

# TEACHFORAMERICA

North Carolina • Second Quarter Legislative Report

December 20, 2013

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

*--Vision of Teach For America*

For more than 20 years, Teach For America has partnered with North Carolina school districts in pursuit of educational excellence. Enabled by the state's increased investment, Teach For America has committed to increasing the number of teachers recruited to the state, opening a region in the Piedmont Triad, expanding placement across Northeastern and Southeastern North Carolina, increasing the number of North Carolinians choosing to teach in North Carolina via the North Carolina Teacher Corps, and increasing the number of corps members retained in North Carolina.

In the second quarter, Teach For America proudly celebrated Veterans Day honoring our nation's veterans and veterans who have joined Teach For America. Teach For America ran a Veterans Week campaign highlighting the service and commitment veterans have made for our country and education. In "A Call To The Classroom," Shaun Murphy, former staff sergeant in the United States Army and Teach For America alumnus, explains how important it is for veterans to make an impact in the classroom: *"Don't leave behind what made [you] great leaders and servicemembers. Bring it all with you to the classroom! Expand on it and take it to the next level. Use the same tools and strategies you used in the military to build camaraderie in the classroom and motivate your students and colleagues. Build your own legacy."*

In "On Education's Front Line," Raheim Smith, former cannon crewmember of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division and current Teach For America corps members discusses the common commitment required by teaching and military service: *"I'm a leader. The students look to me for structure and accountability. I made a commitment to teach. I'm a military man. When I set out on a mission, I finish it. My goal now is to continue teaching."*<sup>2</sup> To date we have matriculated six veterans into North Carolina's 2014 Teach For America corps.

We are honored to see more and more veterans choosing to continue to serve our nation through teaching. We are grateful for the North Carolina General Assembly's continued support of our work in this and other areas. We are excited to update you on the progress of our partnership.

## Increase Number of Teachers Provided to North Carolina

We remain on pace to exceed our goal of recruiting, training, and providing 300 teachers for the 2014-2015 school year. These teachers will impact more than 18,000 students across the state. At our last deadline, Teach For America-North Carolina had the highest matriculation rate in the nation, and we have matriculated 162 of the 300 teachers needed for the 2014-2015 school year. Strong recruitment and matriculation efforts have us on pace to secure our full cohort of teachers ahead of schedule.

The 162 corps members to date represent a diverse and accomplished group of leaders and future teachers. Many of these individuals have themselves overcome tremendous personal challenge to become distinguished leaders, and this is a major factor driving their desire to teach. Of the 162 matriculated candidates:

- 39% come from a low-income background<sup>3</sup>
- 37% will be teaching math or science
- 28% are leaders of color
- 24% are the first in their family to graduate from college
- 4% served in the military

<sup>1</sup> Bissell, J.B. "A Call to the Classroom." *Journal of Higher Learning for Today's Servicemember: Military Advanced Education*, 1 Oct. 2013. Web. 18 Dec. 2013. See Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> Amos, Candace. "On Education's Front Lines." *New York Post*, 7 Nov. 2013. Web. 18 Dec. 2013. See Appendix B.

<sup>3</sup> As identified by receiving a full or partial Pell Grant.

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### Open the Piedmont Triad Region

We remain on pace to open the Piedmont Triad Region for the 2014-2015 school year. To date we have:

- Secured a written commitment for \$3.3 million in private funding to be used over the next three years.
- Received approval from the Guilford County School District to provide 30 teachers to the Piedmont Triad region for the 2014-2015 school year.
- Recruited, selected, and matriculated 19 of the 30 teachers requested by the district. Forty-seven percent of these teachers will be teaching math or science.
- Completed our initial round of executive director candidate interviews.

### Expand Placement Across Northeastern and Southeastern North Carolina

We have exceeded our goal of providing 175 additional teachers for schools in Northeastern and Southeastern North Carolina for the 2013-2014 school year. We currently have 180 teachers impacting 11,500 students across Northeastern and Southeastern North Carolina.

#### Northeastern North Carolina

We currently have 154 teachers impacting over 10,000 students in Bertie County Schools, Clinton City Schools, Durham Public Schools, Edgecombe County Public Schools, Granville County Schools, Halifax County Schools, Nash-Rocky Mount Public Schools, Northampton County Schools, Vance County Schools, Warren County Schools, Washington County Schools, and Weldon City Schools.

