



THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SYSTEM

NORTH CAROLINA TEACHING FELLOWS PROGRAM: ANNUAL REPORT

January 2026

**University of North Carolina System
Raleigh, North Carolina**

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Note

The data presented in this report is current as of the date of its submission; however, there will be shifts in some aspects of the reporting data annually as information is gathered regarding teacher placement and graduate performance is monitored.

Abstract

North Carolina General Statute §116-209.62 established the North Carolina Teaching Fellows (NCTF) Program for the purpose of recruiting, preparing, supporting students residing in or attending selected institutions of higher education in North Carolina who have a desire to teach in a qualifying teaching area in North Carolina's public Schools. The Program is designed as a competitive, merit-based forgivable loan program providing tuition assistance of up to \$10,000 per year for qualified students committed to teaching elementary education, special education, science, technology, engineering, or math in a North Carolina public school. In subsection (j), the Program is tasked with providing an annual report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee outlining several program specifics and data analysis metrics. This report is presented in accordance with this statute and is designed to provide policymakers with updated information regarding the Program's participants, activities, and effectiveness in recruiting, preparing, and supporting teacher candidates as they become fully licensed teachers.

The Program has experienced tremendous growth since 2023, due to several factors including: expansion to ten partner institutions, the addition of elementary education (K-6) licensure, effective recruitment and marketing strategies, and the establishment of a strong network of collaborators in the work of teacher recruitment and preparation. This year, the Program has 932 active students, up from 575 last year, a 62 percent increase. The Program has produced 397 graduates since its reinstatement in 2018 with over 81 percent (324 of 397) of graduates currently working in North Carolina public schools. The Program anticipates having nearly 200 graduates in the Class of 2026 from the ten (10) partner institutions. Detailed information regarding the growth of the program, institutional data, and participant outcome data is found in this report.

While the Program continues to grow and expand its impact across the state, the NCTF Commission has continued to collaborate and explore opportunities to enhance the Program and its effectiveness in meeting the needs of the North Carolina teaching workforce. As such, the Commission has advocated for slight adjustments to the statutes governing the Program to provide greater flexibility and clarification of program logistics to better serve Program participants. These requests, detailed at the end of this report, could greatly benefit students and bolster the impact of the Program while not requiring an additional expense or adjoining request for additional funding.

As a program that works with multiple state agencies including the Department of Public Instruction and local education units, public and private institutions of higher education, educational non-profit partners, and has a robust alumni network, North Carolina Teaching Fellows is committed to leading the state's education workforce charge as we become the nation's premiere model for educator recruitment and preparation.

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Program Background

The original version of the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program was implemented from 1986 – 2011. The Program was reestablished by the North Carolina General Assembly in the 2017 State Budget (S.L 2017-57) with the purpose to “recruit, prepare, and support students residing in or attending institutions of higher education located in North Carolina for preparation as highly effective STEM or special education teachers in the State’s public schools.”

Currently, the Teaching Fellows program is a competitive, merit-based forgivable loan program providing tuition assistance of up to \$10,000 per year for qualified students committed to teaching elementary education, special education, science, technology, engineering, or math in a North Carolina public school.

NC General Statute §116-209.62(a) establishes the Program to be administered by the System Office of The University of North Carolina, in conjunction with the NC State Education Assistance Authority and the NC Teaching Fellows Commission. The North Carolina Teaching Fellows Commission (Commission), established in N.C.G.S. §116-209.61, is a 14-member body tasked with establishing program and loan recipient criteria, selection procedures, and shall select recipients to receive the forgivable loans. The North Carolina Teaching Fellows Commission is comprised of four deans from educator preparation programs, a community college president, a beginning teacher, a principal, a member from business and industry, and a local school board member. The NC Teacher of the Year, Principal of the Year, Superintendent of the Year, Chair of the State Education Assistance Authority (SEAA) Board of Directors, and Director of the Teaching Fellows Program all serve as ex-officio members of the Commission. Commission members are selected by the UNC Board of Governors, the NC General Assembly, or through appointment via title designation.

The members of the Commission for the 2025-2026 year are as follows: Member – Appointing Body

Patrick Brennan (Chair) – UNC BOG	Business & Industry Representative
Taleek Harlee (Vice-Chair) – UNC BOG	Beginning Teacher – Purnell Sweat High School
Dr. Prince Bull – NCGA Senate	NCICU Dean – Gardner-Webb University
Dr. Malcolm Butler – UNC BOG	UNC Dean – University of North Carolina-Charlotte
Rachel Candaso – Designation	2025 NC Teacher of the Year
James Johnson -- Designation	2025 NC Principal of the Year
Dr. Bennett Jones -- Designation	NC Teaching Fellows Director
Dr. Mandi Lee – UNC BOG	NCCCS President – Bladen Community College
Dr. Debora Powell – UNC BOG	Local School Board Member – Wilson County Schools
Matthew Price – UNC BOG	Principal – Garner Magnet High School
Dr. Christiaan Ramsey – NCGA House	NCICU Dean – Mars Hill University
Jim Roberts -- Designation	NCSEAA Board of Directors Chairman
Dr. Joy Smith – UNC BOG	UNC Dean – Elizabeth City State University
Dr. Freddie Williamson -- Designation	2025 NC Superintendent of the Year

