

“One day, all children in this nation will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education.”

Reimagining our Education System

For decades, Teach For America has been working alongside countless partners to fundamentally change our education system. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a traumatic but powerful way of making it clear just how deeply we need to reimagine education and ensure that students — especially those in low-income communities and in communities of color — are no longer left out and left behind.

When the crisis hit in March, despite the best efforts of teachers, administrators, and parents, the transition to remote learning and the socioeconomic trauma of the pandemic exacerbated educational inequities. This was a moment to reinvent the way we do things — both in our own organization and in education writ large.

It’s one thing to call for fundamental changes to our system, but it’s another to put that vision into action. We started with how we train our incoming corps members. Instead of our traditional in-person model, we completely redesigned our training program to meet the needs of the moment.



We prepared our corps with the tools and technical knowledge necessary to run a classroom online, we coached them on how to identify and manage the social and emotional needs of their students, and we brought in a variety of experts to develop and teach new techniques that would keep students across grade levels engaged and learning. As scary as it was to throw out our tried-and-true playbook, we were committed to being nimble in this time of crisis to not only ensure we meet the needs of our students, but to equip this next group of passionate and diverse leaders with the tools they need to be effective members of the educational equity movement.

And none of this would have been possible without each and every corps member who put their commitment to students and to educational equity ahead of the uncertainty and anxiety in their own lives during this crisis. As a result, Teach For America North Carolina’s corps members entered their virtual classrooms this year as some of the most prepared educators in the nation to meet this moment.

We held a panel discussion to dig into the specifics of how we quickly made this shift in our training model, the success we’ve seen from it so far, and what we learned from the experience to better equip incoming corps members for years to come. We were delighted to be joined by North Carolina State Senator Deanna Ballard who has been a fierce advocate for North Carolina students and discussed the work she’s been doing to help bring equity to our education system, especially during the pandemic.

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But this is about so much more than how we train teachers. Our network's commitment to ensuring students' success in



North Carolina has always gone well beyond the classroom. Before COVID hit, TFA alumni were hard at work fighting for educational equity here in the Tar Heel State — from establishing a nonprofit that expands opportunities for students of color (see Appendix I), to taking a new and innovative approach to how we reimagine our education system (see Appendix J), to tackling the unique challenges rural communities face (see Appendix K). And during the pandemic, we've seen our network rise to meet the new challenges COVID has presented, like delivering groceries to food insecure families (see Appendix B), fighting for reliable internet

access for all students (see Appendix C), and providing families the day time child care and tutoring assistance they might need (see Appendix D).

The innovation, agility, and commitment of our corps members and alumni has been extraordinary, and it has mirrored what we have seen from students, families, and educators across our state as we've navigated the educational realities of this pandemic. And while we work to meet the needs of our students in this moment, we must be clear that we cannot and will not go back to the status quo when the pandemic is over. Together with students, families, and teachers, we must take an honest look at what's working and what isn't — and make permanent systemic changes to ensure every single child growing up in North Carolina gets the education they deserve and need to succeed in life.

We now have an opportunity — and an obligation — to reimagine what comes next. We must shape a different future with our students, one that is more equitable, more just, and more fair. But it will take a coordinated and sustained approach from all North Carolinians who are invested in our children's future to build an innovative new education system that puts equity at the heart of education. The work to affect that change in our new normal might have started this spring to solve an immediate problem, but it cannot end when this crisis is behind us.

It isn't going to be easy — but genuine change for the better rarely is. We must continue pushing to finally knock down the barriers to educational equity and ensure that all children in our state and across the country are set up for success.

The North Carolina General Assembly's continued financial commitment for Teach For America made it possible for us to support and place teachers across the state. In 2020, we placed and supported nearly 300 first and second year teachers in 19 counties across North Carolina. We have built and support the sixth largest alumni base with over 1,700 Teach For America alumni living and leading towards educational equity in North Carolina. Today, approximately 80% of our alumni continue to lead in education or work with students and families in low-income communities.

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Teach For America's greatest contribution has always been the diverse, courageous leadership we bring to the state. We are a network of individuals who expand opportunity for children, working from classrooms, from schools, and from every sector, field, and place where people shape the broader systems in which schools operate. We remain thankful for the state's continued investment, which allows us to find promising leaders, develop and cultivate their leadership skills and mindsets through classroom teaching, and support them throughout their lifetime. We are pleased to update you on our progress as well as share our annual metrics (see appendix A).

Statewide Impact

Teach For America's greatest contribution continues to be the growing leadership force that we bring to North Carolina and support across our state. We are committed to leveraging the scale and diversity of our network to make sure we are learning faster and smarter. Below is a spotlight on two of the talented individuals in our network and the impact they are making in North Carolina. Continual transformation is happening in the Eastern part of our state, and the work of our alumni was recently featured in the *New York Times*.

"Edgecombe County Public Schools, a district about 75 miles east of Raleigh, N.C., that serves around 6,200 students — the majority of whom are low-income and high needs — began its own microschool in 2017, in collaboration with Transcend. The North Phillips School of Innovation was housed in the high school and had 30 eighth- and-ninth-grade students. Additional costs for curriculum and professional development, as well as hiring more staff, were minimal and covered by grants.

Edgecombe's superintendent, Valerie H. Bridges, said the microschool had two aims: to help students find purpose and passion in their lives and to strengthen their resilience. After one year, the students reported a significant increase in their sense of belonging and feelings of safety and their standardized test scores in reading and science went up.

The microschool has begun changing the design of the greater school system. It was expanded last year to include all eighth, ninth and 10th graders and this year, to all sixth- through 12th-grade students.

The district also created remote learning pods in response to coronavirus school closings, for students without Wi-Fi access or adequate adult supervision. Ms. Bridges sees opportunities for keeping these kinds of pods in the school system after the pandemic ends, potentially geared toward students with similar extracurricular interests or who need to work full time and might otherwise drop out." See Appendix E

Our continued organizational focus on creating diverse, equitable and inclusive is leading our alumni to create new, innovating ways of operating within educational spaces. An alumna, Janeen Bryant and former Charlotte-Piedmont Triad Board Member James Ford, are the co-founders of the Center for Racial Equity in Education (CREED). Read an excerpt from an EdNC article about the work they are doing.

"To be race-conscious means to see color intentionally as it pertains to the research," Ford said. "It means to include it as a variable — a central variable — not to mix it with socio-economics, not to mask it in cultural assumptions. It's to deliberately look at race as a factor and a variable in empirical research."

Bryant and Ford traveled the state, presenting their findings at some of the many convenings CREED has organized over the past year to engage with community.

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People aren't just showing up to hear what Bryant and Ford have to say, though.

"The community engagement cycle that I come from always listens to community first," Bryant said. "James was doing the research, and while he was doing the research we were checking in with community to see if it resonated with them. We were getting feedback about the research while he was doing the research. It's reciprocal."

Now, and in response, CREED provides a comprehensive array of engagement opportunities:

CREED Academy provides professional development, training equity-minded educators and building critical consciousness for stakeholders,

The REWire, a monthly email newsletter, curates race and education news, views, and research,

On The Margin, a podcast available on Apple and Spotify, is about capturing the often untold stories of educational equity in North Carolina, and

TeachingInColor is a professional learning network (PLN), including webinars and chats on Twitter @TeachInColorNC #TeachingInColor.

Through this reciprocity and engagement, something more was born. Belonging.

"It's so refreshing to be in a space where someone says, 'Yes, I see it, too,'" said Tinisha Shaw, a Guilford County educator who was drawn to CREED's work through a Teaching in Color convening. "It feels freeing. It's liberating." See Appendix F

We are grateful to be able to support our corps members and alumni throughout their careers as they work to impact education from a variety of sectors. We are thankful for the state's support that allows us to continue to cultivate our corps members' and alumni's leadership across North Carolina.

North Carolina Teacher Corps (NCTC)

Teach for America is committed to partnering with the state to inspire more North Carolinians to teach and lead as educators here. While we know great teachers exist across the nation, we believe that teachers with personal ties to North Carolina can make a unique contribution to our state, bringing a special sense of urgency and commitment to educating North Carolina's children.

