

**TEACHFORAMERICA**  
North Carolina · Fourth Quarter Legislative Report  
June 2018

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

--*Vision of Teach For America*

This year marks 27 years of partnership between Teach For America and the state of North Carolina. As a partner, Teach For America has committed to maximizing our contribution to the state by recruiting, training, and supporting excellent, diverse teachers and leaders and growing our number of alumni living and working in North Carolina. We are also committed to strengthening the North Carolina Teacher Corps.

In the fourth quarter, we have the honor of welcoming our newest group of leaders to the state as they prepare to teach in the 2018-2019 school year. They join the growing network of Teach For America corps members and alumni across the state committed to providing an excellent education to North Carolina's, and the nation's, students. As our alumni base continues to grow and mature, our incoming corps members are exposed to more and more examples of the diverse, innovative talent that exists in our network—talent that is working to eliminate educational inequity from a variety of fields.

Courtney Samuelson was an English major at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and was a 2009 Charlotte corps member where she taught English at Coulwood Middle School. She returned to school to obtain a masters in English Language Arts at North Carolina State University. Now Samuelson is a fifth grade teacher at Capitol Encore Academy in Fayetteville, instructing a classroom of students in all subjects, including math and science.<sup>1</sup>

The move to teach all of the core subjects made Samuelson realize the importance of ongoing coaching and support for teachers throughout their careers. “The reality is, especially when you switch subjects or different grade levels, you need a lot of support and you always have room to grow,” she said.

Samuelson’s principal, Angela McCall Hill, wrote of her influence beyond the classroom: “I believe one of the reasons she has a talent for finding quality in potential workforce members is due to her being such an outstanding educator herself. She holds herself to a high standard and never backs away from a challenge or opportunity.”

Courtney was nominated for North Carolina Teacher of the Year and progressed to the finalist round.<sup>2</sup> We are proud to have alumni in our network like Courtney who model what long-term leadership looks like within the schoolhouse to our new members. Other alumni, like Liz Chen, serve as models for the importance of leadership beyond the classroom walls.

Liz Chen is a 2010 alumna of Teach For America—Eastern North Carolina. After earning an undergraduate degree from Princeton University in 2010, she taught biology and chemistry at Northampton County High School. In 2016, Liz co-founded MyHealthEd, a nonprofit organization that uses human-centered design to improve the health and well-being of youth of every identity. She was named *Forbes 30 Under 30 Social Entrepreneurs* for her work with MyHealthED.<sup>3</sup> She also serves as a co-director of ENC STEM, a three-week summer program serving students across three local school districts in eastern North Carolina.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, Laura. “Educators Share Praise for Colleagues across North Carolina.” EducationNC, 11 May 2018, [www.ednc.org/2018/05/11/educators-share-praise-for-colleagues-across-north-carolina/](http://www.ednc.org/2018/05/11/educators-share-praise-for-colleagues-across-north-carolina/). See Appendix A

<sup>2</sup> Fain, Travis. “NC’s New Teacher of the Year Is Named Freebird.” WRAL.com, WRAL, 20 Apr. 2018, [www.wral.com/nc-s-new-teacher-of-the-year-is-named-freebird-/17500566/](http://www.wral.com/nc-s-new-teacher-of-the-year-is-named-freebird-/17500566/). See Appendix B

<sup>3</sup> Barton, Merrilee. “Forbes 30 Under 30.” Forbes, Forbes Magazine, 27 Nov. 2017, [www.forbes.com/pictures/5a0494a74bbe6f37dda214bd/liz-chen-29-l-cristina-le/](http://www.forbes.com/pictures/5a0494a74bbe6f37dda214bd/liz-chen-29-l-cristina-le/). See Appendix C

<sup>4</sup> Chen, Liz. “Tackling Health Disparity with Innovation and Student Empowerment.” EducationNC, 25 May 2018, [www.ednc.org/2018/05/25/tackling-health-disparity-with-innovation-and-student-empowerment/](http://www.ednc.org/2018/05/25/tackling-health-disparity-with-innovation-and-student-empowerment/). See Appendix D

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*The Charlotte Observer, The News & Observer and the Durham Herald-Sun* assembled a panel of 60 influential North Carolinians to elevate policy discussions.<sup>5</sup> Liz was appointed to the panel for her advocacy work.

Reflecting on her journey in education, Liz says:

*When I first moved to this region (Eastern North Carolina) I was rather confident I would move back north after my Teach For America commitment in Northampton County concluded. Today, as support for our mobile app continues to grow, we have never been more motivated to collaborate with leaders and organizations across communities and sectors to expand access to high-quality health tools in our rural communities. And as a former teacher, I could not be more proud of the role students are playing in these efforts. To learn with and work alongside our young people to empower student voices and provide a platform that helps them be the architects of their own future, it's a teacher's dream.<sup>6</sup>*

We are 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 their leadership throughout their lifetime. We are pleased to update you on our progress in the fourth quarter.

### **Statewide Impact**

Teach For America's greatest contribution continues to be the diverse, innovative, and courageous leadership force that we bring to North Carolina and support across our state. Our network of individuals continues to expand opportunity for children through working in classrooms, schools, and from every sector, field, and place where people shape the broader systems in which schools operate.

Today, 27 years since we began partnering with North Carolina, we are over 2,000 individuals strong living and working in nearly two thirds of the counties in our state. In the fourth quarter, *EdNC* ran a series spotlighting our Teach For America alumni in Eastern North Carolina. We are honored that their impact is being recognized broadly and excited to share their stories here.

- **Carice and Eric Sanchez**

Carice and Eric Sanchez are both 2002 alumni of Teach For America-Eastern North Carolina. Together, Carice and Eric co-founded Henderson Collegiate in 2010.

