

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

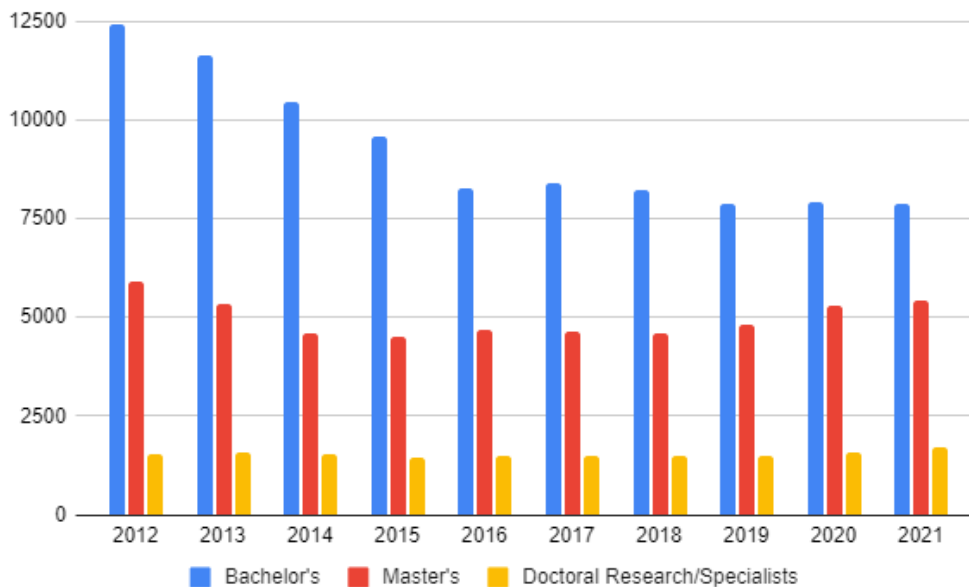
North Carolina’s teachers are dedicated and hardworking, and their professionalism has made our public school system a jewel in the United States. NC continues to lead the nation in the number of teachers who have earned certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. However, NC also trails the nation in how well it pays its teachers. According to a 2021 report by the [National Education Association](#), North Carolina’s average teacher salary for the 2019-20 school year, was \$54,150 approximately \$10,000 below the national average of \$64,133 and put North Carolina’s ranking at #33 among all states in the nation. Salary is one of many elements that affect the number of teachers going into and staying in the teaching profession in NC.

The Teacher Pipeline in North Carolina

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

The teacher pipeline in North Carolina has been shrinking for years. According to a 2019 research brief by the [Education Policy Initiative at Carolina](#), the UNC school system, made up of 16 universities, is the largest supplier of public school teachers in NC¹. As shown in *Figure 1*, there has been a fairly steady decline over the years in the number of students enrolled in a bachelor’s program in education, a critical pathway for the teacher pipeline.

Figure 1. Enrollment in Education Programs in the UNC System 2012 - 2021



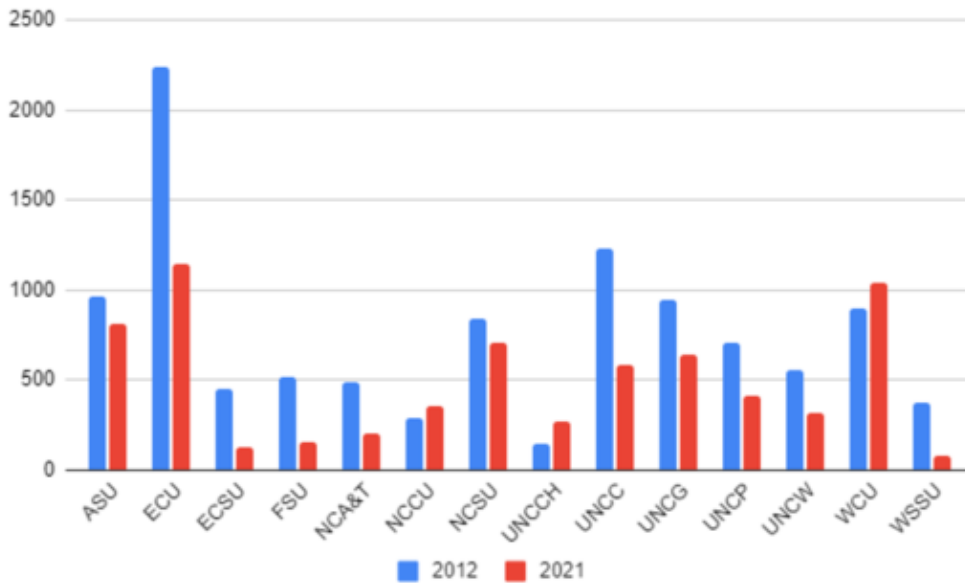
Data collected from the [UNC System Interactive Data Dashboard](#)

¹ The UNC system includes the following institutions: Appalachian State University, East Carolina University, Elizabeth City State University, Fayetteville State University, North Carolina A&T State University, North Carolina Central University, North Carolina State University, UNC Asheville, UNC-CH, UNC Charlotte, UNC Greensboro, UNC Pembroke, UNC School of the Arts, UNC Wilmington, Western Carolina University, Winston-Salem State University, and North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics.