There are currently 121 corps members who identify as part of the North Carolina Teaching Corps that are teaching in their first or second year in the classroom—over a third of our corps. Our NCTC corps members represent 26 different North Carolina colleges and universities including the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina State University, Duke University, Davidson College, and Wake Forest University. Our North Carolina connected corps members make up a diverse group of teachers and leaders across the state:

- The average GPA is 3.4
- 64% come from a low-income background¹
- 66% are people of color
- 43% are teaching math or science

¹ As identified by receiving a full or partial PELL Grant

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- 43% are the first in their families to graduate from college

Last year, we invested capacity and energy into a multi-year plan towards mobilizing our most positive influencers to advocate on behalf of Teach For America. We have found that by working with influencers on college campuses, we are able to steward relationships that endure year over year, provide reciprocity, and ultimately shape a more positive ecosystem to attract top prospects to our mission and organization. Results of our Fall 2019 Brand Health survey showed that campus word-of-mouth is the primary driver of brand awareness at most-selective campuses, accounting for roughly 60% of introductions to Teach For America.

We created new roles that were charged with designing, executing, and continually improving a set of influencer-led experiences to steward and convert mission-aligned candidates throughout their journey. This role was also in charge of developing and executing a set of rigorous experiments to generate learning outcomes for quality lead generation. These roles were able to deliver a series of innovative and high-quality experiences to maximize the recruitment of mission-aligned leaders.

Regional Updates

Eastern North Carolina

Our Corps Member and Alumni working in schools continue to find new ways of educating and operating in a COVID-19 work. Eastern North Carolina Corps Member **Ryan Bravin ('20)**, chatted with EdSurge to talk about his experience so far:

"Bravin's school in Eastern North Carolina—a high-need region with high teacher turnover—started the year on July 31, so he has had some time already to observe and adjust. As a high school English teacher working with a lot of freshmen, he has worked really hard in the first few weeks to get the students to warm up to each other and him.

"Their first days of high school were experienced behind a computer screen, at home. In that capacity, it's difficult for students to come out of their shells," he says. He was having them break into small groups to discuss a passage of the reading, and "they'd just look at each other and don't know what to say."

Now, he starts classes with a prompt. For example, "What's the coolest place you've been?" The students will free-write their responses for about five minutes, then he will select a few to share their answers. "We're able to find a lot of solidarity in how students think and the things they're interested in and things that bring value to their lives," Bravin says. It "helps create that community that is so desperately missed when you're not doing in-person instruction."

Bravin teaches three classes, for a total of about 60 students, from his desk in the high school building. Each class meets for an hour-and-a-half of live video instruction every day, five days a week. For Bravin, that's nearly five hours of Zoom calls a day.

It may be many months before he'll see his students in person. The school, he says, does not expect to reopen for face-to-face instruction before next spring." See Appendix G

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Charlotte

Access to viable technology continues to be a challenge for students across our state. At the beginning of the school year, **Paris Harrell (CPT 2016)** spoke with *Charlotte Agenda* about what access to technology would mean to students, and how it can be achieved:

“According to CMS’ chief technology officer Derek Root, 8,500 students/parents have reported a need for reliable internet access. In an email to the Agenda, Root estimated the need is actually closer to 16,000-18,000. The plan to get those additional hotspots is unclear.

Paris Harrell, a teacher at Windsor Park Elementary, says she spent the first three days of the school year apologizing to students with tablets but no internet access at home, because she didn’t have any way to help them. At Windsor Park almost half of the student body is classified as economically disadvantaged.

On Friday, August 14, two days before the first day of school, Harrell says the district notified her principal that the school wouldn’t get the additional hotspots its students need. Windsor Park is short 79 hotspots, Harrell says, and that doesn’t include the need for pre-k students.

“It’s not CMS saying we don’t want to help you; it’s that the need was far greater,” Harrell says. “Now that we know the need we have to rally together to make sure this is fixed because every single day that we don’t have these hotspots is a day that (some) kids are not learning and other kids are. And that’s where the equity gap comes in.”

There’s no roadmap for educating 140,000 students during a pandemic. Harrell says teachers spent the last few weeks reaching out to families and identifying which ones would need a hotspot for virtual learning.

She believes CMS leaders did what they could to prepare for the virtual start to the school year.

“The district wants to do things, but there’s something systemic that’s not working,” she says. “We have the right people in the field, why is this issue here and what can we do to fix it?” See Appendix H

North Carolina Piedmont Triad

Guilford County Schools is expanding their Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, and have chosen a North Carolina native and Teach For America Alumni, **Stephen Bell (Tulsa 2013)** as its first American Indian Education Coordinator. Stephen Bell is a member of the Lumbee Tribe and was born and raised in Greensboro, NC. Stephen began working as a middle school teacher after graduating from NC State. He later went on to get his Masters in Social Work with a concentration in Native American Communities from Washington University in St. Louis and continued to work in schools as a school social worker. Stephen is honored and excited to join the GCS Community to continue working with our young people, a drive that has been passed down through his family since his great grandfather.

Financial Reporting

Teach For America is steadfast in maximizing the state’s investment through fiscal responsibility and investing donors in our important work in North Carolina. We remain grateful for the state’s investment and are committed to making every public and private dollar work hard for students across our state. Our financial reporting for the 2019-2020 school year can be found in Appendix A.

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APPENDIX A

In addition to our reports, the state has requested an annual update on the information below. This chart contains information regarding Teach For America's operations from June 1, 2019- May 31, 2020

Legislative Language	Teach For America Results
Total number of applications received nationally from candidates seeking participation in the program	Teach For America received 56,645 applications
Total number of applications received from candidates who are residents of North Carolina and information on the source of these candidates, including the number of (i) recent college graduates and the higher institution the candidates attended, (ii) mid-career level and lateral entry industry professionals, and (iii) veterans of the United States Armed Forces	Teach For America received 2,130 applications from North Carolina residents. 320 were recent college graduates representing a range of colleges. The top five contributing colleges were: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and North Carolina State University 1270 were mid-career level and lateral entry industry professionals. 116 of these candidates were veterans of the military
The total number of North Carolina candidates accepted by TFA	Teach For America accepted 228 candidates from North Carolina.
The total number of accepted candidates placed in North Carolina, including the number of accepted candidates who are residents of North Carolina	247 were placed in North Carolina. Of these, 107 accepted applicants placed in North Carolina listed North Carolina as their hometown state or attended a North Carolina college or university.
The regions in which accepted candidates have been placed, the number of candidates in each region, and the number of students impacted by placement in those regions	Eastern North Carolina had an incoming corps of 80 teachers impacting over 3,800 students. Charlotte Piedmont Triad had an incoming corps of 89 teachers impacting over 5,000 students.
Success of recruitment efforts, including the Teach Back Home program and targeting candidates who are (i) working in areas related to STEM education, (ii) mid-career level and lateral entry industry professionals, and (iii) veterans of the United States Armed Forces	126 incoming teachers were STEM teachers. Five teachers in the incoming corps were veterans. 60 teachers in the incoming corps were mid-career level and lateral entry industry professionals.
Success of retention efforts, including the Teach Beyond Two and Make it Home programs, and the percentage of accepted candidates working in their placement communities beyond the initial TFA two-year commitment period and the number of years those candidates teach beyond the initial commitment	Our alumni base across the state of North Carolina has grown from 1,623 last year to 1,716 this year* Of 2016 corps members placed in our Teach For America North Carolina regions, 80% of them remained in North Carolina—a three percent increase from last year. Of those, 65% remained teaching*
The total number of Teach For America alumni school leaders (assistant principals, deans, or principals)	There are currently 119 Teach For America alumni working as school leaders across North Carolina*

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**This includes only FY19 alumni survey data. All alumni employment data is self-reported, largely on our annual survey.*

Category	Eastern North Carolina	Charlotte Piedmont Triad
Funds expended by region of the state	2,868,591	3,131,409
Recruitment, candidate selection, and placement	937,012	1,141,737
Preservice training and preparation costs	252,023	130,090
Professional development and support	1,418,990	1,580,745
Alumni Support	260,565	278,837
Public Affairs & Engagement	-	-
Human Assets	-	-
Office of the CEOs	-	-
Administration	-	-
Information & Technology	-	-
Finance	-	-

Funds received though private fundraising, specifically by sources in each region of the state		
	Eastern North Carolina	Charlotte-Piedmont Triad
Foundation	620,500	840,300
Individual	95,639	840,846
Corporate	99,000	529,500

CMS teacher delivers emergency groceries to students and their families during COVID-19 crisis



By [Kathy Izard](#) | April 12, 2020

Views: 4,855

In mid-March, Paris Harrell received a group text from her friend asking, “What can we do to help the kids in your class?”

The group of seven girlfriends, all in their 20s, regularly communicate on a thread, and earlier in the year, they helped buy books for her students.

While Paris is technically a second-grade teacher at Windsor Park Elementary School, she has an unofficial role as a parent and family advocate at the Title 1 school, which has a high number of low income and immigrant families. In Paris’s class alone there are 20 children who speak half a dozen languages and represent over 14 countries.

