted to the web, surveys for feedback, email devoted to feedback, etc) and the response has generally confirmed our direction. Contracts are also in place to bring in additional experts to help with communication, planning for the IIS, and online module development for standards. Advisory groups provide input and feedback on projects and help to ensure quality that is important to the various stakeholders involved."*

North Carolina is also aware that significant challenges are associated with the major changes to statewide standards and assessments, and took steps during year one to mitigate those complications. The State provided a variety of resources, tools, and professional development opportunities designed to ensure that all State educators, administrators, and professional development leaders have a deep understanding of the basis for CCSS and Essential Standards and the instructional strategies for how to implement them effectively. Additionally, the State solicited feedback from various internal and external stakeholders and partners throughout the design and development phases of documents related to the new standards.

The Department looks forward to hearing more about how the State will use its existing regional support structures and a blended approach to professional development to provide ongoing support for major policy initiatives including standards implementation. Additionally, the Department notes that IIS development will be critical to the State's ultimate success in both implementing instruction aligned to the common core and administering computer-based assessments. Although implementation of the new standards has not yet occurred, the Department commends the State's initial efforts to promote a smooth transition and to support teachers as they prepare for this change.

Since college- and career-readiness is a paramount goal to the State's Race to the Top plan as well as the Governor's *Ready, Set, GO!* initiative, the State developed several additional optional performance

measures to track its progress.<sup>14</sup> The State's actual results for AP participation and scores missed the targets by less than one percent; 10.4 percent of students in the State took an AP exam, and of those who completed an exam, 59.1 percent received a score of 3 or above.

Based on a strong first year of building readiness, the Department rates North Carolina's quality of progress and performance in sub-criterion (B)(3) as "green." However, the Department notes concerns about the State's progress against its targeted release of online professional development modules linked to included in the current (D)(5) scope but connected to (B)(3) based on the purpose of the modules, which is to increase teacher understanding and implementation of the standards.

### **OTHER**

Changes to the State's assessment system, including the elimination of additional end of course exams, may have future implications for North Carolina's work in this Race to the Top initiative. Chemistry and Physics exams were eliminated beginning in school year 2009-10 and Geometry was eliminated beginning in school year 2010-11. Based on legislation passed in 2011, Algebra II, Civics and Economics, Physical Science, and U.S. History will be eliminated beginning in school year 2011-12.

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<sup>14</sup> The State has an amendment under review to revise its baseline for average SAT composite in reading and math to ensure comparability given recent changes by the College Board. The State did not provide actual data for the percent of freshman enrolled in at least one remedial course at the NC Community College System or the University of North Carolina, respectively.

(C)(2)

Data Systems to Support Instruction	Performance and Progress on Goals/Objectives in Race to the Top Plan	
	State	Department
(C)(2) Accessing and using State data	Yellow August 2011	Yellow October 2011

## **OVERVIEW**

### **North Carolina's self-described goals for this sub-criterion**

- Continue to provide data and information products that stakeholders can use to inform their decisions regarding policy and services.
- Provide professional development on Common Education Data Analysis and Reporting System business intelligence tools and how to produce annual and longitudinal reports.

### **Relevant projects**

- State Longitudinal Data: Common Education Data Analysis and Reporting System (CEDARS)<sup>15</sup>

### **Key accomplishments**

- In anticipation of the full system launch, the State held four webinars in July for approximately 500 participants in order to provide information about CEDARS. The webinars provided an overview of the types of data available in the CEDARS Data Warehouse and the kinds of built-in, web-based reporting tools that LEAs could use to access and analyze the data. NC DPI also demonstrated a set of draft dashboards developed for LEA and school use.

### **Key challenges**

- The launch of CEDARS was delayed from May to October 2011 primarily as a result of staff capacity and timing. The State initially reported that it expected the launch to shift from May until early summer; however, based on a number of competing statewide training initiatives and the school year calendar, the State decided to defer the launch until October.
- Staffing for this project was a challenge for North Carolina.
- The State reported that, the timing of the CEDARS rollout is competing with many changes and management challenges at the local level.

## **DEPARTMENT'S ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS**

### **North Carolina's progress against scope of work and goals (by project)**

- *State Longitudinal Data:* CEDARS is North Carolina's PK-13 State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) and contains consolidated education data from more than 30 data sources at NC DPI.<sup>16</sup> Although the full rollout of CEDARS was delayed from May 2011 to October 2011, the State did complete some activities in this project area during year one. North Carolina secured contractual support staff and completed the preparation required to launch the data warehouse. Additionally, the

<sup>15</sup> This project is included in the State's approved Race to the Top scope of work; however, funding is provided from other Federal and State funds.

<sup>16</sup> According to the State, the CEDARS data warehouse is referred to as a "PK-13" because it contains data on all of North Carolina public school students, from pre-kindergarten through high school, including some of the students in North Carolina's early college high school programs who are coded in the data system as "grade 13."

State held four webinars in July for approximately 500 participants in order to provide information about the system.

In October 2011, the full CEDARS system launched and State staff spent three weeks traveling statewide to deliver training on CEDARS to a total of approximately 300 people representing 110 LEAs and 38 charter schools in the State.

- *Additional activities:* In accordance with the State’s goal to continue to provide data and information products that stakeholders can use to inform their decisions regarding policy and services, data from school year 2010-11 was published as part of the State’s online School Report Cards. Data on results from components of the State’s ABCs<sup>17</sup>, including end-of-grade and end-of-course test scores, overall school growth, attendance, graduation and highly qualified teachers are included in the public school-by-school and overall State report cards.

### **Continuous improvement: Methods, tools, processes to assess progress and quality**

To date, the State reported that its work plan for its Institution of Education Sciences grant, team meetings, and other standard feedback mechanisms are the primary methods used to assess progress and quality. During the August monthly call, the State also elaborated on plans to use surveys following the CEDARS training and ongoing feedback loops with LEAs and users over time to see how the tools are utilized and consider enhancements to boost the usefulness of the warehouse.

### **Mid-course corrections or relevant amendments**

Training for LEAs did not occur as originally planned. When the State recognized that fewer participants were going to be able to attend summer trainings in person, it decided to hold four webinars as a preview and to build interest while waiting for the full launch until after the start of the 2011-12 school year. Additionally, the State now plans to offer refresher training sessions as part of standing statewide conferences.

### **Quality of implementation and rationale for Department’s performance rating**

In its August 2011 Progress Update, North Carolina stated: *“We are not pleased that we had to delay the full roll-out of the CEDARS longitudinal data warehouse, but we are pleased with the reporting/analysis capability it provides and the improved agency data quality that is a by-product of the CEDARS development effort. Initial feedback from LEA/charter personnel who have been introduced to the data warehouse is positive (many are excited about the capability and eager to get access/training/begin using).”*

As mentioned above, the State encountered delays in the launch of CEDARS primarily due to staff capacity. These challenges compromised North Carolina’s ability to successfully complete the activities planned for year one. Additionally, the postponed launch of CEDARS meant that LEA and State level staff were not able to access the various reports, data, and data query tools, which are intended to help users make data-informed decisions, as soon as planned.

