The Facts on the NC Teacher Pipeline

"If we don't treat teaching as a profession, we won't have professionals in our classrooms."
-Yevonne Brannon

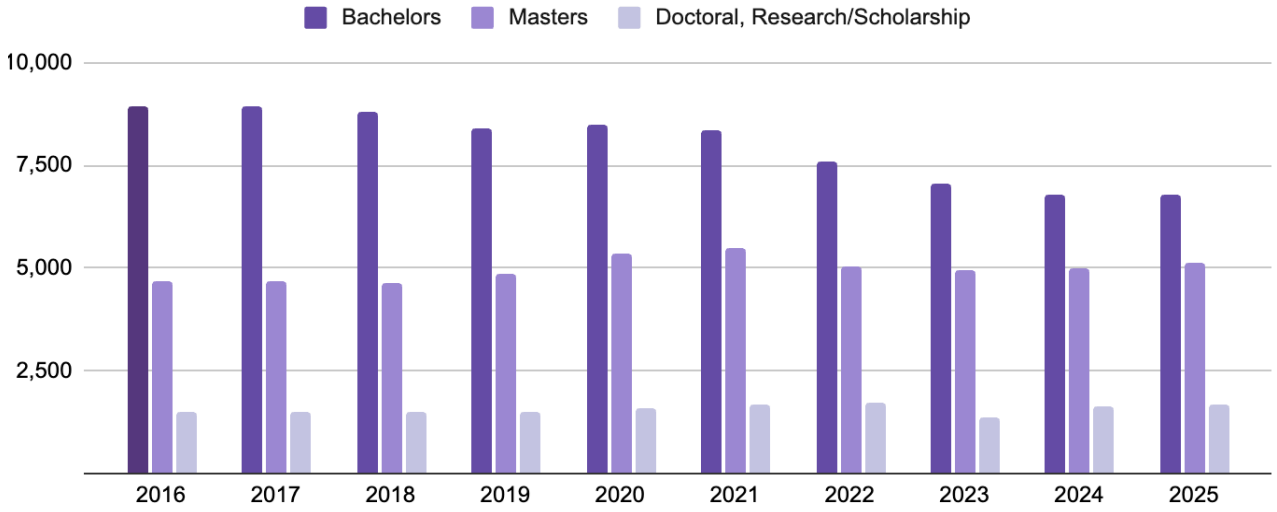
What is the Teacher Pipeline?

The teacher pipeline is a system that extends from recruiting people to the profession, developing them as professionals, and retaining them through retirement. Once inside the profession, teachers are developed, and retained over time through community involvement and administrative, policy, classroom, and peer support.

North Carolina leads the nation in the number of National Board Certified Teachers. However, NC trails the nation in education funding level and effort, and is well below average in teacher salaries. According to the 2026 National Education Association report, NC's average teacher salary in 2025-25 was $60,323, more than $14,000 below the national average. This places NC 43rd in US rankings, and lowest when compared to neighboring states. North Carolina's estimated ranking for 2025-26 falls to 46th in the nation. Read more about teacher salary here.

Although salary is not the only element contributing to the desirability of becoming a teacher, it can't be ignored when evaluating why people enter and remain in the profession. With steadily high attrition rates, a drop in enrollment in education programs, and consistently low funding, salary, and support, the teacher pipeline in North Carolina is at a crisis point.

Enrollment in Education Programs in the UNC System (2016-2025)



Data collected from the UNC System Interactive Data Dashboard

Between 2016 and 2024, enrollment in education bachelor's programs dropped from 8,917 to 6,765, a 24% drop. Enrollment in master's programs and doctoral and specialist programs has been fluctuating over the same time period.

Becoming a Teacher

There are several steps to becoming a licensed teacher in NC. Following the traditional route, individuals must earn their bachelor's degree, complete an educator preparation program (EPP), and pass a Praxis exam and another subject area test. Then they must apply and be approved for a teaching license.

Alternative routes are vital to increasing the teacher pipeline, such as lateral entry through a residency license, which allows people with a bachelor's degree to earn licensure while teaching. Attrition rates tend

to be higher for those who are alternatively certified, because they receive less training *on average,* than teachers who go the traditional route even though NC requires those receiving a residency license to complete their coursework through an established EPP. With rates of enrollment in alternative pathways now higher than rates for traditional pathways, we must ensure that teachers have the resources they need to succeed in the classroom long term.

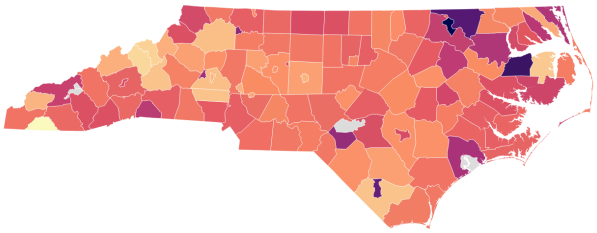
Attrition Rates

North Carolina's attrition rates increased about a quarter of a percent from 2023-24 (9.88%) to 2024-25 (**10.11%**). Of the 90,105 traditional public school teachers employed between March 2024 and March 2025, 9,107 of them are ***no longer employed in public schools*** (teachers who moved to administrative roles but remained in public schools are not included). The 2024-25 attrition rate in North Carolina is near the record high in 2022-23 when it reached 11.5%..