Going into our twenty-first year of partnership in the Northeast, we are encouraged by the continued support of long-term partners. Dr. Ray Spain, eleven-year superintendent of Warren County schools recently explained, *"Every year, I set out to give our principals access to the best pool of teacher talent I can muster. In a low-income, rural district like mine, this is no easy task. ... Every year we struggle both to retain teachers and attract new talent to fill the gaps they leave behind. Over the last 20 years, Teach For America has helped address these shortages and to enrich my own understanding of what makes an effective educator."*<sup>4</sup>

Discussing the impact of early career teachers, Dr. Spain said, *"I am unwilling to cede time in the classroom as the singular predictor of excellence. Over the years, I've watched first- and second-year teachers lead their students to truly outstanding outcomes. And more and more, research supports the need for this differentiated view."*<sup>5</sup>

#### Southeastern North Carolina

Currently, 26 teachers are impacting roughly 1,600 students across Sampson, Lenoir, and Duplin counties. Sixty-two percent of these corps members are teaching math or science.

At the end of our very first semester of partnership in the southeast, we are excited to see our teachers making an immediate contribution to and forming strong relationships in their communities. Over the past semester we have hosted ten professional development events in these counties to help corps members get off to a strong start in their classroom and communities.

<sup>4</sup> Spain, Ray V. "Ray V. Spain: What Teach For America Participants Add." *Newsobserver.com*, 14 Dec. 2013. See Appendix C.

<sup>5</sup> Spain, "Ray V. Spain: What Teach For America Participants Add."

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In Lenoir County, beginning teacher coordinator Kim Hazelgrove reports that *"Teach For America has provided quality teachers for some hard-to-fill positions, and we look forward to our continued partnership with their organization."* In Sampson County, *The Sampson Weekly* recently profiled Brooke Britt's (Eastern North Carolina Corps '13) impact in her home county. Brooke said, *"[When] I was in college, returning home to work was not something I really considered. I felt like many people my age wanted to live in Raleigh, Charlotte or another city away from home – and I did too. But there is no feeling like returning home, starting a career in the community you grew up in, and working to make it an even better place for future generations."*<sup>6</sup>

### Strengthen the North Carolina Teacher Corps (NCTC)

Teach For America has committed to partnering with the state to inspire more North Carolinians to teach and lead as educators in our state. 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.

Teach For America is on track to meet our goal of recruiting an initial cohort of 100 teachers into the re-launched North Carolina Teacher Corps (NCTC). To date, we have matriculated 53 individuals into the North Carolina Teacher Corps.

Thirty-eight corps members are current North Carolina residents, representing 19 cities and 16 colleges across our state. Fifteen corps members are North Carolina natives recruited home from out-of-state colleges and universities including Harvard, Georgetown, and Princeton.

Among the 53 matriculated NCTC corps members, we are pleased to report:

- The average GPA is 3.5<sup>7</sup>
- 53% come from a low-income background
- 42% are people of color
- 41% will be teaching math or science
- 4% served in the military

To recruit this group, we supplemented Teach For America's recruitment methods with outreach tailored to North Carolina Teacher Corps candidates. This outreach included:

- **One-on-One Outreach:** We have conducted 123 individual conversations with final round applicants from North Carolina. North Carolina staff used these calls to inspire applicants to choose to teach in North Carolina rather than choosing to teach out of state. At our last deadline, 88% of individuals who had a one-on-one conversation with a member of the North Carolina staff chose to teach in North Carolina.
- **NCTC Webinars:** We hosted webinars specifically for North Carolinians moving into final round of interviews. Over 100 North Carolinians attended these webinars and a recording of the webinar was sent to applicants who could not join. The webinars highlighted stories of current corps members and alumni with North Carolina ties who chose to lead in our state. At our last deadline, 100% of applicants who attended a webinar chose to teach in North Carolina.

<sup>6</sup> "Brooke Britt Returns Home To Teach For America." *The Sampson Weekly* 28 Nov. 2013, 4th ed., sec. 49: A6. Print. See Appendix D.

<sup>7</sup> This is an increase in average GPA from previous NCTCT cohorts which was 3.1.

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- **Presenting North Carolina Teacher Corps at Final Interviews:** We secured permission from our national admissions team to present the North Carolina Teacher Corps opportunity at all final round interview sites in the state. Following this presentation, applicants were allowed to change their regional placement selections to add Eastern North Carolina, Charlotte or the Piedmont Triad to their list of preferred regions.

### **Increase the Number of Corps Members Retained in North Carolina**

Currently there are 955 Teach For America alumni in North Carolina, 68% of whom are working in education. We are committed to increasing the number of Teach For America alumni working in education in North Carolina for the duration of their careers.

Over the past quarter we conducted a survey of North Carolina alumni that revealed two major factors that would keep more alumni in the classroom. These factors are more pipelines to academic leadership (e.g., master teacher, academic facilitator, assistant principal, or principal positions) and opportunities to pursue leadership-focused graduate degrees while teaching (e.g., executive-MBA or MSA programs).