Between 2012 and 2021, enrollment in bachelor’s programs **dropped 35%** (from 12,434 to 7,901) while enrollment in master’s programs dropped 9% (from 5,918 to 5,411) and enrollment in doctoral research/specialist programs increased 10% (from 1,535 to 1,690). Enrollment in a doctoral program often signals an exit from the classroom, so the increase in doctoral program enrollment may be further evidence of the North Carolina’s shrinking teacher pipeline.

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

Figure 2. Enrollment in Bachelor’s of Education Programs by UNC School 2012 - 2021



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

Data collected from the UNC System Interactive Data Dashboard

As shown in Table 1, the majority of the UNC system’s minority-serving institutions (ECSU, FSU, NCA&T, NCCU, UNCP, and WSSU), whose early-career teachers are predominately racial/ethnic minorities, have been especially hard hit by enrollment declines. With the exception of NCCU, the enrollment and number of programs dropped dramatically for all schools. For example, ECSU lost 72% of its education student enrollment along with 50% of its program offerings between 2012 and 2021.

Table 1. Enrollment and Program Offering Changes 2012-2021 for UNC’s Minority-serving Institutions

School	Enrollment			Programs		
	2012	2021	% Change	2012	2021	% Change
ECSU*	451	128	-72	6	3	-50
FSU*	516	150	-71	12	5	-58
NCA&T*	487	200	-59	10	3	-70
NCCU*	288	350	+22	3	3	0
UNCP	711	414	-42	11	7	-36
WSSU	373	79	-79	8	4	-50

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

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

COVID-19 Impact on Teachers

Covid-19 has had a negative impact on teachers across the United States. A 2021 report by the [CDC Foundation](#) found that “27% of teachers self-reported symptoms consistent with clinical depression and 37%...consistent with generalized anxiety” and that “53% of teachers are thinking of leaving their profession more now than they were before the pandemic” (p. 7). In addition to the pandemic, teachers reported that lack of physical distancing, lack of staff, and poor physical school infrastructure were contributing factors to their poor mental health. According to a [2022 National Education Association \(NEA\) Survey](#) a staggering 86% of surveyed NEA members have seen more educators leaving the profession or retiring early since the start of the pandemic. Teachers in the NEA survey cited some of the same concerns discussed in the CDC Foundation report - poor infrastructure, low pay, and staff shortages - as contributing factors to the mass teacher shortages seen today.

In [February 2022 NCDPI reported](#) that about 8.2% of NC teachers left employment in the public schools during the 2020-21 school year, up less than 1% from the previous year. However, teacher burnout is a major issue that has increased substantially during the pandemic, worsening a teacher shortage that was already severe in NC. For example, between August and December 2021, [approximately 9.3%](#) of the teachers in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System (CMS) either retired or resigned. According to the 2022 article, [“Public Education is Facing a Crisis of Epic Proportions”](#), the pandemic has decreased student enrollment and attendance, contributed to staff shortages among teachers, substitutes, and bus drivers, and decreased learning retention among students. Districts are using federal COVID relief funds to provide retention bonuses to teachers as a way to keep them in the classroom (e.g. CMS allocated \$2,500 to each full-time teacher).

According to [Why Addressing Teacher Turnover Matters](#) by Linda Darling-Hammond et al., teacher attrition and retainment must be attended to more effectively because high attrition rates are disruptive to learning and negatively impact student achievement. They are also expensive. According to research conducted by the [Learning Policy Institute](#) in 2017, urban school districts spent around \$20,000 per teacher replacement. It is estimated that the United States spends billions of dollars each year on teacher replacement.

Becoming a Teacher in North Carolina

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

An alternative pathway to becoming a teacher is called lateral entry. According to the [Regional Assistance Licensing Center in North Carolina \(RALC\)](#), lateral entry allows individuals with at least a bachelor’s degree to teach while they obtain their professional educator’s license or while completing a teacher education preparation program via university or RALC. Individuals cannot request lateral entry licenses on their own. The NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) can issue a license at the request of the school system the individual works for. To help address NC’s shrinking teacher pipeline by having a clear avenue to lateral entry licensure, NCSU and UNCCH have created the [Pathway to Practice NC](#) program.