*In June 2009, we got married. Our honeymoon was spent checking and re-checking email to ensure funding would be approved for our big idea: Henderson Collegiate Charter School. We eventually opened in 2010 with 100 fourth-graders, no name power, little collateral, and zero credit history. We got turned down to rent a copy machine by a local business.*

*Fast forward eight years from our first class of 100 students: Henderson Collegiate now operates three campuses on 40 acres of land, has more than 600 students in grades K-12, the high school is ranked in the top 3 percent of all schools across North Carolina, and more than 70 percent of students meet state standards for being college- and career-ready on end-of-grade and end-of-course tests.*

*None of this progress has been achieved alone. We are, without a doubt, proud of the students, families, and partners who have bought into what some believed was impossible: that we can reimagine our*

<sup>5</sup> Webb, Nancy. "60 North Carolina Leaders Discuss the Future of Our State." *Charlotteobserver, Charlotte Observer*, [www.charlotteobserver.com/news/politics-government/influencers/article212212939.html](http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/politics-government/influencers/article212212939.html). See Appendix E

<sup>6</sup> Chen, Liz. "Tackling Health Disparity with Innovation and Student Empowerment." *EducationNC*, 25 May 2018, [www.ednc.org/2018/05/25/tackling-health-disparity-with-innovation-and-student-empowerment/](http://www.ednc.org/2018/05/25/tackling-health-disparity-with-innovation-and-student-empowerment/). See Appendix D

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*education system and drastically improve opportunity for young people in lower-income and/or rural communities.<sup>10</sup>*

- **Hunter Dansby**

Hunter Dansby is a 2015 alumnus of Teach For America-Eastern North Carolina. He taught high school math at James Kenan High School prior to becoming a Principal Resident within the Duplin County School District.

*I came to Eastern North Carolina as a 2015 Teach For America corps member — I didn't quite know what "eastern" North Carolina meant or all the local counties it covered — but I was eager to start teaching at James Kenan High School in Duplin County.*

*As a math teacher, it became painfully obvious that math was a subject many of my students used to deem their worthiness. The curriculum is difficult and the gaps many of my students came with made my class seem all the more impossible to them. Too many of my students were convinced they could not achieve at high-levels.*

*Today, as a Principal Resident at Warsaw Elementary School, I'm using what I learned in the classroom and applying it to shifting mindsets and expectations for lower-income students on a larger scale. Every day I get to learn from veteran school leaders and play a role in helping students reach their incredible potential while partnering with teachers, administrators, and parents to shape a school culture that inspires and empowers this generation and the next.*

*This work is hard but I believe we are on the right track. Time and time again, when I pop into a classroom at Warsaw, I see students learning and loving to learn. When I have the opportunities to observe teachers and students, I am continually reminded great things are happening in our community, progress is possible in our schools, and — if we stay at it — all our kids will enjoy an excellent education that opens doors of opportunity throughout their lives.<sup>11</sup>*

- **Nichad Davis**

Nichad Davis is a 2013 alumnus of Teach For America-Eastern North Carolina. He taught Middle Grades Social Studies at Charity Middle School in Duplin County Schools prior to enrolling at Campbell Law School.

*After graduating from UNC Charlotte, I joined Teach For America and taught high school social studies at Charity Middle School. My time leading a classroom confirmed much of what I felt as a young boy attending school in Greensboro: all students want to succeed but too many kids, particularly minorities and those living in poverty, are conditioned to believe they can't achieve at the highest levels.*

*Today, as a student at Campbell Law School and a member of the clinical program, I work with young people from juvenile courts and local school systems to advance healing. We bring victims and offenders together using restorative practices to de-escalate conflicts while keeping students in high-quality learning*

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<sup>10</sup> Sanchez, Carice, and Eric Sanchez. "Building Great Schools and Believing in One Another along the Way." EducationNC, 23 May 2018, [www.ednc.org/2018/05/23/building-great-schools-and-believing-in-one-another-along-the-way/](http://www.ednc.org/2018/05/23/building-great-schools-and-believing-in-one-another-along-the-way/). See Appendix F

<sup>11</sup> Dansby, Hunter. "If They Can See It, They Can Achieve It: Grounding Schools in High Expectations, Equity, and Opportunity." EducationNC, 24 May 2018, [www.ednc.org/2018/05/24/if-they-can-see-it-they-can-achieve-it-grounding-schools-in-high-expectations-equity-and-opportunity/](http://www.ednc.org/2018/05/24/if-they-can-see-it-they-can-achieve-it-grounding-schools-in-high-expectations-equity-and-opportunity/). See Appendix G

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*environments. We also work with students and educators alike to advance a dialogue about racial biases and how to recognize them in the school setting.*

*In the years ahead, to best meet the needs of our students, I'm hopeful we continue to promote equity and opportunity for all the students and families in our communities, build stronger alliances with law enforcement and the justice system, and expand our partnerships and learning with in-school resource officers to further address the behaviors that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline.<sup>12</sup>*

- **Wren Davisson**

Wren Davisson is a 2005 alumna of Teach For America--Eastern North Carolina. She taught kindergarten at Mariam Boyd Elementary in Warrenton, N.C. for three years and continued her teaching career a childcare center in Durham. In 2013, Davisson joined Durham's Partnership for Children as the Transition to Kindergarten Program Coordinator and later, the North Carolina Partnership for Children as the Shape NC Project Coordinator.

*I was 22 years old when I moved from West Lafayette, Indiana to Warren County, North Carolina as a Teach For America corps member. I was in a new environment, new career, and about to meet a bunch of kindergarten students who would change my career trajectory.*

*After teaching kindergarten in Warrenton, I relocated to Durham and continued as a classroom teacher in a child-care center. The combination of my time in both a kindergarten and childcare classroom ultimately helped me develop a deep passion for the importance of the earliest years in a person's life. The experiences my students had in the five short years before starting school was hugely influential to their kindergarten experience and beyond.*

*Today, I continue to support young children across the state through my work with the North Carolina Partnership for Children and Shape NC, a statewide initiative that trains early childhood teachers and childcare directors about best practices in child nutrition, physical activity, and outdoor play and learning for children birth to five.*

*Over the past 13 years working in early childhood in North Carolina, I've witnessed firsthand the incredible gifts in every child, but also the great disparities in access to early education opportunities for families and kids in our communities. I better understand the challenges that my students and their families in Warrenton were facing that impacted them even by the time they started kindergarten.<sup>13</sup>*

- **Donnell Cannon**

Donnell Cannon is a 2012 alumnus of Teach For America-Eastern North Carolina. He taught social studies at Weldon Middle School. While there, he served as a grade level department chair and representative of the School Improvement Team. Cannon completed his Principal Residency at Southeast Halifax High School, prior to being named principal of North Edgecombe High School in 2016

*I first came to Eastern North Carolina in 2012 as a Teach For America corps member teaching social studies at Weldon Middle School. For me, my approach in the classroom then is not dissimilar to my*

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<sup>12</sup> Davis, Nichad. "Choosing What Connects Us over What Divides Us." EducationNC, 22 May 2018, [www.ednc.org/2018/05/22/choosing-what-connects-us-over-what-divides-us/](http://www.ednc.org/2018/05/22/choosing-what-connects-us-over-what-divides-us/). See Appendix H

