Converging to Strengthen Teacher Recruitment

September 7, 2022
Every stride has led to this point.

Welcome to the 2022 North Carolina Education Innovation Lab!

In 2020, BEST NC formed the NC STRIDE working group to examine the teacher recruitment landscape in North Carolina and develop a set of recommendations to move our state forward with a coordinated and impactful teacher recruitment strategy.

NC STRIDE stands for North Carolina Strategic Teacher Recruitment with Intentionality, Diversity, and Excellence, and the working group sought input and expertise from more than 100 education stakeholders including teachers, school leaders, researchers, and policymakers.

In 2021, NC STRIDE released the NC STRIDE Teacher Recruitment Action Plan, a set of detailed recommendations and strategies to help strengthen teacher recruitment in our state. This year, the NC STRIDE planning team continued to meet and track progress toward achieving the goals of the Action Plan.

Through those conversations, it became clear that there are a number of organizations, entities, and initiatives converging around the critical issue of teacher recruitment and the imperative that we develop a set of solutions to transform the way we recruit and support high-quality teaching candidates across North Carolina.

That brings us to today.

Every stride has led to this point: to ensure that North Carolina strengthens its teacher recruitment initiatives and becomes the best state in the nation to teach and learn.
2022 NC Education Innovation Lab Agenda

8:30 - 8:45 am  Welcome & Opening Remarks
   Walter McDowell, Chairman, BEST NC
   Brenda Berg, President & CEO, BEST NC

8:45 - 9:00 am  Video: Converging Around Teacher Recruitment

9:00 - 9:30 am  Keynote Address: Why Great Teachers Matter for Students
   Introduction: Matthew Bristow-Smith, Principal, Edgecombe Early College High School; 2019 Wells Fargo NC Principal of the Year
   • Dr. Matthew Springer, Hussman Distinguished Professor of Education Reform, UNC-Chapel Hill

9:30 - 10:30 am  Exploring Recruitment Challenges: Professional Pathways for Teachers
   Moderator: Leah Carper, Teacher, Northern Guilford High School; 2022 Burroughs Wellcome Fund NC Teacher of the Year
   • Dr. Valerie Bridges, Superintendent, Edgecombe County Public Schools; 2022 Craig A. Phillips NC Superintendent of the Year
   • Dr. Alfred Bryant, Jr., Dean of the School of Education and Human Sciences, Campbell University
   • Keiyonna Dubashi, Executive Director, Profound Ladies
   • Dr. Kimberly Gold, Chief of Staff, North Carolina Community College System
   • Dr. Anthony Graham, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Winston-Salem State University

10:30 - 10:45 am  Break

10:45 - 11:00 am  Video: Collective Hope for the Teaching Profession
   Introduction: State Superintendent Catherine Truitt, NC Public Schools

11:00 - 11:45 am  Overview: NC Pathways to Excellence for Teaching Professionals
   Moderator: Julie Pittman, Special Advisor on Teacher Engagement, Office of the State Superintendent, NC DPI; 2018 Western Region Teacher of the Year
   • Dr. Van Dempsey, Dean of the Watson College of Education at UNC-Wilmington; Chair, PEPSC Commission
   • Maureen Stover, Teacher, North Carolina Virtual Public Schools; 2020 Burroughs Wellcome Fund NC Teacher of the Year; Member, PEPSC
A Note About Social Media: We encourage you to share positive Innovation Lab learnings and takeaways using the hashtags #NCEdLab2022, #NCSTRIDE, and #EdConvergence while also asking you to keep participant conversations in confidence to create a safe space for dialogue.
NC STRIDE Key Strategic Priorities

As a state, one of the highest-leverage investments we can make is recruiting the next generation of teachers to North Carolina public schools. In service of that goal, BEST NC and the NC STRIDE Planning Team convened more than 100 stakeholders and experts to analyze the teacher recruitment landscape and develop a set of recommendations to move our state forward with a coordinated and impactful teacher recruitment strategy.