The Learning Policy Institute reports that teachers are leaving because of inadequate preparation, lack of support, challenging working conditions, compensation dissatisfaction, better career opportunities, and personal reasons. This lends to K-12 teaching being the most burnt out profession in America, with high rates of job-related stress. Attrition rates vary widely by district and are tracked by NCDPI.

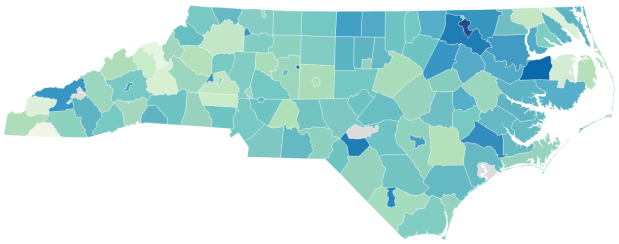
State Teacher Attrition Rate in NC (State Attrition 2024-25), Interactive Map Here

Percent of teachers who leave the classroom in NC public schools entirely; does not include those who transfer or advance in administration. The rate tracks teachers from March of one year to March the following year.



District Attrition Rate in NC (LEA Attrition, 2024-25), Interactive Map Here

Percent of teachers who leave the public school unit (PSU)/school district, including those who transfer to another NC public school or advance in administration. The rate tracks teachers from March of one year to March the following year.



Recruiting and Retaining Teachers

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

- Professional-level salaries
- A clear career path
- Job security and stability
- A fair teacher evaluation system
- Ongoing staff development
- Emphasis on teaching as a profession
- Adequate classroom support in the form of teacher assistants, sufficient supplies, textbooks, and technology

According to NEA's 2026 State Rankings and Estimates report, NC is currently estimated to rank at 46th in the nation for 2025-26 average teacher pay. As one of the main factors in teacher attrition, teacher salary must be addressed to improve retention across NC. The current proposed state budget is meant to offer a

variety of monetary incentives for teachers, including a 17% raise for new teachers, and a 5.5% raise for teachers with 15-24 years of experience, as well as a $500 or $1000 bonus, depending on salary.

North Carolina Teacher Recruitment and Retention Programs

Over the years, North Carolina and local districts have taken steps to recruit students into the teacher pipeline and provide support to retain them. Below are some examples.

NC Teaching Fellows Program

- Created in 1986 to address the teacher crisis of the 80s.
- Provided **state-funded 4-year scholarships for recipients who agreed to teach in NC** public schools for 4 years and attended 1 of the 17 participating institutions.
- Recruited about 11,000 highly qualified teachers from 1986 to 2011, but funding was cut in 2011.

Reinstated NC Teaching Fellows Program (Senate Bill 252 and subsequent legislation)

- In 2017, the Senate Bill **revived the NC Teaching Fellows Program on a much smaller scale,** expanding to include more institutions and disciplines in 2024.
- Currently offers scholarships to those seeking a career in special education, STEM or elementary education.
- Offered to those attending certain schools in the UNC system and some private institutions or HBCUs.

NC Teacher Cadet Program

- Started by the NC Foundation for Public School Children in 1997 to increase teaching interest, give students a positive and realistic view of the educational profession and diversify the field.
- Consists of **two high school courses that focus on hands-on teaching methods** and field experience, as well as an annual conference.

Uniform Articulation Agreement

- Launched in 2021 to **increase opportunities for community college students to transfer** to teacher education programs.
- Allows students apply their transfer credits from 52 participating NC community colleges to a 4-year university within the UNC system.

Leadership Institute for Future Teachers (LIFT)

- Created in 2020 by NC State's College of Education.
- Originally, this program was aimed towards students of color or bilingual students, now, it's open to any high school seniors who want to become teachers.
- This week-long program offers mentoring and support, college readiness sessions, and Success Academies.

District-Specific Examples

- Buncombe County: Early Childhood Workforce Development Program
    - Created to address the shortage in early childhood educators.
    - Offers paid college coursework, classroom experience, and support for those wanting to work in early childhood education.

- Wake County: Future Teachers Program
  - This program strengthens the Wake County teacher pipeline by directing former students, turned teachers, into the Wake County school system.
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools: Teaching Residency Program
  - This is a teaching assistant program to help college graduates to earn their teaching licence while working in Charlotte-Mecklenberg schools.

In response to low teacher salaries and low retention rate, some counties offer reduced-rate housing for teachers in their district.

- Bertie County: Teacher Housing Initiative
  - This program designates discounted housing to Bertie County teachers.
- Buncombe County: Williams-Baldwin Teacher Complex
  - The district's complex offers rental units at a discounted price for teachers in Buncombe County and Asheville City Schools.
- Dare County: Teacher Housing
  - Dare County owns a set of apartment complexes so that they can offer teachers housing below market rate.

Conclusion

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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