With the COVID-19 crisis hitting families hard, normally, Paris would have already reached out to her friends with ideas to help, but Paris’s grandfather had just died. While he was not a victim of the coronavirus, his funeral was, as large gatherings are no longer an option.

“It was just me and my mom,” Paris said. “It was so sad.”

After a small celebration of her grandfather’s life on March 17, Paris returned to Charlotte once again committed full-time to the challenges of her classroom.

Knowing many in the Windsor Wildcats family were struggling with groceries even before food shelves were being emptied for coronavirus stockpiling, Paris suggested her friends contribute to a grocery fund. With their donations, Paris made the first delivery the day after the funeral on March 18 and since then, it has been a spiral of good.

Everyone in the school from the principal, Shanna Rae, to teacher assistants have played a part in the program and donated much of the \$3,000 Paris has raised.

Paris shops for groceries at the Food Lion near Windsor Park Elementary.

When Paris started making deliveries, she’d head out every day. Now, in order to limit exposure, Paris makes two deliveries to over 70 families every week. The families’ emergency needs are achingly simple: beans, rice, bread, milk, bologna.

When Paris and her fiancé, Avery Speight, make deliveries, practicing social distancing can be difficult, but essential. The children, who know her as “Miss Harrell,” run out to her car and attempt hugs.

"When can we come back?" they ask in English, in Spanish, or in Vietnamese. They may speak different languages, but they all want the same thing: to be in community again.

Delivery days can take up to five hours, so Paris uses an app called RouteXL that makes her route more efficient.

One day, she got lost and Paris was frustrated to think she wasted 20 minutes heading into the wrong neighborhood. As Paris was turning around in a stranger's driveway, the homeowner pulled up and asked what she was doing with the bags of groceries loaded in the back of her car. After Paris explained her new program, the woman's face lit up.

"My husband delivers bread!" she said and gave Paris 50 free loaves.

"That is what I am learning in all this," Paris said. "Even when things seem wrong, they lead us to a beautiful place. Coronavirus is terrible, but we are seeing a lot of God moments through this as well."

CMS estimates 18,000 students could still need internet access



By [Paige Hopkins](#) | *August 19, 2020*
Views: 5,254

While CMS students have laptops or tablets to facilitate virtual learning, thousands of them are still without reliable wifi access, rendering those devices useless for online classes.

According to CMS' chief technology officer Derek Root, 8,500 students/parents have reported a need for reliable internet access. In an email to the Agenda, Root estimated the need is actually closer to 16,000-18,000. The plan to get those additional hotspots is unclear.

Paris Harrell, a teacher at Windsor Park Elementary, says she spent the first three days of the school year apologizing to students with tablets but no internet access at home, because she didn't have any way to help them. At Windsor Park almost half of the student body is classified as [economically disadvantaged](#).

On Friday, August 14, two days before the first day of school, Harrell says the district notified her principal that the school wouldn't get the additional hotspots its students need. Windsor Park is short 79 hotspots, Harrell says, and that doesn't include the need for pre-k students.

"It's not CMS saying we don't want to help you; it's that the need was far greater," Harrell says. "Now that we know the need we have to rally together to make sure this is fixed because every single day that we don't have these hotspots is a day that (some) kids are not learning and other kids are. And that's where the equity gap comes in."

There's no roadmap for educating 140,000 students during a pandemic. Harrell says teachers spent the last few weeks reaching out to families and identifying which ones would need a hotspot for virtual learning.

She believes CMS leaders did what they could to prepare for the virtual start to the school year.

"The district wants to do things, but there's something systemic that's not working," she says. "We have the right people in the field, why is this issue here and what can we do to fix it?"

Since school started on Monday, Harrell has helped with in-person live tech hours at Windsor Park for families with questions about their devices. Most families she meets with aren't experiencing any tech kinks. They just need wifi access.

"Families come up here asking for help and it feels terrible having to tell a kid 'I'm sorry, we can't help you. We don't know when we're going to get your internet,'" she says.

The CMS foundation raised \$1 million to buy 6,000 hotspots to help students without internet at home. But that wasn't enough. Now the foundation needs [additional donations](#) to buy additional hotspots. (Those donating can specify what their donation will go toward and which school it will benefit.)

“There’s a huge digital divide,” Harrell says. “Kids who can afford internet are learning; kids who cannot afford internet are not.”

During the spring semester, when the state first moved to virtual learning, Spectrum offered free internet service for one month. Many Windsor Park families took advantage of the free service.

It wasn’t clear, however, to many of the Spanish-speaking families that they’d need to cancel their service before the month ended to avoid being roped into a contract with Spectrum. As a result, families were left with Internet service bills they couldn’t afford.

“So many of our families ended up getting billed with all of these charges because it was not very clear to them that they had to cancel,” Harrell says. “So we had to use money raised for student needs to help pay some of these bills.”

Harrell, who has a history of going above and beyond for her students, fears some families may sign up for internet service that they can’t afford just to ensure their children can get an education.

[Related Agenda story: [CMS teacher delivers emergency groceries to students and their families during COVID-19 crisis](#)]

But, better news came Wednesday afternoon when she started hearing from [community members who were donating](#) to the CMS Foundation, so she’s staying positive.

“I’d like to say that I am always hopeful because I believe in the goodness of people. For me to say I don’t think it’s going to get fixed would be against who I am as an individual,” she says.

Nonprofits step in to help working parents making “impossible choices”

As schools put off reopening in person, parents desperate for help have turned to a handful of organizations trying to provide affordable child care

by **JACKIE MADER** October 1, 2020

The Hechinger Report is a national nonprofit newsroom that reports on one topic: education. Sign up for our [weekly newsletters](#) to get stories like this delivered directly to your inbox.

Students work on a project during an Urban Promise summer program. The nonprofit pivoted to provide full-day care and distance learning supervision this summer. Credit: Brooke Brown Photography/Urban Promise

When schools in northern California shut down in mid-March due to the coronavirus, Casino Fajardo and his wife did their best to balance watching their children while working full-time. For several months, they switched off supervising their children, 5 and 9, while taking back-to-back video calls and responding to in-person work responsibilities, which were at times required for Fajardo in his role as construction director for a local school district. Both often stayed up until midnight or later to catch up on work.

It was impossible to provide much attention to their kids. “Honestly, other than turning around to make sure they’re not breaking something or making sure they have a snack, it’s difficult for us to really be engaged with them,” Fajardo said. They knew they needed help, especially with more distance learning looming as the school year began.

But they had few options. Their children’s grandparents are elderly and more at risk of contracting coronavirus. Joining a “pod” with several families would be complicated and expensive; some parents

are spending upwards of \$1,000 a month per child to do so this year. Instead, the Fajardo's turned to their local YMCA for help. Their children began attending a local center for daily care that evolved into distance learning support when school started in August.

At the Y, their children receive meals, time to play outside and extension activities, like science class, all at a cost that is subsidized for many families and free to others, depending on the location of the center and each family's income.

The continuation of distance learning has put millions of families in an untenable position: in 2019, 76 percent of mothers and 92 percent of fathers whose youngest child was between the age of 6 and 17 were employed. Affluent parents have turned to pricey options such as pods, tutoring centers or karate and dance studios that have transformed to offer distance learning supervision (some advertise prices that run upwards of \$14,000 each semester). But a few organizations, including the YMCA, have stepped up to provide crucial, free or affordable child care assistance.

"Normally, it's only in the afterschool hours [when parents decide], 'Do I go to work to earn money for my family and leave my kids at home alone ... or do I forego work during those hours and be present with my children but forego making a salary to support my children?' Now instead of making that decision three hours a day, they're making that decision the entire day."

Jimmy McQuilkin, executive director of Urban Promise.

Urban Promise, a nonprofit that runs a summer camp, afterschool program and mentorship program for children and teenagers in Charlotte, North Carolina, is one of them. This school year, the organization has pivoted to all-day care and distance learning support for more than 200 children who live in low-income neighborhoods in the city.

“Normally, it’s only in the afterschool hours [when parents decide], ‘Do I go to work to earn money for my family and leave my kids at home alone ... or do I forego work during those hours and be present with my children but forego making a salary to support my children?’” said Jimmy McQuilkin, executive director of Urban Promise. “Now instead of making that decision three hours a day, they’re making that decision the entire day.”

McQuilkin said Urban Promise hopes to solve “the impossible choice” parents are facing. This school year, the nonprofit will host small groups of students at several churches around the city supervised by classroom facilitators at no cost for parents. Children will receive breakfast and lunch each day and enrichment activities like art in the afternoon.

