This edition of the *R3 Framework Evaluation Brief* explores administrators' perspectives of ATRs, Advanced Teacher Roles. In Pitt County Schools, ATR positions include the Facilitating Teacher (FT), Collaborating Teacher, and Multi-Classroom Teacher (MCT). ATR positions are part of the R3 Framework, which is a federal and state funded initiative designed by Pitt County Schools to recruit, retain, and compensate effective teacher leaders.

The findings presented in the report are organized around four areas including, a) communication provided by the DEEL office,[1] b) the role of administrators, c) the impact of ATRs, and d) the sustainability of the ATRs. They are derived from individual interviews conducted via Zoom with administrators throughout the month of June 2020. Out of 35 administrators, 12, or a little over a third, agreed to participate in an interview.[2] A list of recommendations and future considerations offered by the administrators are provided at the end of the report.

Communication

The DEEL office staff provided communication to administrators, clarifying the nuisances of the ATRs roles, goals, responsibilities, and eligibility requirements of the positions. DEEL staff solicited feedback from administrators through a Principal Advisory Council on the development and implementation plans prior to the rollout of the ATRs. Additional communication was provided throughout the school year at regularly scheduled monthly principal meetings. There was a general consensus among administrators that they were satisfied with DEEL office's communication as shown by the following comments.

> "The whole department—they are all great communicators. They are an open book, you can reach out and they respond quickly. They will have one-on-one conversations with us and will stop by the school throughout the year. They meet with FTs and MCTs and then follow up with administrators (or before) so that we are all on the same page and we aren't hearing anything second hand."

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[1] The Division of Educator Effectiveness and Leadership (DEEL) Office in Pitt County Schools oversees the R3 Framework.

[2] The lower than expected participation rate is likely attributable to the COVID19 pandemic.

"[The R3 administrators] would…get their ideas together and then we would meet as a committee and they would ask us…if we had any concerns. Did we have any questions or had they left something out? They would [also] put documents out through email asking us to review them and gave an opportunity to ask questions. They would do that before anything was shared with teachers so that we were well aware of what was taking place. It was helpful."

"They scaffolded the information and didn't throw it out there all at one time. They got people together. I'm on the Principal [Advisory Council]. We talked about implementation and how it would look and how we would do it in the future. I also had the perspective from the principal meeting table, too, so I've been fortunate to hear from different angles. In the end, they were able to answer the questions."

A small handful of administrators also appreciated the communication and guidance that DEEL staff provided on the eligibility criteria, in particular. Put by one person, "We didn't want the [ATRs] to be based on an administrator's judgements of who [she or he] felt was a good teacher. It needed to be objective which is why EVAAS data and other specific criteria were needed. That's why I think it was implemented well and will be able to be sustained." Another administrator added, "In the beginning, myself and other principals were guilty of trying to fit teachers into the criteria. We might have had someone who was one criteria away from being eligible. But in the end, it was better to have the criteria and to stick to it. It took out the subjectivity." A third principal said, "Once DEEL sent out the guidelines and it was more transparent and concrete, I think people were less concerned…I think the issue in the beginning was that people felt that the administrators were selecting FTs and there was speculation over the fairness of that process."

While administrators were in agreement on the clarity of communication regarding the ATR responsibilities and eligibility requirements, there was some disagreement over communication regarding the role of administrators in overseeing and supporting teachers in ATRs. "There was some fogginess about administrator role," said one administrator. "They purposively left it loose and I can understand where [the R3 administrators] were coming from. They didn't want to make more work for the administrator." Likewise, another administrator stated, "[R3 leadership] structured it so that it is not burdensome on administrators. We know the expectations but we are not over-involved." To this latter comment, the DEEL Office employed the concept of 'deliberate autonomy' in order to strike a balance between providing structured supports while also being flexible to the individual needs of schools.

Some administrators were comfortable with the flexibility afforded to them and realized that they could take a hands-off approach to managing the ATRs at their schools. "At first it was fuzzy to me but then I realized that I didn't have to sit in on every CoP meeting. The folks in place are top people…Once they started presenting the information at staff meetings, it really helped me understand where we were within the process," said a principal. Similarly, another said, "It's easier to support teachers now. It's become easier as I've been here longer because I have a better understanding of their individual needs."