In alignment with this data, we are in conversation with graduate schools, including the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, University of Virginia, Vanderbilt University, and Harvard University about creating teacher-specific graduate degree tracks, similar to the executive MBA programs used by professionals in other fields.

### **Financial Reporting**

Teach For America is committed to maximizing the state's investment through fiscal responsibility and working diligently to inspire private donors to invest in our work in North Carolina.

Recently, Teach For America earned its 12<sup>th</sup> consecutive 4-star rating—the top rating available—which is a reward for “sound fiscal management and commitment to accountability and transparency.” Less than 1% of the charities they rate have received at least 12 consecutive 4-star evaluations, which indicates that we outperform almost all other charities in the country. As Charity Navigator stated to us, “this exceptional designation from Charity Navigator differentiates Teach For America from its peers and demonstrates to the public it is worthy of their trust.”

Forbes, Business Week, and Kiplinger's Financial Magazine, among others, have profiled and celebrated Charity Navigator's method of applying data-driven analysis to the charitable sector. They evaluate ten times more charities than their nearest competitor and currently attract more visitors to their website than all other charity rating groups combined.

Midway through our fiscal year, we have raised over \$9,000,000 in private investment, with \$3,000,000 coming from national investors. We are currently on pace to match the state's investment at a rate of more than 2 to 1 with private fundraising. We are tremendously grateful to the individuals, foundations, and businesses across the state that have supported our work here for more than 20 years.

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. It remains a privilege to serve the communities of North Carolina with a spirit of urgency and diligence. We look forward to providing you with our third quarter update in March 2014.

## Appendix A.

A Call to the Classroom by J. B. Bissell, 1 Oct. 2013



Making the shift from advanced operations bases, battlefield strategy and counterintelligence support to the ABCs of classroom management might not seem like a natural progression. According to Shaun Murphy, however, “there’s an incredible overlap between the skills fostered in the military and those we see in our most effective classroom leaders. These include demonstrated leadership ability, excellent critical thinking skills, and perseverance in the face of challenges. Our veteran teachers do whatever it takes to achieve expanded opportunities for students.”

Murphy knows because he’s seen every angle firsthand: He was a staff sergeant in the United States Army before matriculating with Teach For America (TFA) and ultimately becoming a classroom educator. He currently serves as TFA’s manager of veterans recruitment and oversees the “You Served For America, Now Teach For America” initiative, which launched in November 2012 and is focused on bringing “more veterans of the U.S. armed forces in to the fight against educational inequity” by putting “the power of transitioning military professionals and veterans to work in our nation’s highest-need schools.”

This goal speaks exactly to why Murphy believes veterans make such great teachers, and why he jumped at the opportunity to spearhead the “You Served For America, Now Teach For America” campaign.

“I hear time and time again from our veteran teachers that the desire to serve their country didn’t end with their military commitment,” he explained. “We want to be a part of something bigger than us. We are embedded in service and in service is where you will find that veterans gravitate.”

Still, Murphy has also found that some former soldiers don't immediately believe that teaching will provide enough excitement to be worthy of a post-military mission. "Some people I've talked to have been wary of applying because they don't see teaching as a real challenge," he said. "They think, 'I've led platoons and/or squadrons, teaching a class of 20 to 30 scholars can't be that hard.'"

"The reality is that teaching has the potential to be one of the hardest things you will ever experience. It takes committed individuals to do this work, and I encourage everybody to think about it seriously, because our kids are depending on them."

Murphy isn't the only one who suggests veterans—and other people, for that matter—think about it seriously, and do some research in order to decide whether a job in the school system will be a good fit. In fact, each of the educators consulted for this article recommended working with children in some capacity before committing oneself to obtaining a teaching degree.

Volunteering as a camp counselor, being a tutor, mentoring, or coaching a youth sports team all are possibilities. No matter what, though, it's important to understand that "kids are different from soldiers," said Doug Hamman, Ph.D., director of teacher education and associate professor of curriculum and instruction at Texas Tech University. "Most respect and admire servicemen and women, and colleagues value their disciplined approach to the career, but in addition to the ability to focus, veterans will need the patience and creativity to find ways of accomplishing goals and 'valuing' in others what they do best.



"Clinical competency will be natural for the disciplined veteran," said Hamman. "Sanctioning the capabilities of the hard-to-reach student and providing opportunities to explore different points of view are 'soft skills' that are particularly important when teaching adolescents. These skills are often the hardest of all for individuals accustomed to carrying out orders."