As these organizations step up to provide child care and supervision, there are still immense challenges. The YMCA typically relies on college students to staff its afterschool program, but those students aren’t necessarily available during the day. And Urban Promise will spend more than \$200,000 this year for 30 to 35 new staff members who will supervise small groups of students, on top of its regular program expenses. Organizations also have to account for added costs for cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment for employees.

Program officials say they’re determined to overcome these challenges. “The reality we know now is children in low-income families fell further behind in the spring and I think that was accentuated with the normal summer learning loss,” McQuilkin said. “There is academic urgency of making sure this is a school year when students don’t fall further behind.”

For Fajardo, having affordable child care has boosted the academic success of his children. It’s also helped everyone’s mental health. He and his wife have been able to work full time once again during the day and his children have received more attention and support with their

schoolwork than they would have received at home. “I don’t know what we would do without the YMCA being available,” Fajardo said. “It’s reduced our stress tremendously.”

Editor’s note: This story led off this week’s Early Childhood newsletter, which is delivered free to subscribers’ inboxes every other Wednesday with trends and top stories about early learning. [Subscribe today!](#)

This story about [affordable child care](#) was produced by The Hechinger Report, a nonprofit, independent news outlet focused on innovation and inequality in education. Sign up for our newsletters [here](#).

In Pandemic's Wake, Learning Pods and Microschools Take Root

By Eilene Zimmerman

- Oct. 14, 2020

In March, when the coronavirus shut down schools in Portland, Ore., Juliet Travis was desperate to find ways to engage her 12-year-old son. The public schools' remote-learning efforts were hit-or-miss at best, she said, so she signed him up for [Outschool](#), which provides live, virtual classes and allows students to invite their friends to join them.

"I was trying to keep his education going and make it fun," she said.

This fall, Ms. Travis and the parents of several of her son's friends decided to create some semblance of school. "We podded up," she said. In addition to Outschool classes, Ms. Travis hired a retired teacher to go to their homes once a week and augment the public school's history and English curriculum. And a trainer from a local gym conducts physical education classes twice a week in a driveway or garage.

The cost of these learning pods varies, and Ms. Travis said hers was \$40 per week per child for the teacher and the fitness trainer. Outschool classes average \$10 per class, and families in financial need can access classes free through the company's nonprofit arm, [Outschool.org](#).

"The pandemic has launched the largest educational innovation experiment in the history of mankind," says Sujata Bhatt, a senior fellow at Transcend, a national nonprofit that helps communities and school districts create innovative, equitable learning environments.

Parents are increasingly turning to microschools — very small schools that usually have a specific culture — and learning pods. Microschools can be based outside or inside a home, and may or may not be state-approved and accredited. Learning pods are generally ad hoc and home-based, most having been created this summer in response to public school closings. (The [Pandemic Pods Facebook page](#) has more than 41,000 members.)

Like the one Ms. Travis started, learning pods are often a mix of the public school's remote curriculum, supervised care and enrichment activities.

"So much personal growth takes place in school," Ms. Travis said. "My son needed to be learning with other kids."

True microschools, however, predated the pandemic. [Jerry Mintz](#) and the organization he founded, Alternative Education Resource Organization, have been helping parents and educators start “learner centered” schools, including microschools, since 1989.

“Here is the basic difference in the schools in our network and regular schools: We believe kids are natural learners and the job of the educator is to help kids find resources; they are more guides than teachers,” Mr. Mintz said.

CORONAVIRUS SCHOOLS BRIEFING:

This is a consistent theme among microschools: the desire to let students steer the learning. Rather than giving answers and solving problems for students, many microschool educators guide students toward finding the answers themselves.

The mission of [NOLA Micro Schools](#), founded in 2015 in New Orleans, is to have learning driven by the “unique passions, struggles and curiosities of our students.” All the students — elementary, middle and high school age — learn together in one physical space, “a modern-day one-room schoolhouse,” said the head-of-school, Ashley Redd. Tuition is \$9,000 annually, but NOLA offers a sliding-scale tuition for those in need.

[LEADprep](#), a microschool with two Seattle-area campuses, was founded in 2013 by Maureen O’Shaughnessy, a career school administrator with a Ph.D. in education leadership. The schools serve children in middle and high school and each campus is capped at 30, with an average student-teacher ratio of five to one.

“In a microschool, if you master things quickly, you move ahead quickly, but if you need more time, learning is slowed down so you can fill in the gaps,” Ms. O’Shaughnessy said. Tuition is \$25,000 a year but 40 percent of families receive financial aid. “It’s basically a sliding scale,” she said. “We never turn a family away.”

[Edgecombe County Public Schools](#), a district about 75 miles east of Raleigh, N.C., that serves around 6,200 students — the majority of whom are low-income and high needs — began its own microschool in 2017, in collaboration with Transcend. The North Phillips School of Innovation was housed in the high school and had 30 eighth- and-ninth-grade students. Additional costs for curriculum and professional development, as well as hiring more staff, were minimal and covered by grants.

Edgecombe’s superintendent, Valerie H. Bridges, said the microschool had two aims: to help students find purpose and passion in their lives and to strengthen their resilience. After one year, the students reported a significant increase in their sense of belonging and feelings of safety and their standardized test scores in reading and science went up.

The microschool has begun changing the design of the greater school system. It was expanded last year to include all eighth, ninth and 10th graders and this year, to all sixth- through 12th-grade students. The district also created remote learning pods in response to coronavirus school closings, for students without Wi-Fi access or adequate adult supervision. Ms. Bridges sees opportunities for keeping these kinds of pods in the

school system after the pandemic ends, potentially geared toward students with similar extracurricular interests or who need to work full time and might otherwise drop out.

For both learning pods and independent microschools, there is a growing need for supportive technology. Several companies already existed in this space, like [Curacubby](#), which offers administrative software for enrollment, billing and payment processing, and [Prenda](#), which provides the academic tools needed to run a microschool, including Chromebooks and Wi-Fi filters for internet safety.

When the pandemic hit, about 700 students were participating in microschools supported by Prenda, mostly in charter public schools in Arizona; by October, that grew to more than 3,000, and the number of microschools jumped to 326 from 126. The company just expanded to Colorado.

Other education technology companies are adapting to meet the pandemic-driven needs of parents. [Outschool](#) is a marketplace of live, online classes often taught in creative ways, like teaching architecture through the game [Minecraft](#) or Spanish through translations of Taylor Swift songs.

The company is trying to keep up with a 2,000 percent year-over-year increase in classes booked; it went from 80,000 students on its platform in February to more than 500,000 today.

“We’re investing very heavily in increasing the number of teachers and teaching tools, because the range of demands are changing,” said Amir Nathoo, the chief executive and co-founder. “And the social component has become even more important.”

[SchoolHouse](#), which launched in New York City right before the pandemic, was originally created to help teachers start their own microschools. The teachers on its platform had taken a year off to prepare, but when the pandemic struck, those plans were put on hold and SchoolHouse pivoted.

It had a community of teachers on sabbatical and lots of families contacting the company in search of microschools. Joseph Connor, SchoolHouse’s co-founder and chief operating officer, said the company decided to set up its own microschools, which it calls pod schools. The teachers became full-time employees with benefits and general commercial insurance, and they were connected to pods of eight students.

Tuition averages \$14,000 a year per student, Mr. Connor said, but SchoolHouse also offers pods the option to use a sliding scale, where some families pay more and others attend free. SchoolHouse hit its five-year business goal in about five months.

“We really think this is a better way to learn and that even when there is a vaccine, people will continue to choose us,” Mr. Connor said. “We already have parents asking if this will be available next year.”

When they couldn't find a place that centered race in education, CREED's co-founders created one

 ednc.org/when-they-couldnt-find-a-place-that-centered-race-in-education-creeds-co-founders-created-one/

October 22, 2020



Janeen Bryant (left) and James Ford are co-founders of the Center for Racial Equity in Education (CREED). Courtesy CREED.

This year, Durham-based MDC chose nine organizations to join a program called “Learning for Equity: A Network of Solutions” — or LENS-NC. The program aims to improve outcomes for students at the intersection of race, income, and learning differences. This article on CREED’s work centering race in education is part of a series introducing our readers to these nine organizations.

Editor’s note: Through a grant from the Kenan Charitable Trust, James Ford was on contract with the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research from 2017-2020 leading a statewide study of equity in our schools. The Center is affiliated with EducationNC. Ford

launched the Center for Racial Equity in Education (CREED) during the grant, and he now serves as the executive director.

Janeen Bryant and James Ford wanted to work at a place that spoke aloud about all the ways race shows up in education — a place that worked to close race-based opportunity gaps.

They just couldn't find it. "There were places where it was part of their work, but not the centerpiece," Ford said.

"If it's not there, we had to build it."

