

Recruiting Teachers for Hard-to-Staff Schools: Solutions for North Carolina & the Nation

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The North Carolina Public School Forum is a public policy center that brings business and educational leaders together with elected officials to work toward the creation of a state system of schools second to none.



The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality is a regional office of the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future. The Center conducts research, informs policy, and engages leadership, in order to enhance opportunities for all students to have caring, competent and qualified teachers.

POSITION AVAILABLE

College graduate with academic major (master's degree preferred). Excellent communication & leadership skills required. Challenging opportunity to serve 150 children and/or adolescents daily on a tight schedule, developing up to five different products each day to meet individual needs, while adhering to multiple product specifications. Adaptability helpful, since suppliers cannot always deliver goods on time, incumbent must arrange for own support services, and customers rarely know what they want. Ideal candidate will enjoy working in isolation from colleagues.

This diversified position allows employee to exercise typing, clerical, law enforcement, and social work skills between assignments and after hours. Typical work week: 50 hours. Special nature of work may preclude amenities such as telephones or computers, but work has many intrinsic rewards. Starting salary \$24,661, rising to \$36,495 after only 15 years.

Likely first job assignment includes work in either isolated rural or inner-city communities, in dilapidated buildings, and in organizations that will not have strong and positive leadership, for no additional compensation.

Source: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future* (1996), p. 54.

As the nation's student population grows and its information-age economy expands, so does the demand for highly qualified teachers – teachers with professional skills unmatched in previous generations. Yet forecasters tell us that – unless things change – supply will simply not meet demand.

Demographic experts predict a need for more than two million new teachers in the next decade. North Carolina alone must find more than 80,000 new teachers by 2010. A large proportion of our teaching force is approaching retirement age, and the supply problem is further compounded by state and federal initiatives to lower class sizes. How will North Carolina and other states meet the sheer demand for new teachers, much less assure a high-quality teacher for every classroom?

These quandaries present a more troubling picture for some schools than others. For a number of “hard-to-staff” schools, the negative consequences of teacher shortages are compounded by characteristics that make these schools less attractive to teachers. Most often located in our troubled inner cities or isolated rural areas, these schools are frequently plagued by high poverty in the community, higher teacher turnover rates, insufficient physical resources, and low performance on state accountability measures.

What is a “Hard-To-Staff” School?

For our purposes, hard-to-staff schools have the following characteristics:

- 50% or more of students are below grade level
- 50% or more of students are eligible for free and reduced price lunch in elementary schools (40% for high schools)¹
- 15-18% annual teacher turnover rate²
- 25% of teachers have provisional licenses, are lateral entry (up to five years to earn full licensure), emergency or temporary, or are probationary

Schools in North Carolina are “low performing” when they fail to meet the expected growth gain standard on the state’s ABC assessments and significantly less than half of students perform at or above grade level. Because low student achievement is included in our definition of hard-to-staff schools, the state’s low-performing schools will often, although not always, fit that definition. In 1999-2000, 43 schools (2.1% of the total number) in the state were designated low-performing.

Based on our analysis of data from the NC Department of Public Instruction, there are 40 schools that meet the criteria for hard-to-staff schools. Of these, 13 of them are also designated as low performing according to the state’s ABC accountability system. Sixteen of these schools are elementary, 3 are middle schools and 21 are high schools. Many of these hard-to-staff schools are in the east and north-eastern portions of the state, as well as within the southern piedmont and along the urban areas of the I-40 corridor. (See map p. 5.) Of course, there are many more schools in North Carolina that are expected to have difficulties recruiting teachers in the coming years, but we assert that these 40 schools are in a particularly tough spot, given the obstacles that we’ve described.

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Instructional and Accountability Services, Financial and Business Services, and Human Resource Management

¹ Performance data and free and reduced price lunch figures are based upon 1999-2000 data.

² Calculated from a comparison of data for teachers and instructional support personnel from the 9th pay period of 1999-2000 to the 9th pay period of 2000-2001. Teachers and instructional support split across schools in 2000-2001 were considered as having left their 1999-2000 school if school assignments were changed. Teachers and instructional support assigned to a position other than teacher or instructional support for the 2000-2001 school year were considered as having left the school even if the alternative position was in the same school.

The Education Commission of the States says “hard-to-staff” schools are those “that have a particularly difficult time finding and retaining adequately trained teachers who are effective with their student populations.”¹ These schools, whose students have the greatest need for our most capable professionals, are also the schools most likely to be left with ill-prepared principals and under-qualified, inexperienced teachers.

As reports of teacher recruitment difficulties increase, North Carolina policymakers face a dilemma. Some will argue that growing teacher shortages mandate a lowering of standards for entry into the teaching profession. Yet North Carolina also expects every student to meet challenging standards of academic achievement. These expectations apply to *all* of our schools – even those that are the most “hard to staff.” Given historic patterns of teacher distribution, it is clear that when and if standards are lowered, the least qualified teachers will migrate, in ever larger numbers, to our highest-need schools.

Education Week recently identified 27 states that have one or more programs that offer prospective teachers college scholarships or forgivable loans. Of these, 11 have scholarships or forgivable loan programs aimed specifically at academically high-performing candidates, while 10 target minority candidates, 18 target specific subject areas, and 10 target hard-to-staff schools.