The resulting NC STRIDE Teacher Recruitment Action Plan was released in spring 2021 and includes 8 recommendations, 20 strategies, and more than 150 specific actions that can help us recruit high-quality, diverse teachers into classrooms across the state. The Action Plan also identified 5 key strategic priorities that can serve as a catalyst for other strategies and actions:

1. **Teacher Recruitment Entity**
   - The recruitment efforts of 54 EPPs, 115 LEAs, charter schools, and the TeachNC initiative are largely disconnected.
   - Establish an entity, staffed by NC DPI and with a statewide advisory board, that can also collect and report data and best practices.

2. **Teacher Pipeline Data**
   - Current teacher vacancy and supply data are very limited, making it difficult to recommend policies or programs that will effectively address specific staffing needs.
   - Implement consistent vacancy and applicant tracking systems that will accurately identify the most critical needs in the teacher supply pipeline.

3. **Fill Critical Vacancies**
   - Districts report persistent vacancies in secondary math and science, which are critical skills for college and career readiness.
   - Consider sustained compensation for high-skill/high-demand careers, like the military does with their critical positions.

4. **Reimagine Licensure**
   - The current licensure system creates entry barriers and is not aligned with professional priorities.
   - Reimagine the licensure and professional pathway system based on teacher effectiveness, embedded professional development, and paid career opportunities for effective teachers.

5. **Paid Teacher Apprenticeship**
   - While pre-service experience is critical for success, it is a financial barrier.
   - Offer a paid experience for candidates before becoming the teacher of record (EPP student teacher and residency paths, etc.). Consider compensation for effective teachers as mentors.
Below are updates on the progress that has been made on each of these key strategic priorities.

**Teacher Recruitment Entity: COMPLETED!**

The 2021 state budget created a full-time teacher recruitment director position at NC DPI, and the 2022 state budget provided ongoing funding for TeachNC.

**Teacher Pipeline Data: IN PROGRESS**

The 2021 state budget modified the State of the Teaching Profession Report policy to clarify the types of positions that are considered vacancies (including positions that are filled by long-term substitutes or teachers with an emergency or permit to teach license). NC DPI is also using job posting data from the statewide teacher jobs board on TeachNC to get a real-time look at vacancies across the state.

**Filling Critical Vacancies: MINIMAL PROGRESS**

Many public school units (PSUs) have allocated a portion of their federal COVID relief funding to provide increased compensation for specific hard-to-staff positions; however, those efforts are not consistent across the state and salary increases are temporary as they are funded by one-time relief dollars.

**Reimagine Licensure: IN PROGRESS**

The Professional Educator Standards and Preparation Commission (PEPSC) is developing a draft plan called the Pathways to Excellence for Teaching Professionals that reimagines teacher licensure and may be considered by the State Board of Education later this fall.

**Paid Teacher Apprenticeship: IN PROGRESS**

Apprenticeship NC has included education as an area in which they intend to develop new registered apprenticeship programs. Several districts have started initial work to develop teacher apprenticeship programs. Teacher apprentice positions are also included in the Pathways Plan mentioned above.

Follow the QR code and download the **NC STRIDE Teacher Recruitment Action Plan** to learn more about NC STRIDE’s continuing work and recommendations for improving the teacher recruitment landscape in North Carolina!
As we look at the teacher pipeline in North Carolina, there are several critical challenges that inhibit the recruitment of a diverse and high-quality teacher workforce. These challenges limit the number of effective educators in our state’s education system and restrict students’ access to a high-quality teacher. This impacts schools across the state but is disproportionately felt in high-need and rural schools.

**Challenge: Barriers to Entry and Perceptions of the Profession**

Despite a recent increase in educator preparation program enrollment, there are many barriers to entry to the teaching profession that deter talented individuals from becoming teachers, including early career pay, entrance exams, college affordability, and required unpaid student teaching that deter talented individuals from entering the teaching profession.