### Skill Development

Fortunately, Texas Tech's TechTeach curriculum is revolutionizing how learners gain those skills. "We have undergraduate elementary and middle-level teacher certification degrees, secondary-level minors for teacher certification students, and a number of graduate degrees available," said Hamman, and the foundation for each is based on the four unique cornerstones of the TechTeach program.

First, students are evaluated using the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching's TAP rubric, which outlines distinct actions and provides specific goals for improving teaching outcomes. And those evaluations aren't just in the form of a simple report card. Another component of TechTeach is recording lesson delivery with "video-capture technology," Hamman added. "The video is self-rated, peer-rated, instructor-rated, and used to shape and evaluate teacher candidates' instructional behaviors."

Teacher candidate behaviors also are shaped by co-teaching with a mentor from a local school district, an approach that allows them to form a partnership with a working educator in a real classroom to implement and execute lesson plans. Finally, TechTeach wastes no time putting participants in real-

world settings. "Students begin their clinical placements in the first semester with one full day per week," Hamman said, and typically begin student teaching a semester sooner than other programs.

Syracuse doesn't waste any time either. "New students start in major-related classes from day one," said Zachary Schuster, Syracuse's School of Education undergraduate admissions recruiter. "Students who are enrolled in teacher prep programs will typically be placed in a local school within their first year on campus, often as early as their first semester. The wide range of classes and variety of the placements help prepare our graduates as leaders in their respective fields."

Those potential fields are nearly as wide-ranging as the class choices. "Our most popular teaching preparation offering is our Inclusive Elementary and Special Education program," Schuster said. Other possibilities include secondary education, an Inclusive Early Childhood and Special Education program, health and physical education, and art and music education.

"Another very popular track that's located in the School of Education is our Health and Exercise Science Program," Schuster added. "We tend to see most veterans gravitating toward that, and graduates are top candidates for careers in exercise physiology, sports psychology, athletic administration and other related professions."

Whether the career path eventually leads to a classroom, the gymnasium, or an administrative office, "Syracuse University's School of Education is committed to the principle that diverse learning communities create the conditions that both enrich the educational experience and provide opportunities for all to realize their full potential," Schuster said.

The university's professors also are committed to the principle that learning doesn't just take place within the four walls of a classroom. "Students engage in a series of progressively more intense field placements, requiring substantial commitments of time, care and effort to the learning and development of thousands of infants, young children and adolescents in the Syracuse area," Schuster explained. "Students in the Inclusive Elementary and Special Education program engage in a total of 10 field placements, and students in our other preparation programs engage in at least five or six, over the course of their programs. Each placement is linked to an on-campus course or seminar, during which issues related to field placements are analyzed and discussed."

### The Greater Good

Eventually, of course, discussions turn to job prospects. Generally, the future of teaching is good. According to the United States Department of Labor's online Occupational Outlook Handbook, the median pay in 2010 of kindergarten, elementary, and high school teachers was a bit more than \$50,000 per year, and employment growth until 2020 ranges from 7 percent (for high school teachers) to 17 percent (kindergarten and elementary).

Money, however, is not the driving force behind the desire to teach. "I've talked to some folks who went into the private sector and had very successful and lucrative careers, yet found they weren't satisfied," said Murphy. "There was still the call to be a part of something greater. Teach For America provides a community of individuals on the front lines of education, committed to making things better for kids. Our country's well-being lies in the next generation—their success is all of our success."

This commitment to the country's next generation is the essence of every quality teacher preparation program. "The Department of Childhood Education is a professional learning community that shares a common belief that all students deserve a quality education that meets their individual needs," said Michelle Torregano Ph.D., an assistant professor in California University of Pennsylvania's Department of Childhood Education.

At Cal U, future educators learn about meeting those individual needs by means of "the constructivist model of teaching and learning," explained Torregano. Students engage in "classroom learning activities that are discovery-based, experiential, project-based and task-based. Educators who graduate from these programs are prepared to teach all students using developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive practices."

And whether prospective learners choose Cal U's "pre-kindergarten to fourth grade" or "grades four through eight" program, the coursework will include a variety of teaching methodologies that range from lectures and research papers to case studies and tests, as well as "plenty of hands-on activities," Torregano said. "Additionally, each course contains a comprehensive performance assessment task designed to align with standards and assessments endorsed by national, state and local accreditation organizations."

#### Requirements and Choices

Recognizing different standards and requirements for state and local teacher certificates can be just as important as the hands-on activities. "Our programs are clinically rich and prepare students to be researchers and reflective practitioners," said Linda Horisk, assistant dean for Admissions and Enrollment at Fordham University's Graduate School of Education.

There's no arguing that, but practically speaking, enrolling in the Graduate School of Education ensures that teachers can continue teaching, because in New York, educators must either have a graduate-level degree or obtain one within five years of beginning their classroom career.