That seed has grown into the Center for Racial Equity in Education, known as CREED.

CREED conducts race-conscious research that interrogates how race shows up in schooling. Alongside the research, it engages people in the community who care about disrupting a system that isn't working.

Then, it goes one step further — to actually do something about it.

A partner in prioritizing race in education

The idea that became CREED started forming after Ford traveled the state five years ago as North Carolina's teacher of the year.

As a social studies teacher at Garinger High School in Charlotte, he knew something was happening to his Black and Brown students. It showed up in how they were treated, how they felt at school, and the opportunities they were given (or not given).

Traveling the state, he realized the problem was pervasive. He started talking and writing about it.

"It was not a welcome conversation at the time," Ford said.

Ford wanted to create a place that centered this conversation but went further, to tackling the problem. He knew he couldn't do that alone.

A man of faith, Ford prayed. And Bryant's name popped into his head.

Bryant met Ford when Ford was speaking about systems of white supremacy years ago. She was surprised at the directness of his message and his willingness to speak unpopular facts, she recalled. They connected and stayed in touch.

When Ford contacted her about his idea almost two years ago, she was designing programs, curriculum, and discussion opportunities through her consulting firm. But she felt her work wasn't complete.

“I could not tie that directly to, ‘What do we do about it?’,” she said. “My whole career journey has been looking for a place where I can come as a whole person.”

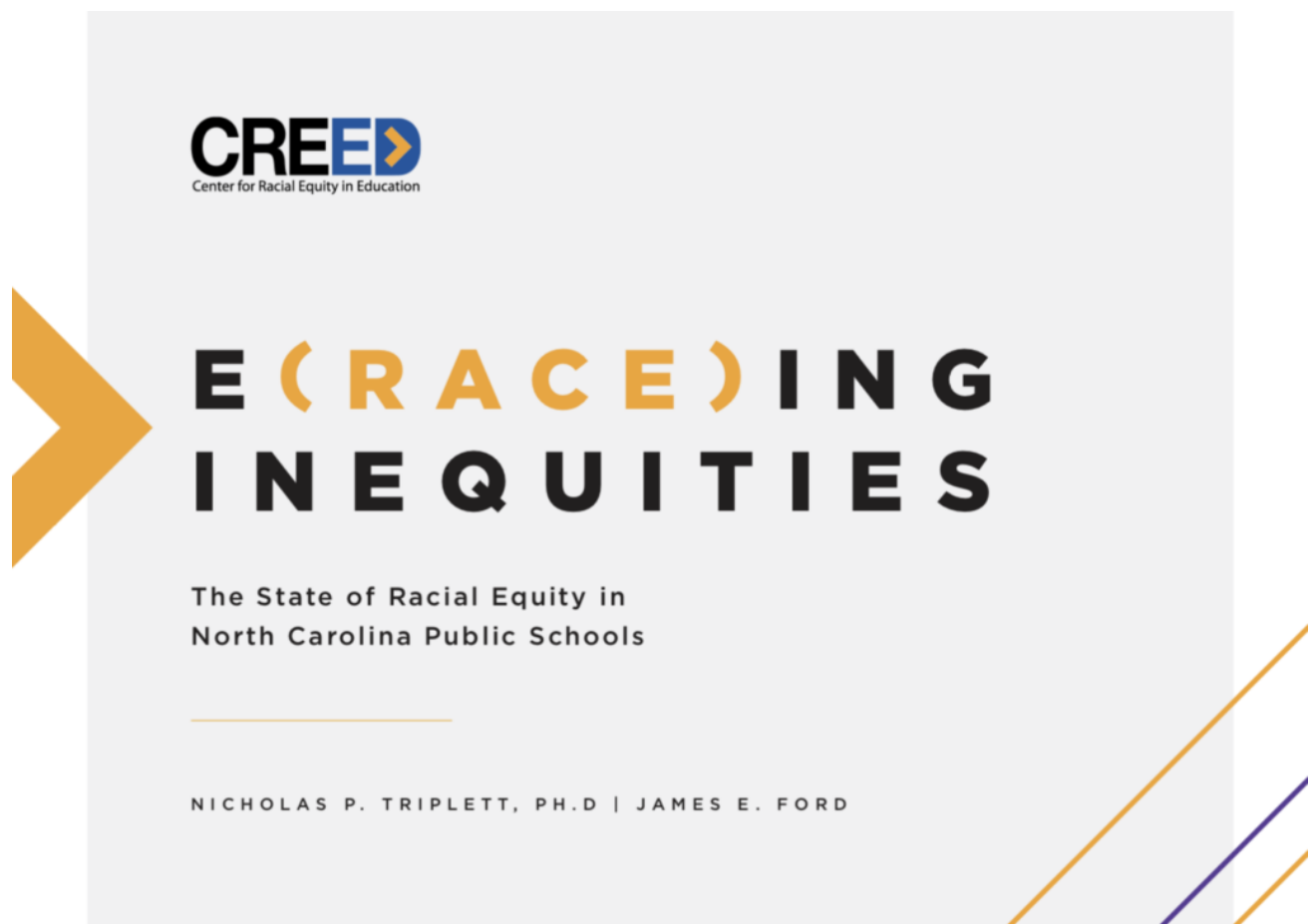
CREED was that opportunity. A way for each of them to create the work they had long wanted to do.

“I get to show up in a space, work with someone else who is also aligned and really drive toward impact and action,” Bryant said. “I don’t want to talk about it anymore — I want to *be* about it.”

Race-conscious work and reciprocal engagement

The first set of research CREED did looked exhaustively at race and education in North Carolina.

The Deep Rooted report provided historical context. Its companion report, E(race)ing Inequities, provided quantifiable evidence for what they had long felt was true.



Other studies had presented some of the findings CREED published, but none was as comprehensive. Or as singularly focused on intentionally examining and centering race.

“To be race-conscious means to see color intentionally as it pertains to the research,” Ford said. “It means to include it as a variable — a central variable — not to mix it with socio-economics, not to mask it in cultural assumptions. It’s to deliberately look at race as a factor and a variable in empirical research.”

Bryant and Ford traveled the state, presenting their findings at some of the many convenings CREED has organized over the past year to engage with community.

People aren’t just showing up to hear what Bryant and Ford have to say, though.

“The community engagement cycle that I come from always listens to community first,” Bryant said. “James was doing the research, and while he was doing the research we were checking in with community to see if it resonated with them. We were getting feedback about the research while he was doing the research. It’s reciprocal.”

Now, and in response, CREED provides a comprehensive array of engagement opportunities:

- [CREED Academy](#) provides professional development, training equity-minded educators and building critical consciousness for stakeholders,
- [The REWire](#), a monthly email newsletter, curates race and education news, views, and research,
- On The Margin, a podcast available on [Apple](#) and [Spotify](#), is about capturing the often untold stories of educational equity in North Carolina, and
- [TeachingInColor](#) is a professional learning network (PLN), including webinars and chats on Twitter [@TeachInColorNC](#) [#TeachingInColor](#).

Through this reciprocity and engagement, something more was born. Belonging.

“It’s so refreshing to be in a space where someone says, ‘Yes, I see it, too,’” said Tinisha Shaw, a Guilford County educator who was drawn to CREED’s work through a Teaching in Color convening. “It feels freeing. It’s liberating.”

Moving beyond research and talk to racially equitable practices

While CREED’s research and convenings have empowered and engaged communities, the goal has always been to close the “knowing-doing” gap.

CREED has worked with dozens of districts on learning and development. It has had extensive relationships with three public school units, providing coaching on how to implement equitable policy.

“We never wanted to be a think tank,” said Ford, quickly adding that he think tanks fill a necessary role. “We’re not a think tank. We’re an educational research-to-practice organization. So when Janeen talks about doing, that was always the angle.”

Tinisha Shaw is a social-emotional learning specialist in Guilford County Schools. CREED's focus on action immediately got her attention.

"I was like, yes, I've been looking for this," she said. "I've been looking for a space where [there were] people with common ideas about education and who wanted to do something about it. Not just talk about it and complain, but actually get together and organize to transform the system."

When Shaw speaks, you can hear how personal this is to her. It's that way for CREED's co-founders, too. They are both parents and say they are deeply committed to the state's students — Black, Brown, Indigenous, white, Asian — all of them.

"This is not some theoretical abstract for us," Bryant said. "This is real. When I talk about urgency, I mean that this is urgent for us, personally."

Building coalition

The work is personal for thousands of others across the state. One of CREED's biggest efforts is bringing these thousands together to build coalition.

CREED launched its Freedom Hill Coalition this year. Named after the first settlement in the country established by formerly enslaved people, a settlement in present-day Edgecombe County, Freedom Hill Coalition is a statewide organization of change-makers.