Other administrators, however, felt uncomfortable with looseness of guidance around their role. "I think the administrator's role was the biggest thing that was not clear. [When I first came to this school] I had to trust that they were doing their stuff and it was done right." One administrator felt that the lack of clarity posed difficulties with the evaluation process. He said, "At the end of the school year, we have to evaluate them. It's different than a teacher evaluation because you don't observe them in action like you would in a teacher's classroom. Some of that information I can get from their presentations at staff meetings but some are better than others at presenting. So I can't really judge what they are doing based on a staff meeting presentation because they might have been nervous."

Then there were concerns from people who were new to the role as an administrator or to a school with ATRs in place. Their sentiments are expressed in the comments below.

"For a first year principal or someone who is new to the district, it can be daunting. They are definitely teacher leaders…I didn't want to get in the way as a new principal in the school."

"It was not communicated very clear to me in my first year here; however, [the R3 administrators] did a session with us last summer on how to evaluate the positions and it became clearer then…In the meantime, I just basically had to figure it out."

"I felt out of the loop. I needed to be clear on what it was supposed to look like. We talked about logistics not as much about their role, so I wasn't clear on what they were expected to do. If you are a brand new principal especially coming from AP position, you need training and support to better understand the roles and how to support them."

Role of Administrators

Ultimately, administrators agreed that their primary role was to provide support to teachers in the ATRs, so that the teachers could fully realize and implement their leadership responsibilities effectively. Administrators varied the type and extent of their supports based on the individual needs of the FTs and MCTs (see **Box 1** for examples of supports). The following quotes capture the general sentiment of how administrators perceived their role.

"I want to know what is going on but I don't like to micromanage. If they need anything then they know to come to me. The purpose of the grant is to give them the leadership opportunities and they've been trained to be leaders. So as far as I'm concerned, it's not my place to step in unless there is a need. I haven't had to do that to date."

"The support that I provide varies by teacher leader readiness level [that is part of the Situational Leadership model].[3] As a principal, you have to know what they need and how much you need to put yourself in the advisory role. The MCT at my school is an expert teacher and is comfortable in this role. He keeps me up-to-date through one-on-one conversations. I have one FT where my main support [has been] to provide data, whereas I have another FT who stepped up from the CT role. It was very unique. I gave her more guidance during our first meetings together. We had reflective-process conversations so that she was better prepared to become an FT."

In addition to tailored supports, all of the administrators reported that they met regularly with FTs and MCTs to discuss implementation progress and to address any needs or concerns. They also provided opportunities for FTs, in particular, to present the work of their CoP at School Improvement Team (SIT) and/ or whole school staff meetings.[4] The frequency of these share-outs varied across schools from one time to multiple times throughout the year, according to administrators. Overall, the presentations were considered beneficial for building buy-in among other staff in the building. For instance, one principal said, "The challenge at first was getting [other staff] to see the whole picture because you don't know what's going on in the classroom next door. The presentations helped people to see that the work was important and valuable."

The presentations also helped to increase staff's awareness and understanding of the ways in which the CoPs were addressing a school wide problem of practice. "Presentations throughout the year have helped to show…all of the components of the project," said an administrator. "[The staff] saw the results from the presentations and then understood that [the CoP] was doing something that was actually different." In at least one school, the presentations brought to light an example of implicit bias, as exemplified in the following comment. "I had them present at a staff meeting. Our school is 55% Hispanic and 45% African

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[3] Administrators were trained in the use of the Situational Leadership Model. More on the model can be found at
https://situational.com/situational-leadership/
[4] It should be noted that staff presentations were a requirement from the DEEL Office. MCTs, however, were not required to present to the staff because they were not addressing a Problem of Practice(PoP).

Box 1.Examples of Supports

I provide subs to the CoPs for a few half days during the school year. They can really crunch data and use that time to get caught up. They've shared with me that they love that dedicated chunk of time for data review.

I worked with another school with an ACT-focused CoP and we brought in a trainer for the CoPs.