**Public and Independent Educator Preparation Enrollment, by Degree Type (2014-15 to 2020-21)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree Type</th>
<th>14-15</th>
<th>15-16</th>
<th>16-17</th>
<th>17-18</th>
<th>18-19</th>
<th>19-20</th>
<th>20-21</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>7,167</td>
<td>7,041</td>
<td>6,290</td>
<td>5,899</td>
<td>6,083</td>
<td>6,029</td>
<td>7,476</td>
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<tr>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>3,311</td>
<td>3,099</td>
<td>2,820</td>
<td>2,859</td>
<td>3,210</td>
<td>4,708</td>
<td>6,646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensure Only</td>
<td>6,489</td>
<td>6,424</td>
<td>5,320</td>
<td>5,263</td>
<td>5,336</td>
<td>5,503</td>
<td>6,198</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Average Beginning Teacher Pay in Southeast Region, Adjusted for Cost of Living (2021-22)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Avg. Beginning Teacher Pay</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>$45,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>$43,233</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>$43,106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>$42,577</td>
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<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>$40,442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>$40,293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>$39,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>$39,946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North Carolina</strong></td>
<td><strong>$39,695</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>$37,730</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*North Carolina’s nominal average beginning teacher pay is $37,127.
Source: 2020-21 NEA Teacher Salary Benchmark Report


- American Indian/Alaska Native: 75%
- Asian: 87%
- Black: 66%
- Hispanic: 85%
- Two+ Races: 86%
- White: 88%
- All Candidates: 85%

Source: NC DPI EPP Dashboard
The percentage of teachers prepared outside of traditional educator preparation programs has increased significantly in recent years. This pathway now represents more than one-third of all new teachers and is more diverse than traditional routes. Unfortunately, these alternatively prepared teachers receive few classroom experiences before becoming a teacher, have very limited early career support, are less effective than traditionally prepared teachers, and leave the profession at higher rates.

**Challenge: Non-Traditional Routes to Entry are Growing with Insufficient Professional Supports for Educators**

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**Distribution of Preparation Routes for Newly Hired K-12 Public School Teachers (2015 to 2021)**

**Distribution of EVAAS Scores for First Year Teachers, by Preparation Route (2018 to 2021)**

**Teacher Attrition Rates in K-12 Traditional Public Schools, by Teacher Category (2020-21)**

- 6,417 of 80,804 Fully Licensed Teachers
- 1,320 of 13,538 Beginning Teachers (0-3 Years of Experience)
- 468 of 3,599 Lateral Entry Teachers

**In the 2021-22 academic year, 38% of residency license teachers were Black, compared to 17% of the overall teacher workforce.**

Source: NC DPI 2020-21 State of the Teaching Profession Report
Challenge: Lack of Professional Pay and Opportunities for Professional Advancement

Average teacher pay in North Carolina lags behind several of its regional neighbors, and it takes teachers longer to reach the top of the state salary schedule than it does other highly-skilled state employees. Additionally, outside of the state’s Advanced Teaching Roles program, there are not currently opportunities for professional advancement that allow highly effective teachers to stay in the classroom and receive increased pay for increased responsibility, which many are already taking on without additional compensation.

Comparison of State Salary Schedules for Public Sector Employees in North Carolina (2021-22)

Source: Current Operations Appropriations Act of 2021; NCGA Fiscal Research Division (Data Request)

Distribution of State-Funded Classroom Teachers by Years of Experience and State Base Salary in North Carolina K-12 Public Schools (2021-22)

Source: NC DPI Highlights of the Public School Budget
Converging Around Teacher Recruitment

Average Teacher Pay in Southeast Region, Adjusted for Cost of Living (2021-22)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Average Teacher Pay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>$63,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>$61,679</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>$59,286</td>
</tr>
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<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>$59,228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>$58,374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North Carolina</strong></td>
<td><strong>$57,355</strong>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>$57,186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>$56,729</td>
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<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>$56,629</td>
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<td>Louisiana</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>$49,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>$49,104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*North Carolina’s nominal average teacher pay is $53,644.
Source: 2022 NEA Rankings and Estimates Report

Advanced Teaching Roles

Nineteen districts across North Carolina are offering career advancement through Advanced Teaching Roles. Follow the QR code to learn more and download BEST NC’s free policy brief.

Challenge: Licensure is Disconnected from Effectiveness

Under the current teacher licensure process, teachers renew their licenses based on the accrual of continuing education units and principal evaluation ratings. Research shows that, when state licensure systems measure professional development (PD) by the number of hours completed, teachers often receive PD that does not increase their effectiveness or spur professional growth.