<sup>13</sup> Davisson, Wren. "High-Quality Early Childhood Education: The Best Investment Our Communities Can Make." EducationNC, 24 May 2018, [www.ednc.org/2018/05/24/high-quality-early-childhood-education-the-best-investment-our-communities-can-make/](http://www.ednc.org/2018/05/24/high-quality-early-childhood-education-the-best-investment-our-communities-can-make/). See Appendix I

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*approach as a principal today at North Edgecombe High School: value the diverse perspectives and backgrounds of every single person who walks through your door, believe in the potential of all children, build a safe and inclusive environment, and love. Love your kids, colleagues, and the work. This alone will not make possible an equitable and excellent education for all students in Edgecombe or elsewhere, but it is where we start.*

*Knowing 48 percent of children across our state live in poor or low-income homes, and knowing nearly half of these children have remained persistently poor, according to Public Schools First NC, I recognize the challenges ahead. Yet, at North Edgecombe and elsewhere, we must push on with critical optimism and build on the successes we're seeing in the classroom while collaborating with others to expand our growing coalition of leaders committed to all kids.*

*I believe the culture has shifted in North Edgecombe. With it, so too will the narrative about what is possible for kids growing up in our area. In the years ahead, this is how I believe we shape the arc of history: by empowering all students to chase and achieve their dreams while building a more prosperous future for themselves and our communities in Eastern North Carolina.<sup>14</sup>*

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 the state.

#### **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.

We know that personalized and individual, tailored contact with applicants is one of the strongest strategies in influencing applicants to preference a North Carolina region. As such, this year we significantly increased our communication strategies on our regional end to match the support candidates received from our national recruitment team. This year, we surpassed our goal of establishing contact with at least 250 candidates with North Carolina ties. We conducted 130 one: one phone calls, hosted eight webinars specially designed for candidates with North Carolina ties, and engaged a total of 253 candidates across all windows (this could be via webinar, phone calls, emails and/or texts).

We currently have 189 corps members who identify as part of the North Carolina Teaching Corps who are teaching in their first or second year in the classroom. One hundred and forty-seven of them graduated from a North Carolina college or university and 164 of them are North Carolina natives. Our NCTC corps members represent 28 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 3.49
- 48% come from a low-income background<sup>18</sup>
- 52% are people of color
- 51% are teaching math or science
- 32% are the first in their families to graduate from college

<sup>14</sup> Cannon, Donnell. "Where We Start: Empowering All Our Students." EducationNC, 25 May 2018, [www.ednc.org/2018/05/25/where-we-start-empowering-all-our-students/](http://www.ednc.org/2018/05/25/where-we-start-empowering-all-our-students/). See Appendix J

<sup>18</sup> As identified by receiving a full or partial PELL grant

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- 4 served in the military
- 19 were taught by a TFA teacher when they were in grade school

Our North Carolina Teacher Corps initiative was continuously cited as a model for the entire organization, and we remain committed to improving our program year over year. Our strategies for the past year included:

- **Alumni Outreach:** We strategically matched our North Carolina alumni callers with final round applicants based on their interests and career paths. We conducted over 130 calls over six recruitment windows. Alumni used these calls to inspire applicants to choose to teach in North Carolina rather than choosing to teach out of state.
- **NCTC Webinars:** We hosted eight webinars specifically for North Carolinians moving into the final round of interviews. These webinars highlighted stories of current corps members, alumni, and students with North Carolina ties who choose to lead in our state. Over 115 applicants joined our webinars throughout the year.
- **Strategic Stewardship:** Our staff called and texted all applicants with North Carolina ties who were rated as the most competitive and highly likely to be admitted to the corps. These applicants often had competing offers and we used these calls as an opportunity to share more about the education landscape in North Carolina and why their leadership is needed in our state.
- **Statewide Calendar of Events:** We built a statewide calendar of events across our regions that was shared with our national recruitment team. This allowed recruiters to easily advertise our local events to prospective applicants.

### Regional Updates

#### Eastern North Carolina

Teach For America's greatest contribution has always been diverse, courageous leadership. We are a network of individuals who expand opportunity for children, working from classrooms, from schools, and from every sector and field and place where people shape the broader systems in which schools operate. The Eastern North Carolina team is committed to maximizing this broad network of alumni across the region.

Throughout June and July each summer, Teach For America-Eastern North Carolina partners with Northampton County Schools and Lenoir County Public Schools on a one-of-a-kind localized teacher training program called Eastern North Carolina Residency. The program provides free summer school classes to more than 500 students yearly, many of whom lacked access to any such summer learning prior to Residency's launch in 2016.

By basing our summer programming in Eastern North Carolina, we have contributed more than \$700,000 to local businesses and community members via housing, food, and staffing opportunities. We are excited to share updates from the 2018 Residency in our September report.

#### Charlotte

In the fourth quarter, five Teach For America-Charlotte corps members were named the Beacon Learning Community's Irreplaceable Teacher of the Year:

- Jesse Westerhouse teaches math at Westerly Hills. She attended college at Auburn University and is originally from Huntsville, Alabama.
- Maggie Brownrigg teaches science at Garinger High Schools. She is originally from Cincinnati, Ohio and went to college at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. She was recruited under our North Carolina Teacher Corps initiative.

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- Jennifer Lucas teaches math at James Martin Middle School. She went to the University of Georgia and is from Johns Creek, Georgia.
- Jamie Binns teaches biology at Harding University High School. He is originally from Greensboro, Alabama and went to Talladega College.
- Mike McGean teaches algebra at Vance High School. He is originally from Lincoln, Massachusetts and attended Middlebury College.

**North Carolina Piedmont Triad**

In the fourth quarter, the North Carolina Piedmont Triad had three teachers nominated for Rookie Teacher of the Year by Guilford County schools:

- Akeylah Campbell teachers middle school science at Swann Middle School. She is from Statesville, North Carolina and went to North Carolina A&T. We are proud to share that we recruited her as part of our North Carolina Teacher Corps efforts.
- Ingrid Jackson teachers English at Eastern Guilford Middle School. She is from Wilmington, North Carolina and went to the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. We are excited to share that we also recruited Ingrid through our North Carolina Teacher Corps efforts.
- Stephanie Moyer teachers English at High Point Central High School. She is originally from Raleigh and went to Penn State University. Stephanie was also recruited under our North Carolina Teacher Corps efforts.