Partner Institutions. Per G.S. 116-209.62(f), the Commission was initially directed to evaluate educator preparation programs and use the designated legislative criteria to create an application process to select five educator preparation programs as partners for the program. After careful evaluation, the following institutions were selected in 2017:

- **Elon University**
- **Meredith College**

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- **NC State University**
- **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**
- **University of North Carolina at Charlotte**

2020 Expansion. During the 2020 Legislative Session, HB 1096 (Session Law 2020-56) was adopted, which authorized the expansion of the program to three additional educator preparation programs (EPP) partner institutions and in doing so, directed the NCTF Commission to make a “diverse selection.” In response to that directive, the Commission modified the rubric used to evaluate applications from prospective EPP partners to include the following qualitative metrics (in addition to other assessment measures):

- Diversity of EPP Program Admissions
- Diversity of EPP Program Completers
- Geographic Diversity
- HBCU/MCI Institution Status

After careful evaluation and independent scoring, the three institutions selected by the Commission were **Fayetteville State University, North Carolina A&T State University, and the University of North Carolina at Pembroke**. Each of these institutions welcomed their first Teaching Fellows in the 2022-2023 academic year.

2023 Expansion. NC Session Law 2023-134 Section 8A.4.(a)(b), authorized the expansion of the NCTF Program from eight institutions to ten. A request for proposals was announced in December 2023 and advertised to the public and private education preparation programs across the state. A total of fifteen proposals were submitted for review by the Commission from North Carolina colleges and universities.

In February 2024, the NCTF Commission reviewed and independently scored submitted proposals. The scoring rubric for submissions followed the legislative guidelines found in G.S. 116-209.62(f) and included components such as program data, an outline of institutional support for Teaching Fellows, and a plan for practical experiences for program participants. Further, the Commission specifically identified three additional areas for priority consideration among the submissions: ensuring geographical diversity of partner institutions in NCTF, the number of potential applicants and program participants to enhance the impact on teacher preparation, and the number of licensure programs offered and the various formats for student participation including face-to-face instruction, distance education, and residency programs.

The Commission had the difficult task to discern between 15 outstanding submissions to determine the best fit for the NCTF Program. After deliberation and rounds of scoring, the Commission selected **Appalachian State University** and **East Carolina University** as the two new NCTF institutions, beginning in the 2024-2025 academic year. The current list of NCTF partner institutions are:

- **Appalachian State University**
- **East Carolina University**
- **Elon University**
- **Fayetteville State University**
- **Meredith College**
- **North Carolina A&T State University**

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- North Carolina State University
- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- University of North Carolina at Charlotte
- University of North Carolina at Pembroke

Program Details. As outlined in statute, the Program shall be used to provide a forgivable loan to individuals interested in preparing to teach in the public schools of the State in qualifying licensure areas. The student must be seeking a clear, initial teacher license in North Carolina at an approved educator preparation program.

Licensure Areas. NC Session Law 2023-134, Section 8A.4. (5a) amended G.S. 116-209.60 and established qualifying teacher areas for the NCTF program as Special Education, STEM Education, and added Elementary Education (K-6).

Regarding Elementary Education, Section 8A.4.(b) of NC Session Law 2023-134 established that educator preparation programs enrolling loan recipients in a program of study leading to K-6 licensure shall be determined to provide training that is aligned with the Science of Reading. Any program participating prior to August 1, 2024, shall have met either of the following requirements:

- a. Is rated “strong” or “good” on the February 15, 2023, report of the Board of Governors of The University of North Carolina on the Science of Reading Educator Preparation Programs Coursework Implementation required by Section 8.4 of S.L. 2021-180.
- b. Received a grade of “A” or higher in reading foundations on the June 2023 report on Strengthening Elementary Reading Instruction of the National Council on Teacher Quality.

For institutions who do not meet these requirements, the NCTF Commission, in accordance with G.S. 116-209.62(f)(8), shall select a third-party entity to evaluate participating educator preparation programs and determine whether a program is providing training that is aligned with the Science of Reading for the 2025-2027 academic years. This review is required subsequently two academic years thereafter.

The following NCTF partner institutions met one of the two parameters noted above and offered Elementary Education as a qualifying teacher area in the 2024-2025 academic year:

- Appalachian State University
- East Carolina University
- Elon University
- Fayetteville State University
- North Carolina A&T State University
- North Carolina State University
- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Of the two remaining institutions, UNC Pembroke was approved in November 2024 to begin Elementary Education licensure in the Spring 2025 semester. The other, Meredith College, was evaluated in January 2025 to determine the elementary educator preparation program’s alignment with the Science of Reading. After review, the program received a rating of an A and is now eligible to offer elementary

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education as a qualifying NCTF area. As such, all ten NCTF institutions will offer licensure in the area of Elementary Education in the 2025-2026 academic year.