Additionally, evidence shows that while principal evaluations are able to identify the 10%-20% of teachers who are most effective and the 10%-20% that are least effective (according to value-added models), they cannot reliably distinguish between the middle 60%-80% of teachers.

Teacher Evaluation Systems Fail to Recognize Differences in Teaching Quality

In 2009, TNTP’s report *The Widget Effect* analyzed teacher evaluation data from across the country and found that school districts largely assume classroom effectiveness is the same from teacher to teacher, rather than recognizing key differences in performance and targeting resources to reward excellence teachers and support improvements in teaching quality. Key findings can be found below:

- **All Teachers are Good or Great**: In districts that use binary evaluation ratings (usually “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory”), more than 99% of teachers receive the satisfactory rating.

- **Excellence Goes Unrecognized**: When all teachers are rated good or great, those who are truly exceptional cannot be formally identified. 59% of teachers and 63% of administrators say their district is not doing enough to identify, compensate, promote, and retain the most effective teachers.

- **Inadequate Professional Development**: The failure to assess variation in instructional effectiveness precludes districts from identifying specific professional development needs in their teachers. In fact, 73% of teachers surveyed said their most recent evaluation did not identify any development areas.

- **No Special Attention to Novices**: Inattention to teacher performance and development begins from a teacher’s first days in the classroom. Though it is widely recognized that teachers are least effective in their beginning years, 66% of novice teachers in districts with multiple ratings received a rating greater than “satisfactory” on their most recent evaluation.

- **Poor Performance Goes Unaddressed**: Despite uniformly positive evaluation ratings, teachers and administrators recognize ineffective teaching in their schools. In fact, 81% of administrators and 57% of teachers say there is a tenured teacher who is performing poorly. But district records confirm the scarcity of formal dismissals – at least half of the districts studied did not dismiss a single non-probationary teacher for poor performance.


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**Putting Your “Best Foot Forward” on Teacher Evaluation**

The Best Foot Forward Project investigated whether video technology can make the classroom observation process easier to implement, less costly, and more valid and reliable. From 2013-2015, researchers put cameras in the hands of 350 teachers and allowed them to select their best lessons for evaluation. Giving teachers control of the video collection and submission process resulted in greater perceived fairness of the teacher evaluation system and more insightful self-reflection by teachers, and allowed administrators to shift observation duties to quieter times of the day when they had more time to devote to giving thoughtful feedback.

Sources: Best Foot Forward Project; Visibly Better
The Pathways to Excellence for Teaching Professionals is a draft plan that reimagines North Carolina’s teacher licensure system to address several of the key challenges highlighted in the previous pages. The initial drafts of the Pathways Plan offer a set of solutions to help strengthen teacher recruitment across the state, including:

**Professional Pay:** Significantly increasing teacher pay and transforming the salary schedule so individuals reach the top of the schedule faster, as in many other high-skill professions.

**Effectiveness-Based Licensure:** Offering teachers multiple methods for demonstrating effectiveness and persisting in the profession, rather than relying solely on licensure exams.

**Career Advancement Opportunities:** Providing effective teachers the opportunity to extend their reach and earn more with Advanced Teaching Roles.

**Early Career Support:** Providing embedded professional support for early career teachers, including those pursuing teaching through an apprenticeship position or a residency license.

**Traditional Preparation Valued:** Emphasizing the value of traditional educator preparation programs, which currently produce more effective teachers with lower attrition rates than other alternatively prepared teachers. In the model, teachers graduating from traditional preparation programs would enter the profession at a higher license and compensation level than teachers who enter through other routes.
Dr. Valerie Bridges
Dr. Valerie H. Bridges is Superintendent of Edgecombe County Public Schools. She has served as Associate and Assistant Superintendent in Edgecombe and Washington County Schools. Dr. Bridges is also the 2022 A. Craig Phillips North Carolina Superintendent of the Year.

Dr. Alfred Bryant, Jr.
Dr. Alfred Bryant, Jr. is the Dean of the School of Education and Human Sciences at Campbell University and is an enrolled member of the Lumbee American Indian Tribe. He served as the Dean of the School of Education, the Founding Director of the Southeast American Indian Studies Program and Full Professor in the Educational Leadership and Counseling Department at UNC-Pembroke.

