Recruiting and Retaining Special Education Teachers: The North Carolina Story
August 2012

Personnel Improvement Center Awards Services to North Carolina

Each year, the Personnel Improvement Center (PIC) at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education accepts applications for technical assistance to states in need of assistance in recruiting, hiring and retaining new and existing, qualified personnel. Dr. George Ann Rice, PIC state service provider, works with state leadership to identify human resource and special education directors in up to three high-need locales, as identified by the state agency. Best practices in recruitment and retention are then integrated into local plans through use of a 'best practices' questionnaire. North Carolina’s State Department of Education (NCDE) was awarded PIC services for the 2011-2012 school year. Dr. Rice worked with NCDE state leader, Dr. Paula Crawford, Education Program Administrator, to leverage the necessary resources for attracting, developing and supporting (ADS) highly qualified special education teachers.

North Carolina’s Efforts

Dr. Rice facilitated an on-site meeting with NCDE state leadership in the fall of 2011 to establish goals for improving state efforts in attracting and developing highly qualified special education teachers (see state action plan.) PIC and NCDE leadership then convened a state-wide summit to focus upon strategies that would help districts to be more effective in the areas of recruitment, retention and development of special education teachers. Using a representative group of stakeholders from districts, universities, NCDE and Troops to Teachers, the NCDE worked together to develop the format for the summit and necessary follow-up activities. During the summit, Dr. Rice presented a variety of viable strategies in the areas of recruitment, retention and development to the large group and the local district representatives collaborated in regional groups to select those strategies which they believed would be most productive in their districts, culminating in the creation of action steps for implementation of the selected strategies. Dr. Rice conducted a follow-up survey to identify the specific strategies of interest and has been providing regularly scheduled webinars on those strategies, since the state-wide summit, with this work continuing through the early fall of 2012.

PIC’s provision of Year 4 services has resulted in several positive outcomes in North Carolina’s efforts to improve its ability to recruit and retain highly qualified special education teachers. In addition, the PIC Communications Manager, Leila Richey has created a private online community of practice to facilitate ongoing dialogue among state and local special education administrators.

The PIC collaboration with NCDE has also prompted inter-state collaboration for the sharing of recruitment and retention materials. For example, North Carolina mentored Oklahoma in the creation of a support system for
new special education directors (see Building a Support Network for Special Education Directors: The Oklahoma Story). North Carolina leadership provided access to a literacy trainer-of-trainer session with a stakeholder group from Louisiana. Louisiana has shared its co-teaching materials with North Carolina and Utah has requested support from Oklahoma as it considers providing a support network for new special education directors, and the Oklahoma advisory board has agreed to provide it.

Advice for Other States:

1. Look at work which has proven successful in other states or regions but do not be limited to what others have done. Think outside of the box!
2. Ensure that all stakeholder groups are involved in the work to ensure efficient planning and implementation.

This document was written by Leila Richey, PIC communications manager. Special thanks to the following for providing the information included here:

Dr. George Ann Rice, PIC Service Provider for ADS services
Dr. Paula Crawford, Education Program Administrator