Northeastern Randolph Middle School (NERMS) was pleased to host four school headmasters from rural China October 20 and 23-24, 2017. The headmasters are part of an initiative funded by the Jack Ma Foundation, which is one of China’s largest charitable foundations. The visit was organized by the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), and the educators were hosted at NERMS by Administrative Intern Paula LaPlant.

While at NERMS, the headmasters observed classrooms, participated in Professional Learning Team (PLT) meetings, took a bus tour of the attendance zone, and studied bus transportation and cafeteria operation. There were opportunities each day for the headmasters to interact with students, teachers, parents, and NERMS and Randolph County School System leadership. Roundtable discussions were attended by groups of students, parents, and teachers, with an open exchange on success and challenges of schools in rural China and rural North Carolina.

One common opportunity discovered from the discussions was the need to increase differentiation of instruction to meet individual student needs. Dr. Stephen Gainey, Randolph County School System superintendent, focused his session with the headmasters on the theme of "move the needle forward and minimize any backward movement."

As part of the initiative, the selected headmasters have the opportunity to participate in educational exchanges overseas. In collaboration with New Mind Education, UNCG hosted these headmasters for eight days while they visited the United States. These headmasters attended seminars and discussions with faculty from the School of Education, visited rural schools in North Carolina (with four principals visiting NERMS), and exchanged ideas with school administrators through the Principal Preparation for Excellence and Equity in Rural Schools (PPEERS) grant project led by faculty from the Department of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundation in the School of Education at UNCG.

Randolph County School System participates in the PPEERS partnership involving eleven rural districts in North Carolina and aims to develop a strong, sustainable leadership pipeline with these districts. PPEERS principal candidates, partnering school administrators, and teachers will have the opportunity to exchange ideas with visiting headmasters from rural China. This intercultural exchange offered learning opportunities for educators from both China and North Carolina who are dedicated to rural education.