Although the system subsequently launched in October 2011 and the State provided face-to-face training, the State did not meet the year one deliverable in its plan. The Department first became aware of this delay during the May 2011 onsite review; however, the Department is concerned that the State did not come forth in writing through the formal amendment process to articulate this change in timeline or to discuss its impact on the State’s plan for (C)(2) and other initiative areas.

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<sup>17</sup> According to the State’s Executive Summary for the complete 2010-11 ABCs results, “The SBE developed the ABCs of Public Education in response to the School-Based Management and Accountability Program enacted by the General Assembly in June 1996. The program focuses on strong Accountability, teaching the Basics with an emphasis on high educational standards, and maximum local Control.”

As the State moves into year two, a major determinant of the quality of CEDARS implementation will be based on maintaining coordination with the IIS and NC Cloud teams. The SEA recently hired a former CEDARS contractor to serve as a project manager for the IIS. This may help with coordination and alignment among the various data, technology, and curricular supports that will be integrated through the IIS.

The Department agrees that “yellow” is an appropriate rating of North Carolina’s quality of progress and performance in sub-criterion (C)(2).

**OTHER**

The State reported having all 12 America COMPETES Act elements in its longitudinal data system at the time it submitted its application.

(C)(3)

Data Systems to Support Instruction	Performance and Progress on Goals/Objectives in Race to the Top Plan	
	State	Department
(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction	Yellow September 2011	Yellow October 2011

## **OVERVIEW**

### **North Carolina's self-described goals for this sub-criterion**

- Create a statewide Instructional Improvement System.
- Provide professional development around using data for instruction, ensuring that every teacher and instructional leader in NC:
  - Has access to a high-quality instructional improvement system containing assessment and data analysis tools and guidance in how to use these tools to improve instructional practices;
  - Has professional development that is sufficient to prepare him or her to use the instructional improvement system to address students' instructional needs effectively; and
  - Develops increasingly effective instructional and leadership practices that use data to improve student outcomes.

### **Relevant projects**

- Instructional Improvement System (IIS)

### **Key accomplishments**

- NC DPI executed a contract with the Center for Educational Leadership and Technology (CELТ) to provide technical expertise and assistance to the State in planning the IIS.
- The State completed outlines of the specific visions, goals, and objectives of the IIS as well as the *A Day in the Life* document to illustrate how teachers, students, parents, and school, district, and State administrators might use the IIS.
- CELТ worked with NC DPI to develop IIS specifications, which have been vetted by State, LEA, and school representatives.

### **Key challenges**

- North Carolina experienced significant delays in planned activities in this project during year one, partly as a result of the lengthy statewide procurement process, and partly because the State underestimated the cost and time associated with planning and building the IIS. As a result, the State rethought the IIS implementation plan.

## **DEPARTMENT'S ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS**

### **North Carolina's progress against scope of work and goals (by project)**

- *Instructional Improvement System (IIS)*: Although activities were delayed due to planning and procurement processes taking longer than the State originally anticipated, North Carolina is now on schedule with the revised planning timeline for this project. The State established the IIS project structure, including the project steering committee during year one. In order to guide the

development of the IIS, North Carolina prepared several documents, including outlines of the specific vision, goals, and objectives of the IIS as well as the *A Day in the Life* document.

NC DPI executed a contract with a planning vendor, CELT, and worked with this vendor to develop draft Background Information, Business Requirement, and Technical Requirements documents as well as a Request for Proposals and Comprehensive Plan for the IIS. Additionally, North Carolina met with experts for input on business and technical requirements gathering and held four regional focus groups with over 300 participants—including teachers, principals, technology coordinators, testing coordinators, and curriculum coordinators—to gather input about the desired business functions of the IIS.

In addition to focus groups, in order to continue to engage districts and schools to ensure that the system created aligns with their needs, the State communicates regularly through a variety of email groups representing superintendents, principal, instructional leaders, English as a second language teachers, technology directors, and assessment directors. To formalize the ongoing feedback and guidance from LEA and school staff, the State plans to establish an IIS Stakeholder Advisory Committee and an IIS User Group by November 2011 which will convene through face-to-face sessions and webinars.

Additionally, North Carolina has been in communication with other States to exchange information and to collaborate around potential efficiencies and innovations across multiple aspects of this work.

#### **Continuous improvement: Methods, tools, processes to assess progress and quality**

Much like previously discussed sub-criteria, North Carolina uses its work plans and regular meetings of initiative leads, project coordinators, and Race to the Top leadership team to update progress and provide direction. North Carolina also manages all IT projects under the oversight of the NC Enterprise Project Management Office and submits both weekly and monthly status reports.

#### **Mid-course corrections or relevant amendments**

North Carolina realized that planning to design and build the IIS would take longer and cost more than originally anticipated. The State received approval for an amendment for additional time to translate its high level description of the IIS to a detailed implementation plan. Further, because the system will not be fully functional until school year 2013-14, one year later than originally planned, funds for one year of LEA licensing and subscription fees were shifted to support planning and development including hiring a contractor to support the set up process.

#### **Quality of implementation and rationale for Department's performance rating**

*In its September 2011 Progress Update, North Carolina stated, "NC has been successful in assembling a team that is qualified to lead and manage this project...The IIS team has successfully communicated its vision for the project and has included business and technical staff at various levels of the project. Feedback from the districts surrounding the project vision has been overwhelmingly positive. NC has been able to engage stakeholders including the NC Association of Educators, NC School Board Association, and NC Parent-Teacher Association in discussions about the IIS vision and functional specifications. Summer regional meetings, follow-up webinars, and an online survey provided opportunities to engage LEA and school staff in the refinement of the functional requirements...We are pleased with our progress given that, NC experienced significant delays in planned activities due to the slow statewide IT procurement process."*

The Department concurs with this assessment, and credits North Carolina with completing substantial planning and development for the IIS. The guidance documents, efforts to gather input from important

stakeholders, and the time the State took to translate a broad description of the IIS into a specific plan indicate that North Carolina is being thoughtful about developing and rolling out the IIS.

However, as mentioned above, the planning and development stages took much longer than the State anticipated, resulting in delays in project activities and full implementation of the IIS. This means that the IIS—and its shared tools and applications that are intended to improve instruction—will be available to users one year later than planned. The Department is concerned about the broader implications of the IIS delay; it is a key piece of the State’s plan to build a statewide technology infrastructure and is critical to successful implementation of North Carolina’s Race to the Top grant.

Given the pace of this work and the other activity in the field, the Department suggests that the State to consider points of interoperability as it develops and releases RFPs to support the IIS. The Department’s Race to the Top and Educational Technology staff look forward to continuing opportunities to provide support and feedback in this project area.

In light of these concerns, as well as the State’s efforts to develop a more structured and informed implementation plan for the IIS during year one, the Department concurs with the State’s assessment and rates North Carolina’s quality of performance and progress for sub-criterion as (C)(3) “yellow.”

