

**“If we don’t treat teaching as a profession, we won’t have professionals in our classrooms.”  
-Yevonne Brannon**

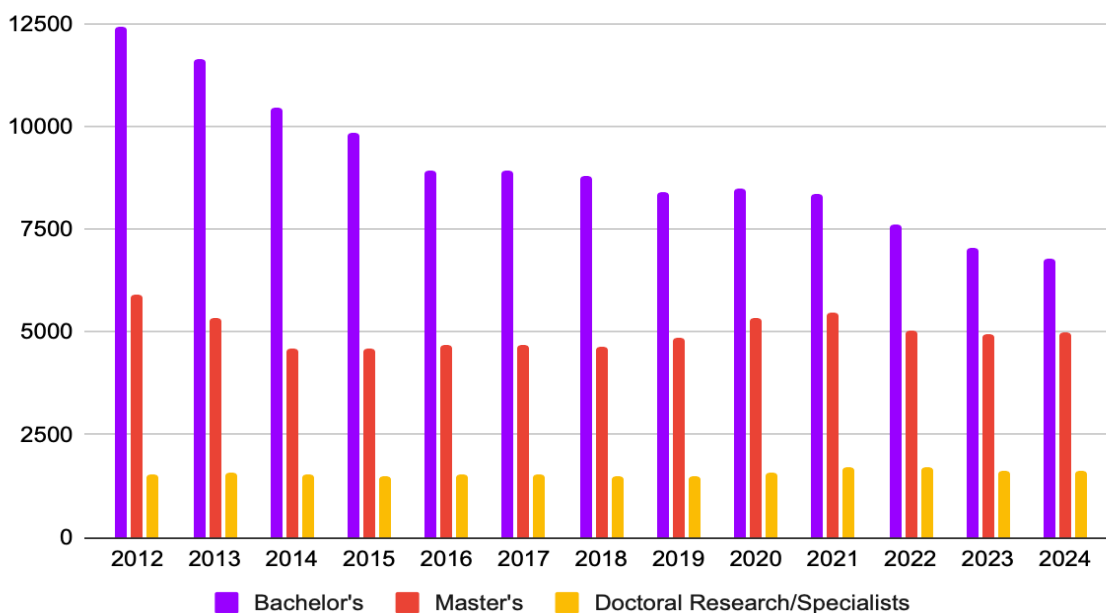
North Carolina’s teachers are dedicated and hardworking, and their professionalism made our public school system a jewel in the United States in the early 2000s. Even today, North Carolina continues to lead the nation in the number of teachers who have earned certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. However, North Carolina currently trails the nation in [education funding level and funding effort](#), and is well below average in teacher salaries. According to the [National Education Association](#), North Carolina’s average teacher salary for the 2022-23 school year was \$56,559. This average includes the supplements local districts add to the state salary, but it still falls about \$13,000 below the national average of \$69,597, putting North Carolina’s ranking at #38 among all states in the nation (See [The Facts on Teacher Pay](#)). Although salary is just one of many elements contributing to the desirability of becoming a teacher, it is one that can’t be ignored when evaluating the factors affecting why people enter and remain in the teaching profession.

## The Teacher Pipeline in North Carolina

[The teacher pipeline](#) is an interconnected system that extends from recruiting individuals into the profession, developing them as teaching professionals, and retaining them through retirement. The pipeline begins with attracting new teachers to enter the field. Once inside the profession, teachers are developed, and retained over time through administrative support, local policy support, classroom support, peer support, and community involvement (Bankert, 2018).

The teacher pipeline in North Carolina has been shrinking for years. According to a 2019 research brief by the [Education Policy Initiative at Carolina](#), the [UNC school system](#), made up of 16 universities, is the largest supplier of public school teachers in North Carolina. **As shown in Figure 1**, there has been a fairly steady decline over the years in the number of students enrolled in a bachelor’s program in education, a critical pathway for the teacher pipeline.