The coalition will help inform CREED's efforts. The hope is also that the coalition can be vocal at all levels of education — in schools, districts and state government.

CREED held its first large-scale convening of Freedom Hill Coalition virtually in June. The movement has grown to 350 members who are now organizing locally and also engage with one another on Twitter — using the #IStandOnFreedomHill hashtag.

"It is my sincerest desire that Freedom Hill grows into a formidable force of public-facing, respected and organized individuals and organizations that are pushing an agenda for racial equity," Ford said. "I hope we will be able to look back after the next year and see significant changes in policy."

Shaw, who is organizing a Freedom Hill group in the Piedmont Triad area, doesn't think these desires are far-fetched.

She said she believes that Ford and Bryant are the right leaders for this moment, and that the way they are building a network is rooted in successful movements of the past.

"James and Janeen are really building on the tradition of the civil rights movement," she said. "They're building coalition and listening to the past and really connecting with the community. I appreciate that they're bringing that tradition back. It can really have an

impact on North Carolina — and on the country.”

Feature Equity LENS-NC

Rupen Fofaria

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Rupen Fofaria is the equity and learning differences reporter at EducationNC. He exists to shine light, including by telling stories about under-reported issues.



The Newest Teach for America Corps Is Preparing for a Year Like No Other

By [Emily Tate](#)

Aug 28, 2020



Ryan Bravin has reported to his classroom every day for the last few weeks to teach English to ninth and 10th graders at his school, located in Vance County in Eastern North Carolina.

He leads discussions on literature from behind his desk. But there's no one else in the room. All his students are logging in from home.

It's not quite the experience Bravin had envisioned when he applied to join Teach for America during his junior year of college. Nor is it the experience that he thought he'd be getting when he agreed to move 2,100 miles, from Arizona to North Carolina.

For Bravin, who had not gone to college with intentions of becoming an educator, the global pandemic and the subsequent nationwide experiment with remote learning might have dampened his enthusiasm for [Teach for America](#), which recruits young people—often recent college graduates—to teach in under-resourced communities for at least two years.

But even as his first year in the classroom was thrown into question, and then dramatically transformed, Bravin was not deterred.

When the pandemic first hit the U.S. in March, "the main thing immediately flooding my head was, 'Oh, my goodness, I may not get to do this at all,'" Bravin recalls. "In the midst of everything canceled—from graduation to trips I had planned—the prevailing thought was, 'I may not get to do Teach for America.'"

As the pandemic persisted, Bravin wasn't wondering or worrying about how Teach for America may not be the experience he'd originally signed up for. Instead, he became more resolute about its mission.

The more I saw people struggle with online learning, it convinced me this work is more important now than it ever was."

-Ryan Bravin, 2020 corps member in Eastern North Carolina

"If anything I think I was more committed to joining," Bravin says. "A lot of people in my life—friends and family members—were like, 'Maybe you should not teach. Maybe you should stick around and work the job you have now.' But the more I saw people struggle with online learning, it convinced me this work is more important now than it ever was."

It's too soon to say how the pandemic will impact retention of Teach for America's 2020 corps members—the organization won't have complete data until all of the schools it serves have had their first day and can tally how many of the 3,000 incoming corps members show up to teach (in person and remotely). But staff at Teach for America suspect COVID-19 will only bolster their corps members' commitment to teaching and supporting students.

"I would put money on it, and I'd bet that we're going to have higher retention through the first day of school and even through the end of the school year, because of just how much energy there is for equity work," says LaNiesha Cobb Sanders, senior vice president of teacher leadership development at Teach for America.

In addition to counting who shows up on the first day of school, Teach for America also measures retention by tallying how many of the corps members who were hired show up for summer training. This year's numbers were higher than average, Cobb Sanders says. And anecdotally, she and her colleague ChaKia Parham, the vice president of institute and program implementation at Teach for America, are hearing a lot of corps members echo Bravin's sentiment: The pandemic has illustrated some of the inequities in education, and spurred them to want to be part of the solution.

That's true for Prince Islam, a 2020 corps member teaching in New York City this fall. His school is starting in a fully virtual setting on Aug. 31.

"For me, personally, I didn't have any second thoughts, because I've always just wanted to be in the classroom. It's more so thinking about what I want to do differently in the classroom," he explains. "What are the ends I'm seeking in my classroom? How can I achieve those ends? How can I build community in a virtual setting?"

Virtual Teacher Training

Parham, who was traveling to different Teach for America regions up until the end of February, says that within a week or two of the COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S., Teach for America staff realized that a traditional summer training experience on college campuses was not going to be feasible.

“We had to pivot really fast,” says Parham. “We asked ourselves, given what is happening in our country, and happening in our schools, ‘What needs to be our path forward this summer?’”

The organization decided on March 27 that it would do a fully virtual summer teacher training for 2020 corps members.

Between then and June 4, when the training would start, staff reoriented their training program for a virtual setting, Parham says, in a way that still allowed corps members to learn the foundational teaching skills and build community with one another.

“It was quick. It was agile. And it was scrappy in some ways,” Parham describes.

Ordinarily, Teach for America holds about 19 summer institutes at college campuses across the country. Members teach summer school during the day and attend teacher training in the afternoons. The virtual training, held for four weeks from June to July, brought all 3,000 corps members together at once.

Given the constraints of an online setting, the staff had to “get really, really clear” about what was most essential for corps members to take away, says Parham. They decided to focus on instruction and pedagogy; learning environments (since some would teach in person, and others in hybrid or fully virtual settings); diversity, equity and inclusion; and reflection.

The training included six hours a day of synchronous learning, then asynchronous work later for reading, reflection and lesson planning. It was intended to be as rigorous and high quality as an in-person experience, Parham says.

During the virtual summer training, corps members taught reading and literacy virtually to children in grades K-3 through the student-coaching company Springboard Collaborative, as a way to practice engaging with students, working through lessons, setting and reaching goals, and meeting with parents and families.

“It’s not the traditional classroom environment with a desk in front of you and a blackboard,” says Islam, one of the 2020 corps members. “But you can set goals, [such as], ‘I want them to master this particular skill with phonics.’ In terms of communication and goal-setting, that’s really important to your teaching, and I got to work on those.”

Teach for America also used a platform, Teaching Channel, so corps members could watch existing videos of teachers giving lessons in a class, as well as record and upload videos of themselves teaching.

Corps members were broken up into cohorts of 40-50 people for most training, and then divided into pods of four or five, Parham says. In their pods, they would rehearse lessons for the first time with each other, which for many can be intimidating or make them feel

vulnerable. It was in those pods that most members developed strong bonds with each other, Parham says, since “pods served as a place for rehearsal, reflection and feedback.”

After the four weeks, corps members did some additional training within their regions. They will also each receive ongoing support and professional development from Teach for America during the first three months of the school year.

Parham says she and her colleagues were bracing for the reality that many corps members may want to defer their spots for another year. Corps members committed to Teach for America with expectations of working alongside colleagues and teaching students in person—an experience that some may not get at all this year.

“We were very surprised to find out corps members were really excited—nervous and scared, definitely—but corps members came online,” she says. “We didn’t see a huge dropoff in our corps size throughout the summer.”

Parham adds: “For the 2020 corps, they were so much clearer about the need for teachers. ... Teachers are truly essential workers. They are doing incredible work, not only for our students, but for this country. And [corps members] were able to see up close and personal the inequities that live within our education system and think about the schools they may have come from and the access to technology that they had in their schools, and how it would’ve been for them to transition to virtual training.”

‘I Know What It’s Like’

Something that the vast majority of 2020 corps members—and all first-year teachers, for that matter—will be bringing with them this fall is their own experience with virtual learning. It wasn’t that long ago that many of them were students on the receiving end of remote instruction.

Islam, who will be teaching high school math in the South Bronx, says that all of his classes at Tufts University moved online in the spring, and he finished his senior year remotely.

“I know what it’s like,” he says. “I took math virtually. I took differential equations. So I have a better understanding of the type of challenges my students might feel learning math virtually—especially with engagement.”

Islam continues: “I struggled with engaging with the content virtually, so I’m definitely going to be reflecting about my own experience and thinking about, ‘OK, so what are the moments where I myself felt unengaged? Why did I feel unengaged? What might my instructor have done in that moment to make me feel more engaged? Could they have sent me to a breakout room? Or done a better job building community? Could we have done an ice breaker?’”