**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. In 2016 (the most recent data available), we earned a perfect four-star rating from Charity Navigator for the fourteenth straight year for exemplary financial health (see appendix K). Less than one percent of all nonprofits nationwide have received this many consecutive four-star ratings, putting us in the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile among all nonprofits. 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. We look forward to updating the state on our progress in our September quarterly report.

# Educators share praise for colleagues across North Carolina

 [ednc.org/2018/05/11/educators-share-praise-for-colleagues-across-north-carolina/](https://ednc.org/2018/05/11/educators-share-praise-for-colleagues-across-north-carolina/)

By Laura Lee

May 11, 2018

Courtney Samuelson was an English major, loved the subject, and began her teaching career in English. She returned to school to obtain a masters in English Language Arts at North Carolina State University. Now Samuelson is a fifth grade teacher at Capitol Encore Academy in Fayetteville, instructing a classroom of students in all subjects, including math and science.

The change was a challenge. "I feel like a first year teacher all over again," Samuelson said.

The move to teach all of the core subjects made Samuelson realize the importance of ongoing coaching and support for teachers throughout their careers. "The reality is, especially when you switch subjects or different grade levels, you need a lot of support and you always have room to grow," she said.

Samuelson is one of many teachers nominated by their colleagues for recognition during Teacher Appreciation Week through a ReachNC Voices survey. Samuelson's principal, Angela McCall Hill, wrote of her influence beyond the classroom: "I believe one of the reasons she has a talent for finding quality in potential workforce members is due to her being such an outstanding educator herself. She holds herself to a high standard and never backs away from a challenge or opportunity."

Throughout the week, EducationNC has highlighted the hard work and dedication of teachers across the state. Educators have a front row seat to the good work of their colleagues, so we called on them to nominate others who deserve praise.

Shelley Townsend nominated her colleague Jodi Cook at New Market Elementary in Sophia, NC. Townsend wrote of Cook: "As her neighboring classroom teacher, I have watched her teach the most challenging students. With consistent classroom management, daily routines and well planned lessons, her students are equipped to meet individual and classroom goals. She knows the individual needs of each student, is incredibly organized, and differentiates rigorous lessons based on student data."

Nominators shared their pride in the work of their colleagues at the high school level as well. Assistant Principal Elizabeth McGowan offered enthusiastic praise for history and civics teacher Nekia Cromity at Terry Sanford High School in Fayetteville, NC:



This teacher is amazing!!!! Ms. Cromity makes history relevant, exciting and when the students complete their courses with Ms. Cromity they are well prepared for what ever is next. She makes learning FUN!!!!!!! even though the class is tough. We need more educators like Nekia Cromity.

One common thread of many of the nominations was how much an educator cares for his or her students. Kindergarten teacher Leslie Pritchett nominated her colleague at Lake Norman Elementary School in Mooresville, Sherry Morris.

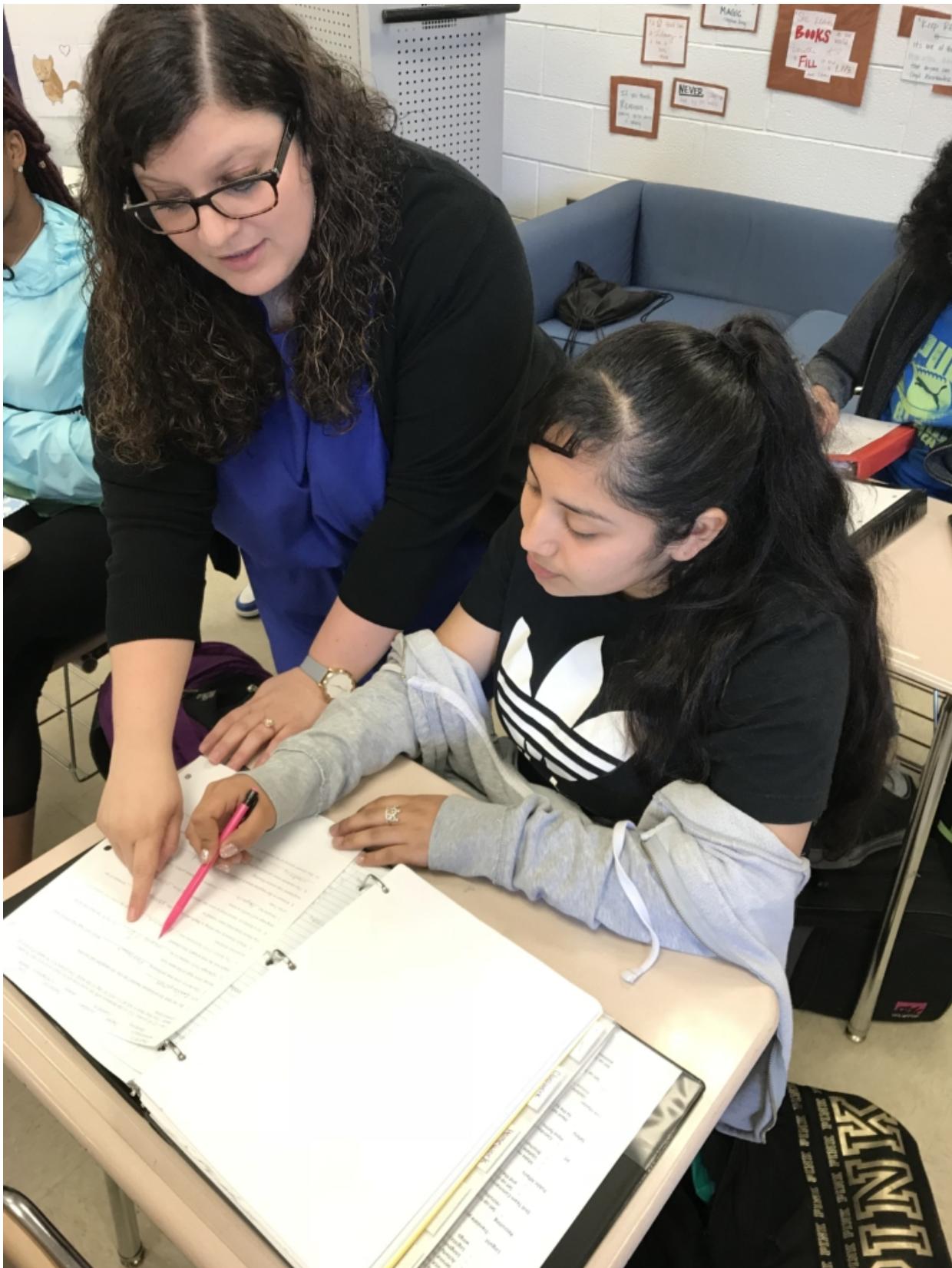
“She not only teaches her students academics, she makes each students feel special and loved,” Pritchett wrote. “Her joy in working with children is contagious!”