Recruit and Retain Teachers

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

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

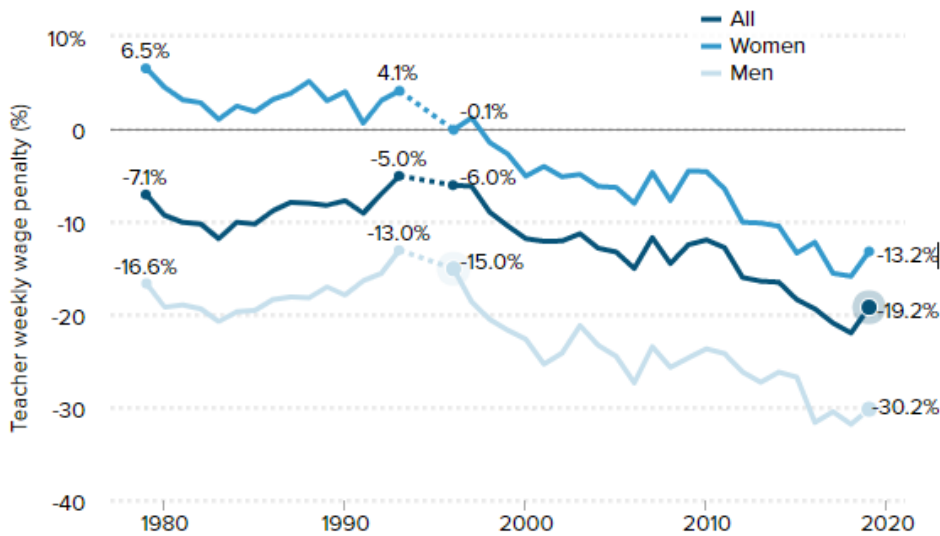
A 2016 study conducted by Anne Podolsky et al., for the [Learning Policy Institute](#), highlighted several effective strategies to improve the teacher pipeline: increased salaries, lower costs of entry into the profession, college loan forgiveness programs, and internal support for new teachers.

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

Figure 2. *Teacher Wage Penalty over Time*

Teachers earn 19.2% less than comparable college graduates

Teacher weekly wage penalty (or premium) for all teachers and by gender, 1979–2019



In their latest report (2020) the recorded gap was 19.2%, down from a record high of 21.4% the previous year. In NC, the situation is worse than the nation as a whole; teachers make 25.3% less than comparable college graduates, making it even harder to attract people to the profession.

The [NC state salary schedule](#), which sets the bottom limit for state salaries, starts beginning teachers with a bachelor’s degree at \$35,460. Some municipalities use local funds to supplement the state base pay rates as a way to more fairly pay teachers and to attract teachers to their schools. However, this creates disparities between districts in communities that can afford a local supplement and those that cannot. As shown in *Table 2*, local supplements increase the statewide average teacher salary across districts to \$37,049, slightly higher than the state base salary (\$35,460). However, this average starting salary is still lower than all surrounding states and ranks as 43rd lowest average starting salary in the nation, negatively affecting NC’s ability to recruit teachers from outside the state. See **Facts on NC Teacher Salaries** for more information.

Table 2. Average Starting Salaries in North Carolina and Surrounding States

State	Average Starting Salary
Virginia	\$42,069
Tennessee	\$38,809
Georgia	\$38,509
South Carolina	\$37,550
North Carolina	\$37,049

Data collected from the National Education Association

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

In NC, [educators who have earned National Board Certification](#) receive a 12% salary supplement to their regular pay. This is one of the only avenues left for teachers to increase their pay in NC, so it is not surprising that NC has more [National Board Certified teachers than any other state](#) with 23,418 teachers having earned certification. National Board Certified teachers make up 23% of all NC teachers.

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

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

Internal Support for New Educators. Induction programs can help welcome and prepare new educators to thrive as teachers. A research report by Ingersoll and Smith for [NASSP Bulletin](#) revealed that first-year educators were more likely to stay in the profession when they had a mentor from the same field, common planning time with same-subject teachers and regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers. The report showed that educators with no induction programs were 40% more likely to leave the profession, whereas educators with at least 3 forms of induction support were only 28% likely to leave after their first year of teaching. The percent dropped to 18% when 8 supports were provided (e.g. reduced number of course preparations, participation in an external network, regular supportive communication with an administrator). Schools that take time to develop their new educators will lower attrition rates and contribute to a stable school environment.

Recruiting Teachers in North Carolina

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

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

[In 2017, the Teaching Fellows Program](#) was revived on a much smaller scale through [Senate Bill 252](#). The current program extends only to individuals seeking careers in special education or STEM rather than all subject areas as in the original program. Starting in 2021, the current program is offered at 8 schools (up from 5), which is less than half of the 17 schools in the original program. Surprisingly, some of the state's largest teacher education programs (e.g. ASU and ECU) and some HBCUs are not included in the new program. Students who participate receive around \$8,250 per year in forgivable loans. A full restoration of The Teaching Fellows Program should include **all** UNC system schools and other qualified private universities/colleges in North Carolina, specialization in all subject areas, and should see a substantial increase in funding to address the teaching shortage facing our state.

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

[The Leadership Institute for Future Teachers \(LIFT\)](#) – was created in 2020 by NC State's College of Education to help diversify the teaching force in NC. Although students of color make up about half of the state's public school student population, about [80% of North Carolina public school](#) teachers are white. High school students of color and/or bilingual students who are interested in increasing their leadership skills and potentially pursuing a career in education are the main participants in this free program. It includes a summer leadership program at NC State, mentoring and family support, college readiness sessions, and Saturday Success Academies for high school seniors. Students who participated in the program responded positively, giving hope to its future and the future of a more diverse teaching force.

Conclusion

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

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