Figure 1. Enrollment in Education Programs in the UNC System 2012 - 2024

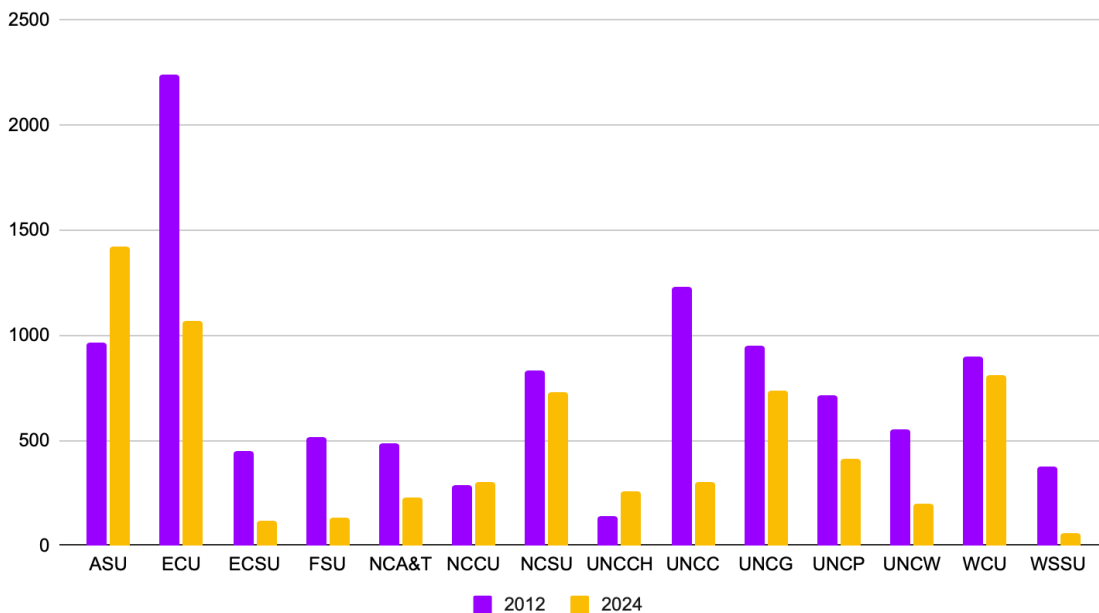


Data collected from the [UNC System Interactive Data Dashboard](#)

Between 2012 and 2024, enrollment in bachelor’s programs **dropped 45%** (from 12,434 to 6,793) while enrollment in master’s programs dropped 16% (from 5,918 to 4,989) and enrollment in doctoral research/specialist programs increased 6% (from 1,535 to 1,630). Enrollment in a doctoral program often signals an exit from the classroom, so the increase in doctoral program enrollment may be further evidence of North Carolina’s shrinking teacher pipeline.

The enrollment declines across the schools have not affected all schools equally; some saw enrollment drop by more than 70% while others have seen enrollment increase. **Figure 2** shows the enrollment change in undergraduate education majors for all UNC systems offering a bachelor’s in education.

Figure 2. Enrollment in Bachelor’s of Education Programs by UNC School 2012 - 2024



Data collected from the [UNC System Interactive Data Dashboard](#)

Some UNC schools require students to major in a non-education subject and take specific education courses to fulfill the teacher licensure requirements (e.g., UNC-Asheville) or offer the option instead of the education major. UNC-CH offers teacher licensure for math and science majors in the UNC-BEST program.

**As shown in Table 1**, the majority of the UNC system’s minority-serving institutions (ECSU, FSU, NCA&T, NCCU, UNCP, and WSSU), whose early-career teachers are predominately racial/ethnic minorities, have been especially hard hit by enrollment declines. Except for NCCU, the enrollment and number of programs dropped dramatically for all schools. For example, WSSU lost 84% of its education student enrollment along with 63% of its program offerings between 2012 and 2024.

These enrollment trends are devastating to a teaching profession seeking to increase the diversity of its members to better reflect the diversity of students in the classroom.