Many states offer signing bonuses, relocation expenses, housing subsidies, and a wide variety of perks in order to entice teachers to classrooms where they are needed most. We have found little research about the impact of such incentive programs generally, or their effectiveness in helping to staff our most challenged schools. Where data do exist, they suggest that these programs are not meeting their goals. In the Southeast, for example, Georgia has developed many recruitment strategies, but reports we have examined show that few have drawn teachers to hard-to-staff schools.

Massachusetts and California are also using monetary incentives in an effort to attract teachers to high-need schools. These states offer signing bonuses ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000 over four years. Massachusetts’ \$20,000 signing bonus program is a case in point. Three times more recruits are teaching in wealthier suburban districts than in needy urban districts and the new teachers, who only have to attend truncated summer training program before they begin teaching, are leaving at two times the national average.

We can be certain about one fact: much more information is needed so policy makers can make good, sound, evidence-based decisions about which programs to deploy.

QUALIFIED TEACHERS ARE VITAL TO HIGH ACHIEVEMENT

Can quality teaching really make a difference in our most challenged schools, where students begin with so many disadvantages? Evidence continues to mount that teachers are the most powerful determinants of whether students are able to meet high standards.

For example, recent studies in Tennessee and Texas reveal that teacher effectiveness is more important than one of the most often-discussed school

reforms – reducing class size. The researchers found that students who are assigned to several ineffective teachers in a row have significantly lower achievement than those who are assigned to several highly effective teachers in sequence.²

Consider the odds of success for our most at-risk students:

- Nationwide, 26 percent of students attending high-poverty secondary schools have teachers without certification, compared to 13 percent of students who attend low-poverty schools.³
- Nationwide, students from high-poverty schools are almost twice as likely as students from low-poverty schools to have a teacher without a major or minor in their field.⁴
- Tennessee and Texas found that African American students are nearly twice as likely to be assigned to the most ineffective teachers and half as likely to be assigned to the most effective teachers.⁵ There is little reason to believe that the pattern is different in North Carolina and many other states.
- North Carolina’s low-performing schools are more likely to have out-of-field teachers and individuals teaching on substandard licenses.⁶

The most troubling data come from California, a state where teachers teach in some of the nation’s poorest working conditions. California recently instituted major class-size reductions without addressing teacher supply issues. Today, over 14% of the state’s 291,000 teachers lack full credentials, and students in high-minority schools have a seven-times greater chance of being taught by an unqualified teacher. Schools that serve primarily minority students are staffed with seven times more underqualified teachers than those who serve primarily white students.

Los Angeles is one of the most daunting of all of America’s urban public school challenges, home to 25% of the state’s under-qualified teachers. Students in the city’s lowest performing schools are five times as likely to be taught by an underqualified teacher. In addition, as California’s use of emergency licensing proliferates, the percentage of teachers who have completed a preparation program before entering teaching has dropped precipitously from 78% in 1991-92 to 52% in 1998-99.⁷

Without proper preparation, new teachers are less likely to stay, creating a revolving door of new and unqualified teachers for the most needy students.

A TEACHER QUALITY CRISIS IS DEEPENING IN NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOLS

North Carolina has not yet experienced the drastic teacher shortfall that has provoked a supply crisis in California. But emerging teacher shortages in North Carolina not only threaten the education of our children, they lessen the opportunity for long-term, statewide cooperation to improve teacher quality. Pressure to staff classrooms at all costs provides a disincentive for school system leaders to unite around

high standards for entry into the teaching profession. In addition, widely varying salaries, incentives, and supports create an uneven playing field where local recruiters vie for a shrinking pool of well-prepared professionals.

North Carolina currently employs 86,000 teachers. With expected retirements, enrollment increases, and a recent history of teacher turnover, the state will need to hire 80,000 additional teachers over the next ten years.⁸

The state has introduced several initia-

tives to support teacher recruitment in general, including scholarship programs for future teachers, reduction of barriers to teachers coming from other states, and streamlining of hiring processes. In addition, the state invests at least \$14 million⁹ in teacher recruitment, including North Carolina Teaching Fellows, Prospective Teacher Scholarship Loans, Model Teacher Education Consortium, and NC TEACH. These efforts have produced some good results. One indicator: the state’s teacher education program enrollment increased 14% last year.¹⁰

Despite this success, more needs to be done to actively channel teachers specifically into North Carolina’s hard-to-staff schools. For example, teachers who are entering classrooms from the state’s new alternative route program, NC TEACH, are not targeted to teach in the state’s neediest schools. And even if hard-to-staff schools had enough teachers, they would still face a shortage of teachers who were “good enough.” Why? Hard-to-staff schools hire a disproportionate share of new teachers. While some of these new teachers are well-trained, many are not. Only 20% of the state’s new hires are produced by North Carolina’s teacher education programs. More and more teachers are entering the state’s classrooms through alternative routes,¹¹ some of which allow novices to bypass North Carolina’s rigorous new teaching standards – standards that have been praised and emulated in other states.

Despite its significant efforts, North Carolina has clearly not managed to ensure that hard-to-staff schools can compete fairly for highly qualified teachers, or that teachers who begin their careers in our hard-to-staff schools are well-qualified and prepared for the challenges they are certain to face.

Teachers are the most powerful determinants of whether students are able to meet high standards.