Entry Status Parameters and Awards. In NC Session Law 2023-134 Section 8A.4.(a), G.S. 116-209.62(g) was amended to increase the maximum semester award from \$4,125 to \$5,000 for each participant. The forgivable loans are administered to students based upon their entry status in the Program:

- High school seniors - up to 8 semesters of funding at a maximum of \$5,000 per semester
- External transfers - students at non-NCTF institutions who transfer into an approved NCTF program are eligible to receive up to 6 semesters of funding at a maximum of \$5000 per semester
- Internal transfers - students at current NCTF institutions who change their major into an approved NCTF program are eligible to receive up to 4 semesters of funding at a maximum of \$5000 per semester
- Residency candidates - students who have earned a bachelor's degree who are seeking a first, clear initial license may enroll into a NCTF program and are eligible to receive up to 4 semesters of funding at a maximum of \$5000 per semester

Original Repayment Structure. As outlined in G.S. 116-209.63, students receiving funding prior to the 2024-2025 academic year through the NCTF Program are required to pay back the funds in one of two ways:

- Cash repayment – All loans are subject to repayment plus interest ninety days from program completion or withdrawal
- Service repayment – The loan and any interest accrued shall be forgiven as follows if the recipient serves as a teacher in a STEM or special education licensure area. For every year the teacher was awarded a forgivable loan, it will be forgiven if:
 - Teacher serves one year at a North Carolina public school identified as low-performing under G.S. 115C-105.37
 - Teacher serves two years at a North Carolina public school if not identified as low-performing under G.S. 115C-105.37

Repayment Structure 2024-2025 Change. – NC Session Law 2023-134 Section 8A.4.(a), amended G.S. 116-209.63(b) regarding service repayment to clarify that for every year a qualifying teacher, as defined in G.S. 116-209.60(5b), remains a qualifying teacher the Authority shall forgive the loan amount received in one year of enrollment in an educator preparation program and any interest accrued on that amount. However, NC Session Law 2023-134 Section 8A.4.(c) stipulated that the change began in the 2024-2025 year meaning that Fellows who received loans prior to the change must repay the loan in the original service terms. This also means that students may have two different repayment schedules based upon when they entered the Program.

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Reporting Requirements

This report has been prepared in accordance with the reporting criteria specified by G.S. 116-209.62(j). Of note, some program graduates may be working in areas within public schools that do not have measurable instruments regarding student performance. As such, the number of teachers for whom student achievement data is available is lower than the total number of graduates from the program.

The following guidelines for reporting are outlined in G.S. 116-209.62:

- 1) Forgivable Loans awarded from the Trust Fund, including the following:
 - a. Demographic information regarding recipients.
 - b. Number of recipients by institution of higher education and program.
 - c. Information on number of recipients by anticipated STEM and special education licensure area.
- 2) Placement and repayment rates, including the following:
 - a. Number of graduates who have been employed in a STEM or special education licensure area within two years of program completion.
 - b. Number of graduates who accepted employment at a low-performing school identified under G.S. 115C-105.37 as part of their years of service.
 - c. Number of graduates who have elected to do loan repayment and their years of service, if any, prior to beginning loan repayment.
 - d. Number of graduates employed in a STEM or special education licensure area who have received an overall rating of at least accomplished and have met expected growth on applicable standards of the teacher evaluation instrument.
 - e. Aggregate information on student growth and proficiency in courses taught by graduates who have fulfilled service requirements through employment in a STEM or special education licensure area.
- 2a) Mentoring and coaching support through the North Carolina New Teacher Support Program, including the following:
 - a. Number of forgivable recipients who received mentoring and coaching support when employed at a low-performing school identified under G.S. 115C-105.37.
 - b. Number of forgivable loans recipients who received mentoring and coaching support when employed at a school not identified as low-performing under G.S. 115C-105.37.
- 3) Selected school outcomes by program, including the following:
 - a. Turnover rate for forgivable loan graduates, including the turnover rate for graduates who also received mentoring and coaching support through the North Carolina New Teacher Support Program.
 - b. Aggregate information on student growth and proficiency as provided annually by the State Board of Education to the Commission in courses taught by forgivable loan graduates.
 - c. Fulfillment rate for forgivable loan graduates.

Data Reporting

The data below reflects the cumulative totals of the six cohorts of North Carolina Teaching Fellows and is presented to meet the requirements as outlined in general statute. Also included is information for the fall applicants and early-action awardees of the 2026-2027 cohort.

A. Program Applications

The traditional application window runs from November to January, with decisions announced in March. As noted above, the numbers for the 2026-2027 cohort represent the early window applicants and

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awardees. The regular application window for the 2026-2027 cohort will close on February 1st, 2026. Data are presented in Table 1 for each cohort, including the number of completed applications, awards offered, and the number of awards accepted per cohort. Reasons provided by awardees for declining the program include wanting to attend another institution not in the NCTF, seeking another teacher licensure area, receiving other scholarship awards with less restrictive repayment terms (or no repayment at all), or choosing to attend a community college first.

TABLE 1. TEACHING FELLOWS APPLICATIONS, AWARDS, ACCEPTANCE BY COHORT

	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26	26-27
Application	232	220	189	156	125	161	640	809	222*
Awards	110	133	114	118	119	132	462	530	170*
Acceptance	79	101	85	86	92	107	403	498	TBD*

*Numbers are from early-action window; full cohort numbers will be reported in May 2026.