"We offer master's programs that lead to New York State initial teacher certification," Horisk continued. "For those who are already certified, we have extension programs that lead to additional certification areas, and advanced degrees for those who are certified but only have an undergraduate diploma. All teachers in New York must have a master's degree and experience as a teacher to qualify for the 'professional level' of certification."

Additionally, all of these programs "include coursework and practice in meeting the needs of students with special learning needs, diversity of culture and language, literacy development, content knowledge and methods of assessment," added Horisk.

She was also quick to point out that members of the military should not be intimidated by the thought of tackling post-bachelor's-level coursework. "Veterans bring transferable skills that serve them well in graduate teacher education—and the field of teaching as a whole—such as leadership, collaboration, goal setting, evaluation and service learning. Veterans might also have backgrounds and experiences that could be a foundation for their chosen level of teaching, such as early childhood, childhood or adolescence."



Choosing a specific area of teaching might be the most important decision of all. Western Michigan University's Department of Teaching, Learning and Educational Studies prepares students to become teachers in either a childhood, elementary or secondary classroom environment. To an outsider, the difference between working in those three disciplines might not seem significant, but to a veteran deciding which to specialize in, the distinctions can be vast—and will certainly influence educational selections. "The main difference between elementary and secondary programs is how teachers are prepared," explained Regena Nelson, Ph.D. and chair of Western Michigan's Department of Teaching, Learning and Educational Studies. "Secondary education majors must choose a content major in a teachable subject. For example, they identify as a biology or history major who will teach biology or history. Elementary education majors identify as teachers of a specific age group, such as an elementary or early childhood teacher, who can teach all subject areas.

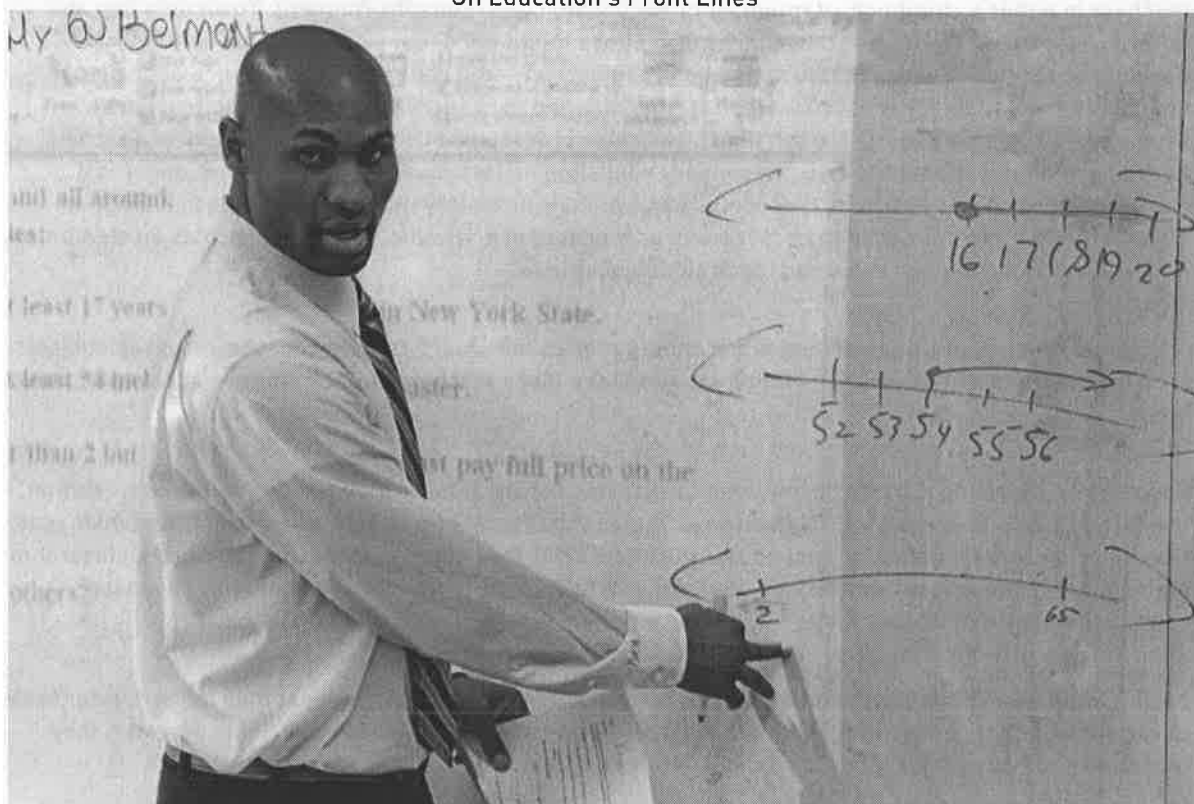
"Thus, the requirements are different. Secondary majors take more content courses in a given subject area than elementary majors. Elementary majors take more teaching method courses across all subject areas."