Our grade level FTs have common planning time but we have specific days for those meetings after school so that we don't schedule other things to conflict with their meetings.

During the first year of the MCT role, she had 3 people and later we realized it was way too many. Then we bumped it down the next year. Having open communication allowed us to tweak it.

Our MCT has been able to find PD for specific needs and I provide the resources for the Co-Teacher to attend the PD.

We have a teacher proposed FT project that focuses on non-traditional honors access. I helped them with the communication with parents. We brought them into the school to discuss program.

I purchased instructional materials and resources for the group to implement their projects.

American. One of the misconceptions was that we were low performing because of the Hispanic students. [The CoP] did a data inquiry. Our Hispanic students outperformed African American students by 30%. That got teachers to think differently, it turned on the light bulb, and they got more interested in the process. It changed their thinking and how they look at data." Finally, some principals reported that the presentations led to an increased interest in the strategies and practices that were implemented in the CoP from other teachers, as well as an increased interest in the data inquiry cycle process. One administrator stated that the FT at her school had recently held an evening Zoom meeting that was attended by 15 out of 18 core teachers from across the school.

Impact of ATRs

Administrators were in agreement that the ATRs have had a positive impact on their students, the specific groups of teachers who are paired with ATRs, and in some cases, other teachers in their schools. At the student level, principals reported that students were making progress on outcomes identified by their CoP and that Co-Teachers who were paired with MCTs improved their EVAAS scores. "I felt that I got the most bang for my buck and more with the MCT," stated one principal. "We saw growth in one year, all of the Co-Teachers went from red to green…We also saw progress in the CoPs at our school. Every year, our grade level proficiency went up." Others reported similar findings that included increased academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes among students who were directly taught by the ATRs and their teams.

At the ATR group level, administrators believed that the data inquiry process of the CoP helped to build teachers' data proficiency and confidence. Teachers were then empowered to analyze data to identify and address root causes for lower student performance. "[The FT and the CoP] provided a gracious space for our teachers so that they could share and figure out how to become better educators," said one administrator. "They were reflective practitioners during this process and they learned how to assess themselves and make goals for themselves. They held each other accountable in a loving but firm way." Likewise, another person stated, "It brought vertical alignment and it brought the data to the teacher level, not the administrator- or county level. They were able to dig deep and ultimately, they increased math scores. It gave the teachers something to look forward to and to be rewarded for doing well. They all want to do well." Lastly, a third principal stated, "They grew a culture of data inquiry. Teachers aren't afraid to share their data because it has been modelled by [the FTs] and it's not threatening, rather it's a growth opportunity. The FTs have had a broad ranging impact on teachers."

At the school level, administrators witnessed improvements in the level of collaboration and focused discussion regarding student needs among other teachers as a result of the influence of ATRs and their groups. For example, CoPs influenced PLCs. "PLCs weren't really PLCs when I came here," said one interviewee. "We really worked to revamp it. The structure of the CoP process has improved our grade level PLCs and gave them tools to grow." Another added, "Even though there were people in the PLC who were not in the CoP, I believe that the work of our CoP stemmed out to the entire group because it was very collegial. I saw a big

change in the grade level teams." A third person had this to say, "Bringing together [teachers from different content areas] has been huge. The impact has trickled into each of the departments. We have a really good foundation with CoP. The whole process was phenomenal because it allowed them to zone in and dig deep into stuff and they have taken ownership of it."

Finally, several administrators were hopeful about the long-term impact of ATRs beyond their schools. They felt that building a critical mass of teacher leaders in each school would eventually trickle up to the county level. In some cases, an ATR teacher moved to a county position, which they viewed as a positive step toward increasing impact. Below is a comment by an administrator who was optimistic about the larger impact of the ATRs.

> "We are losing our MCT next year because she is going to a county office position; however, I see two good things with her moving up. One, it demonstrates that we can build teacher leaders. I was the one who encouraged her to apply for that position and to see her develop into a leader has been really awesome. Two, some of the things that she was doing here are things that she can now do, countywide. It was great that it started here with us, her position and what she made of it was incredible. She impacted so many other areas of our school, not only the Co-Ts but she also impacted the transition of students from middle to high school."