State Teaching Scholarships

- Teacher Assistant Scholarship Loan: \$1,200/year for practicing teaching assistants to become fully licensed. Participants agree to teach one year in the state's public schools for every year of assistance.
- North Carolina Teaching Fellows: \$6,500 annually for 400 participants for four years.
- Prospective Teacher Scholarship-Loan program: \$2,500/year allocated for participants attending four-year institutions or \$900/year for community college coursework leading to transfer to a university program. 200 total participants each year. Payback is waived after four years of public school teaching or three years in a low-performing school.

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Teacher Recruitment and Retention in North Carolina (2001).

MEETING HIGH STANDARDS IN HARD-TO-STAFF SCHOOLS

The growing teacher supply crisis comes at a time when the need for highly qualified teachers may never have been greater. Many states, including North Carolina, are raising their student achievement standards, ending “social promotion,” and instituting sanctions for schools that fail to meet performance goals. Hard-to-staff schools will be most affected by these new policies, since they (and their students) are most at risk of failing to meet standards.

Studies¹² have shown that most teachers would not teach in schools in our poorest communities, given a choice. Hard-to-staff schools serve children with more special needs and fewer social advantages, and teachers are not compensated for gaining the special skills necessary to meet these students' greater needs. Most often, such schools have weak leadership and meager resources, such as outdated textbooks and inferior buildings. These schools are frequently understaffed, and teachers wear too many hats, leaving little time to meet the teaching challenges they face. Teachers in these schools must sacrifice much of the comfort of wealthier school systems to serve those who need them most.

It is simply harder to teach effectively in this environment. Reports from North Carolina teachers themselves bear this out. In the spring of 2000, the North Carolina Association of Educators¹³ surveyed teachers across the state to determine what it would take to entice them to teach in low-performing schools. Of the 14,000 teachers who responded, only 30% indicated a willingness to accept such a challenge, even if incentives were offered. Salary bonuses were deemed important, but clearly not sufficient. What mattered most were smaller class sizes, strong administrator support, extra planning time, and instructional support personnel.

What will it take to ensure that hard-to-staff schools have the quality professional workforce they need for all students to succeed? Here are the issues:

Successful teachers in hard-to-staff schools must have strong leaders. Effective school leadership is critical to attract and retain teachers. Good teachers do not choose schools where principals perform poorly. Effective leadership means involving teachers in key instructional decisions and providing opportunities for teachers to learn from each other. Effective leaders ensure that schools run smoothly. They promote family and community involvement, and they lead and support teachers to create a safe and orderly environment.

Teacher salaries are important, and recruitment bonuses may help bring talented teachers to schools where they are needed most. However, money alone is not sufficient to recruit good teachers to hard-to-staff schools. Although the Excellent Schools Act of 1997 has raised North Carolina teacher salaries to 23rd highest in the nation (from 43rd),¹⁴ districts across the state still face teacher shortages, with the most vacancies in needy urban and rural schools. Assuring salary equity for our hard-to-staff schools is a necessary part of effective recruitment. But research tells us that effective leadership is equally critical.

In a recent report¹⁵ documenting progress toward meeting former Governor James B. Hunt's goal to make North Carolina first in education, the North Carolina Education Research Council assigned the state a B-minus in the category “Quality Teachers and Administrators.” The authors found that many North Carolina educators rated their schools low as “places to work and learn.” That is a leadership issue.

Beginning teachers are much more likely to make a long-term commitment when school leaders involve teachers in decision making and support professional relationships among the teaching staff. Other research has shown that the extent to which principals support teachers determines whether teachers are willing to engage in implementing new curriculum and take full advantage of professional development opportunities.

Successful teachers in hard-to-staff schools work with like-minded, supportive colleagues. Even the most accomplished individuals cannot turn a poor performing school into an effective learning community without like-minded colleagues who work together as a team. Good teachers know that they must have colleagues who have similar standards and expectations. To be effective, school faculties must agree on what constitutes good student work, and they must share similar beliefs and understandings about how and why students learn.

Good teachers want to be successful with all students – and they want to work in school organizations that give them a chance to do so. Many hard-to-staff schools are found in

isolated or inner-city locations. They frequently lack the resources of other public schools in more affluent neighborhoods. For these reasons, accomplished teachers are more likely to choose to work in hard-to-staff schools when there will be a “critical mass” of like-minded colleagues who share their commitment to excellence. North Carolina might take advantage of this teacher mindset by creating incentives and bonuses when hard-to-staff schools can demonstrate high levels of successful teacher collaboration under the leadership of an accomplished principal.

Successful teachers in hard-to-staff schools must have sufficient knowledge and skills to help students learn. Hard-to-staff schools most often serve a high proportion of disadvantaged students who may have learning difficulties and lack the family supports that make teaching to standards less complex and difficult. Yet we now expect these students to meet the same high standards as everyone else. Clearly, the teachers who serve in our hard-to-staff schools must have unprecedented skills and knowledge.