Table 1. Enrollment and Program Offering Changes 2012-2024 for UNC Minority-serving Institutions

School	Enrollment			Programs		
	2012	2024	% Change	2012	2024	% Change
ECSU*	451	114	-75	6	3	-50
FSU*	516	135	-74	12	6	-50
NCA&T*	487	231	-53	10	4	-60
NCCU*	288	304	+6	3	3	0
UNCP	711	409	-42	11	6	-45
WSSU*	373	61	-84	8	3	-63

\*HBCU Data collected from the [UNC System Interactive Data Dashboard](#)

## Becoming a Teacher in North Carolina

According to [Teach North Carolina](#), there are several steps in becoming a licensed teacher in North Carolina. Individuals who take the traditional route begin by earning a bachelor’s degree in education or a field related to what they want to teach. They must also complete an educator preparation program (EPP) via their school or another accredited university. After completing the EPP, they must pass a [Praxis exam](#) and another [subject area test](#). Preparation for these tests begins in the educator preparation program. Finally, individuals must apply for a teaching license. Once approved, they can begin teaching in North Carolina.

The [NCDPI EPP dashboard](#) has data for EPP enrollments starting in 2014. Their data shows that enrollment in alternative pathways [increased 170%](#) from 2014 to 2023, with a surge after 2018. Data for traditional pathway enrollment shows a 9% drop from 2014 to 2023. There are more candidates currently enrolled in alternative pathways (8,129) than the traditional pathway (7,288). This increase is largely due to the expansion of the [residency license](#) (RL) pathway, a lateral entry program that allows individuals to teach while they obtain their professional educator’s license. Individuals must meet the following requirements to be issued an RL:

- be requested by the local board of education and have a certification of supervision from the recognized educator preparation program (EPP) in which the individual is enrolled
- hold a bachelor’s degree
- have completed coursework relevant to the requested licensure area or passed the content area examination relevant to the requested licensure area that has been approved by the State Board

North Carolina’s most prominent public universities have collaborated with the NCDPI to strengthen the teacher pipeline and get qualified instructors in classrooms. [NC T.E.A.C.H](#) is an RL program designed to train, support, and retain mid-career professionals as they become licensed teachers. [Pathway to Practice NC](#) is a collaborative effort between UNC and NCSU that allows individuals obtaining their license to build a flexible coursework schedule around their teaching obligations.

National reports show that turnover rates are higher for teachers who obtain certification through an alternative pathway. [Teacher Turnover: Why it Matters and What We Can Do About It](#) from the Learning Policy Institute states that “teachers who enter the profession through alternative certification pathways...are 25% more likely to leave their schools and the profession, even after controlling for their students, schools, and teaching conditions.” However, **this narrative is flipped in North Carolina**. The attrition rate (% of teachers who left NCPS from 2022-23) for RL teachers is 3 percentage points lower than the state’s 2022-23 attrition average. While we do not know for certain why North Carolina’s attrition rate for RL teachers is lower than national data would suggest, North Carolina’s requirement that RL participants must complete coursework through an approved EPP may be a reason. By requiring enrollment in an EPP, North Carolina ensures that RL participants receive the same level of training and preparation as those who

obtain licensure the traditional way (this is not the case in most other states with alternative pathways). Because the preparedness gap is mitigated by the EPP requirement, it is less surprising to see lower attrition rates for RL teachers than traditionally licensed ones. Alternative pathways are an important way to increase the teacher population, but we must continue to improve them and provide teachers with the resources they need to succeed, thrive, and stay in the classroom.