(D)(2)

Great Teachers and Leaders	Performance and Progress on Goals/Objectives in Race to the Top Plan	
	State	Department
(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance	Green July 2011	Green October 2011

## **OVERVIEW**

### **North Carolina's self-described goals for this sub-criterion**

- By 2013-14, all participating LEAs will:
  - Measure student growth;
  - Have qualifying evaluation systems for teachers and principals; and
  - Use qualifying evaluation systems to develop teachers and principals, promote teachers, retain effective teachers and principals, grant tenure and/or full certification to teachers and principals, and remove ineffective tenured and untenured teachers and principals.
- By 2013-14, some participating LEAs will use qualifying evaluation systems to compensate teachers and principals.
- Introduce an achievement-based compensation model for teachers and principals in the lowest-achieving schools.

### **Relevant projects**

- Teacher and Principal Evaluation Tool
- Teacher and Principal Effectiveness
- Performance Incentives for Lowest- Achieving Schools

### **Key accomplishments**

- The SBE formally adopted student growth as a component of teacher and principal evaluations, adding a sixth standard to the teacher evaluation instrument and an eighth standard to the principal evaluation instrument.
- NC DPI created teacher workgroups to assist in the design of measures of student learning for non-tested grades and subjects.

### **Key challenges**

- North Carolina began implementing a new evaluation system shortly prior to winning Race to the Top. Integrating an explicit growth component into the existing system with fidelity and communicating to build understanding around what the enhanced North Carolina Educator Evaluation System means to an educator's ongoing improvement is an ongoing challenge for implementation.
- North Carolina recognizes that developing assessments for non-tested subjects and grades is a complex undertaking. Measuring student growth precisely and assigning cut scores to assessments for subjects such as art and music are challenges for the State in this project area.
- The State intended to contract with a particular organization to create aligned evaluation instruments and processes for school personnel not currently covered by the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System, but staffing changes within that organization led the State to question whether it could align the system for support staff with its current system. Although the State has since addressed these concerns, the development of these evaluation instruments and processes was delayed.

## **DEPARTMENT'S ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS**

### **North Carolina's progress against scope of work and goals (by project)**

- *Teacher and Principal Evaluation Tool and Teacher and Principal Effectiveness:* North Carolina made important strides toward the goal of instituting and utilizing a qualifying evaluation system for teachers and principals during year one of Race to the Top implementation.<sup>18</sup> The SBE officially adopted student growth as a component of the teacher and principal evaluation instruments, which adds a uniform requirement for student growth to be considered in all teacher and principal evaluations. The SBE also voted to require that all teachers be evaluated annually. During the 2010-11 school year, as a part of the transition to an online North Carolina Educator Evaluation System, the State required all LEAs to enter summary evaluation data into the online system. Further, NC DPI completed a roster validation process through which teachers confirmed the accuracy of class rosters that would be used to determine part of their evaluation scores.

As described in North Carolina's application evaluation system narrative, the State established a Teacher Effectiveness Workgroup, including NC DPI staff members, teachers, principals, superintendents, parents, researchers, and representatives from higher education, non-profit organizations, teacher organizations, principal organizations, and the SBE. This Workgroup was created to provide recommendations to the SBE about a uniform set of acceptable measures for student growth data. The Workgroup also assisted in the development of the sixth and eighth standards which were added to the principal and teacher evaluation instruments. Additionally, the State released an RFP for a vendor to assist in the selection and implementation of a student academic growth model for use in teacher effectiveness initiatives.

NC DPI also created Measures of Student Learning Design Groups composed of approximately 800 educators to provide recommendations to the SBE for the statewide set of approved measures to be used during the 2012-13 school year. These Groups met for the first time in October 2011 and, according to the State's revised approach (see below), will provide feedback on a set of vendor-created assessments in early 2012.

Additionally, the State completed research and site visits to identify innovative ways to assess student growth in non-tested grades and subjects. After being unable to contract with the initially envisioned vendor, the State released a new RFP for the design of statewide evaluation instruments for school social workers, school speech/language pathologists, school psychologists, guidance counselors, media specialists, and instructional technology teachers. While a contract has since been executed, the development of these evaluation instruments and processes was delayed from school year 2010-11 to school year 2011-12.

- *Performance Incentives for the Lowest Achieving Schools:* The State's plan indicates that certified staff members at low-achieving schools who made higher than expected growth during the 2010-11 school year will receive bonuses. However, the SBE has to approve the statewide test results prior to making awards. As of June 30, 2011, awards had not been made. In October 2011, the State indicated that staff members in 23 of 118 schools were eligible for this incentive based on growth in the 2010-11 school year. Per the State's approved plan, the incentives are currently awarded based on schoolwide growth. Beginning in the 2013-14 school year, the incentives will be awarded to individuals in the State's low-achieving schools based on individual educators' results.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> As defined in the Race to the Top application package, qualifying evaluation systems are those that meet the criteria described in (D)(2)(ii): rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation systems for teachers and principals that: (a) differentiate effectiveness using multiple rating categories that take into account data on student growth as a significant factor, and (b) are designed and developed with teacher and principal involvement.

<sup>19</sup> Based on a conversation on November 1, 2011, it is the Department's understanding that staff members in 112 schools will be eligible for this award in future years. Six of the 118 schools identified based on student achievement results from the 2009-10 school year selected 'school closure' as their reform model.

### **Continuous improvement: Methods, tools, processes to assess progress and quality**

Much like previously discussed sub-criteria, North Carolina uses its work plans and regular meetings of initiative leads, project coordinators, and Race to the Top leadership team to track progress and problem solve as issues emerge. Additionally, through ongoing conversations with North Carolina, the Department understands that the State has a Technical assistance committee in place that includes discussions about teacher and leader effectiveness as part of its quarterly agenda. North Carolina also noted that in this project, SBE policies provide particular leverage.

The Evaluation Team's scope of work outlines plans for both projects in this sub-criterion. Quantitative and qualitative analyses will be performed to examine the validity and reliability of new, independently-developed components to be added to the current North Carolina Educator Evaluation System. The study will look at the implementation of the new Educator Evaluation System components to determine if the new value-added measures provide independent information that allows for meaningful assessment of teachers' and administrators' effectiveness. Additionally, teacher observations and teacher and principal interviews will be conducted to assess the impact of the new evaluation process on educators' attitudes and practices. The performance incentives for lowest-achieving schools will be studied alongside the voucher incentives and strategic staffing projects discussed in (D)(3) to see whether and to what extent all of the initiatives collectively or any of the initiatives separately contribute to a positive change in the distribution and effectiveness of teachers in the State's lowest-performing schools.

### **Mid-course corrections or relevant amendments**

- The State received approval for an amendment to permit LEAs to use school-level growth data as one of multiple measures of teacher effectiveness for non-tested grades and subjects in school year 2011-12 until a statewide set has been approved for school year 2012-13. North Carolina adjusted its approach to this activity, in part, based on feedback from LEAs about the expertise and resources necessary to design valid and reliable measures of teacher effectiveness for non-tested grades and subjects.
- The State requested and was approved to amend the function of the Measures of Student Learning Design Groups. Instead of having the Groups develop assessment items for non-tested grades and subjects, North Carolina will contract with a vendor to generate assessment items and then utilize the design groups to review and vet options.