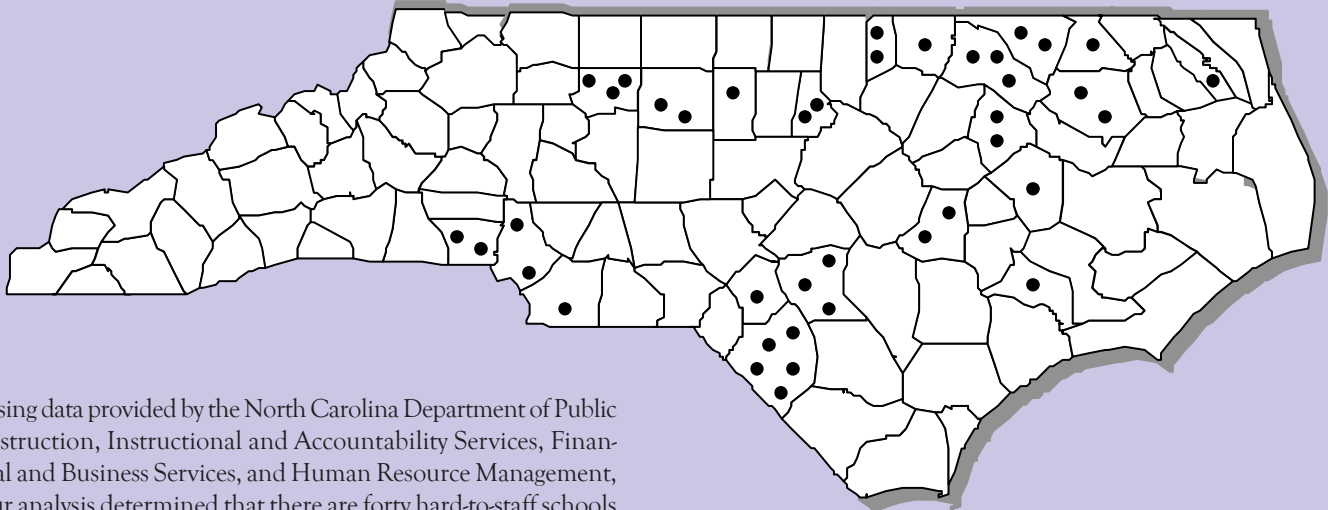
To be effective in these classrooms, teachers need to know much more about teaching reading and writing skills in subject areas like science, history and mathematics. They must be well-prepared to work with students whose primary language is not English and with students who have a variety of learning disabilities. Teachers in our hard-to-staff schools must

understand their subject matter thoroughly and how to teach it to students who are performing below grade level.

Equally important, these teachers must understand how students think and behave, what they find interesting, what they already know, and how they can be motivated. Teachers in our most challenged schools must also be able to recognize and respond to student differences that may arise from culture, language, family background, and prior schooling. They must use their understanding to adapt lessons and experiment with a variety of teaching strategies.

Many teachers are well aware that their teaching range is limited. They understand that while they may have sufficient knowledge to teach some students, they do not have the knowledge and skills necessary to teach *all* students. As a result, many will (wisely) shy away from schools where they may not be successful. How, then, do we encourage teachers to work in hard-to-staff schools? *We prepare them to be successful.* We look to the colleges and universities across the United States that have been effective in training teachers to succeed in the nation’s most challenging classrooms. Good examples include Trinity University in San Antonio, Bank Street College in New York City, Alverno College in Milwaukee, and other institutions that consistently produce teachers who thrive in hard-to-staff schools.

Hard-to-Staff Schools in North Carolina



Using data provided by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Instructional and Accountability Services, Financial and Business Services, and Human Resource Management, our analysis determined that there are forty hard-to-staff schools in North Carolina.¹ For our purposes, such hard-to-staff schools met the following criteria:

- 50% or more of students are below grade level
- 50% or more of students are eligible for free and reduced price lunch in elementary schools (40% for high schools)²
- 15-18% annual teacher turnover rate³
- 25% of teachers have provisional licenses, are lateral entry (up to five years to earn full licensure), emergency or temporary, or are probationary

¹ Each dot represents one school. Placement within each county is not intended to match geographic location.

² Performance data and free and reduced price lunch figures are based upon 1999-2000 data.

³ Calculated from a comparison of data for teachers and instructional support personnel from the 9th pay period of 1999-2000 to the 9th pay period of 2000-2001. Teachers and instructional support personnel split across schools in 2000-2001 were considered as having left their 1999-2000 school if school assignments were changed. Teachers and instructional support personnel assigned to a position other than teacher or instructional support for the 2000-2001 school year were considered as having left the school even if the alternative position was in the same school.

Inside Two of North Carolina's Hard-to-Staff Schools

The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality investigated a pair of hard-to-staff schools in North Carolina, according to the definition laid out in this policy brief, to determine the barriers they face in their efforts to recruit and retain good teachers. The two case studies that follow reveal the complexity of teacher recruitment and the intricate policy development needed to insure that these schools will have teachers who can help all students rise to the challenge of state standards. They also underscore the importance of school leadership in building and retaining a quality teaching force. Fortunately, upon visiting the urban school, we found a number of highly promising practices that could turn the school around. Although it met our criteria for hard-to-staff, the urban elementary school was already attracting more quality teachers with its professional working climate.

Urban Elementary School

Everyone in town thinks that Urban Elementary School must be a “hard-to-staff” school. In the school’s approximately 50-year history, there has never been a year in which more than one half of the students have performed at grade level on state assessments. Among Urban’s 452 students, approximately 93% are minority and 85% are on free-or-reduced lunch, as compared to 53% minority and 36% free-or-reduced lunch district-wide. Urban is on North Carolina’s list of low-performing schools, and a state assistance team has been assigned to support improvement. The school’s single copy machine is in a constant state of disrepair, computers rarely function properly, and school administrators have difficulty procuring necessities like classroom lights and trashcans.