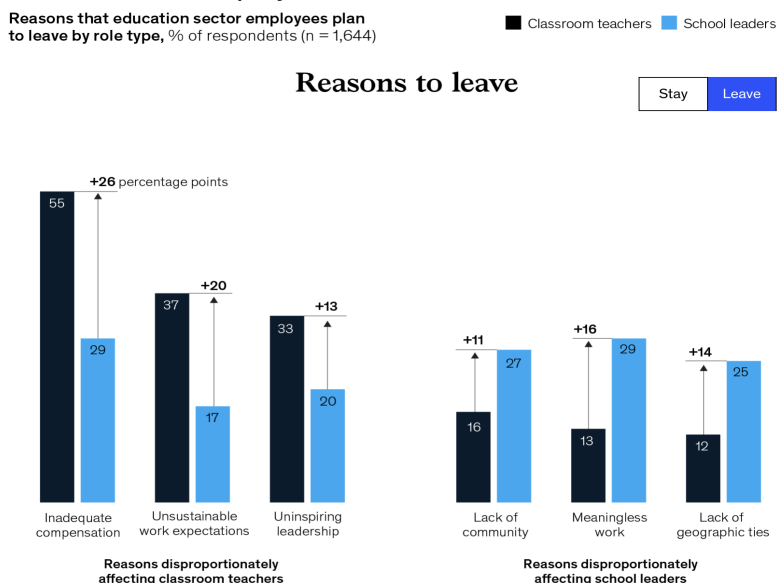
## Teacher Attrition and Turnover

North Carolina’s teacher turnover rate hit its highest mark in decades in 2023. According to the NCDPI’s 2022-2023 State of the Teaching Profession in North Carolina, of the 90,638 traditional public school teachers employed between March 2022 and March 2023, 10,376 of them are no longer **employed** in public schools (teachers who moved to administrative roles but remained in public schools are NOT included). This accounts for a state attrition rate of 11.5%, up 3.7 points from 7.8% in 2022. Educator Attrition and Hiring in North Carolina Public Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic from the Education Policy Initiative at Carolina (EPIC) also reported an increase in teacher attrition. Because EPIC counted teachers who moved to administrative roles as leaving the teaching profession, their teacher attrition is higher. They report the attrition rate jumping from 12.1% in 2022 to 15.6% in 2023.

Exit surveys show that, of those teachers who left NCPS between March 2022 and March 2023, 48% resigned because of personal reasons (e. g. family responsibilities, family relocation, career change), 31.16% resigned because of other or unknown reasons, and 13.07% retired with full benefits. Because the exit surveys do not ask questions about pay and support, it is difficult to say how many teachers left NCPS due to lack of pay and/or support. However, only 2.82% of teachers left because they were dissatisfied with teaching, signaling that it is not the teaching profession but rather extenuating circumstances spearheading the increase in teacher attrition.

National surveys show lack of compensation as the primary reason teachers are leaving the profession. The 2023 article “K-12 teachers are quitting. What would make them stay?” from McKinsey and Company reports that 55% of teachers planning to leave the profession cited inadequate compensation as a reason. Compensation is cited as a more salient reason for classroom teachers to leave than school leaders (26 percentage point difference). 37% of teachers said the unsustainable work experience was a reason for their planned departure, while 33% felt uninspiring leadership affected their decision to leave.

Figure 3. *Reasons Education Sector Employees Plan to Leave*



K-12 teachers are the [#1 most burnt out profession](#) in America. In a Gallup poll conducted in 2022, 44% of American K-12 teachers reported feeling burned out often or always. A [2023 survey by the RAND corporation](#) found that approximately 60% of teachers experience job related stress either always or frequently. Teachers reported that these increased stress levels contributed to loss of sleep, decreased family time, and poorer physical and mental health. The inherent burnout and stress levels of teaching were compounded even further by the COVID pandemic, which continues to have residual, negative impacts on teachers. According to a [2022 National Education Association \(NEA\) Survey](#), 86% of surveyed NEA members saw more educators leaving the profession or retiring early from the start of the pandemic in 2020. Teachers in the NEA survey cited concerns such as poor infrastructure, low pay, and staff shortages as contributing factors to the mass teacher shortages seen today.

According to [Why Addressing Teacher Turnover Matters](#) by Linda Darling-Hammond et al., teacher attrition and retainment must be attended to more effectively because high attrition rates are disruptive to learning and negatively impact student achievement. They are also expensive. According to research conducted by the [Learning Policy Institute](#) in 2024, urban school districts spent around \$24,930 per teacher replacement. It is estimated that the United States spends billions of dollars each year on teacher replacement.