Fortunately, incoming students have some time to decide which route they want to take. "As freshmen, they are pre-education majors," Nelson said. "Late in their sophomore year or early in their junior year, they can choose elementary or secondary education. They take courses in teaching methods, classroom management, educational psychology, assessment, technology and child development. They also continue taking content courses to fulfill their majors."

All the while—and no matter what level their focus—students are applying what they learn during class to varied field experiences that correlate to upper-level courses. "Then, in their final semester, they complete a full-time internship at a school," Nelson added.

Admittedly, that first day at school—when you're on the teacher's side of the podium as opposed to the student's—can be a bit nerve racking, which is why Murphy believes it's so important that veterans "don't leave behind what made them great leaders and servicemembers. Bring it all with you to the classroom! Expand on it and take it to the next level. Use the same tools and strategies you used in the military to build camaraderie in the classroom and motivate your students and colleagues. Build your own legacy." ♦

Appendix B.  
On Education's Front Lines



Raheim Smith is currently teaching at a Brooklyn school that offers young offenders a new start. "The students look to me for structure and accountability," he says. Photo: Lorenzo Ciniglio

The need for a fulfilling career that gives back is deeply ingrained in many of the men and women who have left the military. Often, veterans express the need to continue serving their country.

Recently, this came to the attention of Teach For America, an organization formed in 1990, which aims to bring leaders from all walks of life into the classroom by training them as teachers and placing them in two-year contracts in schools in low-income areas. The corps currently has around 2,000 members.

Vanessa Descalzi, TFA's national communications director, says that from 2009 to 2012, they noticed a huge spike in applications from those leaving the military. The organization felt compelled to identify what was driving the trend.

"We saw an amazing increase in applications from veterans from all branches, including the Marines, the Army and the U.S. Coast Guard. We realized that when veterans come home from service, their desire to serve their country doesn't go away," Descalzi says. "Veterans were happy to be in the private sector when they first got home, but later they felt a hole and wondered about their purpose."

With a looming teacher shortage by the year 2020, it's no wonder TFA listened. Launched in 2012, You Served For America, Now Teach For America is looking to recruit veterans with bachelor degrees and a

2.5 minimum grade point average. Veterans start with a five-week training institute that includes courses on lesson planning, creating presentations and general classroom preparation.

Shaun T. Murphy, a TFA corps member alumni and former human resources specialist in the U.S. Army, was hired to comb through the pool of applicants as the program's manager of military recruitment.

Murphy left the Army in 2006 but felt a desire to continue serving. He applied to the TFA and accepted a position to teach English and math.

"In 2009, we saw a bump of veterans, even without any recruitment efforts," says Murphy. "That's when I was brought on board."

A year into the program, Murphy and his team had recruited over 100 servicemen and women to teach in 48 regions across the country.

One of those veterans is Raheim Smith, who now teaches at Brooklyn's Passages Academy, an alternative school offering a second chance to students with criminal backgrounds. Smith himself came from a childhood of homelessness in North Amityville, Long Island. He decided to join the military at age 17 to make something of his life.

"I didn't have the money to go to college. I made the decision in order to help my family and better myself to go into the military," Smith says.

Smith served as a cannon crewmember of the 10th Mountain Division, the most deployed unit in the military.

After being discharged in 2006, Smith attended Arizona State University, graduating in 2010 with a degree in political science. He entered a career on Wall Street, which was good for his bank account but left him unfulfilled. That's when he decided to get back to helping people.

Now, his proudest work is enriching the lives of his students.

"I have a student who only scored 21 on a math test. She was very upset about it and she wouldn't allow anyone to talk to her about it," Smith says.

He wrote her note telling her that at one time he wasn't very good in math. He promised her that her grades would improve if she accepted his help.

"We studied for 20 minutes every day. By the time she took the test again, she passed. On one test she got 70, and on a later test she scored 85. Every single day, she gets better," he says.

Smith says being a teacher is more than just teaching algebra, it's about creating better people.

"I'm a leader. The students look to me for structure and accountability," he says. "I made a commitment to teach. I'm a military man. When I set on a mission, I finish it. My goal now is to continue teaching."