### **Quality of implementation and rationale for Department's performance rating**

In its July 2011 Progress Update, North Carolina assessed its quality of implementation as follows:

*“North Carolina is proud that it has moved forward on teacher and leader effectiveness in collaboration with the field. Unlike other States, North Carolina has not seen bitter battles between the State Education Agency and teachers. Change will be most effective when it is orchestrated in partnership with teachers and is not simply something done ‘to them’ by policymakers. The State has met deadlines and submitted amendments when additional time would result in higher-quality policies and implementation.”*

The Department agrees that the alterations to timelines and approaches of activities related to this sub-criterion are important to note. The previously discussed decision to contract with a vendor to guide the design groups should make better use of the involved educators' time and expertise. Additionally, while the State modified its approach to school year 2011-12 to make better use of resources, this did not alter the State's commitment to begin implementation in school year 2011-12. The State still plans to approve a statewide set of approved growth measures for the 2012-13 school year.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> North Carolina's Educator Evaluation System specifies that student growth scores will be calculated for educators with a minimum of three years of valid student achievement data.

North Carolina's year one accomplishments represent essential initial steps in the implementation of an evaluation system that explicitly includes student growth as a measure of effectiveness for all teachers and principals in the State. The State's approach included contracting with organizations which can assist in the technical aspects of this complex work, conducting research, and involving educators and other stakeholders in the process of designing and adopting measures of student learning and growth. The Department commends North Carolina's efforts to ensure that the State's teacher and principal evaluation system is well-informed, fair, accurate, and reliable and that key stakeholders support it.

Timing impacted the expenditures reported for the projects in the sub-criterion and creates some concern about the State's progress to date against its approved plan. Approximately one-fourth, or \$773,000 of approximately \$4 million budgeted for year one in the (D)(2) projects was expended as of June 30, 2011. Based on the previous discussion, the Department is aware that these draw downs reflect the timing of the release of the performance incentives after student achievement data is available. Additionally, it appears that the October timing of the first Design Groups and the delay in the contract for developing measures for social workers, school speech/language pathologists, etc. also impacted the reported expenditures as of June 30, 2011.

The Department is concerned about the time required for the State to receive results on the Educator Evaluation System. During conversations about the submission of data for the Year One APR, the State initially expressed some concern about the availability of evaluation results from its contractor. The contractor was able to produce results by early fall. While this timeline did not impact the submission of data for the APR in Year One, in Year Two when the State will be reporting on a results from a qualifying evaluation system, there are additional factors that may lead to delays. It is the Department's understanding that the State expects that data related to the growth standard will not be available until a few months into SY 2012-13. The Department urges the State to ensure evaluation results can be provided on a timeline that supports educators in continuously reflecting and improving upon their practices.

The State had a strong first year of implementation and completed activities identified in its approved scope. The work scheduled for year two of the grant is critical to ensure the State can carry out the rest of its plan. In particular, while feasible, the timeline for the Design Groups to select and approve measures for the SBE to approve and then have functioning by the fall of 2012 will require substantial attention. Similarly, continuing to communicate and engage educators and other stakeholders on the purpose and components of the new evaluation system, including the more explicit inclusion of student growth data, will be critical as implementation continues. Based on its progress against its approved year one scope of work, the Department rates North Carolina "green" for sub-criterion (D)(2).

#### **OTHER**

- As was the case at the time of submitting its application, North Carolina's APR reflects that all of North Carolina's LEAs measure student growth. At present, this data is limited to those teachers who have sufficient historical EVAAS or end of course exam data. Additional data on teachers in non-tested grades and subjects will become available as part of the State's expanded evaluation system beginning in school year 2012-13.
- NC DPI used its Line of Credit for consultative services related to the design of measures of student learning for non-tested grades and subjects. The Department facilitated connecting North Carolina with a group of experts to assist in designing and standardizing processes and templates for the workgroups.

**(D)(3)**

Great Teachers and Leaders	Performance and Progress on Goals/Objectives in Race to the Top Plan		
	State <sup>21</sup>		Department
(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals	Green October 2011	Yellow October 2011	Yellow October 2011

**OVERVIEW****North Carolina's self-described goals for this sub-criterion**

- Increase the number of principals prepared to lead transformational change in high-need schools.
- Increase the numbers of new college graduates teaching in NC schools through Teach for America and a new NC Teacher Corps program based on the Teach for America model. Specifically, expand the number of Teach for America corps members in the northeastern region of the State; and launch a North Carolina Teacher Corps to increase the number of effective teachers in low-achieving districts not served by Teach for America.
- Strengthen the preparation of novice teachers—particularly lateral entry and out-of-State—which data show is a critical need.
- Employ strategic staffing approaches to optimize the use of available human capital.
- Make further use of virtual and blended classes for students to expand curriculum offerings and provide effective teachers when they are not available locally.
- Increase the number of high-level STEM courses in NCVPS.
- Meet (D)(3) performance measure targets related to teachers and principals rated as highly effective and ineffective.

**Relevant projects**

- Regional Leadership Academies
- Teach for America (TFA) Expansion
- North Carolina Teacher Corps
- Induction Support Program for New Teachers in High Needs Schools
- Strategic Staffing Initiatives
  - Voucher Incentive Program
- Virtual and Blended Courses

**Key accomplishments**

- The State created three leadership academies to increase the pipeline of high-quality principals, particularly for low-performing schools. Approximately 80 potential school leaders are currently participating in various phases of the two-year training program.

**Key challenges**

- The State's contracting and hiring timeline continue to challenge implementation for several projects including the NC Teacher Corps, Strategic Staffing, and Virtual and Blended Courses.

<sup>21</sup> In its October 2011 Progress Update, the State provided individual ratings for each project in this sub-criterion. Four were rated 'green' and three were rated 'yellow.'

## **DEPARTMENT'S ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS**

### **North Carolina's progress against scope of work and goals (by project)**

- *Regional Leadership Academies:* As part of its approach to addressing the State's principal pipeline and turning around its lowest-achieving schools, the State launched three regional leadership academies during year one. Over the course of the grant, the State expects to serve three cohorts of a total of approximately 225 principals in a two-year program.<sup>22</sup> The Northeast Leadership Academy placed its first cohort in administrative internships and the second cohort began first year activities, including classes and site visits to successful schools. Additionally, both the Piedmont-Triad Leadership Academy and the Sandhills Leadership Academy matriculated their first cohorts of participants and placed them in administrative internships.
- *Teach for America Expansion:* Just under the target of 25 teachers, Teach for America accepted 20 additional corps members in the 2011 cohort for placement in the Eastern North Carolina region. Over the course of the grant, the State targets an increase from 395 to 500 Teach for America corps members.
- *North Carolina Teacher Corps:* Planning for this project began during year one. The State completed the paperwork needed to establish three staff positions to support the program. However, as of October 2011, the positions had not yet been filled.
- *Induction Support Program for New Teachers in High Needs Schools:* To provide an intensive support structure for teachers in the State's lowest achieving schools, the State launched a "New Teacher Induction Support Program" in four of the State's eight regions. Prior to the 2011-12 school year, approximately 75 teachers participated in a five-day intensive induction experience. Due to additional teacher hires closer to the start of the school year, approximately 30 additional teachers are in the 2011-12 cohort. Throughout the school year involved teachers will receive coaching and other professional development.<sup>23</sup>
- *Strategic Staffing Initiatives:* North Carolina released an RFP in early 2011 for a vendor to provide strategic staffing consulting to all LEAs and targeted resources to the District and School Transformation partnership districts; however, no bids within the available budget were received. The State revised its RFP and recently received a few potential bids that are currently under review. The State reports that it plans to award a contract by December to provide support for human capital considerations for the 2012-13 school year.
  - *Voucher Incentive:* Under a revised strategy, the State planned to pilot a retention program in its lowest-achieving schools for school year 2011-12 hiring. North Carolina planned to offer up to 181 newly certified classroom teachers a voucher incentive – to be applied to student loans, toward obtaining a Master's degree, housing, or a combination – to work in a lowest-achieving school identified for participation in the pilot based on geography and historical turnover rates. The SBE approved a policy to govern the voucher incentive payments. However, as of October 2011, no teachers received voucher incentives. Based on conversations with the State, it appears this may have been a result of new teachers' lack of awareness of the program.