Bravin's college courses in the spring were mostly writing-based, he says. And he found the virtual learning environments to be frustrating and, in many ways, lacking. In one course, there was no element of synchronous learning—just students responding to discussion boards. “We lost a lot,” he says. In another class, his professor wanted to stick to the same schedule and cadence they had in person, so the class met two hours a week at the same time and on the same days of the week as before the pandemic.

“We had to be there the whole time, and it simply wasn't engaging—in the classroom or outside of the classroom,” Bravin says. “So overall I either saw too much adaptation or not enough, really nothing in between.”

Like Islam, Bravin's takeaways from his own experience with virtual learning are that relationship-building is key, and engagement needs to be a priority.

Bravin's school in Eastern North Carolina—a high-need region with high teacher turnover—started the year on July 31, so he has had some time already to observe and adjust. As a high school English teacher working with a lot of freshmen, he has worked really hard in the first few weeks to get the students to warm up to each other and him.

“Their first days of high school were experienced behind a computer screen, at home. In that capacity, it's difficult for students to come out of their shells,” he says. He was having them break into small groups to discuss a passage of the reading, and “they'd just look at each other and don't know what to say.”

Now, he starts classes with a prompt. For example, “What's the coolest place you've been?” The students will free-write their responses for about five minutes, then he will select a few to share their answers. “We're able to find a lot of solidarity in how students think and the things they're interested in and things that bring value to their lives,” Bravin says. It “helps create that community that is so desperately missed when you're not doing in-person instruction.”

Bravin teaches three classes, for a total of about 60 students, from his desk in the high school building. Each class meets for an hour-and-a-half of live video instruction every day, five days a week. For Bravin, that's nearly five hours of Zoom calls a day.

It may be many months before he'll see his students in person. The school, he says, does not expect to reopen for face-to-face instruction before next spring.

CMS estimates 18,000 students could still need internet access



By [Paige Hopkins](#) | August 19, 2020

While CMS students have laptops or tablets to facilitate virtual learning, thousands of them are still without reliable wifi access, rendering those devices useless for online classes.

According to CMS' chief technology officer Derek Root, 8,500 students/parents have reported a need for reliable internet access. In an email to the Agenda, Root estimated the need is actually closer to 16,000-18,000. The plan to get those additional hotspots is unclear.

Paris Harrell, a teacher at Windsor Park Elementary, says she spent the first three days of the school year apologizing to students with tablets but no internet access at home, because she didn't have any way to help them. At Windsor Park almost half of the student body is classified as [economically disadvantaged](#).

On Friday, August 14, two days before the first day of school, Harrell says the district notified her principal that the school wouldn't get the additional hotspots its students need. Windsor Park is short 79 hotspots, Harrell says, and that doesn't include the need for pre-k students.

"It's not CMS saying we don't want to help you; it's that the need was far greater," Harrell says. "Now that we know the need we have to rally together to make sure this is fixed because every single day that we don't have these hotspots is a day that (some) kids are not learning and other kids are. And that's where the equity gap comes in."

There's no roadmap for educating 140,000 students during a pandemic. Harrell says teachers spent the last few weeks reaching out to families and identifying which ones would need a hotspot for virtual learning.

She believes CMS leaders did what they could to prepare for the virtual start to the school year.

“The district wants to do things, but there’s something systemic that’s not working,” she says. “We have the right people in the field, why is this issue here and what can we do to fix it?”

Since school started on Monday, Harrell has helped with in-person live tech hours at Windsor Park for families with questions about their devices. Most families she meets with aren’t experiencing any tech kinks. They just need wifi access.

“Families come up here asking for help and it feels terrible having to tell a kid ‘I’m sorry, we can’t help you. We don’t know when we’re going to get your internet,’” she says.

The CMS foundation raised \$1 million to buy 6,000 hotspots to help students without internet at home. But that wasn’t enough. Now the foundation needs [additional donations](#) to buy additional hotspots. (Those donating can specify what their donation will go toward and which school it will benefit.)

“There’s a huge digital divide,” Harrell says. “Kids who can afford internet are learning; kids who cannot afford internet are not.”

During the spring semester, when the state first moved to virtual learning, Spectrum offered free internet service for one month. Many Windsor Park families took advantage of the free service.

It wasn’t clear, however, to many of the Spanish-speaking families that they’d need to cancel their service before the month ended to avoid being roped into a contract with Spectrum. As a result, families were left with Internet service bills they couldn’t afford.

“So many of our families ended up getting billed with all of these charges because it was not very clear to them that they had to cancel,” Harrell says. “So we had to use money raised for student needs to help pay some of these bills.”

Harrell, who has a history of going above and beyond for her students, fears some families may sign up for internet service that they can’t afford just to ensure their children can get an education.

But, better news came Wednesday afternoon when she started hearing from [community members who were donating](#) to the CMS Foundation, so she’s staying positive.

“I’d like to say that I am always hopeful because I believe in the goodness of people. For me to say I don’t think it’s going to get fixed would be against who I am as an individual,” she says.

Male educators of color are uniquely positioned to define a narrative

 ednc.org/male-educators-color-uniquely-positioned-define-narrative/

May 2, 2017

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois posed a serious and thought-provoking question about the human condition of Black people in 1903 America: “How does it feel to be a problem?” Du Bois was not delving into problems that arise from financial constraints, educational depression, or an unfair judicial system, but the problem of simply being a breathing, feeling, and thoughtful Black body.

The culprit

Du Bois wrote about the conditions of Black people in 1903 America and oddly enough his words ring true today, especially in relation to our students. If I presented you a school environment where the people who resemble you and your family members were not equitably reflected in advanced placement courses, gifted and talented programs, or even as your instructional leaders, but were the faces of discipline policies and academic interventions programs, you might think there’s a problem. Either the system is completely broken, or our students are the culprit.

When we see our students, especially our boys, as problems and do not acknowledge their positive attributes, we miss out on the beauty of their perspectives. We miss out on the reality of their dreams, and they miss out on what Aristotle defines as the “good life” — intellectual and character virtues.

How Profound Gentlemen works

Profound Gentlemen was birthed by the idea that our Black and Brown boys are assets, and we equip men of color with the resources, structures, and tools to uncover these assets through education and mentorship. Not only are we preparing men of color to be leaders in their school building, but we empower them to use our Code Orange Curriculum that infuses social emotional learning, college and career readiness, and civic and community engagement to ensure that their students, especially their boys, are on a cradle-to-career pipeline. These educators dedicate additional time to support boys of color by meeting at least 120 minutes a month and facilitating Code Orange activities into their lessons.

Our work in action

I want to highlight an educator: Archie Moss. He is the principal of Bruce Elementary School in Memphis, TN. Mr. Moss founded and currently runs the Gentlemen's League, a program designed to educate, empower, and enrich males. In elementary school, he uses Profound Gentlemen's framework of social and emotional learning, college and career readiness, and civic and community engagement to equip his boys with the skills to enter into a cradle-to-career pipeline.

"Archie has done a tremendous job in working with Black males," said Mario Jovan Shaw, co-founder and chief program officer of Profound Gentlemen. "In Charlotte, he created an organization that transformed the lives of his students with the Gentlemen's League. He then moved to Memphis where the same impact his happening in the 901 community. I look forward to seeing his continued impact of his work."

Mr. Moss highlights the assets of his boys by encouraging them to create their own narratives. [Check out their work.](#)

Mr. Moss is one of the hundreds of male educators of color in the Profound Gentlemen community who is reshaping the narrative for boys of color in his school. We have a front row seat to observe and support the impact he is having, and we know that his work is fueling young boys to enter a cradle-to-career pipeline.

Visit profoundgentlemen.org — be a friend, a supporter, and grab a front row seat to watch the impact.

Perspective Profound Gentlemen Equity

Jason Terrell

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Jason began his journey as an 8th-grade teacher in Charlotte Mecklenburg School. In the classroom, he served as a mentor, athletic coach, and tutor and was deeply invested in his students' pursuit of academic and personal success. In 2015, he became co-Founder and Executive Director of Profound Gentlemen, a national agency dedicated to increasing the 2% of male educators of color who teach across the nation.

Through this work, Jason has received numerous fellowship experiences and has been recognized by Forbes 30 Under 30 as one of the world's brightest social innovators who seek to bring about change and equal opportunity for boys and male educators of color. When Jason is not working, he is spending time with his wife and son, going to rap concerts, and boxing.