Personnel officials at the central office have been known in recent years to discourage teachers from considering teaching at Urban. “I really don’t think they were trying to place good quality teachers here,” says

one new Urban Elementary teacher about her job interview. In the recruit’s view, the school system had so many openings that they sought to sell the district by sending prospective teachers to visit the “good schools.” The sense among some teachers is that the low status of the school and its problems securing basic resources are symptoms of thinly veiled racism in the school system and community.

“I really don't think they were trying to place good quality teachers here.”

Despite its low status and history of low performance, Urban’s teachers and administrators say that there is no place they would rather work. “I cannot wait to get here in the morning just to put the cones down on the parking lot,” says the assistant principal, expressing his exuberance for being part of a dedicated professional community of teachers lead by a strong and supportive principal. Several of the school’s faculty agreed that they enjoy mutual professional support and administrative, community, and parent participation as they work to combat the school’s public image of failure.

On the outside, Urban looks like any middle-class suburban school. The facade is sturdy brick, with the school’s name displayed in sophisticated metal lettering. Inside, the halls are clean and the walls are covered with student work and awards. In the main foyer an easel displays architectural plans for a new classroom building to break ground in the next few weeks. Teachers say they enjoy the pleasant environment, but the thing they value most is the leadership provided by the school’s principal.

A new principal was recruited out of retirement mid-year in 1999 to give the school a boost, and her special brand of respectful leadership has brought in both experienced and new teachers committed to improvement, while reinvigorating the staff she found there. Her teachers say this principal leads by example and fosters an atmosphere of respect and professionalism. She has been a key factor in their decisions to teach at Urban.

When the principal arrived, only 17% of the school’s teachers had as much as one year of

experience. She was able to retain most of the teaching staff, and is raising the level of expertise by investing more of the instructional budget into fully qualified teachers. The principal has also convinced several teachers to come out of retirement and join her team, and one teacher in her 28th year decided to transfer to Urban, “because I knew I could make a difference.”

To increase the instructional impact of existing funds, the principal moved experienced Title I-funded teachers from limited-impact reading positions into Lead Teacher positions at each grade level, putting a greater emphasis on spreading teaching quality across the school. These lead teachers do not have their own classes, but provide instructional support to grade level teachers. Lead teachers partner with colleagues to “co-teach,” work with low-performing students, and lead weekly team planning sessions that focus on ways to improve instruction based on assessments of student performance.

New teachers are assigned mentors at their grade level to address specific needs and provide general support during their critical first year. Across the school, teachers say they receive more encouragement to work together to improve teaching than they have at other schools. Teachers who do not share the belief that all children can succeed have decided to transfer. These conditions set the stage for Urban’s teachers to utilize, rather than resist, the resources of the state’s assistance team.

One well-prepared young teacher that we interviewed helps make the point that good working conditions are only part of an urban school’s recipe for success. Specialized teacher preparation is also critical. This teacher was prepared in an urban teacher education program in another state. Her university program was sensitive to the special needs of teachers in high-challenge schools. She participated in seminars designed to explore urban-school issues and did her pre-service teaching in a nearby inner-city district. Her training included visits to other cities and rural areas, where she had the opportunity to interact with panels of experienced teachers who shared what it is really like to teach in schools with more than the usual obstacles to high achievement.

Teachers at Urban Elementary School expressed concerns about North Carolina's accountability and incentive system, which pays bonus money to teachers in higher performing schools. They fear that too many of their younger colleagues will leave in order to teach in schools where it is easier to meet performance goals and secure the \$1,500 bonuses. They believe that in a system where teachers are rewarded for high student achievement, a school's success in bringing up the achievement of students who begin far below the average should not go unnoticed.

Rural High School

Rural is the only high school in a small and remote North Carolina district. Its 100 teachers know that they earn less than their peers in neighboring districts, and the relative low wealth of the district presents challenges all around. On average, students are less ready to learn to high standards, and there are fewer resources available to support teacher learning. The school was fully staffed this spring, and the principal is quite proud that most of her teachers signed commitments to teach next year. She is especially relieved that the teachers of Exceptional Children are planning to stay, since these specialists are hard to find in all schools. She even felt a little guilty when she was promoted from math teacher to principal last year, given the dearth of math teachers in the area.

In recent years, the community has lost some of its confidence in Rural High. As a long-time member of the community, the principal feels that she will be able to win back the trust of parents. She went to Rural herself with many of them, and she thinks they will appreciate the presence of a "local," after recent experiences with administrators who blew through town as a career step on the road to higher profile positions. She understands the concerns of her close-knit community, and she is determined to reinforce the once-cherished image of the high school as a family working together for student learning.

While this is a noble endeavor, the truth is that the community does not produce enough teachers to staff the high school or other district schools, and they will need to continue to attract educators from other areas. It seems that this small-town atmo-

sphere may be difficult to fit into, especially for novice teachers who must work overtime to pass components of North Carolina's performance-based licensure system. Even for experienced teachers, Rural's block schedule adds stress to teachers who are accustomed to 50-minute lessons and have received too little help in planning engaging lessons in the 90-minute blocks.

The school relies heavily on lateral entry teachers, a term referring to those who are working to complete certification requirements while they are teaching, and there are not enough experienced mentors to provide support for lateral entry and initially licensed teachers. North Carolina requires all beginning teachers — most of whom receive three-year Initial Licenses after graduating from a teacher education program — to pass a standardized test and a complex performance assessment of their knowledge and skills. A few teachers mentioned that they could use much more support in preparing for the assessments.