Teachers value the compassion and kindness of their colleagues, but they also understand the importance of diligence, consistency, and accountability. Bryan Christopher nominated a fellow teacher from Riverside High School, writing:

Mira Rahili is tough. When students are late to class, they get detention. If they do a poor job on an assignment, she makes them do it again. If they show disrespect, she pulls them aside and addresses it. If they give her a hug, she tells them to sit down and get to work. She also arrives early, stays late and attends her students’ games, performances and dances at night. She works tirelessly to improve her own practices, sets high expectations and holds her students and colleagues accountable so they can be at their best every day. And Riverside High School (Durham, NC) loves her for it.

For Rahili, a sense of safety — physical, intellectual and emotional — is vital in her classroom. “I want them to feel safe to express who they are, their beliefs — whether I agree with them or not,” Rahili said. “I want them to feel like there is an adult in their lives that cares about all the things they care about.”

Rahili teaches English to a wide range of high school students, and she wants every one to understand his or her worth. “For 90 minutes everyday... I want my kids to feel safe and appreciated and valued for who they are — whether they are good at English or not, whether they are struggling to be here everyday or they are an AP student that is headed to Harvard.”



Mira Rahili instructs a student at Riverside High School.

“Teaching is not glorified babysitting,” she said. “We are meeting the most amazing human beings, and we are not just keeping your kids while you’re at work. We are not monitoring to make sure they are living and breathing... we are trying to teach them to be great, wonderful people and they are slowly turning into that.”

But a lack of resources can hinder her work, Rahili said. “It is really hard to craft wonderful, helpful, kind human beings when you are lacking foundational resources.”

For the thousands of teachers across the state, helping to create more wonderful, kind human beings is what motivates them to get up early and stay at school late. A parent, writing about Tanya Sams, a third grade teacher at York Elementary School in Raleigh, summarized what many parents hope for their child’s teacher: “Mrs. Sams loves her students and they know it and love her right back. At the end of the day, that is what all parents want for their children; to be loved while at school.”

Teacher Appreciation Week 2018

Just In

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## EDUCATION

# NC's new teacher of the year is named Freebird

**Tags:** [education](#), [teacher](#)

Posted April 20

Updated April 21

7

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8 Reactions

**By Travis Fain, WRAL statehouse reporter**

**CARY, N.C.** — North Carolina's newest teacher of the year is a Burlington high school teacher named Freebird McKinney, and he says he was born to fly.

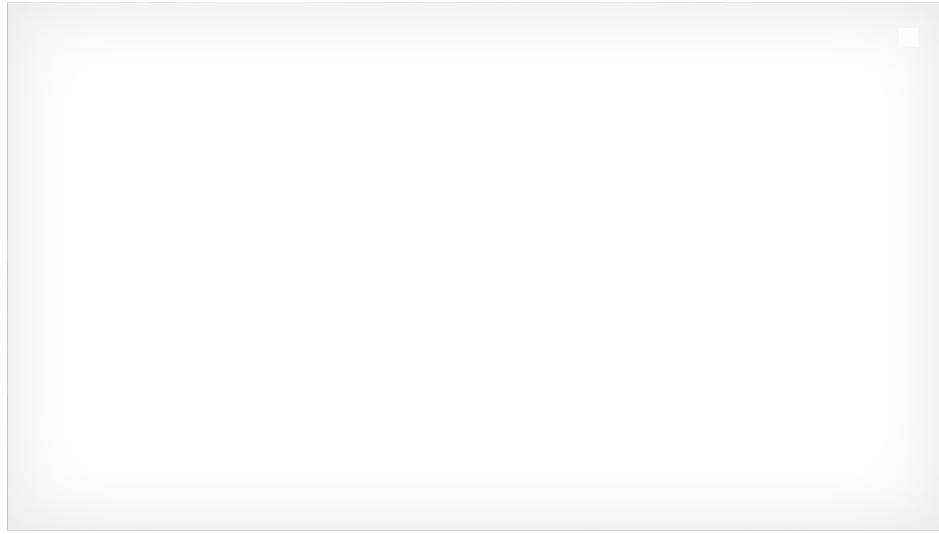
McKinney teaches social studies at Walter M. Williams High School. He was named the 2018 Burroughs Wellcome Fund North Carolina Teacher of the Year in a Friday

ceremony attended by Gov. Roy Cooper, Superintendent of Public Instruction Mark Johnson and McKinney's fellow eight finalists.

McKinney calls himself "a village teacher." He told the luncheon crowd at The Umstead Hotel that he grew up wanting to be a hero: a Jedi knight, or Indiana Jones, or someone from a fantasy book. Instead, he found his calling.

"Walk the path of the dragon slayer," McKinney told the crowd. "My dragon is ignorance." 

ADVERTISING



McKinney has been a teacher since 2004. He'll spend the next school year on a sabbatical of sorts, traveling North Carolina as an ambassador for teaching and going to Mexico as part of an endowment sponsored by Go Global NC. He'll also serve as an adviser to the State Board of Education.

McKinney said he tries to teach his students "to be a better human being than they were yesterday."

"I want them, each and every day, to leave my class in a moment of reflection: Was I better than I was yesterday?" he said. "I want them to do that by understanding their place in the story. I want them to do that by understanding their purpose and their

calling. And we work on that all year, to make sure that you have something that you're willing to wake up for every single day, to live for, to fight for, a purpose, a calling.

"If they can do that," McKinney said, "then my job as an educator is done."

The other regional finalists for this year's state Teacher of the Year award were: Kaley Kiffner of Perquimans County Middle School, Cameron Gupton of Greene Early College High School, Kedecia Stewart of Pinkston Street Elementary School, Lindsey Sise of West Hoke Middle School, Lisa Wall of Burke Middle College, Julie Pittman of R-S Central High School and Courtney Samuelson of The Capitol Encore Academy.