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<sup>22</sup> Only the first cohort of 75 principals will receive the "full treatment," which consists of one year of academic tuition, summer tuition, tuition for a second year residency, books, a laptop, a salary of \$60,000 for the residency year and associated fringe benefits, substitutes for release days for Masters of School Administration field work, stipends for current principals to mentor RLA participations, and coaching costs. Cohort two will receive all aforementioned components except coaching. Cohort three will receive one year of coursework, mentoring, and release time.

<sup>23</sup> As of October 2011, three of the five coaches expected to provide support to approximately 100 new teachers were hired.

- *Effective Teachers via Virtual and Blended Courses:* North Carolina experienced significant delays in initiating implementation of this project. Under a revised approach and timeline approved in July 2011, the State planned to develop two STEM-related courses during 2011 to begin teaching in three pilot districts beginning in January 2012. During the October monthly call, it was brought to the Department's attention that the course developers and additional staff requested for implementation of the revised approach have not yet been hired. As a result, the courses may not be ready for implementation until the beginning of school year 2012-13. Furthermore, two of the three LEAs selected to participate in the pilot recently dropped their commitment due to changes in leadership and teacher interest. The State has since met with a dozen interested LEAs and plans to identify and train replacement partners.

#### **Continuous improvement: Methods, tools, processes to assess progress and quality**

- In its October Progress Update, the State indicated that all of the (D)(3) projects focus on growing quality teachers and leaders for North Carolina schools; as such, educator effectiveness ratings will be the ultimate determinant of whether or not the programs have meet the goals for D(3).
- As formative data, the educator support programs collect participant feedback on the quality of services provided for teachers and aspiring leaders, as well as student outcome data gathered throughout the year.
- For the strategic staffing and incentive programs, the State will use teacher retention data and information on staff vacancies that districts cannot fill to assess progress and quality.
- Also, these projects are a major component of the overall Evaluation project. As part of that effort, direct observation of participants as they enter classrooms or school leadership will be conducted and analyzed.

#### **Mid-course corrections or relevant amendments**

- The State received approval to alter the approach and timeline of the NC Teacher Corps. In order to allow more time for planning, North Carolina will begin operating the program in school year 2012-13. The State also decided that the program should not be a stand-alone program implemented by a single contractor. To create a program uniquely positioned to address the State's pipeline needs, the program will now be a collaborative effort managed by NC DPI. NC DPI added three new staff positions to support the work of the NC Teacher Corps.
- North Carolina received approval to amend the budget for Virtual and Blended Courses to make resources and benefits available to more schools, teachers, and students. While courses will not be available until second semester of school year 2011-12, over the course of the grant period the State now plans to develop eight and pilot six STEM courses, instead of two, and will serve approximately 1,000 additional students than originally planned. However, as noted above, the revised timeline to begin offering the first two courses in January 2012 may be delayed. At this time, it is unclear how many students could be served with a second revised approach to implementation.

#### **Quality of implementation and rationale for Department's performance rating**

In its October 2011 Progress Update, North Carolina assessed its quality of implementation as follows: *"Thus far, the State feels that its implementation of the regional leadership academies, new teacher support program, Teach for America expansion, and incentive/voucher program has been strong. These programs are already having a direct impact on the growth of students in classrooms throughout the State, and the number positively affected will only increase as program outreach expands."* The State

also noted that some areas need substantial attention. In particular for the Virtual and Blended Courses project, the State reported, *“Project implementation is limited to date, due to delays in approving the budget...and process approvals to hire contract and time-limited, permanent positions.”*

The Department agrees that the Teach for America and Regional Leadership Academy projects are generally on track in terms of matriculating at or near the anticipated targets. However, the Department needs further clarity on the impact of the placed principals’ and teachers’ “growth of students in classrooms throughout the State” as included above in the State’s rationale for its rating. Over time the Department understands that the Educator Evaluation System and classroom observations conducted by the Evaluation team should provide meaningful information towards this end.

Other projects in this sub-criterion require substantial attention, particularly because three of the four projects have already undergone significant revisions. It is the Department’s understanding that while the NC Teacher Corps hiring is being finalized, existing staff at NC DPI have taken steps to design the recruitment selection model and process and to begin reaching out to superintendents to identify potential partner districts. Based on the refined project scope submitted to the Department in August 2011 as a condition of the April 2011 amendment approval, the Department has some concern about the State’s ability to carry out the pivotal components of the project such as releasing the online application and selecting and placing new corps members in partner districts scheduled for late 2011 and early 2012.

By contrast, it appears that the Virtual Public Schools project is at a standstill until additional staff is in place to design content. The Department is concerned about the State’s ability to reach more than 2,000 students during the grant period. Additionally, because this project has potential synergy with other efforts targeting STEM, low-achieving schools, and the implementation of the CCSS and NC Essential Standards, the Department is concerned about how delays in this project could have implications for other components of the State’s scope of work.

Given the lack of interest in the Voucher Incentive, the Department questions the State’s positive rating. The Department recognizes that the SBE approval for a process for dissemination was significant, but without awareness of the incentive, it is going to be difficult for the State to assess whether this is meaningful either independently or in conjunction with other incentives available to teachers in low-achieving schools. Lastly, the Department is concerned about the delay in the Strategic Staffing RFP given the anticipated reach of services to inform human capital decisions in all LEAs.

The State has made some progress toward its goal of increasing the number of principals prepared to lead transformational change in high need schools. With regards to alternative certification, according to the State’s APR, in school year 2010-11, 85 principals successfully completed an alternative route to certification in the State.<sup>24</sup> This is approximately 20 fewer principals than school year 2009-10; however, the total number of principals newly certified statewide decreased by 12 percent, so the relative number of principals prepared by alternative routes increased slightly. The number of teachers prepared through alternative routes increased in school year 2010-11. While there was only a 5 percent increase in the total number of teachers newly certified statewide, the State had 350 more teachers complete an alternative route in school year 2010-11 than in school year 2009-10.