It should be noted that administrators felt that there was less growth or impact when there was turnover in the CoP membership, particularly when the change included a new FT, which meant re-establishing relationships and trust. "One of our CoPs hasn't had a lot of impact because of the stop and start with the turnover in the CoP." Administrators also felt that the work of the ATRs was negatively impacted by the school shutdown as a result of the COVID19 pandemic. In some cases, administrators felt that teams were starting to make good progress but lost their momentum. The quote below exemplifies this sentiment.

> "One of our FTs is focusing on climate and culture. They just started before the shutdown. They were going to do Instructional Rounds around discipline. It was cool how they structured it. It was good that they acknowledged it as an issue at the school. More importantly, they had a good group of people who wanted to participate in the CoP. How can you continue that type of CoP when schools are closed? You simply can't. It's too bad."

In other instances, administrators pointed out that the inability to collect data on student progress hampered the work of the teams and deflated excitement over potentially documenting the progress that was made throughout the school year. In the words of one administrator, "The CoP was excited about their research this year. The MOY data saw really good growth already. They were so disappointed with COVID...We were going to compare to last year data but won't be able to do it because of COVID."

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Sustainability of ATRs

All of the administrators would like to see the ATRs sustained beyond the life of the grant. A few would like to see more data on the effectiveness of the positions before making a firm decision. The remaining administrators were confident about the value of the positions and the need to continue implementing them. Principals in schools that had Title I funding felt that they could use the funding to help pay for the positions; however, they agreed that schools without the extra funding would probably not be able to fund the positions and hoped that the county would be able to help out. Below are various comments from administrators that speak to their desire and reasons for continuing the ATRs.

> "The MCT is a great position. The ways in which they can help a beginning teacher are wonderful. I think that we will be able to retain beginning teachers longer if they feel supported and that is exactly what the MCT does."

> "The things that our [ATRs teachers] are working on are part of our SIP…it is not something that is extra, rather it is [work] that needs to be done at our school. As a result of [the ATRs], we are moving things schoolwide and we are building a common language…So for us, we are at the point of, okay, what is our next step? We feel it is important to continue and I am very invested in it for our school and for myself."

> "I would definitely sustain MCTs and FTs because they are benefitting our teachers. I don't think we've even seen the true benefits yet."

> "I would like to see the FT position continue for the benefits to retention. We are always trying to increase the capacity of teachers so that they feel like they have a voice and they are part of [larger school wide improvement efforts]."

Recommendations and Future Considerations

Following are several recommendations and considerations that were offered by administrators to improve communication and implementation of the ATRs.

Support for new administrators. To better support new principals there needs to be a formal process in place to onboard them so that they are knowledgeable about the positions and the work being done at their school. This should include a meeting with the ATRs and a DEEL Coach to provide an overview of the roles and responsibilities, the PoP, data and progress update on the work of the CoP for the FT position, and an orientation on the evaluation process. Another suggestion was to have new administrators paired up with an administrator who is familiar with the process, and in particular, the evaluation process so that they could shadow or observe an evaluation.

Reconsideration of Protraxx. Nearly all of the administrators found Protraxx to be difficult to navigate and use to complete the ATR evaluations. They appreciated the training that was provided by DEEL, regardless, they claim that the system is not user friendly. One administrator said, "It's not DEEL's fault. They were looking to streamline it but it's just messy. You could be meeting with the MCT and not be able to pull everything up." Another added, "There should be a better and more streamlined process because it is not easy to use. [The R3 administrators] sent a video but even after watching it, it could be cleaner. And especially because it is an extra thing for principals to do. Would it be possible to have artifacts added to the NCEES evaluation to include the PoP work so that it was more streamlined?"

Formalized process for transitioning Co-Teachers out of the co-teaching structure. While mentioned less often, several administrators noted that there was not a clear process for "graduating" Co-Teachers. They wondered if there should be criteria for making the decision based on teachers' experience, EVAAS scores, etc. These administrators said that some Co-Teachers, particularly new teachers, felt that they weren't ready and were worried about the loss of supports from the MCT. They wondered if DEEL should consider modified supports for co-teachers as they transitioned out.