Nikki Buxton
Nikki Buxton is a 20-year educator currently serving as a Math Multi-Classroom Leader (MCL) at Welborn Academy of Science and Technology in High Point, N.C. She has previously served as a middle school math and science teacher, Instructional Facilitator, and Instructional Math Coach.

Dr. Van Dempsey
Dr. Van Dempsey is the Dean of the Watson College of Education at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. In 2019, he was appointed to Governor Roy Cooper’s Task Force to Develop a Representative and Inclusive Vision for Education (DRIVE). In 2022, Dr. Dempsey began serving as the Chair of Professional Educator Preparation and Standards Commission (PEPSC).

Dr. Jackie Ennis
Dr. Jackie Ennis serves as the Dean of the School of Education at Barton College. She taught middle grades math, science, and technology in North Carolina public schools for 15 years. Dr. Ennis earned her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction with a focus on Instructional Technology from North Carolina State University.

Dr. Anthony Graham
Dr. Anthony Graham is the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at Winston-Salem State University. Prior to this position, Graham was a tenured full Professor and Dean of the College of Education at North Carolina A&T State University. Additionally, he serves as the Chair of Governor Roy Cooper’s DRIVE Task Force and Co-Chair of the University of North Carolina System Educator Preparation Advisory Group.

Dr. Kimberly Gold
Dr. Kimberly Gold is Chief of Staff for the NC Community College System Office. Previously, Dr. Gold served as president of Robeson Community College in Lumberton and worked at Isothermal Community College in Spindale. She earned her doctorate in educational leadership from Appalachian State University, Master of Business Administration from Western Carolina University and Bachelor of Science in business administration from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Abe Hege
Abe Hege is the principal of Fairview Elementary in High Point, NC and a Principal of the Year Finalist for two consecutive years in Guilford County. This is his fifth year as principal of Fairview where, over the years, he led his staff in lowering referrals and suspensions by over 90% and raised school proficiency by more than 10%.

Kathryn Castelloes
Kathryn Castelloes is the Director of Apprenticeship NC. She began working with the NC Department of Labor in 1994 in the Pre-Apprenticeship Division. After working there for four years, she became an apprenticeship consultant with the Apprenticeship and Training Bureau. In 2006, she began working as the Western Field Supervisor and, in 2008, started as the Bureau Chief for Apprenticeship and Training.

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Jill Camnitz
Jill Camnitz of Greenville is a representative of the 1st Education District on the State Board of Education. Camnitz is Chair of the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Coastal Plain Board of Directors. She also serves on the Parents for Public Schools of Pitt County, Pitt County Educational Foundation, and Brody Foundation. She previously served as a member and as Chair for the Pitt County Board of Education.

Keiyonna Dubashi
Keiyonna Dubashi is a National Board-Certified educator with over 16 years in education as well as the Founder and Executive Director of Profound Ladies. Her background is in elementary education and administration. After teaching for over a decade, Dubashi joined the nonprofit world, creating professional development centered on culturally-responsive teaching for educators all over North Carolina.

Leah Carper
Leah Carper is the 2022 Burroughs Wellcome Fund NC Teacher of the Year. She has been a high school English teacher for Guilford County Schools since 2006. She has served on various commissions at the state level, including the NC Educator Effectiveness and Compensation Taskforce and the Principal Fellows Commission.

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Abe Hege is the principal of Fairview Elementary in High Point, NC and a Principal of the Year Finalist for two consecutive years in Guilford County. This is his fifth year as principal of Fairview where, over the years, he led his staff in lowering referrals and suspensions by over 90% and raised school proficiency by more than 10%.

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Dr. Thomas Kane
Dr. Thomas Kane is an economist and the Walter H. Gale Professor of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He is also the faculty director of the Center for Education Policy Research. His work has spanned both K-12 and higher education, covering topics such as the design of school accountability systems, teacher recruitment and retention, and race-conscious college admissions.

Dr. Lynn P. Moody
Dr. Lynn Moody is a Strategic Advisor for the Innovation Project. She was school superintendent for the past 15 years in two school districts, Rock Hill Schools in South Carolina and Rowan-Salisbury Schools. She served on a number of boards and participated in several organizations such as North Carolina High School Athletic Association, Responsive Classroom, Schlechty Network, ERDI Network, Novant Health Rowan Medical Center, and United Way.