The 2018 North Carolina Regional Teachers of the Year are:

- Northeast: Kaley Kiffner, Perquimans County Middle (Perquimans County Schools);
- Southeast: Cameron Gupton, Greene Early College High (Greene County Schools);
- North Central: Kedecia Stewart, Pinkston Street Elementary School (Vance County Schools);
- Sandhills: Lindsey Sise, West Hoke Middle (Hoke County Schools);
- Piedmont-Triad: Bryan McKinney, Walter M. Williams High (Alamance-Burlington Schools);
- Southwest: Samone Graham, Mooresville High (Mooresville Graded School District);
- Northwest: Lisa Wall, Burke Middle College (Burke County Public Schools);
- Western: Julie Pittman, R-S Central High (Rutherford County Schools); and

- Charter Schools: Courtney Samuelson, The Capitol Encore Academy (Fayetteville)

**Tags:** [education](#), [teacher](#)

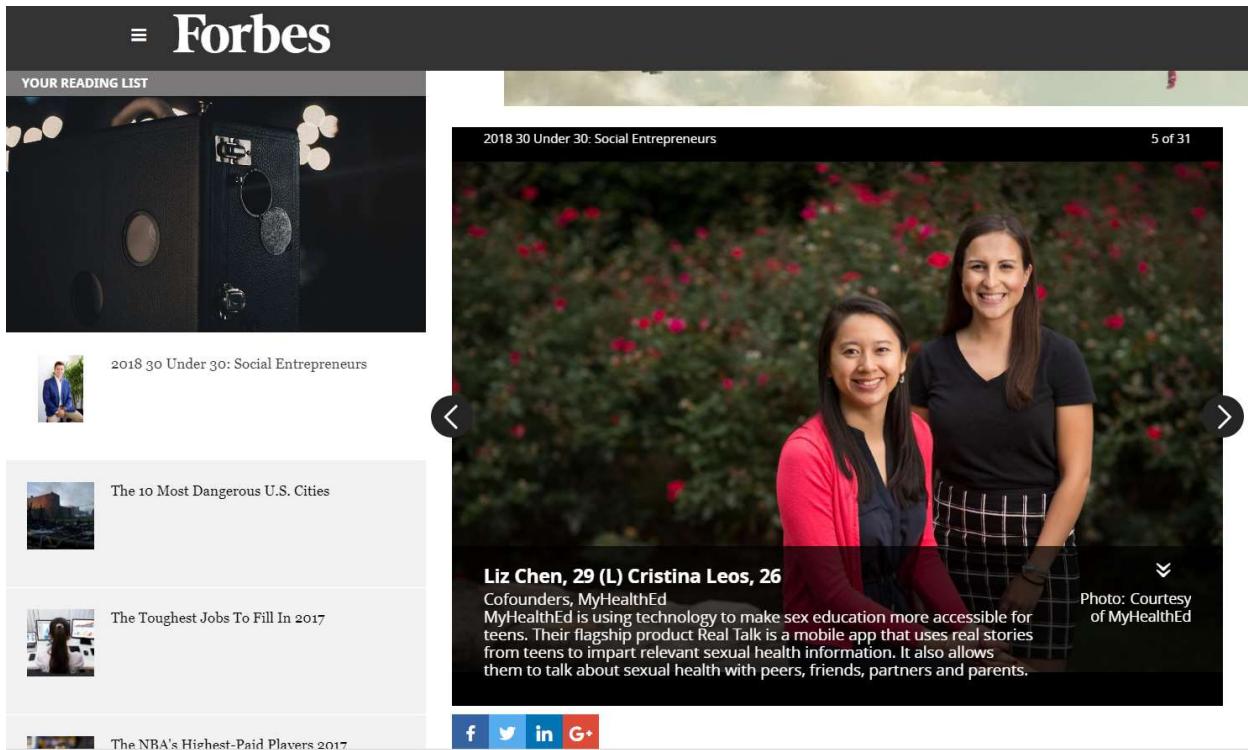
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## CREDITS

**Reporter** [Travis Fain](#)

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## APPENDIX C



Forbes

YOUR READING LIST

2018 30 Under 30: Social Entrepreneurs

5 of 31

The 10 Most Dangerous U.S. Cities

The Toughest Jobs To Fill In 2017

The NBA's Highest-Paid Players 2017

**Liz Chen, 29 (L) Cristina Leos, 26**  
Cofounders, MyHealthEd  
MyHealthEd is using technology to make sex education more accessible for teens. Their flagship product Real Talk is a mobile app that uses real stories from teens to impart relevant sexual health information. It also allows them to talk about sexual health with peers, friends, partners and parents.

Photo: Courtesy of MyHealthEd

f t in G+

# Tackling health disparity with innovation and student empowerment

 [ednc.org/2018/05/25/tackling-health-disparity-with-innovation-and-student-empowerment/](https://ednc.org/2018/05/25/tackling-health-disparity-with-innovation-and-student-empowerment/)

By Liz Chen

May 25, 2018

I could have thought about the decision more. I could have consulted my parents about accepting an offer to teach high school biology and chemistry at Northampton County High School in Gaston County, North Carolina. Yet, eight years after coming to the eastern part of the state as a Teach For America corps member, I have no regrets about the move.

As a teacher in Northampton County, I fell in love with my students and the area. I learned a great deal about the teenagers in my classroom and school — their abilities, their dreams for the future and yes, their struggles. The impacts of public health on their personal lives being one of those struggles.

As graduate of Princeton University with a degree in anthropology, I have long been interested in the intersection of health and education. I want to best understand what needs to be true in our schools and communities to help *all* students lead long, productive and healthy lives.

In and around the county where I taught, teen pregnancy rates have been disproportionately higher compared to those in more affluent, non-rural parts of our state for some time. While students are supposed to receive state mandated sex education in seventh, eighth, and ninth grades, my experience was that many of them still sought additional answers relating to puberty, STDs and gender identities, to name a few.

These experiences, and the impacts of teen pregnancy on students as young as 14 or 15 years, never left my mind as I began to research masters programs in public health. I purposefully enrolled at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with the hopes of remaining close to my students and seeking solutions to what I had grown to care most about: bridging the gap between public health and public education and decreasing health disparities in our rural communities that hinder student growth.

Vichi Jagannathan, a Princeton classmate and fellow Teach For America—Eastern North Carolina alumna, shares this passion. Together, we have sought to breakdown the institutional barriers that knowingly or unknowingly prevent all children from accessing the knowledge they want and need. We witnessed first-hand that education alone, especially in our rural, lower-income schools, is not a silver bullet capable of solving for the many factors influencing the mental and emotional growth of students.