## Recruit and Retain Teachers

Teacher recruitment and retention are the essential components of a solid teacher pipeline. Fostering a work environment where teachers are respected as professionals and creating working conditions that enable them to have positive impacts on their students is critical to keeping teachers in the classroom. This includes:

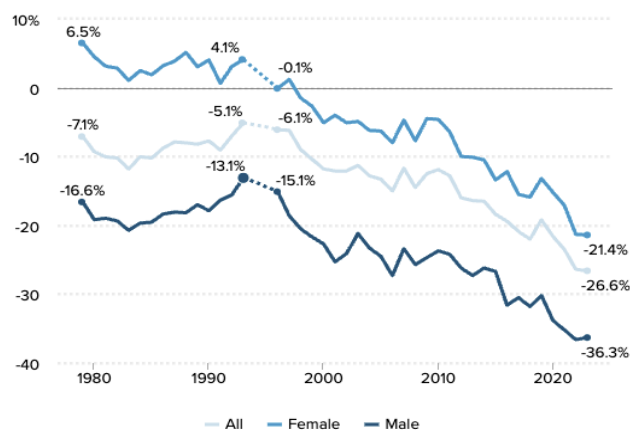
- professional-level salaries
- emphasis on teaching as a profession
- a clear career path
- adequate classroom support in the form of teacher assistants, sufficient supplies, textbooks, and technology.
- job security and stability
- ongoing staff development
- a fair teacher evaluation system

[Solving the Teacher Shortage: How to Attract and Retain Excellent Educators](#), highlighted several effective strategies to improve the teacher pipeline: increased salaries, lower costs of entry into the profession, college loan forgiveness programs, and internal support for new teachers.

Figure 4. *Teacher Wage Penalty over Time*

### Teachers earn 26.6% less than comparable college graduates

Public school teacher weekly wage penalty (or premium) for all teachers and by gender, 1979–2023



*Improved Salaries.* It is no secret that teachers in America are underpaid. The [Economic Policy Institute](#) has documented the growing gap between teachers and comparable college graduates over the years.

In their latest report (2024) the nationwide gap was a **record high 26.6%**. In North Carolina, the situation is not much better, as teachers make 25% less than comparable college graduates, making it even harder to attract people to the profession.

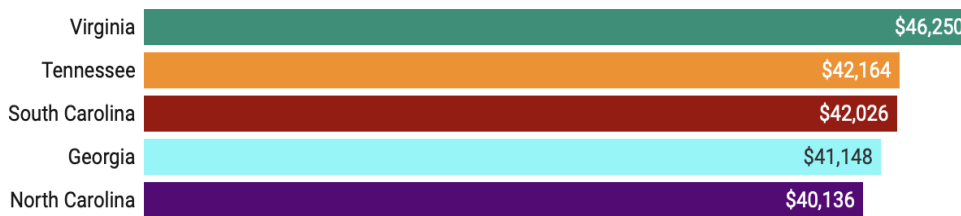
The 2024-25 [North Carolina state salary schedule](#), which sets the bottom limit for state salaries, starts beginning teachers with a bachelor's degree at \$41,000.

Some municipalities use local funds to supplement the state base pay rates to more fairly pay teachers and to attract teachers to their schools. This creates disparities between districts in communities that can afford a local supplement and those that cannot. *Figure 4* shows the average starting salaries of North Carolina and surrounding states according to the NEA’s Educator Pay Data 2024 (which uses FY 2022-23 data). NC’s average starting salary is lower than all surrounding states and ranks as the 42<sup>nd</sup> lowest average starting salary in the nation, negatively affecting North Carolina’s ability to recruit teachers from outside the state. See [The Facts on Teacher Pay](#) for more information.

Figure 4. Average Starting Salaries in North Carolina and Border States

## Average Starting Teacher Salary by State, NEA 2024 Rankings

NEA data is from the 2022-23 fiscal year.



Some states have improved salaries through statewide minimums or salary incentives for educators who hold a National Board Certification.