The superintendent provides mentor training at the district level, but he knows that it is not sufficient to connect the dots for new teachers struggling to learn to teach while managing their own classrooms.

The principal recognizes the problem of assigning mentors to all new teachers, as state guidelines require, and she said that she is working to recruit more mentors for the next school year. She is concerned that young teachers use her school to gain experience and then move on to systems with higher salaries. She suggested that having new teachers sign a commitment

to work in the school beyond their mentoring experience might reduce teacher turnover. However, teachers usually choose to stay in a supportive professional environment, with salary as a secondary factor. Perhaps the lack of mentor support is key to this retention problem.

The local superintendent, a veteran teacher and principal who has returned to his native district to improve school performance, agrees that it is a challenge to support teachers and meet North Carolina's higher standards with a slim budget. The district leader was reluctant to abdicate responsibility for his "certified teacher crisis," although he feels caught between the rigorous requirements of the state and his capacity to offer resources for quality teaching. He feels responsible for becoming more creative in working with the resources he does have. He provides mentor training at the district level, but he knows the training is not sufficient to connect the dots for new teachers struggling to learn to teach while managing their own classrooms. On top of this, all of the teachers in this district face special teaching challenges, with fewer resources than other districts that serve mostly middle-class suburban students.

Although these two schools — like all schools — are unique, their stories highlight several vital issues in staffing urban and rural schools across the state. They underscore, for example, the important roles that funding and working conditions play in building the capacity of hard-to-staff schools to recruit and retain quality teachers.

Source: Based on interviews and focus groups with teachers, administrators, and Technical Assistance Team members (January 2001).

The Center staff met with faculty members at a pair of hard-to-staff schools in North Carolina. One good example of the value of specialized training surfaced in one of the schools we visited. During an interview, a new teacher who was specifically trained to teach disadvantaged students in her teacher education program revealed that she was more likely to stick with this hard-to-staff school because she believed she had the skills to make a difference with the students she taught.

In partnership with school districts, some colleges and universities have launched Professional Development Schools that can be designed to support teacher learning in the most challenging schools. These “PDS” programs can offer teachers-in-training many opportunities to learn in a “laboratory” setting, observing and working side by side with master teachers who are experts at helping struggling students achieve.

Hard-to-staff schools need expert teachers to serve as leaders and mentors. High levels of support for new and continuing teachers make the difference in building a strong, united faculty in hard-to-staff schools. Much of that support must come from master teachers who agree to work in these schools. How do you attract and keep them where they are needed most? Salary incentives will help, but salary alone will not put expert teachers in every hard-to-staff school. South Carolina’s teacher specialists program offers more than \$18,000 in additional *annual* salary to highly qualified teach-

ers who serve in a high-need school for at least three years. Yet South Carolina found only 115 teachers to fill 500 slots in the 2000-01 school year.¹⁶ The state just could not lure accomplished teachers to hard-to-staff schools, even with an annual 50% salary bonus. It seems apparent that higher salaries will not meet the need for expert staff in these schools, in the absence of other reforms.

Why must we have expert teachers in hard-to-staff schools? They provide critical mentoring support early in a teacher’s career and are an essential part of a well-crafted induction program for beginning teachers. To offer one example: retention improved in California for minority teachers in rural and urban schools when induction support for new teachers was available.¹⁷ (“Induction” refers to the process by which a school system supports new teachers as they take on professional responsibilities for the first time.) Supportive induction programs include a professional development “scaffold” built around a new teacher’s special needs – covering everything from effective lesson planning and assessment, to classroom management and the development of collaborative relationships with other teachers.

In one North Carolina school we visited, we found a strong principal leader who made teacher support a top priority. To increase the instructional impact of existing funds, the principal moved experienced Title I-funded teachers from

Lessons Learned from NC’s Efforts to Support and Assess New Teachers

Mentoring and other support for beginning teachers speeds professional growth and increases the retention of teachers in their first assignment. The State of North Carolina has provided a mentoring program for Initially Licensed Teachers since 1985. This program was extended from one to three years under the Excellent Schools Act. At the same time, the state has ratcheted up standards for beginning teachers by requiring a performance-based assessment to earn a continuing license by the end of the third year.

State board guidelines for new teacher support include recommendations for special working conditions, such as the number of daily lesson preparations, limits on the number of exceptionally difficult students assigned to new teachers, and minimal non-instructional duties. Also, according to the Excellent Schools Act, new teachers are to be assigned no extra-curricular assignments unless requested in writing by the new

teacher. The state developed a new mentor training program in 1998, but local systems are free to use other training methods. The state has also produced a *Mentor Toolkit* that local school systems can purchase.

A survey of beginning teachers, mentors, and principals indicates mixed views on the success of North Carolina’s school-based mentoring programs. Mentors and school principals believe that mentoring is helping new teachers remain in the classroom, while the new teachers themselves are much less likely to report that positive effect. Many novices felt the mentors had no influence on their willingness to continue teaching.

The data reveal that teachers are experiencing very different induction programs across the state. They also suggest that program quality is linked to the ability of individual school systems to adequately finance support programs for new teachers. The schools where teachers need the most support might have the least capacity for providing it.

Several important questions emerge: Are all schools able to follow the basic state guidelines

to reduce stress for novice teachers? Can low-wealth or small school systems afford adequate mentor training or release time for mutual observation and planning? And, in schools with higher proportions of inexperienced teachers, are there enough qualified mentors to support them adequately?