## Ray V. Spain: What Teach For America participants add

Ray v. Spain, 14 December 2013

Regarding the Dec. 2 Point of View piece “Seasoned teachers worth so much more”: Midway through my 11th year as superintendent of Warren County Schools, I certainly appreciate Helen Ladd’s tribute to tenure. But this enthusiasm aside, the argument she puts forth risks obscuring both the challenges we face and the solutions on which we must focus if we are to build the outstanding force of public educators our children so deeply deserve.

Every year, I set out to give our principals access to the best pool of teacher talent I can muster. In a low-income, rural district like mine, this is no easy task. Far from the bustle of Raleigh or Chapel Hill, days for our educators are long, resources are scarce and students come to classrooms with challenges much deeper than their grasp on reading or math.

Every year we struggle both to retain teachers and attract new talent to fill the gaps they leave behind. Over the last 20 years, Teach For America has helped address these shortages and to enrich my own understanding of what makes an effective educator. Like in most district leaders, I continue to see the value of experience – both based on the research and my own view. But based on the same two factors, I am unwilling to cede time in the classroom as the singular predictor of excellence. Over the years, I’ve watched first- and second-year teachers lead their students to truly outstanding outcomes. And more and more, research supports the need for this differentiated view.

The good news is that we don’t have to choose between experienced educators and outstanding beginning teachers– most notably because, if we do this work well, one grows out of the other. We must work to create a diverse pipeline of educators from a wide range of backgrounds. Today, there are nearly 1,000 Teach For America alumni living in our state, including several hundred classroom teachers, and dozens of principals, assistant principals and deans, school-leaders-in-training and district officials.

I hope Dr. Ladd and her colleagues will continue to uncover important insights about how experience affects outcomes. I’d urge us not to lose sight of the complex realities we face – or to underestimate the contribution being made by those stepping up to address them every morning in our classrooms. Every year, 92 percent of first-year Teach For America corps members return for a second year of teaching compared with 82 percent of first-year teachers in high-poverty schools and 86 percent of all new teachers. This increasingly diverse group – over a quarter of whom are the first in their families to graduate from college – have the potential to be the experienced force of excellent educators for tomorrow. We must regard them as such.

RAY V. SPAIN

**SUPERINTENDENT, WARREN COUNTY SCHOOLS  
WARRENTON**

*The length limit was waived to permit a fuller response to the Point of View.*

Read more here: <http://www.newsobserver.com/2013/12/14/3457915/ray-v-spain-what-teach-for-america.html#storylink=cpy>

## LOCAL NEWS

## Brooke Britt Returns Home To Teach For America



Brooke Britt

document design. I attended UNC Wilmington and decided to major in English with a concentration in professional writing. After all, I enjoyed reading, writing, and design - and it seemed like a good choice for law school as well - it also left the door open in case I wanted to go into teaching."

At UNCW, Brooke excelled. A natural leader emerged as the talents of this young woman were recognized and awarded by her peers, as well as college administrators. In college, Britt received the UNCW Leadership Excellence Award - awarded on behalf of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Pat Leonard, which recognizes outstanding contributions to student life, leadership, service, and a positive attitude. And she also received the UNCW Senior Medallion Award in May of 2012. The Senior Medallion is the most prestigious award presented by the Division of Student Affairs, and recognizes significant campus involvement, leadership, personal integrity, fortitude, and a passion for the university. While at UNCW, Brooke was active in student government and was named Student Body Vice President her senior year. She was also awarded Panhellenic New Member of the Year for her work with Alpha Gamma Delta in 2010, and named President of her Theta Mu chapter in Wilmington.

Always self-motivated, and always over-achieving, Brooke was well on her way to post-educational opportunities that included law school; but along the way she paused. "I really wanted to rush into graduate or law school," states

Britt. "However, as I was rapidly filling out applications and signing up to take the GRE and LSAT, I realized that these next few steps I was taking in life were significant." Brooke adds, "After talking with mentors, I decided that instead of rushing into a graduate program right out of undergrad, I should pause, reflect, and carefully consider my options. You see, all of my life I have been a constant go-getter and over-achiever. Originally, I did not like the idea of pausing, waiting, or reflecting - but, alas, I conceded to the advice of those wiser ones around me."