In North Carolina, [educators who have earned National Board Certification](#) receive a 12% salary supplement. This is

one of the only avenues left for teachers to increase their pay in North Carolina, so it is not surprising that the state has more [National Board Certified teachers than any other state](#) with 24,875 teachers having earned certification. National Board Certified teachers make up nearly [24%](#) of all North Carolina teachers.

In 2013 the North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA) eliminated an important avenue for teachers’ professional and pay growth – advanced degree salary supplements. Starting in SY 2014-15, teachers who earn a master’s or doctoral degree no longer receive a salary increase. They continue to be paid at the bachelor’s degree level with pay increases tied to the number of years employed. The NCGA also eliminated teachers’ career status and shifted all teachers to one-year contracts. These moves had a chilling effect on the teacher pipeline. In 2016 the North Carolina Supreme Court ruled that teachers who had career status prior to 2013 could retain it. Also, many districts now provide multi-year contracts to provide employment stability for their teachers. However, these fixes have not reversed the steady decline in North Carolina’s teaching force.

**Cost of Entry.** In addition to low pay, many educators have student loans that are difficult to pay off, especially given their low beginning and career-long pay levels. High student loans coupled with low salaries make the cost of entry into the profession difficult for many people and lead to teachers seeking second jobs or leaving the profession. To help, [Anne Podolsky et al.](#) suggest that states provide more scholarship programs and loan forgiveness programs to educators. The [North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program](#) is a good example. Full restoration and even further expansion of the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program could be very effective in improving the teacher pipeline.

**Internal Support for New Educators.** Induction programs can help welcome and prepare new educators to thrive as teachers. A [research report by Ingersoll and Smith](#) for NASSP Bulletin revealed that first-year educators were more likely to stay in the profession when they had a mentor from the same field, common planning time with same-subject teachers and regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers. The report showed that *educators with no induction programs were 40% more likely to leave the profession*, whereas educators with at least 3 forms of induction support were only 28% likely to leave after their first

year of teaching. The percentage dropped to 18% when 8 supports were provided (e.g. reduced number of course preparations, participation in an external network, regular supportive communication with an administrator). Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools provides support to new educators through their [New Teacher Induction](#) program, which supports all Beginning Teachers (0-3 years). Beginning Teachers are given a mentor who helps them navigate the challenges of being a new educator. The goal of the program is to retain beginning teachers and attract teachers to the district by ensuring a broad support system. Schools that take time to develop their new educators will lower attrition rates and contribute to a stable school environment.

## Financial/Housing Support for New Educators

With the volatility and scarcity in today's housing market contributing to teachers' financial challenges, some public school districts offer reduced-price housing to attract and retain new teachers. In the summer of 2024, Bertie County opened a [24-unit apartment complex](#) designed to house teachers and address the county's housing shortage. Dare County, one of the state's [wealthiest and most expensive counties](#), offers [two teacher housing complexes](#) that provide teachers housing at an affordable price. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools recently started the [At Home in CMS initiative](#), which offers rental discounts, referral programs, and downpayment assistance for teachers. Buncombe County opened the [Williams-Baldwin Teacher Campus in 2017](#), a 24-unit complex that provides teachers a cost-effective, comfortable home. [Teacher Next Door](#), a nationwide initiative, offers North Carolina teachers housing grants up to \$8,000.

## Recruiting Teachers in North Carolina

North Carolina is taking steps to recruit students into the teacher pipeline. Efforts include partially reinstating the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program, expanding the North Carolina Teacher Cadet Program, establishing a Uniform Articulation Agreement between UNC system schools and North Carolina Community College system schools, and creating programs such as the Leadership Institute for Future Teachers (LIFT), and the informational website [Teach NC](#) that provides step-by-step information on how to become a teacher in North Carolina. Even so, the state has failed to sufficiently increase educator pay, failed to decrease student loan debt, and has failed to elevate the education field to the professional level it deserves by reinstating advanced degree pay and career status to teachers.