In 2016, we launched our nonprofit MyHealthEd, Inc., and our mission is to use human-centered design to improve the health and well-being of youth of every identity. Our first product, a mobile app called Real Talk now reaches about 5,000 local teenagers. Through the app, teens ages 13 to 15 can access high-quality sex education while reading stories from real teenagers about puberty, relationships, bullying and more. The information is accessible in both format (stories are presented as text message conversations, the app can be accessed via phone and soon will be accessible without an internet connection) and language (content is written by teenagers and reviewed by our Real Talk team).

With Real Talk, students can select the topics and stories that interest them most. Thus far, we have seen a willingness among users to share personal stories about puberty, relationships, and bullying and users like the peer-to-peer sharing of experiences and knowledge. Paired with additional hyperlinks from reliable sources, teens can access a host of stories at their fingertips. While the app is not designed to replace traditional sex education, it bridges an existing gap between health and education while drastically expanding access to information for rural students in our area.

Too often and for too long the differing sectors that impact young people — healthcare, housing, education, technology and so forth — have operated in silos. In the years ahead, our hope is that Real Talk plays an important role in a larger local and national effort to promote the well-being of the “whole child.” We aim to partner with additional teachers and schools as well as families and communities to move away from an approach that focuses on merely academic success and refocuses on the many factors impacting a child’s growth and success, both inside and outside the classroom. As such, we need leaders across sectors working collectively to further the health of all young people to better prepare them for our 21st century workforce.

When I first moved to this region I was rather confident I would move back north after my Teach For America commitment in Northampton County concluded. Today, as support for our mobile app continues to grow, we have never been more motivated to collaborate with leaders and organizations across communities and sectors to expand access to high-quality health tools in our rural communities. And as a former teacher, I could not be more proud of the role students are playing in these efforts. To learn with and work alongside our young people to empower student voices and provide a platform that helps them be the architects of their own future, it’s a teacher’s dream.

Teach For America



**THE INFLUENCER** **Claude Alexander Jr.**  
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**Brooks Bell**  
CEO, Brooks Bell, Inc.



**Anita Brown-Graham**  
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Government, UNC Chapel Hill



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**Liz Chen**  
Co-Founder of MyHealthEd



**Astrid Chirinos**  
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**Ashley Christensen**  
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**Lew Ebert**  
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Manager, Wells Fargo



**Carol Folt**  
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**Shirley Frye**  
Longtime Greensboro community leader



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**Vivian Howard**  
Chef, author, TV host, advocate for Eastern N.C.



**Webb Hubbell**  
Author, former Clinton administration member



**Mark Jewell**  
President, North Carolina Association of Educators



**Dr. James H. Johnson**  
Distinguished Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship, UNC's Kenan-Flagler Business School; director of the Urban Investment Strategies Center



**Catherine Lawson**  
Attorney, Parker Poe in Raleigh; Started the #meAt14 campaign



**Doug Lebda**  
CEO, Lending Tree



**Carol Lovin**  
Executive Vice President and System Chief of Staff,  
Atrium Health



**Michael Marsicano**  
President and CEO, Foundation For The Carolinas



**Jim Martin**  
Governor, 1985-1993



**Hugh McColl**  
CEO of Bank of America, 1983-2001



**Pat McCrory**  
Governor, 2013-2017, Charlotte mayor 1995-2009



**Bob Morgan**  
President and CEO, Charlotte Chamber of Commerce



## Bree Newsome

Activist



## Bob Page

CEO, Replacements, Ltd.



## Cyndee Patterson

President, The Lee Institute



## Bev Perdue

Governor, 2009-2013; Chair and Founder of digiLEARN



## Art Pope

CEO, Variety Wholesalers; Chairman, John William Pope Foundation



## Karen Rindle

Executive Director, WakeUP Wake County



## Mike Rizer

Executive Vice President and Head of Community Relations at Wells Fargo



## Pilar Rocha-Goldberg

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## Madison Shook

GOP fundraiser



## Sallie Shuping Russell

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## Richard Sneed

Principal Chief, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians



## Thomas Stith

Former Chief of Staff under Gov. Pat McCrory



## Patricia Timmons-Goodson

Justice (Ret.) N.C. Supreme Court; Vice Chair U.S. Civil Rights Commission



## Que Tucker

Commissioner, North Carolina High School Athletic Association



## Paul Valone

President, Grass Roots North Carolina



## Richard Vinroot

Partner, Robinson Bradshaw; Charlotte mayor 1991 to 1995



## Mark Vitner

Senior Economist, Wells Fargo



## Bishop Hope Morgan Ward

Bishop, North Carolina Conference, United Methodist Church

**Clayton Wilcox**

Superintendent, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

**Patrick Woodie**

President and CEO, NC Rural Center

**Gene Woods**

President and CEO, Atrium Health

**Randy Woodson**

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**Larry Wooten**

President, N.C. Farm Bureau

**Joan Zimmerman**

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# Building great schools and believing in one another along the way

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 [ednc.org/2018/05/23/building-great-schools-and-believing-in-one-another-along-the-way/](https://ednc.org/2018/05/23/building-great-schools-and-believing-in-one-another-along-the-way/)

by Carice Sanchez and Eric Sanchez | May 23, 2018

May 23, 2018

In June 2009, we got married. Our honeymoon was spent checking and re-checking email to ensure funding would be approved for our big idea: Henderson Collegiate Charter School. We eventually opened in 2010 with 100 fourth-graders, no name power, little collateral, and zero credit history. We got turned down to rent a copy machine by a local business.

“And, when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.”

This quote from the novel, *The Alchemist*, is a favorite. It also begins to illustrate our journey and collective work in Vance County. We came to this area in the summer of 2002 as Teach For America corps members, teaching at Pinkston Street Elementary and Eaton-Johnson Middle School, respectively. We loved our students, our schools, and the community. Most of all we knew then what we are acting on now, and that’s the reality that students here have unlimited potential when provided the opportunity to realize it.

Fast forward eight years from our first class of 100 students: Henderson Collegiate now operates three campuses on 40 acres of land, has more than 600 students in grades K-12, the high school is ranked in the top 3 percent of all schools across North Carolina, and more than 70 percent of students meet state standards for being college- and career-ready on end-of-grade and end-of-course tests.

Part of what attracted us to this work in 2002 was a desire to challenge the status quo; we still share this desire. Moreover, we were and remain confident all children, when provided opportunity, could challenge the status quo themselves. Our experiences in the classroom and what we see at Henderson Collegiate are proof points that the dogmatic view which suggests zip code or income is destiny is simply untrue.