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, *Mentor Program Study* (2000).

limited-impact reading positions into Lead Teacher positions at each grade level. These lead teachers do not have their own classes, but provide full-time instructional support to other teachers, partnering with colleagues to “co-teach,” working with low-performing students, and leading weekly team planning sessions that focus on ways to improve instruction based on assessments of student performance. New teachers are assigned mentors to address specific needs and provide general support during their critical first year. Across the school, teachers say they receive more encouragement to work together to improve teaching than they have at other schools. As a result, they share a strong belief that all children can succeed and work toward that goal together.

Riverside Academy in Fairfax County, Virginia, recruited four National Board Certified Teachers to share two teaching positions while they support seven of their colleagues in their pursuit of the national credential. By recruiting and further developing a critical mass of highly accomplished teachers, the school hopes to improve the overall quality of instruction and student achievement across the board.

Developing “local talent” is a key component of the hard-to-staff school solution. Results from long-standing initiatives like the South Carolina Teacher Cadet program and the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program demonstrate that scholarships, high-interest middle school and high school

programs, and other recruitment strategies can attract talented young people. We also know that mid-career programs, properly marketed, can bring non-traditional recruits into teaching. But more needs to be done to tie these programs to recruits who have deep roots in high-need communities.

Many prospective teachers, bound by ties of family or place, are reluctant to move to unfamiliar locations. For this reason, it is extremely important for policymakers to offer programs that will develop “local talent” – young people and adults who already live and work in communities with hard-to-staff schools. These programs need to address a variety of situations, from high school students who feel some “call” to teach, to out-of-field teachers who need more study and professional development to master their teaching area, to the school paraprofessionals or second-career adults who have an interest in becoming fully-prepared teaching professionals.

Guilford County has announced a grow-your-own teacher training initiative in 2000-2001, to be funded with private donations. The program will recruit high school seniors committed to completing teacher training and returning to teach at-risk students in poor neighborhoods. The young recruits will receive college scholarships in return for three years of service in the system.

North Carolina’s Local Incentives for New Teachers

Financial	Lifestyle/Community	Professional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salary or supplement advances • Tuition reimbursement • District pay for Praxis exam • Signing bonuses – for all teachers or shortage fields • Local longevity pay • Travel expenses for recruits • Bonus for teaching in Equity Plus schools (Winston-Salem/Forsyth County) • Interest-free home loans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discounts from local merchants • Relocation assistance • Additional health benefits • On-campus child care • Apartment and utility deposits waived • Banking fee and rent waivers for first few months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentors • Professional development days for Initially Licensed Teachers • Membership in Model Teacher Consortium for professional development • Pay-for-performance (Charlotte-Mecklenberg) • “Professional treatment” • Class-size reduction and additional staffing for Equity Plus schools (Winston-Salem/Forsyth County)

Source: North Carolina Association of School Administrators, Survey: Anticipated Teacher Vacancies on the First Student Day and Recruitment Strategies (July 1999).

North Carolina school systems have a grab-bag of teacher recruitment strategies. But they must also have comprehensive recruitment plans. Ultimately, teacher recruitment and hiring is the responsibility of local education agencies. Many districts in North Carolina rely on college and university job fairs, newspaper ads, and Internet postings to connect with potential candidates. Some have relationships with local colleges that produce teachers, or use early contract-signing strategies to “beat the summer rush.” One district reports paying an unlimited number of \$100 bonuses to current employees who recommend certified teachers who are hired. In addition to these strategies, local systems report an array of financial, lifestyle, community, and professional incentives for new teachers.

While many school districts have a grab-bag of recruitment strategies, it is fair to say that many also have no coherent recruitment plan. Responses to formal surveys and informal inquiries reveal that many district administrators have given little thought or attention to the effectiveness of their hiring processes and the link between teacher recruitment and school improvement. One district representative actually claimed that her recruitment strategy involved “smiling a lot” – hardly a comprehensive plan for drawing and keeping quality professionals in our toughest schools.

There are exceptions, of course. For example, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County’s Equity Plus program offers extra incentives to high-quality teachers who agree to work in the district’s most challenged schools. Teachers who remain at a school for an entire school year receive a bonus equal to 20% of their local salary supplement. Also, extra teaching positions allow Equity Plus schools to reduce class sizes by as many as six students below the more advantaged schools in the district. Class size is an important working-conditions issue for teachers considering several schools.

While the Equity Plus program may serve as an example for some districts with hard-to-staff schools, many systems in North Carolina do not have the resources to support recruitment strategies that require salary supplements and extensive recruitment travel. These systems find themselves at a significant disadvantage as they try to compete for qualified teachers. Clearly, they have the greatest need for comprehensive recruitment plans – plans that are built on a thorough understanding of the conditions described in this report that influence teacher job selection.

Collaboration is a must. H.L. Mencken once said, “For every complex social problem there is a simple answer that is wrong.” As we search for effective ways to recruit teachers for our hard-to-staff schools, we must not ignore the complex relationships that govern our system of teacher preparation and recruitment. School districts and colleges must work more closely with each other – and states must provide new incentives for them to do so. Even strong partnerships among schools and colleges will not be enough.

While many school districts have a grab-bag of recruitment strategies, it is fair to say that many also have no coherent recruitment plan.