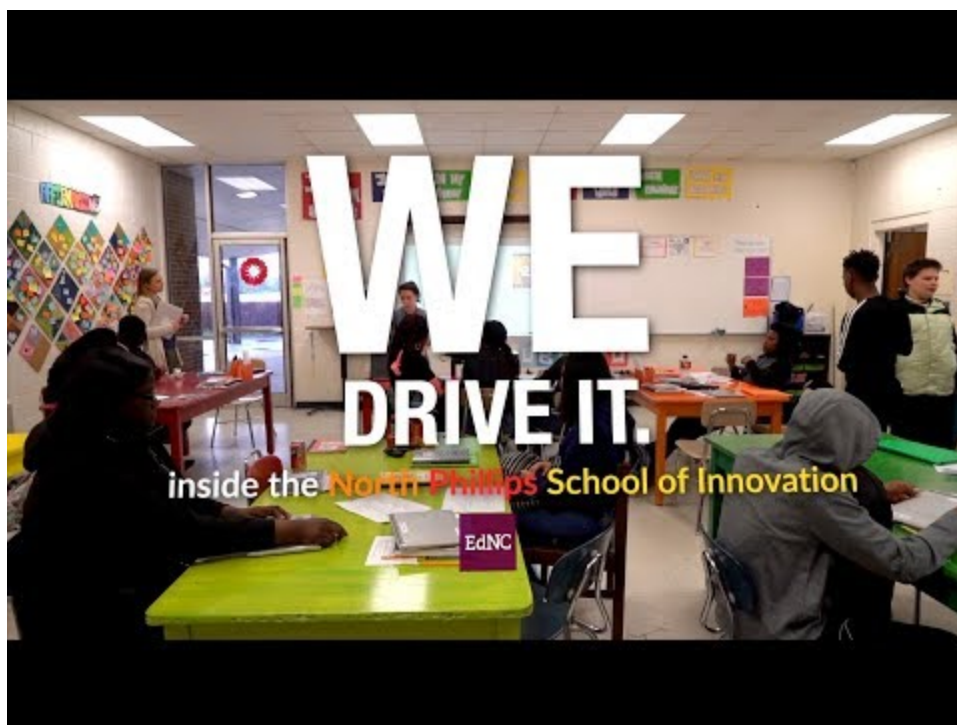


We Drive It: Inside the North Phillips School of Innovation

 ednc.org/we-drive-it-inside-the-north-phillips-school-fo-innovation-short-film/

May 13, 2019

EducationNC's new short documentary, *We Drive It*, highlights the work of a team of passionate educators and scholars in rural North Carolina.



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/LgXh5YRSOnk>

In the high-poverty area of Edgecombe County called the Northside, schools have historically lagged behind on test scores and other metrics. That's why changemakers there decided it was time for something radically different. It was time to build a new school from the ground up, a school specifically designed with students in mind.

The ultimate goal of this innovative new school? Self-actualization for students. Throughout a yearlong planning process, the team asked students and parents in the Northside what their dream was for school. Then they traveled across the country looking for innovative new approaches to teaching that they could bring home.

The result was a collection of learning experiences that create a brand new innovative school model: The North Phillips School of Innovation.

It's a place where students experience social-emotional support from the moment they show up. In the morning, students meditate on their goals and affirm the successes of others in the space. They learn the required academic standards by completing exciting passion

projects. And they discover the richness of their own identities, taking charge of their agency in the world.

This documentary follows the School of Innovation during its first year, which functioned as a pilot run. Next year, these innovative practices will be expanded to all eighth through 10th graders in the Northside of Edgecombe County.

Digest Spotlight Innovation

Robert Kinlaw

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As EducationNC's director of multimedia, Robert Kinlaw focuses on telling stories with video, photos, and sound.



In this rural community, ‘there’s a lot of heart’

 ednc.org/tarboro-rural-community-documentary/

March 24, 2020



Inez Rubistello works with her father in the offices of Tarboro Brewing Company. Robert Kinlaw/EducationNC

Editor’s Note: Robert’s documentary, Anchored in Tarboro, is the first in a series for EdNC on the strength we see in our rural places. At EdNC, we deeply embed in communities because our schools are anchor institutions, but we’ve realized so are churches and nonprofit organizations and restaurants. Join us in getting to know our rural communities.

In rural places, folks are more spread out, so they have to reach out a little further to lean on each other.

Take a look behind the scenes with me.



In December 2018, I began making occasional trips to Tarboro. My goal was to meet these people and create a video about them. As I explored the area, it became clear that the work here was so extensive that capturing it all in one video would be tough.

In the 2010 Census, Tarboro's population was 10,856. Edgecombe County was the sixth poorest county in North Carolina. But there is so much hope.



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/8CF58RWybw>

Craft beers and conversation

I spent the most time with Inez Rubistello, known to most people in Tarboro as “Inie.” She’s a Tarboro native who moved back home with her husband, Stephen, who’s from New Jersey. They met in New York City working at Windows on the World, the restaurant that once sat at the top of the World Trade Center.

Together, they operate two local businesses: a restaurant called On the Square and a brewery called Tarboro Brewing Company. The duo opened the brewery after they realized On the Square, which offers food and wine choices for a more refined palate, was too exclusive for some in the community.

Inside Tarboro Brewing Company, you’ll find a large open layout complete with air hockey and foosball tables, a bar, plenty of chairs, and a chalkboard wall that doubles as a menu. Hand-drawn doodles accompany the listing for local brews like *Nana’s Roof* and *Small Town IPA*.



Nestled on a corner in downtown Tarboro, it's hard to miss Tarboro Brewing Company. Robert Kinlaw/EducationNC



Tarboro Brewing Company lists its current offerings in colorful chalk on the wall. Robert Kinlaw/EducationNC

In this room, the brewery hosts a monthly community meeting called “Cultivating Change.” A panel of speakers will tackle a topic — on one of my visits, for example, it was food and dieting — and then begin a dialogue with the community members in attendance.

The event is free and everyone gets a free drink ticket, but you don’t have to drink. In fact, you don’t have to buy anything at the brewery — folks are encouraged to bring food from elsewhere and just sit for a while.

Inez hopes the meetings will generate conversations between the politically opposed, but noted the tendency of similarly-minded people to attend. The event inherently attracts a crowd that cares about things like inequality, racism, and poverty.



Rev. Richard Joyner talks about food and nutrition at Cultivating Change. Robert Kinlaw/EducationNC

It starts in the home

Sitting in that crowd, you'll often find a pair of researchers well known in the community. Seth Saeugling and Vichi Jagannathan relocated to Tarboro from the Bay Area and created a nonprofit organization called Rural Opportunity Institute.

During their time in San Francisco, the duo had learned more about a study known as the ACE study. ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) — such as experiencing violence or abuse, or losing a family member — are correlated with a plethora of negative health outcomes as an adult. Your ACEs score is determined by your answers to these 10 questions, and high scores were correlated with everything from heart disease and stroke to depression.

With this knowledge in mind, Seth and Vichi created Rural Opportunity Institute with the goal of ending generational cycles of trauma and poverty. First they sat down and interviewed members of the Edgecombe community to learn more about their particular struggles. Then they used these interviews to generate a map of issues and an action plan for the community.



Vichi Jagannathan addresses the group at a Rural Opportunity Institute community meeting. Robert Kinlaw/EducationNC



Local change-makers Matthew Johnson, Inez Rubistello, and Na'im Akbar at a community meeting in Tarboro. Robert Kinlaw/EducationNC

When suspensions turn into sentences

At one of these community meetings, I met a man named Na'im Akbar. His own nonprofit organization, House of Help, is focused on aiding students and formerly incarcerated people in the community.

Na'im was incarcerated twice. With his college education, he was adept at speaking with both the people held in prisons and the prison staff, and often found himself representing inmates in an attorney-esque position.

Now, he uses that ability to do something similar for school children. When suspended students are called in for a disciplinary hearing, parents sometimes enlist Na'im to sit in on the meeting, helping the parent navigate a world of terms and policies they don't fully understand.



Na'im went to East Carolina University and lived in New York City before returning to Tarboro. Robert Kinlaw/EducationNC

Faith helped Na'im stay out of prison for good. As a practicing Muslim, he said he has no problem working alongside the mostly Christian populace of Tarboro. The important thing, he said, is removing the barriers between us that prevent great work from getting done.

My time in Edgecombe County was too short to cover all the innovative initiatives there. For example, Richard Joyner operates the Conetoe Family Life Center, which grows fresh fruits and vegetables and offers community education on nutrition.

North Carolina's 2019 principal of the year works in Edgecombe County. And a group of K-12 educators near Tarboro recently created a radical new public school model that warranted an entire EdNC short documentary of its own.

These initiatives cover a broad spectrum of the issues we face as human beings. What they have in common is a culture of listening. Why do people believe what they do? What would best help people experiencing poverty and trauma? How do students want school to look? In Tarboro, people are asking, people are listening, and people are changing.

Feature K-12 Rural EdNC 2020

Robert Kinlaw

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