

R3 Framework Evaluation Brief



July 2022

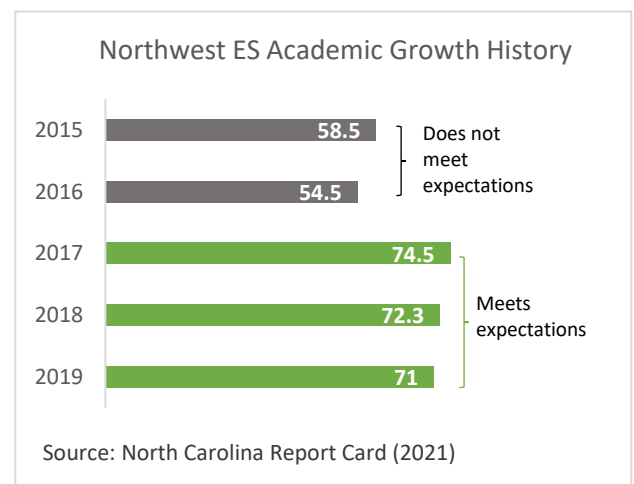
This edition of the *R3 Framework Evaluation Brief* showcases two schools in Pitt County Schools—an elementary and a high school—that accomplished schoolwide implementation of the strategies used by teacher leaders in the role of the Facilitating Teacher (FT) and Multi-Classroom Teacher (MCT). Both positions are part of the Advanced Teacher Roles (ATRs) that were developed by the district to improve teacher retention and student outcomes. FTs lead a team of Collaborating Teachers (CTs) in a Community of Practice (CoP) to address a problem of practice at their school. MCTs co-teach with a small group of teachers to share their expertise and support in the classroom.

Each school took different paths towards expanding the teacher leadership strategies from the team to the school-level. While one school intentionally set the goal of integrating the practices into their school improvement plan from the outset of the ATRs, the other school embraced and expanded the work after seeing its benefits to teaching and learning. Nevertheless, both schools shared several similarities that undoubtedly facilitated their success which included: (1) strong support from the school administrators; (2) teacher leaders that were well regarded by their colleagues; and (3) teachers from the CoPs who served as leaders on other teams in the school, e.g., PLC facilitator and/or grade level chair.

Northwest Elementary School¹

Northwest Elementary School is located on the northwest outskirts of Greenville. The school community is comprised of 18 teachers and 356 students in grades pre-kindergarten through five.

After moving to Greenville from another school district in North Carolina, Mrs. Sara English became the principal in 2018. Several years prior to her arrival, Northwest went through reform under the designation of a Restart School¹ to improve instruction and student outcomes. Since that time, Northwest has experienced academic growth that met state expectations (see chart with Northwest's academic growth history).



¹ [What is a Restart School?](#)

When the district first introduced the FT position in 2017, several teachers from Northwest applied and were accepted. They created two CoP teams—one that focused on vocabulary and the other that focused on math word problems in grades three through five. One of the FTs fondly recalled her understanding of the position and why she applied, “Pitt County started the FT role to keep teachers in the classroom and to give them opportunities and leadership roles within the school. It was a whole new way of communicating, working together, and collaborating with one another.”

Following the success of the previously mentioned FTs, a third FT joined the school for one year and eventually became one of two Instructional Coaches. More recently, another teacher moved up from the position of Collaborating Teacher to become an FT where she started a CoP to address issues related to equity—a new focus of the FT role in Pitt County Schools.

Mrs. English recalled that when she first came to Northwest, teacher leadership roles and the concept of building teachers as leaders were new to her. “We did not have anything like this at my previous school district,” she stated. Nevertheless, she met with the teachers and came to understand their roles. Being new to the school, she appreciated having strong leaders who had good rapport with their colleagues. “The FTs are well-regarded here. We have a combination of young and veteran staff, and they are wonderful. For example, [during the COVID-19 pandemic] one of our FTs scheduled a Zoom meeting at 7pm at night. And do you know that 15 of the 18 core teachers showed up? That says a lot about her and how much they regard her. The FTs lead by example and people are willing to support the work.”

Mrs. English believes that the school made great strides in changing its culture and outcomes for students, in part because of the expansion of the data inquiry process used by the CoPs across the school. Equally important, the school has two Instructional Coaches who provide follow-up support to teachers on instructional strategies that are identified through the data inquiry process.

For their part, the FTs believe that using similar strategies (e.g., Adaptive Schools) from their CoPs in other meetings, such as PLCs and grade level meetings, were important to growing a culture of data inquiry. In the words of one FT, “The norms and protocols I use in the CoP that focus on building trust and relationships are the ones that I use right at the beginning of the school year in our PLCs. So, when we come to the data, we have the foundation for collaborative and open conversations.” She went on to say, “By following the same protocols and being consistent with our goals, the whole school is very familiar with the strategies that we are using and why we're doing things a certain way...They have eventually become leaders themselves and it's nice to see the trickle-down effect.”