B. Demographic Information

The Teaching Fellows' demographic data mirrors the metrics of the existing teacher workforce in North Carolina, particularly in terms of race and gender. At current capacity, the Teaching Fellows program makes up a fraction of the larger teacher pipeline, but even so, remains committed to the larger statewide efforts to substantively increase teacher supply. Additionally, the Program continues to implement strategic recruitment efforts to enhance geographic diversity of applicants and awardees.

TABLE 2. TEACHING FELLOWS BY GENDER, 2018-2019 TO 2025-2026 COHORTS

	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26	TOTAL
Female	65	89	70	69	78	89	352	445	1,257
Male	14	12	15	17	14	18	47	52	189
No report	--	--	--	--	--	--	4	1	5
TOTAL	79	101	85	86	92	107	403	498	1,451

TABLE 3. TEACHING FELLOWS BY ETHNICITY/RACE, 2018-2019 to 2025-2026 COHORTS

	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26	TOTAL
Black	7	*	6	12	17	15	51	74	182
Ethnicities <5*	8	13	12	9	16	19	18	39	134
Hispanic/Latino	*	*	*	*	*	*	26	34	60
Non-reporting	1	0	3	0	0	0	2	8	14
White	63	84	64	64	59	73	306	343	1,056
TOTAL	79	101	85	86	92	107	403	498	1,451

* Includes race/ethnicity categories where most annual counts are fewer than 5 (American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Nonresident Alien, and Two or More Races). These numbers are suppressed to protect Fellows' anonymity. In 2024-2025, Hispanic counts increased to be able to be reported.

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C. Program & Licensure Area

Information presented in this section reports accepted awards to partner institutions by NCTF Program participants. Students who transfer from one institution to another after initial enrollment are captured in Sections D and E. Beginning in 2023, the NCTF program extended the opportunity for previous awardees to participate in NCTF activities if they had initially denied the NCTF award due to receiving a full scholarship to their institution. There are 16 students active in the NCTF Program who do not receive forgivable loans due to having their tuition, books, and fees covered by other academic financial awards.

Students must be working towards licensure in special education, elementary education, or STEM education which includes middle and high school science and math, technology education, and engineering education, including agricultural education programs. Students are allowed to change majors as long as they continue working towards a qualifying teaching license. Students enter the program classified as either a recently graduated high school senior, a college transfer, or a residency teacher seeking an initial teacher licensure through an approved educator preparation program.

TABLE 4. TEACHING FELLOWS BY LICENSURE AREA, 2018-2019 to 2025-2026 COHORTS

	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26	TOTAL
SPED	26	31	34	32	38	44	55	90	350
STEM	53	70	51	54	54	63	82	98	525
ELEM*	*	*	*	*	*	*	266	310	576
TOTAL	79	101	85	86	92	107	403	498	1,451

*Elementary Education Licensure (K-6) was added to the program beginning in the 2024-2025 program year.

TABLE 5. TEACHING FELLOWS BY INSTITUTION, 2018-2019 to 2025-2026 COHORTS

	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26	TOTAL
Appalachian State	***	***	***	***	***	***	85	91	176
East Carolina	***	***	***	***	***	***	92	117	209
Elon	8	6	2	7	3	0	15	16	57
Fayetteville State	**	**	**	**	2	3	7	14	26
Meredith	7	6	0	8	6	5	8	13	53
NC A&T	**	**	**	**	3	2	14	26	45
NC State	27	49	49	47	44	63	113	111	503
UNC-Chapel Hill	18	10	13	10	12	10	20	21	114
UNC Charlotte	19	30	21	14	17	9	27	60	197
UNC Pembroke	**	**	**	**	5	15	22	29	71
TOTAL	79	101	85	86	92	107	403	498	1,451

** Fayetteville State University, North Carolina A&T State University, and University of North Carolina-Pembroke were first added to the program in the 2022-2023 school year.

***Appalachian State University and East Carolina University were first added to the program in the 2024-2025 school year.

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D. Currently Enrolled Teaching Fellows

The tables below report on the current 932 students in the NCTF program receiving funding. There are 13 additional students who are part of the program but are not receiving funding and are thus designated as Honorary. Those who entered as high school seniors are eligible for eight (8) semesters of funding. External transfer students are eligible for six (6) semesters of funding. Internal transfer students and residency candidates are eligible for four (4) semesters of funding. Included in this data are honorary teaching fellows who were offered awards but declined financial assistance due to receiving other scholarships. Finally, data in this section reflects current data; students may have transferred from one NCTF institution to another resulting in slightly different numbers from cohort data.

Also of note, the Program's total number of active participants is a 62% increase from the previous year (945 from 575). This is due to an aggressive recruitment strategy, a successful marketing campaign, and an increased number of transfer students due to two statutory changes. First, the addition of the NCTF Program at Appalachian State University and East Carolina University allowed for currently enrolled students at those universities to apply to the program as external transfers since the program was not initially at their university. Further, across eight of the ten institutions, elementary education licensure was available for the first time in 2024-2025. This allowed current college students enrolled in elementary education licensure programs to apply at their university to become NC Teaching Fellows. Finally, the expansion of elementary education to all institutions resulted in subsequent increases to NCTF transfer numbers.