While some projects are on track, others have yet to move beyond planning stages and are at risk of not being able to accomplish intended outcomes. The Department rates the current quality of progress and performance as “yellow” for sub-criterion (D)(3).

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<sup>24</sup> Such programs may or may not have been directed to preparing principals for high needs schools

(D)(4)

Great Teachers and Leaders	Performance and Progress on Goals/Objectives in Race to the Top Plan	
	State	Department
(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs	Green October 2011	Green October 2011

## **OVERVIEW**

### **North Carolina's self-described goals for this sub-criterion**

- Expand scope of future evaluations to include NC independent college and university preparation programs.
- Publish an Educator Preparation Program report card that rates the effectiveness of each preparation program based on student achievement and student growth criteria.
- Increase the percentage of public and private teacher preparation programs for which the public can access information on the achievement and growth of the graduates' students.
- Increase the percentage of public and private principal preparation programs for which the public can access information on the achievement and growth of the graduates' students.
- Launch University of North Carolina (UNC) Teacher Recruitment Initiative to develop a strategic plan for coordinating teacher recruitment efforts. Included within this initiative is an alternative teacher certification track for math and science majors at participating UNC campuses.

### **Relevant projects**

- Research on Effectiveness of Teacher and Principal Preparation Programs<sup>25</sup>

### **Key accomplishments**

- The SBE approved the school year 2010-11 performance report<sup>26</sup> in October.<sup>27</sup>
- The State established working groups to engage IHEs in the development of the streamlined report cards and in broader collaboration around a strategic plan for teacher recruitment and preparation for the State's high-needs areas.
- All of North Carolina's public and private IHEs will be included in the expanded report card.

### **Key challenges**

- The impact of the preparation program report cards is dependent on the fidelity of implementation with the student growth factor in the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System.
- The State expressed a commitment to tying preparation program approval to outputs; however, determining how those outputs are most appropriately captured is difficult.
- In order to actualize the full value of the report cards, the State will need to consider multiple audiences. For example, LEAs will need to be supported to access and utilize the data contained in these report cards for human capital decisions.

## **DEPARTMENT'S ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS**

### **North Carolina's progress against scope of work and goals (by project)**

- *Research on Effectiveness of Teacher and Principal Preparation Programs*: North Carolina law has required the State to submit an annual report on undergraduate and graduate teacher education programs since 1999. The IHE summary performance report for the 2010-11 school year was

<sup>25</sup> This project is included in the State's approved Race to the Top scope of work; however, funding is provided from other sources.

<sup>26</sup> The State plans to shift use of the term 'performance report' to 'report card' beginning in school year 2011-12.

<sup>27</sup> See <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/stateboard/meetings/2011/10/tcp/10tcp02.pdf>.

approved by the SBE. As part of its commitment under its Race to the Top plan, the State plans to redesign and enhance the existing report in alignment with the School Report Cards also currently developed and shared publicly. The new reports will streamline display of the data IHEs currently submit for other programs (e.g., Title II) and also integrate student growth data as it becomes available (in accordance with the new Educator Evaluation System).

In accordance with the State's approved scope, year one activities focused on engaging key stakeholders and beginning the redesign process. NC DPI established a working group with public and private IHEs to discuss the streamlined, user-friendly report. An initial mock-up of the revised report will be reviewed by the GETC in November.

With regards to program approval, the State began considering how it will revise its process to focus on outcomes rather than inputs per a concept approved by the SBE in January 2008. During year one, the State began planning for a pilot that will begin in summer 2012 to review teacher candidate's electronic evidences as artifacts of candidate's proficiencies. The State is still considering whether outputs concept is best represented through teacher candidates or practicing teachers.

The State also took initial steps toward launching a UNC Teacher Recruitment Initiative as outlined in its approved plan. Later this fall, NC DPI plans to release a working paper to guide discussion on teacher recruitment and preparation for high needs areas. In its October Progress Report the State said it expects the paper to "spur a cross-cutting work group to bring together DPI staff, IHE representatives, and representatives from school districts to collaborate on a new strategic plan for the public university system."

#### **Continuous improvement: Methods, tools, processes to assess progress and quality**

The State indicated that it is using the publication and ongoing revision of IHE Report Cards as the indicator of progress for the goals in its Race to the Top application.

#### **Mid-course corrections or relevant amendments**

The Department is not aware of any mid-course corrections in this project.

#### **Quality of implementation and rationale for Department's performance rating**

In its October 2011 Progress Update, North Carolina assessed its quality of implementation as follows: *"The State has moved forward with full participation of both public and private IHE representatives, including specific IHE work groups and IHE representation on the GETC. As a result, IHE preparation programs are supportive of the current transitions being made and are committed to high-quality accountability for the growth of graduates' students, program approval processes, and focus on preparing teachers for high-needs content areas."*

The year one activities in sub-criterion (D)(4) focused primarily on planning and building engagement. These are critical elements to the intended goals of public accountability, program approval, and recruitment, and will be best judged once tangible outcomes such as revised materials, processes, and policies are in place. The Department urges the State to consider how to track progress and quality as it works toward its deliverables for school year 2013-14. The State's current scope of work does not clearly delineate the milestones necessary for each annual outcome and further refinement to the long-term deliverables will enable the Department and North Carolina to maintain a shared understanding about the State's progress.

Additionally, given that the (D)(3) Strategic Staffing project includes providing technical assistance to LEAs around human capital decision such as hiring, delays in the contract to provide that support could

have implications for building LEA capacity to utilize the data contained in the preparation program report cards.

According to the State's APR, in school year 2010-11, the public could access data on the achievement and growth of 31.25 percent of teacher preparation programs in the State.<sup>28</sup> Given the agreements from public and private IHEs and the expansion of available growth data through the Educator Evaluation System, over time, the Department and the State expect this percentage to increase.

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<sup>28</sup> The State's baseline was 31 percent. The State reported that the public could access data on the achievement and growth of zero percent of principal preparation programs in the State. The State's baseline for principal programs in its approved application was 76 percent. The State recently brought this to the Department's attention and plans to provide additional information and a proposed revision in an amendment soon.

(E)(2)

Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools	Performance and Progress on Goals/Objectives in RTT Plan	
	State	Department
(E)(2) Turning around the lowest- achieving schools	Green June 2011	Yellow October 2011

## **OVERVIEW**

### **North Carolina’s self-described goals for this sub-criterion**

- Improve achievement in the lowest 5% of schools in the State
- Raise district-wide performance in those districts which have a high concentration of lowest-achieving schools
- Provide new opportunities for students in the lowest-achieving schools and districts to attend schools that will better support their achievement and successful graduation and lead them to college and career readiness

### **Relevant projects**

- Turning around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

### **Key accomplishments**

- The State conducted Comprehensive Needs Assessments (CNAs) in 97 of the 118 schools whose improvement programs are funded through Race to the Top.<sup>29</sup>
- The State purposefully matched support positions to each school and engaged the school community in the hiring process.
- North Carolina designed and deployed two summer professional development sessions for school leaders.