And it appears that wisdom has placed Brooke Britt squarely where she belongs - teaching. "I am an educator because I realize the tremendous impact and positive influence that one can have on a child's life. An educator possesses the power to possibly transform the life of a student and alter the trajectory of one's life. I was blessed with amazing educators who encouraged, motivated, and pushed me to excel." Britt goes on to add, "It is an amazing opportunity to be able to have such influence on a young person's life; however, it is also a great deal of pressure. We, as teachers, hold one of the most important and vital jobs in our society. I cannot stress enough the significance of persevering through the challenges facing the education field today; we must keep students at the focus of everything we do as educators." Britt is a passionate advocate of education, as speaks enthusiastically about returning to teach in her own hometown. When she first applied to Teach For America, Brooke didn't know coming home would be an option, but in her application she passionately explained, "I would like to join Teach For America because it presents an undeniable opportunity to serve the community by providing equal education to all students, regardless of their socioeconomic statuses. As a student and as a mentor, I have seen students overcome financial obstacles and personal hurdles every day. However, I have also seen many students fail because of an inadequate and unequal system. More often than not, students who fall behind are not granted the necessary guidance in order to succeed. Their potential is overlooked, or simply not pushed to actualize. However, I can be that person who does. I can be that person, along with other passionate educators who make a difference in the lives of America's underprivileged students."

Of Teach for America, Britt says, "While considering what to do with my life post-graduation, I researched Teach for America. I knew what TFA was about on the surface, but I wanted to really discover what this organization valued before applying and possibly joining and making a commitment. When researching TFA, I found its vision that 'One day, all children in this nation will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education' inspiring." Britt adds, "I wanted to be a part of this fight to end education inequity. After researching and applying, I kept my fingers crossed. I now know that I wanted to begin a career in education and I hoped I could be a part of an organization filled with committed and relentless individuals."

"As a teacher," says Brooke, "I hope to help students recognize and reach their potential as students and as individuals. I aim to show students that although there are and will be challenges in life, they can prevail. I strive to serve as a continuous source of motivation and encouragement for all students by maintaining high expectations, refusing to accept excuses, and pushing them to excel on a daily basis." She adds, "I also lead by example; as their teacher, I hold myself to the same high expectations and do not make excuses. In our class, we hold each other accountable by maintaining our classroom values and expectations. Our classroom values include: community, urgency, joy, grit, and care."

On the opportunity to return home and teach, Brooke says, "Returning to Wildcat Country feels like I'm back at home. Our high school serves as the center of our community and town of Newton Grove. Being able to return home and teach is truly a blessing and honor. To be honest, when I was in college, returning home to work was not something I really considered. I felt like many people my age wanted to live in Raleigh, Charlotte, or another city away from home - and to be honest I did too. But there is no feeling like returning home, starting a career in the community you grew up in, and working to make it an even better place for future generations."



Brooke Britt is glad to return home to help the Sampson County community

Brooke concludes, "I love this community and its people. It is full of vitality and passionate human beings striving for improvement and excellence in all areas. It is an honor to be a part of that movement. I am truly blessed."

For more information about Teach for America, please visit: [www.teachforamerica.org](http://www.teachforamerica.org)

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## It's a Wonderful Christmas in the City

Dec. 5, 2013 • 5:30-8:30pm

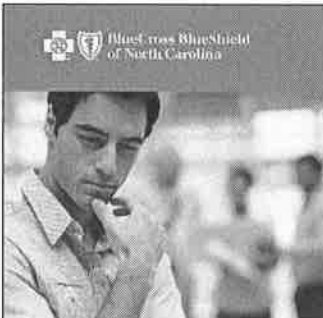
- Participate in the Gingerbread Decorating Activity at Clinton City Hall
- Stop by Santa's House on the Courthouse Square
- Take care of your Christmas Shopping downtown
- Let Choirs & Bands serenade you with the sounds of Christmas on the Courthouse Square
- Bundle up for Hay Rides & Carriage Rides around historic downtown Clinton
- Warm up at the Sampson County History Museum's Reception & Silent Auction

### Schedule of Events

- 5:30pm Clinton Community Christmas Tree Lighting  
Tree Park behind the City Market • 215 Lisbon Street
- 5:30-8:30pm Gingerbread decorating activity (free to the public)  
Gingerbread House Contest entries on display at the Clinton City Hall Auditorium • 221 Lisbon Street
- 5:30-8:00pm Carriage rides (\$15 per person, reservations required)  
City Market • 215 Lisbon Street  
Spaces are limited, call Vickie Crane at 910-592-2557 for reservations
- 5:30-8:00pm Hay rides (\$3 per person, tickets may be purchased at the event)  
City Market • 215 Lisbon Street  
Rides are provided by Hubbs.com Muzz & Clinton Truck and Tractor
- 5:30-8:30pm Live Christmas Music  
Courthouse Steps • Main Street side
- 5:30-8:30pm Sampson County History Museum open house, reception and silent auction (free to the public) 313 Lisbon Street

The Clinton Main Street Program brings this event to you in partnership with: the Sampson County Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Sampson County History Museum, the Clinton-Sampson Chamber of Commerce, the Sampson County Arts Council, and the Sampson Community Theater. All proceeds from this event will be contributed to the Sampson County History Museum.

For more information, please call 910-298-8904



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