TABLE 6. CURRENT TEACHING FELLOWS BY INSTITUTION, ENTRY STATUS

	HS Seniors	Internal Transfer	External Transfer	Residency	TOTAL
Appalachian State	96	24	43	3	166
East Carolina	78	42	63	8	191
Elon	9	11	10	--	30
Fayetteville State	6	3	3	9	21
Meredith	22	2	--	1	25
NC A&T	18	16	1	7	42
NC State	174	49	26	16	265
UNC-Chapel Hill	17	14	5	8	44
UNC Charlotte	43	25	18	11	97
UNC Pembroke	29	10	5	7	51
TOTAL	492	196	174	70	932

TABLE 7. CURRENT TEACHING FELLOWS BY LICENSURE AREA, INSTITUTION

	ASU	ECU	Elon	FSU	MC	NCA&T	NCSU	UNC-CH	UNCC	UNCP	TOTAL
SPED	22	32	9	5	5	6	47	8	25	15	174
STEM	23	22	3	8	10	8	112	8	21	15	230
ELEM	121	137	18	8	10	28	106	28	51	21	528
TOTAL	166	191	30	21	25	42	265	44	97	51	932

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E. Program Outcomes

The data presented below represents data for the 1,451 students who have participated in the NCTF Program. The information in Table 8 is presented as a comparison from the totals in the 2022 - 2024 reports as compared to the numbers for the 2025 year. This data highlights the significant expansion of the program and illustrates the anticipated production of a significant number of licensed teachers in the coming years.

TABLE 8. TEACHING FELLOWS OUTCOMES

	Total	Active	Honorary	Graduated	Withdrawn	Other
2022 Report	443	250	9	143	41	7
2023 Report	559	260	17	217	62	3
2024 Report	953	559	16	290	77	11
2025 Report	1,451	932	13	397	96	13

The information in Table 9 is a breakdown of students by institution. Students are classified as:

- Active loan recipients (currently enrolled)
- Honorary (in program, but not receiving funding)
- Graduated (completed the program and/or obtained licensure)
- Withdrawn (left program without completion)
- Other (left institution for another institution or other teacher prep program)

TABLE 9. TEACHING FELLOWS OUTCOMES BY INSTITUTION

	Total	Active	Honorary	Graduated	Withdrawn	Other
Appalachian State	174	166	1	4	2	1
East Carolina	214	191	2	19	2	--
Elon	56	30	--	19	7	--
Fayetteville State	26	21	1	2	2	--
Meredith	49	25	--	19	5	--
NC A&T	46	42	--	--	4	--
NC State	498	265	6	171	50	6
UNC-Chapel Hill	119	44	3	63	7	2
UNC-Charlotte	198	97	--	86	13	2
UNC-Pembroke	71	51	--	14	4	2
TOTAL	1,451	932	13	397	96	13

Teaching Fellows Post-Program Data

Of the 397 program completers, 81.6% (324) are currently teaching in a North Carolina public school. Further, 24% of the teachers are working in a school designated as low-performing (78 of 324). It is anticipated that the employment numbers will continue to surge as the Program has significantly increased in capacity over the last two years. In addition to adding more teachers to the classroom, the rate of teacher turnover for NCTF graduates has dropped each year. In 2021-2022, there were 79 NCTF participants teaching. The next year saw a 17% teacher attrition rate from the previous year. In 2022-

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2023, there were 122 teachers from the Program, and the following year attrition rate was cut in half to 9%. The number has continued to decline and in the current year the attrition rate has fallen to just over 6% from the previous year.

TABLE 10. TEACHING FELLOWS EMPLOYED IN NORTH CAROLINA PUBLIC SCHOOLS BY YEAR

	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26
Teaching in a NC Public School	15	38	79	122	167	216	324
Teaching in Low-Performing	3	8	22	31	36	51	78

TABLE 11. SUMMARY OF PROGRAM GRADUATES

Program Graduates	397
Teaching in a North Carolina Public School	324
<i>Teaching in a Qualified Area and a School Designated as Low Performing</i>	<i>78</i>
Recent College Grads (Verifying 2025 Employment File)	14
Other (No Longer Teaching, Working in a Non-NC Public School, Moved Out of State)	59

As outlined in G.S. 116-209.63, students receiving NCTF loans are required to pay back provided funds through either service or cash repayment plus interest accrued. Of the 1,451 Teaching Fellows since the program's inception, 1,428 students have received loans through the program. Table 12 reports on the outcomes of those no longer in the Program, whether they completed the program or withdrew, and identifies their repayment status.