[The North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program](#) was created in 1986 to help recruit students into the teaching profession through tuition help at one of the 17 participating colleges/universities and professional development in exchange for four years of teaching in North Carolina public schools. The Teaching Fellows Program helped address the teacher crisis of the 80s and became one of the most effective recruitment programs in North Carolina, earning national recognition for its quality. The program provided state-funded 4-year scholarships (\$5K or \$6.5K per year depending on the program years) for recipients who agreed to teach in North Carolina public schools for 4 years and emphasized teaching as a profession as prestigious as medicine or law. The Teaching Fellows Program recruited approximately 11,000 highly qualified teachers across North Carolina from 1986 to 2011. Sadly, state funding for the program was cut in 2011.

[In 2017, the Teaching Fellows Program](#) was revived on a much smaller scale through [Senate Bill 252](#). The current program extends only to individuals seeking careers in special education or STEM rather than all subject areas as in the original program. In 2024, with the [unanimous approval](#) to add Appalachian State and ECU as partner institutions, the current program is now offered at [8 out of 17 UNC system schools](#) (up from 6 prior to 2024). Two private institutions, Elon University and Meredith College, also participate in the program. Two HBCUs—Fayetteville State and NC A&T—are also included. Students who participate in the program receive around \$8,250 per year in forgivable loans. A full restoration of The Teaching Fellows Program should include **all** UNC system schools and other qualified private universities/colleges in North Carolina, specialization in all subject areas, and should see a substantial increase in funding to address the teaching shortage facing our state.

[The North Carolina Teacher Cadet Program](#) was started by the North Carolina Foundation for Public School Children in 1997 to increase high school students' interest in teaching. Students in the cadet program complete two honors courses (Teacher Cadet I and Teacher Cadet II) through their respective high school. Using a curriculum involving hands-on teaching methods and field experiences, the program is a structured course of study that gives students a positive and realistic view of the educational profession. The program is designed to create a pipeline of future teachers that is reflective of the diverse demographic makeup of North Carolina's students and encourages high schoolers to attend college and eventually teach in North Carolina public schools.

[The Uniform Articulation Agreement](#) – was launched in 2021 to address the teacher shortage by increasing opportunities for community college students to transfer to teacher education programs within the UNC system. This agreement allows students in teacher education/educator preparation programs to apply all their transfer credits from 52 participating North Carolina community colleges to a 4-year university within the UNC system. The hope is that by making the transfer credit process easier, more students enrolled in these programs will complete their journey to becoming a licensed educator.

[The Leadership Institute for Future Teachers \(LIFT\)](#) – was created in 2020 by NC State's College of Education to help diversify the teaching force in North Carolina. Although students of color make up about half of the state's public school student population, about [75% of North Carolina public school](#) teachers are white. High school students of color and/or bilingual students who are interested in increasing their leadership skills and potentially pursuing a career in education are the main participants in this free program. It includes a summer leadership program at NC State, mentoring and family support, college readiness sessions, and Saturday Success Academies for high school seniors. Students who participated in the program responded positively, giving hope to its future and the future of a more diverse teaching force.

Some of North Carolina's public school districts have created their own initiatives to recruit and retain teachers. For example, the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) recently created the [Future Teachers Program](#), which is a recruitment initiative aimed at developing the district's internal student talent. Future Teachers participants are WCPSS high school graduates who intend to pursue careers in education and who commit to teaching in WCPSS upon completion of their EPP's. The program ensures participants a job in WCPSS and also provides annual summer stipends for professional development during college. Edgecombe County Public Schools (ECPS) created the [Scholar Teacher](#) program, which introduces students at Edgecombe Early College High School to the basics of teaching and provides them with classroom experience in their local schools. Students graduate with an associate's degree and can apply for a \$10K annual college scholarship. Students who accept the scholarship agree to teach in ECPS at least three of their first seven years after graduating from college.

## Conclusion

At the same time that more college students question whether teaching is a good personal and financial career choice, North Carolina is experiencing record numbers of teachers leaving the profession. Having dedicated, experienced, career teachers is critical for our students' success. Treating teachers like professionals, which includes providing professional-level salaries, is essential to developing a high-quality teaching force. If North Carolina is to maintain the strong public education system all our students deserve, we must support our teachers and give them the resources we need to succeed.



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