Another FT added that, “In the beginning, I think it was important to let them know, ‘I don't have the answers to these problems, but this is something we are going to do as a team.’ I believe that is where the trust came in. They knew that I wasn't above them. We were all the same and I was just the person to facilitate the discussions.” She and the other FTs also discussed the importance of honoring people's time by being intentional about how they spend their allotted time together in meetings. They credited the inclusion activities and protocols for providing everyone with a safe space and the tools to use their time effectively.

The teachers also recognized Mrs. English for supporting the expansion of the data inquiry process by setting the example and expectations for its use outside of the CoP. According to them, Mrs. English met with the FTs to listen to their work and then she “took different data pieces and incorporated them into staff meetings.” She also communicated the successes of the CoPs to the staff and/or provided the CoP teams the opportunity to share their work with other teachers.

Consequently, there is more schoolwide collaboration and consensus among the staff on how to address the needs of students. In the words of one Instructional Coach, “We’re very student focused, and the data leads the way because we want to improve those weaker areas.” For example, all grade levels agreed to move math instruction to the morning rather than the afternoon. Additionally, the two FTs combined their CoPs into one to focus on math vocabulary.

The school also implemented place value charts across all grades. “The place value chart is a concrete visual that every homeroom teacher uses throughout the year, and it ties in nicely with our CoP on math vocabulary,” said one of the FTs.

Another FT adds, “We’re all gaining consistency with math vocabulary. The first graders are going to be familiar with it by the time they get to fifth grade. There is more vertical alignment across the grades.”

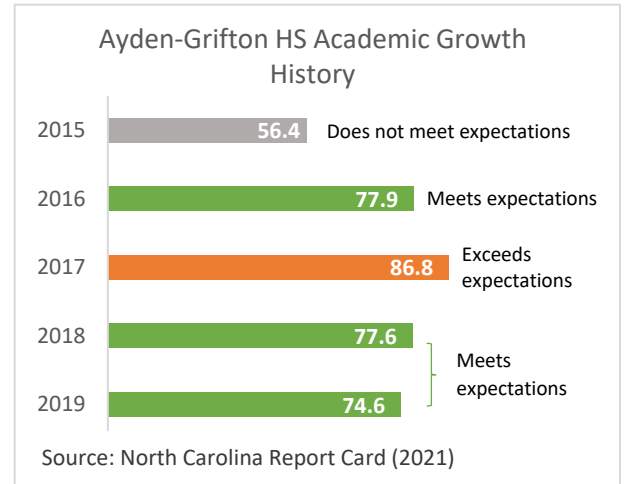
The teachers expressed pride in describing Northwest as a positive and supportive place to work. In the words of one of the Instructional Coaches, “The teachers genuinely want to do what’s best for the students, so when we ask them to put up place value charts and give them counters for the 100 days of school, you know that every teacher will do that wholeheartedly and with fidelity. In other schools, you might have to convince teachers to do it, but here, they want to be a part of it. We’ve really grown a collaborative community and it’s a special place to work in.”

Ayden-Grifton High Schoolⁱⁱ

Ayden-Grifton High School is located in southern Pitt County, in the town of Ayden. The school community consists of 45 educators, and approximately 572 students in grades nine through 12, making it one of the smallest high schools in Pitt County Schools.²

² [2021 North Carolina Report Card](#)

Dr. Chena Cayton served as principal at Wahl-Coates Elementary for five years prior to relocating and becoming principal of Ayden-Grifton in 2015. At that time, Ayden-Grifton was designated as low performing and did not meet state expectations for growth (see the chart to the right to view the schools' academic growth history). In Dr. Cayton's words, "Our students didn't see what was beyond high school. They had low aspirations. Generational poverty is part of many of their backgrounds and most expected to go into food services or low-paying jobs. They really hadn't been pushed or convinced to think beyond that outcome." Cayton, however, was determined to change that prevailing mindset and knew that she had a core of strong educators to join the charge.



When the DEEL office introduced the R3 Framework to the district, Cayton saw it as an opportunity for positive impact and took action. She joined the R3 Advisory Team along with a group of fellow principals and educators who provided feedback on the development and implementation of the advanced teacher leadership positions. She also served as a liaison to the other high schools to help build buy-in and support for the roles. Cayton then turned to several of her teachers to apply for the FT position. In her words, "I [knew] who my key people [were] and [which staff members] people [would] listen to. We are a small school, so the reach is wide." She knew that these teachers possessed leadership qualities that could be further developed with additional training and a space to share their expertise. She recalls saying to one of the teachers, "You are one of the main people in this school. If they see you change, they will change." Moreover, Cayton knew that the elevation and promotion of teachers as leaders would result in ground-up change. "Teachers are the leaders of content knowledge. We need to empower them because they are most impactful, so it has to come from them. I don't know the curriculum like they do, I can just water it and let them grow. And they don't have to leave their classroom. [DEEL leadership] understood what the [district] needed and really captured it."

During the districtwide rollout of the FT position in 2017, two teachers from Ayden-Grifton were accepted into the position. They built CoPs that included several subject areas-one CoP included English and social studies and the other CoP included math and science. From the beginning, there was an intentional focus on aligning their work with the larger school goals. One FT, who was Department Chair at the time, says, "I didn't want to work on something that wasn't aligned with the school goals. The goal from the beginning was to take what we were doing in our [CoP] and expand it out. We had buy-in from all corners [subject areas]."