TABLE 12. REPAYMENT STATUS FOR NCTF RECIPIENTS

Total Number of Participants Receiving Funding	1,428
Active NCTF Students	932
Program Graduates/Completers	397
<i>Program Graduates Repaying/Repaid Loans Through Service</i>	<i>319</i>
<i>Program Graduates Repaying/Repaid Loans Through Cash Repayment</i>	<i>62</i>
<i>Program Graduates in Deferment/Grace Period**</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Program Graduates Currently in Repayment (Service and Cash)</i>	<i>254</i>
<i>Program Graduates with Loans "Paid in Full"</i>	<i>112</i>
<i>Program Graduates in "Other" Repayment Status**</i>	<i>31</i>
Withdrawn from Program	96
<i>Withdrawn Students Currently in Repayment (Cash)</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Withdrawn Students with Loans "Paid in Full"</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Withdrawn Students in "Other" Repayment Status**</i>	<i>43</i>
Students exhausted TF funding but still enrolled in university	3

** "Other" repayment status includes "Deferment", "AG Demand", "In-House Collections", "Grace" and "SEDCA Article 60".

As outlined in G.S. 116-209.62, graduates from the NCTF Program are offered mentoring and coaching support during loan repayment via the North Carolina New Teacher Support Program (NTSP). Graduates are offered this optional support regardless of their work location, though some districts already provide coaching through NTSP or their district-level beginning teacher support program. The students being

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served are working in 34 different school districts at 102 traditional schools and three (3) public charter schools.

TABLE 13: PARTNERSHIP WITH NEW TEACHER SUPPORT PROGRAM COMPARISON

	Graduates receiving NTSP Mentoring	Graduates in Low-Performing Schools receiving NTSP Mentoring
2021-2022	29	8
2022-2023	61	21
2023-2024	51	9
2024-2025	69	11
2025-2026	111	26

Due to the small number of evaluative metrics that measure student proficiency and teacher effectiveness in the areas of Special Education and STEM, combined with the testing changes during the COVID pandemic, there is a limited amount of data for program graduates. The NCTF Program is working with NCDPI to create a data-sharing dashboard to be able to track Fellows throughout their employment to establish ongoing effectiveness data past the repayment window. The NCDPI dashboard should be in place for reporting at the end of the 2025-2026 academic year.

2025-2026 Program Highlights

There have been 1,451 participants in the NCTF program since its return in 2018, of which 932 are active students at the partner institutions. A detailed overview of data is provided in this report; however, this section highlights additional areas of success.

Completion of Strategic Planning Process. During the 2024-2025 academic year, the NCTF program completed a strategic planning process to develop program goals over the next five years to 2030. The program worked with a third-party consultant to facilitate a series of focus group meetings with various groups to provide feedback on the program, identify strengths and areas for growth, and discuss the teaching workforce needs of the state and how the program could best address those needs. The focus groups included in the strategic development process were:

- The NCTF Commission
- The NCTF Advisory Board
- NCTF Program Deans from the partner institutions
- NCTF Program Campus Directors
- Current NCTF Students
- Representatives from Educational Organizations and State Agencies including DPI
- Members of the UNC System Office Leadership

Following the series of meetings, the consultant worked with the Program to create a detailed strategic plan for NCTF, identifying both short- and long-term activities and goals, which was approved by the NCTF Commission. The Program's strategic goals for the 2025-26 academic year include:

- Increase applicants by 10 percent to 1,000 through active recruitment, opening of fall application window, and collaboration with local education agencies across the state
- Increase participants at each institution to a minimum of 20 per academic year
- Increase candidates from underrepresented areas, regions, populations, and licensure interests

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- Reduce cash repayment number to below 5 percent in 3-year window while increasing service repayment by 10 percent

A key aspect of the strategic planning process was to work on funding projections for the long-range viability and capacity of the program. As the program has experienced tremendous growth over the past two years, it is important to note the financial obligations for the program have increased as well. In the current year, it is projected that the program will use reserves from the NCTF Trust Fund for the first time, as the funding for preparing over 900 future teachers is greater than the annual appropriation for the program. Using input from our data analytics partners, a plan has been created to project a program funding model through the 2030-2031 year. Based upon current legislative metrics and funding guidelines, we have reached a target capacity for actively enrolled students (approximately 1000). As such, we project that our incoming classes over that span will be smaller than the last two years as our enrollment numbers stabilize. These projections are based on current legislation and as such, any changes to legislation or funding allocations could necessitate adjustments to the forecasted program size.

Creation of State Assistant Director Position. With the growth of the Program, it was recognized that an additional leadership position was necessary to assist with not only the day-to-day operations of the Program, but to provide leadership and guidance to each of the campus directors to ensure continuity across the statewide program in student experiences and enrichment opportunities. Working with the UNC System leadership, the Director posted an Assistant Director position in Spring 2025 which attracted over 100 applicants. After multiple rounds of interviews, three finalists were invited to take part in the final selection process. The Program was pleased to hire Crystal Espey as the Assistant Director of the NCTF Program in May 2025. Crystal had previously served as the campus director at the largest NCTF institution, North Carolina State University. Her proven leadership of a successful NCTF Program identified her as a great addition to the staff. In her short time in the role, Crystal has already been integral in implementing professional development opportunities for campus directors, establishing partnerships between the program and other state agencies, and in facilitating improvements to the NCTF website and application.

Statewide Experiences. In the 2025-2026 academic year, the NCTF Program is instituting three additional statewide experiences. In April 2026, the Program will host a senior professional development day for Program completers. They will receive information relevant for emerging teachers, and the day will conclude with a celebratory reception for the graduates. The second is the return of the Discovery trip in May 2026. Students will visit various districts and regions to learn more about teaching in different areas of the state and promote job possibilities for these future teachers once they have completed their education. The final event is a planned Beginning Teacher/Teacher Fellows state conference to be held in June 2026. This event will feature multiple days of professional development for both current Fellows and Teaching Fellows alumni who are now beginning teachers across the state.