Erin Shoemaker
Erin Shoemaker is the Executive Director of Learning and Teaching for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. She has served for over 16 years as a teacher, instructional facilitator, Dean of Students, and Director of Digital Innovation & Personalized Professional Learning. She enjoys collaborating with her team to meet the needs of educators and to provide professional learning experiences that integrate the use of digital tools.

Dr. Matthew Springer
Dr. Matthew Springer is Hussman Distinguished Professor of Education Reform, UNC-Chapel Hill, where he focuses on the role of accountability and incentives in K-16 education. He advocates for research-practice partnerships whereby rigorous academic research is conducted collaboratively with district and state partners.

Dr. Thomas R. Tomberlin
Dr. Tom Tomberlin works for NC DPI as the Senior Director of Educator Preparation, Licensure, and Performance, where he collaborates with state, district, and local leaders on developing measures of educator effectiveness and opportunities for professional growth and development. He has worked as a Latin Instructor at Tulane University, a statistical support specialist for Charlotte-Tulane University, a strategic data fellow for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, and as a commissioner on the PEPSC Commission, for which he co-chairs the Preparation and Entry sub-committee. Tomberlin’s work is focused on improving the state’s public schools, expanding innovation, and creating new opportunities for students to learn, grow, and successfully transition into the postsecondary plans of their choice.

Tammi Ward
Tammi Ward is the Interim Superintendent of Hertford County Schools. Ward began her career in education in 1996 as a middle school CTE teacher. Since that time, she has served public schools in northeastern North Carolina in various roles ranging from classroom teacher, administrator at the middle and high school levels, and director positions in Career Technical Education and Human Resources.

Dr. Sean McWherter
Dr. Sean McWherter serves as the Director of Restart Programs in Guilford County. In this role, he supports the district’s 24 Restart Schools and the district’s Advanced Teaching Roles initiative. Dr. McWherter has worked across all three levels of education and has served as an administrator in both elementary and high school settings.

Julie Pittman
Julie Pittman is a Special Assistant to the State Superintendent on Educator Engagement at NC DPI. A 22-year educator, Pittman was a National Board-Certified high school English teacher in Rutherford County Schools, and was named the 2018 Burroughs Wellcome Fund Western Region NC Teacher of the Year. Prior to joining NC DPI, she was a teacher on loan to No Kid Hungry, serving as the Education Outreach Manager in North Carolina.

Matthew Bristow-Smith
Matthew Bristow-Smith is the 2019 Wells Fargo NC Principal of the Year and principal of Edgecombe Early College High School in Edgecombe County, NC. Bristow-Smith has served Edgecombe County Public Schools his entire career. Under Bristow-Smith’s principalship, Edgecombe Early College’s enrollment has grown by 50% while maintaining a 100% graduation rate and a North Carolina School Performance Grade of A.

Maureen Stover
Maureen Stover is an AP Physics I teacher at the NC Virtual Public School, and the 2020 Burroughs Wellcome Fund North Carolina Teacher of the Year (NCTOY), a 2021 National Teacher of the Year finalist, and a 2022 National Educators Association California Casualty Excellence in Teaching awardee. She has taught at the elementary, middle and high school levels and worked as an educational consultant for the National Science Teaching Association.

Superintendent Catherine Truitt
As North Carolina state superintendent, Catherine Truitt’s work is focused on improving the state’s public schools, expanding innovation, and creating new opportunities for students to learn, grow, and successfully transition into the postsecondary plans of their choice. Truitt’s service in education began as a high school English teacher, where she spent 10 years in the classroom at both the high school and middle school levels.

Dr. Hank Weddington
Dr. Hank Weddington serves as Dean of the College of Education and Human Services and Professor of Education at Lehigh-Rhyne University. He currently serves as a commissioner on the PEPSIC Commission, for which he co-chairs the Preparation and Entry sub-committee. Weddington also serves as Immediate Past President for the NC Association of Colleges and Teacher Educators, an organization that advocates for and supports K-12 teachers and teacher educators.
Special thanks to SAS Institute for its continued support of the North Carolina Education Innovation Lab.