One issue that we have surfaced is that there are very little outcome data on the wide array of recruitment initiatives launched recently in North Carolina and across the nation. This is where strong partnerships and interagency collaboration can really make a difference in recruiting teachers for hard-to-staff schools. Georgia has created a Teacher Workforce Center, serving as an information clearinghouse for both teachers and recruiters, as well as a vehicle to collect and analyze critical supply and demand data. Such a clearinghouse is more effective when it is managed

jointly by different agencies, because neither higher education, the state agency, nor local agencies have all the necessary information on supply and demand.

The efforts of the Department of Public Instruction’s newly created North Carolina Center for Recruitment and Retention may prove a helpful first step in this regard. Organized within the Department in September 2001, the Center hopes to provide leadership on this issue by promoting teaching through effective marketing and recruitment strategies. Plans are already underway to design a “Teach4NC” website, as well as to develop an 800-number to access comprehensive information about teaching within the state.

In a 21st century society, with its many interlocking and interdependent relationships, it is equally important that we involve other collaborators – business and industry, economic development centers, local and state governments, foundations, non-profit agencies, and the like – in a united effort to ensure that every public school child in North Carolina has a competent, caring and committed teacher with the skills and knowledge required to help every student meet 21st century standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To help ensure that every hard-to-staff school enjoys high-quality teachers with the skills, knowledge and commitment to raise the achievement of all students, North Carolina leaders should:

- Provide scholarships to prepare out-of-field teachers and paraprofessionals who already work in hard-to-staff schools to serve as fully licensed teachers.
- Recruit a critical mass of accomplished teachers to lead reform of hard-to-staff schools, serving as mentors, coaches, and curriculum leaders.
- Overstaff schools where nontraditional recruits are employed and allow experienced teachers to team-teach with them.
- Provide internships for teachers-in-training, such as those found in Professional Development Schools, in hard-to-staff schools. Offer all teaching candidates pre-service experience in urban and rural schools.
- Improve working conditions and school building leadership and make these issues a high state and local priority.
- Encourage or require districts with hard-to-staff schools to develop comprehensive staffing plans that address recruitment, hiring, induction, and working conditions and that directly link staffing plans to school improvement strategies.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS TO RECRUIT TEACHERS TO HARD-TO-STAFF SCHOOLS

Education and community leaders at every level can take action to support hard-to-staff schools and the students they serve, who are most in need of quality teachers. We know the aforementioned recommendations must be supported by specific coordinated actions. The newly created teacher recruitment and retention center will surely help. What follows is a series of suggested actions for the Department of Public Instruction, State Board of Education, and the State Legislature as well as colleges and universities and local district and school leaders to consider.

Provide scholarships to prepare out-of-field teachers and paraprofessionals who already work in hard-to-staff schools to serve as fully-licensed teachers.

- Develop grow-your-own programs and paraprofessional certification programs to meet defined needs.
- Provide extra financial and social support to minority and other nontraditional teacher candidates to prepare them to teach in hard-to-staff schools.

Recruit a critical mass of accomplished teachers to lead reform of hard-to-staff schools, serving as mentors, coaches, and curriculum leaders.

- Offer hiring incentives to cohorts of student teachers who have experience working together as interns in hard-to-staff schools.
- Provide incentives for high-quality principals to move to hard-to-staff schools.

Overstaff schools where nontraditional recruits are employed and allow experienced teachers to team-teach with them.

Provide internships for teachers-in-training, such as those found in Professional Development Schools, in hard-to-staff schools. Offer all teaching candidates pre-service experience in urban and rural schools.

- Expand North Carolina Teaching Fellows and other high-quality scholarship programs to prepare teachers with specific targets of service in hard-to-staff schools.
- Develop Professional Development Schools in hard-to-staff schools, to adequately train prospective teachers for the challenges they will face (see PDS standards of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education).
- Create new field experiences in hard-to-staff schools for student teachers and interns.
- Host information-sharing meetings or other events between teaching candidates and teachers working in hard-to-staff schools.
- Send teachers and district officials to meet with candidates and invite them to visit several hard-to-staff schools.
- Form partnerships between teacher education and local school systems for the induction of new teachers and professional development of experienced teachers.

Improve working conditions and school building leadership and make these issues a high state and local priority.

- Fully fund and monitor the induction of new teachers (Initially Licensed Teachers) to ensure that new teacher support programs meet the challenges teachers face in hard-to-staff schools.
- Provide supplemental funds for professional development and on-site technical assistance, such as that provided by Technical Assistance Teams, to any school with 25% inexperienced teachers or 15% teacher turnover.
- Broadly disseminate the lessons learned by Technical Assistance Teams to superintendents and principals statewide through the Principals Executive Program.
- Continue to raise salaries and standards for teachers across the board.

- Offer principals flexibility in hiring and general staffing to meet the special learning needs of each school.
- Reduce teaching loads of new teachers in hard-to-staff schools, through new scheduling plans, reallocated staff, and number of course preps.
- Prepare principals to redesign schools to be more conducive to student and teacher learning and improve working conditions.
- Make teacher retention a major part of principal evaluation processes.

Encourage or require districts with hard-to-staff schools to develop comprehensive staffing plans that address recruitment, hiring, induction, and working conditions and that directly link staffing plans to school improvement strategies.

- Provide incentive grants to universities and school districts to develop local solutions, such as grow-your-own programs and paraprofessional certification programs, and disseminate model initiatives.
- Create a statewide teacher recruitment and retention center, serving as an information clearinghouse.
- Create comprehensive teacher recruitment and retention plans, linked directly to school improvement plans.



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