Program Director Professional Development Workshops. This year, the Program began providing bimonthly professional development workshops for campus directors to enhance student enrichment activities. The coordinated training is designed to allow campus directors the opportunity to network and learn from their peers so they can better serve their fellows. In addition, the directors are working at these events with state officials to plan statewide enrichment activities and visit local school districts in targeted recruitment areas. Finally, these two-day workshops also serve as host for Commission meetings to allow Commissioners the opportunity to visit with fellows and to learn more about campus initiatives and enrichments provided to NCTF participants.

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Continuing Initiatives and Program Strategies

As the Program has continued to grow, there are initiatives and strategic activities that continue to be a focus of the NCTF Program.

Early-Application Window. In 2023, the State Director and Commission implemented a shift to the application window for the Program. In all previous years, the application window for students had run from November to January with decisions being announced to applicants at the end of March. This timeframe was extremely late in the college application process and was seen as a possible reason why students were declining the award or not seeking the program altogether.

The early-action window launched in September 2023 and closed in November. This allowed for decisions to be made and announced to students in December 2023, matching the timeframe for them to make college decisions knowing they have been accepted into the NCTF program. The shifting window increased applications dramatically. In 2022-2023, there was a total of 161 completed applications. In the 2023 early-action window, there were 221 completed applications and in 2024, there were 307 applications.

The early-decision window has continued to show great promise. The 2025 early-action window, which ended on November 1st, 2025, had 222 applications. On December 19th, the NCTF Commission awarded 170 NCTF early-action awards for the Class of 2026. As of the publication of this report, there are 337 completed applications for the 2026 regular decision window and over 1,200 applications which have been started by interested candidates indicating the strong interest in the program by future teachers.

Advisory Board. G.S. 116-209.62(d)(ii) charges the State Director to “actively engage with educators, business leaders, experts in human resources, elected officials, and other community leaders in the state” in the coordination of the program. As such, Dr. Jones established an NCTF Advisory Board composed of representatives from various education stakeholder groups in North Carolina including teachers, principals, superintendents, NCTF alumni, school district employees, college and university staff, and non-profit education partners. The purpose of the Advisory Board is to provide ideas and feedback for the program, explore opportunities for partnerships and new teacher support initiatives, provide ideas for program enrichment and pre-service professional development activities, and to advocate for the NC Teaching Fellows Program across the state. The Advisory Board consists of over forty members for the 2025-2026 year.

District Pilot Recruitment Initiative. As stated in G.S. 116-209.62(d), the NCTF director “shall be responsible for recruitment and coordination of the Program, including proactive, aggressive, and strategic recruitment of potential recipients. Recruitment activities shall include targeting regions of the state with the highest teacher attrition rates and teacher recruitment challenges.” In a review of NCTF data as well as qualitative feedback from program participants, there continues to be a challenge in getting NCTF graduates to teach in more remote areas of the state, in identified low-wealth districts, and in low-performing schools.

In response, the Program has embarked upon a strategic recruitment effort with local public school units (PSUs) to promote both the Program and the teaching profession in their respective schools and communities. The concept is to create a pipeline of applicants and potential teachers to seek opportunities to engage in teacher preparation courses, pursue teacher licensure in an approved educator preparation program, and return to work in districts which continue to face recruitment and retention challenges.

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The district pilot initiative is addressing a goal of the NCTF Program to expand its recruiting efforts across the state in a targeted, strategic manner to find potential students, to help establish a pathway for students into the education profession and return them to classrooms in North Carolina public schools. The collaborative initiative seeks to enhance the NCTF Program while supporting grow-your-own platforms across the state. As part of the initiative, students receive professional development support and benefit from local teacher recruitment strategies. The initiative supports efforts to build a pipeline that will identify and train emerging teachers enrolled in secondary schools, current employees, and/or those employed in other sectors who can then pursue gainful employment as a licensed teacher in the participating district. The Program provides funding to support the recruitment efforts while districts actively promote the Program and the teaching profession. Districts participate in pilot collaboration efforts and must display a commitment to data collection, reporting, and continuous improvement.

Twenty partnering districts were identified and approved by the Commission in December 2023 for one-year terms. Of the 19 original district partners in 2024-2025 (one withdrew from consideration after being approved), 18 applied and were granted renewals to focus on one or more of the following areas for the 2025-2026 academic year:

- Personnel – districts may use funds for personnel to teach educator preparation courses in their districts. They may also use funds to provide stipends for mentoring or support of future teacher programs.
- Recruitment – districts may use funds to increase recruitment efforts of interested individuals to pursue enrollment in teacher preparation licensure programs and promote the NC Teaching Fellows Program.
- Professional Development activities – districts may use funds to provide preservice training and instructional support activities to aspiring teachers including current students and instructional support staff who desire to obtain teacher licensure.