### **Key challenges**

- Hiring was also a year one challenge in this project area, as the State has not been able to fill all 75 District Transformation Coach (DST), School Transformation Coach (STC) and Instructional Coach (IC) positions included in its approved plan.
- The State recognizes that considerable time, effort, and staffing are needed in order to improve capacity and positively impact North Carolina’s lowest-achieving schools; maintaining these resources going forward will be a challenge for North Carolina.
- Managing turnaround work in the large number of lowest-achieving schools North Carolina plans to reach as a part of its Race to the Top plan and cohesively aligning the work underway with support of Race to the Top alongside other State and Federal programs may be a challenge for the State going forward.

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<sup>29</sup> According to the State’s District and Schools Transformation Web site, CNAs “provides a framework to: 1. Provide districts and schools with a clear view of their strengths, areas for improvement, challenges, and successes; 2. Enable a systematic review of practices, processes, and systems within a school district; 3. Assist district and school leadership in determining needs, examining their nature and causes, and setting priorities for future action; and 4. Guide the development of a meaningful district or school plan and suggests benchmarks for evaluation, Most importantly, it is a corner stone of continuous improvement – ensuring the best possible for all students.

## **DEPARTMENT’S ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS**

### **North Carolina’s progress against scope of work and goals (by project)**

- *Turning around the Lowest-Achieving Schools:* In SY 2010–2011, North Carolina identified the lowest-achieving five percent of all schools in each grade span (elementary, middle, and high school) by determining the schools with one or more of the following characteristics: 1) any school with a performance composite<sup>30</sup> under 50 percent, 2) any high school with a graduation rate below 60 percent in the prior year and one of the two previous years, and 3) any school in each grade span with performance composites in the fifth percentile or below.<sup>31</sup> As a result, it began to initiate components of an intervention model in 118 schools.<sup>32</sup> In year one, North Carolina completed CNAs in 97 of the 118 lowest-achieving schools initiating intervention models with support from Race to the Top funds. At the request of a school or LEA, as of October 2011, instructional coaches worked with 22 schools to “unpack” CNAs to help those leaders interpret the State’s findings and determine how to apply them to improve their schools.

Based on preliminary conversations with North Carolina staff, the Department understands that the State is using a phased approach to implementation of intervention models and that the State interprets the term “initiate” to mean that the initial phase of the intervention model is underway.<sup>33</sup> In SY 2010-11, the State reports that it initiated work in 118 schools; in many cases, that work included implementation of some but not all of the strategies required to fully implement the intervention model. The Department recently requested additional clarification for this phased in approach, including the timeline for actions around principal replacements and increased learning time.

As of October 2011, the State hired 25 transformation coaches and 33 instructional coaches. North Carolina held two Summer Professional Development Leaders sessions for approximately 350 school leaders. The State also continued its work with Halifax County Schools; this work included conducting a Professional Development Week focused on literacy, instituting a 30 minute extension to the school day, designing and implementing a third grade co-teaching literacy model, and participating in the process to replace eight principals.

As part of its comprehensive statewide effort, in addition to schools served under Race to the Top, North Carolina’s District and School Transformation (DST) division also provides targeted assistance to 12 LEAs identified as Transformation Districts, which are those LEAs that are the lowest 10 percent of LEAs in the State for performance composite. DST provides customized support for those LEAs that focus on building district-level capabilities to provide better support to their schools.

### **Continuous improvement: Methods, tools, processes to assess progress and quality**

In its June Progress Report, the State identified the following as its primary mechanisms for assessing progress and quality:

- CNA reports and “unpacking” meetings to discuss the reports as requested by schools and districts;
- Hiring records for the approximately 75 positions funded through Race to the Top;

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<sup>30</sup> North Carolina considers the performance composite for a school as the proportion of individual test scores at or above Achievement Level III (often referred to as “at grade level” or “proficient”).

<sup>31</sup> According to the State’s plan, only conventional schools were considered in determining the lowest five percent for each grade span. Conventional schools do not include alternative, special education, charter, or un-graded schools.

<sup>32</sup> According to the State’s Year 1 APR, nine of these schools initiated the school closure model in SY 2010–2011.

<sup>33</sup> According to the Department’s records, there are five schools included in the 118 that are also SIG recipients: Petree Elementary-Transformation, Oak Hill-Turnaround, Southeast Halifax High-Transformation, Enfield-Transformation, Lumberton Senior-Transformation. Under the SIG requirements, the Department would expect that all of the elements of the model were in place in school year 2010-11.

- Agendas and feedback forms from professional development activities; and
- Ongoing collaboration with evaluators provides formative information.

### **Mid-course corrections or relevant amendments**

As the State continued its hiring processes and worked to identify customized matches for each school's needs, North Carolina identified interim support for unfilled DTC, STC, and IC positions.

### **Quality of implementation and rationale for Department's performance rating**

In its July 2011 Progress Update, North Carolina assessed its quality of implementation as follows: *"Implementation to date has been of a high level of quality. We have worked hard in making sure that superintendents and principals feel comfortable with the [Race to the Top] hires that will be working with their teachers and schools and that DST is comfortable with the quality/ability of the personnel we have to offer. Feedback from all professional development has been outstanding."*

The initial activities North Carolina completed during year one represent important progress toward the goal of improving student achievement in the lowest-achieving schools in the State. A major component of the initial implementation activities in school year 2010-11 included identifying the 118 schools that met the State's definition included in its Race to the Top plan.<sup>34</sup> The Department discussed this update with the State extensively during winter 2010-11 which was beyond the August 31, 2011, date targeted in the State's scope of work. During the updating process, the Department encouraged the State to consider how it could cohesively align its Race to the Top work with other Federal and State efforts targeting similar schools in need. The State decided to continue with its current approach. The Department appreciates that the State is building on an existing District and School Transformation program and that many schools in the State could benefit from additional supports to provide better opportunities for students across the State.

The Department recognizes that the scope of this initiative is substantial but also acknowledges that since the State committed to such a scope in its plan, it is imperative that the State has sufficient structures to manage and oversee implementation of this work and the additional resources provided through Race to the Top. To date, the Department has experienced difficulty receiving consistent information on the implementation of this initiative and its relationship to other initiatives including SIG. The Department looks forward to receiving additional clarification on the phased in approach, including how each school that initiated a model in school year 2010-11 will fully implement all of the required components during the grant period and how the State plans to support and oversee implementation of each required strategy.

According to the State's APR, less than \$1.5 of the \$6 million budgeted for this project in year one was expended by June 30, 2011. The State indicates that the difference is due to the time required in hiring qualified personnel. Given that hiring for the 75 positions outlined in this project were a primary milestone for year one, the unfilled positions reflect on the State's quality of implementation to date.

The Department also has some concerns about the coordination between the Turning Around Lowest-Achieving Schools initiative and other projects aimed specifically at these schools (e.g., Performance Incentives for the Lowest-Achieving Schools, Voucher Incentives) as well as those impacting schools statewide (e.g., Educator Evaluation System, CCSS, IIS). Vast resources are being deployed and the current identified mechanisms for tracking on progress and quality appear insufficient to make the most efficient and effective use of these resources to impact instructional practices and student achievement.