Reflecting on the decision to merge different departments in the CoPs two years later, Cayton shared that, "Bringing those departments together has been huge. The impact has not only been to the CoP teachers but also trickled down the department. We had a really good foundation with CoP and we talked about the plan for moving it out to teachers. We've actually talked about opening day with teachers and how they are going to bring [the CoP members] in to do some of things that they have done that have been very successful. The whole CoP

process is phenomenal because it allowed them to zone in and dig deep into stuff more than a PLC can do, they have taken ownership of it.”

The rubric work that started back in 2017 with the two CoPs is currently part of the everyday work at Ayden-Grifton. “We reached a point where there was consistency with the rubric and now it’s just part of the way we do things here,” said Cayton. After the two CoPs merged, they switched their focus to an advanced honors academy. “What we noticed is that we were doing things for our lowest kids through Freshman Academy. We had AVID for our middle kids, but we weren’t really hitting our high achievers.” To address the needs of the higher achievers, the CoP has been developing higher order rubrics and conducting monthly symposiums with students to help them improve their AP assessment and ACT scores.

In addition to the FTs, another teacher at Ayden-Grifton stepped into the role of MCT in 2018. “We don’t have a lot of turnover at this school,” remarked Cayton, “However, we had two new Beginning Teachers (BTs) in the English department that year, so I paired up our MCT with them along with several BTs from the middle school to work on reading because we had a lot of kids who were low in this area.” The match proved to be successful. Cayton reported that the two Co-Ts are currently strong teachers who are highly respected by their peers.

The MCT took a job at the district office one year later, but the school brought in a reading specialist to continue the work with students. Ultimately, it was the original work of the MCT that led to the increased focus on reading and the advent of a Freshman Academy. According to Cayton, the Freshman Academy has been a success. She states, “The whole school is seeing the benefit. They see the community, six teachers with kids all day long. They have built a community with these kids. The Freshman Academy is aligned with MTSS because of a lot of it is small group instruction and problem-solved with specific students. It’s turned into so much more stuff and now we have a Sophomore Academy. The students asked for it.” The test scores are equally impressive. During the 2021-2022 school year, 90% of the freshman students improved at least one grade level or more in their reading scores, with 42% increasing their reading score by two or more grade levels.

Ultimately, Ayden-Grifton has taken the work of the teacher leadership positions and expanded it across the school. For instance, the CoPs and PLCs present at monthly School Improvement meetings, helping to keep teachers informed about occurrences in classrooms across different departments. Many of the PLCs have people who also participate in the CoPs, so there has been natural cross pollination of the processes and protocols. Additionally, teachers outside of the CoP have attended Adaptive Schools and Data Driven Dialogue training from the DEEL office and have learned to use the same language as the teachers in the CoPs.

Above all else, the work has been aligned with the school’s goals and improvement plan from the beginning. “All of our FTs are not something that is extra,” says Cayton, “It’s stuff that needs to be done at our school. All of this has been an easy steppingstone for what is next at our school. And if your CoP is working on something that the school is not really invested in, that’s a problem in my opinion. The thing that one of our FTs is working on is part of our SIP. It’s part of my Professional Development Plan and others. It just all fits in.”

Conclusion

The case studies presented in this brief show how the teaching communities at Northwest and Ayden-Grifton have embraced the strategies used by teacher leaders (i.e., FTs and MCTs) to support collaborative conversations to drive school improvement. The schoolwide implementation of these strategies has paid off in several important ways. One, there is collective ownership among staff and a shared understanding of data inquiry to investigate and identify solutions that address problems of practice affecting student learning. Two, there is increased alignment of instruction within and across grades. Three, and most important, students have made academic growth.

For other schools to achieve the same success in building schoolwide inquiry-driven, professional communities, several foundational pieces should be considered. More specific, school administrators should invest the time needed to understand the CoPs/co-teaching teams and prioritize this work to other staff members at the school.

To add, existing teacher leaders and their teams should consider ways that they can expand their sphere of influence in other existing school-based teams, such as PLCs. Teacher leaders in the case studies used engagement activities and Adaptive Schools strategies to build trust and level the playing field in other teams. It was important to them to build a collaborative professional community where all voices were heard and honored. This can be accomplished in all school-based teams.

Finally, schools could consider ways to leverage the expertise of other instructional leaders to support the work. For example, Northwest used their Instructional Coaches to follow-up with teachers on implementation of strategies that are identified through the data inquiry cycles. To add, Ayden Grifton used MCTs to support beginning teachers in areas identified on the school improvement plan.

ⁱ Information on Northwest ES was derived from a focus group that was conducted in June 2022 with three of the school's current Facilitating Teachers and two Instructional Coaches, and an interview with the school administrator that was conducted in June 2020.

ⁱⁱ Information on Ayden-Grifton HS was derived from a series of interviews with the school administrators that were conducted in 2018, 2020, and 2022, and an interview with the FTs in 2018.