The districts were selected by the Commission because of their commitment to teacher recruitment. These districts also face challenges in recruiting teachers due to geographic location, district size, or other challenging factors. Additionally, the 18 district partners represent all eight DPI regions across the state. District partners commit to sharing best practices in teacher recruitment and collaborating with the NCTF Program on activities and enrichments. For the 2025-2026 year, the partnering districts are:

Brunswick County Schools	Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Schools	Person County Schools
Caldwell County Schools	Granville County Schools	Rockingham County Schools
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	Harnett County Schools	Rowan-Salisbury Schools
Chatham County Schools	Henderson County Schools	Sampson County Schools
Clinton City Schools	Orange County Schools	Wayne County Public Schools
Edgecombe County Schools	Perquimans County Schools	Yadkin County Schools

Program Enrichments. A key element of the NCTF Program is providing meaningful enrichment opportunities to all program participants. North Carolina General Statute (NCGS) §116-209.62(f)(4) states that NCTF partner institutions should “provide curricular and co-curricular enhancements in leadership, facilitate learning for diverse learners, and promote community engagement, classroom management, and reflection and assessment.”

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NCTF provides funding for both statewide efforts and a per-pupil expenditure to each partner institution to support campus enhancement and enrichment opportunities for program participants.

Both campus enhancements and statewide enrichment activities align with the four areas of targeted professional development for NCTFP students as established by the Program and the Commission which are:

- Instructional Technology
- Coaching and Mentoring
- Literacy Components and Strategies
- Environmental Responsiveness

NCTF has allocated funds to provide content training and support to students to enhance their experiences in their EPP plan of study. Under the direction of a campus director, each of the partner institutions has an enrichment framework, designed to build community in a smaller setting among peers who attend the same institution. The campus-level enrichment opportunities are intentionally designed to be unique, allowing each institution to align to their respective program's particular areas of focus and to build organic partnerships within their respective communities. Campus activities have also included inviting guest speakers, facilitating instructional technology certifications, and offering Fellows the opportunity to become credentialed in Youth Mental Health & First Aid Training.

An additional layer of support is provided by state-level enrichment opportunities, which bring together the collective group of NCTF students from all partner institutions. These events are designed to build a powerful sense of community among all participants and to highlight topics to ensure a strong and cohesive vision for the broader mission and purpose of the Teaching Fellows program. The Program has partnered with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, TeachNC, Future Teachers of North Carolina (FTNC), SAS Institute, the North Carolina Association of School Administrators (NCASA), the Public School Forum of North Carolina, and the University of North Carolina System Office (UNCISO) among others to expand relevant and meaningful learning opportunities for program participants.

Next Steps and Program Advocacy

The NCTF Program application is open for 2026-2027 and will close on February 1st, 2026. After that time, all submitted applications, including those deferred in the early-action window, will undergo a review followed by a round of finalist video and/or interview evaluations. The Commission, per statute requirements, will make final decisions on the number of awards to be offered in March.

The NCTF Program will use campus fellows to actively recruit and promote the benefits of the program to potential applicants. The Program will also continue the formation of partnerships with local school units and educational partners in a collaborative effort to enhance the teacher preparation pipeline across the state, and most notably, in areas of the state that have the highest teacher attrition rates and recruitment challenges. Working with the partner institutions and with potential future legislative flexibility to use existing NCTF Trust Fund resources, the NCTF Program is poised to be a leader in the recruitment, preparation, and support of future teachers in North Carolina.

To enhance these efforts, the Commission has advocated for the following adjustments to the current guidelines to better serve Program participants and increase interest in the Program from perspective teachers.

1. Restructure of Awards of Forgivable Loans - G.S. 116-209.62(g) – Amend wording to read as such: “For individuals currently holding a bachelor's degree seeking preparation for teacher licensure, the Program shall provide forgivable loans of up to ten thousand dollars (\$10,000)

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per academic year for up to two academic years. For all other students, the Program shall provide forgivable loans of up to ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) per academic year for up to four academic years. Forgivable loans may be used for all expenses related to enrollment in an approved educator preparation program and obtaining licensure, including tuition, fees, and the cost of books." This becomes effective in the 2025-2026 academic year.

2. Repayment Clarification – there are currently students who are held under two (2) different repayment structures, the language below would clarify that all students would be under one repayment structure regardless of when they received their initial award.
 - G.S. 116-209.63 (b) – Amend wording to read as such: “For every year a qualifying teacher remains a qualifying teacher, the Authority shall forgive the loan amount received over one year of enrollment in an educator preparation program and any interest accrued on that amount.
 - Apply retroactively to Certain Teaching Fellows Revisions to rewrite Section 8A.4 of S.L. 203-134 – “This applies beginning in the 2024-2025 academic year to all students enrolled in an approved educator preparation program at an institution of higher education participating in the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program (Program) and receiving a forgivable loan under the Program in the 2024-2025 academic year and thereafter.”
3. Provide authority to the Commission to evaluate campus programs and create a competitive application process cycle for renewal and/or consideration of new institutional partners.

Conclusion

The NCTF Commission will meet in February, April, and June 2026. The UNC Board of Governors will appoint members to the Commission at its May 2026 meeting to serve two-year terms. The new Commission will hold its first meeting in September 2026. The next annual report from the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program will be submitted in January 2027. Please contact NCTF Director Dr. Bennett Jones at btjones@northcarolina.edu with any questions or comments concerning the NCTF Program or content of this annual report.