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<sup>34</sup> Any school in NC with a performance composite under 50%; any high school in NC with a graduation rate below 60% in the prior year and one of two previous years; and the lowest 5% of Title I schools currently in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring status (excluding those classified as alternative/other, PreK/K-2, charter, exceptional children, or limited English proficiency specialty).

Due to the progress hiring personnel, and based on the information the Department currently has on the implementation of intervention models, the Department rates the quality of progress and performance to date as “yellow” for sub-criterion (E)(2).

**OTHER**

North Carolina Session Law 2011-164 went into effect on July 1, 2011. It removes the cap on the number of charter schools in the State and raises the enrollment growth cap for charter schools to 20 percent, without prior approval, during the school’s second year of operation and annually thereafter. This law also addresses adequate and inadequate performance by a charter school.

(P)(2)

Competitive Preference Priority	Performance and Progress on Goals/Objectives in Race to the Top Plan	
	State	Department
Emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)	Yellow August 2011	Yellow October 2011

## **OVERVIEW**

### **North Carolina's self-described goals for this sub-criterion**

- Provide technical assistance and professional development to support implementation of the CCSS in mathematics and the new Essential Standards in science.
- Complete the development of the elementary science and math concentration modules.
- Provide technical assistance to LEAs and RESA organizations around the planning and implementation of STEM high schools.
- Work with partners to support the development of a small set of anchor/model schools and sites for professional development around project-based learning.
- Focus on recruiting highly-effective teachers in STEM areas in hard-to-staff communities.
- Develop a set of STEM cluster high school networks.
- Provide new opportunities for students in the lowest-achieving schools and districts to attend schools that will better support their achievement and successful graduation and lead them to college and career readiness.

### **Relevant projects**

- STEM Anchor Schools and Network

### **Key accomplishments**

- In SY 2010-11, North Carolina had two operational Anchor Schools and one school operating as an Affinity Network school.
- North Carolina completed a thorough research process of STEM Attributes and applied them to draft a State Strategic Plan to guide implementation of STEM education initiatives in alignment with other STEM efforts in the State.

### **Key challenges**

- One challenge that North Carolina faced during year one was finding schools to participate in the Affinity Networks that were not already being served by the State's pre-existing work with the New Schools Project. This and other delays mean that one Anchor School and three Affinity Network schools will not be operational (i.e., serving students) until SY 2012-13.
- As a result of the delays in identifying schools, some of the associated professional development including school coaching, residencies in model schools, and extended employment do not appear to have been executed in school year 2010-11 as outlined in the State's scope of work.

## **DEPARTMENT'S ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS**

### **North Carolina's progress against scope of work and goals (by project)**

- *STEM Anchor Schools and Network*: In school year 2010-11, North Carolina served students in two Anchor Schools and one Affinity Network school. As of October 2011, all four Anchor and 16

Affinity Network schools were established and planning to participate in the expansion of the State's network of innovative high schools. The State's plan includes a total of four Anchor Schools, with each focused on a part of the State's economy with potential for development – energy, aerospace, health and life sciences, and biotechnology and agriscience. Four schools around each Anchor will form an Affinity Network to learn and spread the lessons from the Anchor Schools more broadly. Because of the timing associated with executing agreements with the primary contractor and with the participating schools, several of the supports planned for deployment in school year 2010-11 were delayed including school coaching and visitation at model residencies.

During summer 2011, 50 teachers began developing project units in the four STEM areas. Additionally, Leadership and Assistance for Science Education Reform (LASER) professional development was delivered in seven counties to 500 teachers and school personnel. Nine low-achieving schools which have selected STEM as a component of implementing a restart model received on-site coaching and technical assistance. The State also created online and face-to-face teacher orientations for new STEM faculty in one of the LEAs expected to pilot the Virtual and Blended Courses curriculum (see (D)(3)).

- *Additional activities:* During year one, North Carolina drafted the NC STEM Strategic Plan for K-12, which is up for review by the SBE in November 2011. As part of developing the Strategic Plan, one major area of activity involved establishing partnerships within and beyond NC DPI. Within the SEA, NC DPI reported collaborative partnerships with other offices in the SEA including career and technical education, instructional technology, virtual public schools, 21<sup>st</sup> century learning centers, and other content-specific program areas to build STEM alignment within the agency. Additionally, STEM project staff engaged the GETC and SBE and developed relationships with postsecondary education, legislators, business/industry, State agencies and external national partners.

#### **Continuous improvement: Methods, tools, processes to assess progress and quality**

Given the importance of establishing the Anchor and Affinity Network schools, the State identified signed contracts with vendors including the New Schools Project, as well as Memoranda of Understanding signed from participating schools as key progress indicators. The State also listed professional development agendas and evaluation forms as mechanisms for assessing progress and quality.

In addition to building and supporting schools in implementing STEM models and curriculum, the State also sees this as an opportune moment to cohesively align STEM initiatives across the State. The State listed ongoing collaboration with external and internal partners, the feedback received from 125 State and national partners to develop the draft plan, and the eventual adoption of a Strategic Plan as elements to assess progress and quality.

The State is in the process of developing additional tools to assess progress and quality including a community engagement self-assessment module and a rubric to evaluate alignment to the STEM attributes.

#### **Mid-course corrections or relevant amendments**

- The State currently has an amendment under review to clarify the performance measures related to initiation of Anchor Schools and Affinity Network schools and to account for some delays in establishing participation agreements.

#### **Quality of implementation and rationale for Department's performance rating**

In its September 2011 Progress Update, the State listed a key success and a key challenge but did not provide a clear assessment of its quality of implementation to date to support its self-assessment.

According to the State's APR, \$0 of the approximately \$2.8 million budgeted for the STEM Anchor and Network was expended as of June 30, 2011. As a consequence of contractual negotiations taking longer than anticipated, the work in this area experienced delays. The State has yet to fully present the rationale and impact of these delays. While much progress was made on executing the contract and securing MOUs after June 30, 2011, without further information, it is difficult for the Department to assess the impact of these delays during year one on the State's ability to meet its intended outcomes for years two to four of the grant period.

To better appreciate the status of implementation, the Department would like to see additional clarity around the interim deliverables associated with the Anchor Schools and Affinity Network schools. To date, the Department is unclear how the State is gauging successful implementation. For example, it is unclear how the State's STEM rubric aligned to the State strategic STEM plan is being used to evaluate the progress and commitment of STEM Anchor and Affinity Network schools. Additionally, given the significant role of the approved contractor in executing the State's plan, the State should consider how to evaluate the outputs of professional development training and conferences not only for Race to the Top investments but also to inform the long-term sustainability of the Anchor/Affinity model.

To ensure its Race to the Top STEM investments align and leverage other educational as well as economic, legislative, and community development initiatives supporting STEM across the State, NC DPI is in the process of contributing to a statewide STEM strategic plan. It is difficult to assess the impact of this plan at this stage of implementation.

Based on the implementation in year one and the information currently available, the Department rates North Carolina's progress and performance "yellow." The Department urges the State to communicate about potential revisions to its approach or timeline so that the Department can better understand the impact of the year one contractual delays.