None of this progress has been achieved alone. We are, without a doubt, proud of the students, families, and partners who have bought into what some believed was impossible: that we can reimagine our education system and drastically improve opportunity for young people in lower-income and/or rural communities. We are also particularly proud of the leadership team at Henderson, the overwhelming majority of which—over 90 percent of our 30-person team—has served in leadership roles throughout our school’s history. There are multiple, maybe 100 reasons for student success in our community, but the strong, consistent leadership of this diverse group is undoubtedly number one on the list.

Leaders develop leaders and across the Henderson campuses we model the motto: “Hungry. Humble. And Smart.” Our team of leaders is hungry and seems to have a limitless motor chugging towards excellence and equity. The culture across our campuses is grounded in

humility and a universal understanding that feedback makes us all better. And of course, the teachers and administrators working with our kids are smart—not just book smart—but smart in their tenacity towards collaborative opportunities and their mindfulness towards building an environment where all of us strive together. And of course, we seek to mirror these qualities for our students so that they can take greater ownership of their learning and life trajectory.

Together, teachers, staff, and everyone in and around Henderson Collegiate conspire to advance excellence and equity. They are the ones who consistently transform hopes into realities. We still have plenty of learning, adapting, and re-equipping to do in Vance County but the progress we have seen strengthens our belief we can and will continue to deepen our impact with students and families and redefine what is possible for lower-income, rural children in our community.

[Teach For America](#)

# If they can see it, they can achieve it: Grounding schools in high expectations, equity, and opportunity

 [ednc.org/2018/05/24/if-they-can-see-it-they-can-achieve-it-grounding-schools-in-high-expectations-equity-and-opportunity/](https://ednc.org/2018/05/24/if-they-can-see-it-they-can-achieve-it-grounding-schools-in-high-expectations-equity-and-opportunity/)

By Hunter Dansby

May 24, 2018

I cannot picture myself doing anything else, anywhere else. That was not always the case.

As a math teacher, it became painfully obvious that math was a subject many of my students used to deem their worthiness. The curriculum is difficult and the gaps many of my students came with made my class seem all the more impossible to them. Too many of my students were convinced they could not achieve at high-levels. For years our education system has reinforced this belief in communities across our state and beyond: the bar for students growing up in lower-income, predominantly communities of color and/or rural communities, is set frighteningly low.



Students recognize this reality too. My role as a teacher was to set high expectations for my students, design relevant academic lessons to help my students realize their true potential, and help them reimagine what was possible in my classroom and beyond. I believe it was our classroom culture that fueled growth in my students, followed by excellent content teaching, that empowered a group of students that arrived 15 percent proficient in math to leave my classroom 67 percent proficient at year's end.

It was my job as their teacher to remind students that they have the potential and the unique gifts to do the difficult inside the classroom and elsewhere. Over time, I would see students recognize how much I believed in them and maybe they too should believe in themselves. The ongoing work of shifting mentalities and building a culture rooted in excellence and equity quickly became my passion in the classroom. I was able to build deep relationships with about 60-70 kids as a teacher, but I knew all kids deserve whole buildings of teachers and adults that believe in them. I wanted to help transform entire schools and communities, encourage and empower students and adults alike, and hold all of us (including myself) to high standards along the way.

Today, as a Principal Resident at Warsaw Elementary School, I'm using what I learned in the classroom and applying it to shifting mindsets and expectations for lower-income students on a larger scale. Every day I get to learn from veteran school leaders and play a role in helping students reach their incredible potential while partnering with teachers, administrators, and parents to shape a school culture that inspires and empowers this generation and the next.

Our students, like all students, are smart, full of curiosity and big dreams. They consistently

know more than people give them credit for and this includes knowing they attend a low performing school. Changing this reality is critical if we are to put every student on a strong educational path that enables our kids to fully participate in and shape our future communities. These efforts start with changing mentalities and culture.

As a school leader, I aim to be a partner who continually listens to a diverse group of stakeholders, grounds decisions in equity, and acts with empathy and courage to drive progress. At Warsaw, we strive to empower students to think drastically different about what their lives can be and what their futures will be. We strive to make our physical building a place parents want to visit and love to engage with others. When a current teacher is posed with the question, “would I want to take my class?” we want them to say, “yes” every time. These elements are foundational to school turnaround efforts and it’s how I believe we start to reimagine a school we are all proud of for years to come.

This work is hard but I believe we are on the right track. Time and time again, when I pop into a classroom at Warsaw, I see students learning and loving to learn. When I have the opportunities to observe teachers and students, I am continually reminded great things are happening in our community, progress is possible in our schools, and — if we stay at it — all our kids will enjoy an excellent education that opens doors of opportunity throughout their lives.

Teach For America

# Choosing what connects us over what divides us

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 ednc.org/2018/05/22/choosing-what-connects-us-over-what-divides-us/

By Nichad  
Davis

May 22, 2018

Why am I not a school-to-prison pipeline statistic?

I found my refuge in school. I was provided opportunity, exposed to rigorous coursework, and felt the support of teachers and administrators. Yet, my experience was far different than many of my friends and peers. I was invited to enroll in AP classes like calculus. I had teachers in my gifted classes telling me that I could be somebody. They encouraged me to express myself. And when I did get in trouble, the language was far different than what many of my friends heard. After I got in a fight once, I recall hearing something like, “You’re such a good kid. Why are you fighting?”



My friends and I might have lived in the same neighborhood, attended the same schools, but our realities inside the school walls were very different. I got in trouble just like my friends and made some of the same bad decisions as people who are now incarcerated or convicted felons. By all generalized accounts I was a “troubled” student. As a high school teacher in Duplin County, I was always mindful of my experiences as a kid and it helped me connect with many students who would have previously been considered “troubled” as well.

No child is unreachable. With a focus on healing, not punishment, I believe we can reach far more young people and empower them to achieve at the highest levels. These interventions hold the potential to reduce suspensions and incarceration.

Today, as a student at Campbell Law School and a member of the clinical program, I work with young people from juvenile courts and local school systems to advance healing. We bring victims and offenders together using restorative practices to de-escalate conflicts while keeping students in high-quality learning environments. We also work with students and educators alike to advance a dialogue about racial biases and how to recognize them in the school setting.

For years, harsh school policies, particularly a reliance on suspensions, once believed to solve one problem has incited a far worse problem. Suspending students is not the answer. We know from data that students who are suspended are more likely to drop out of school, enter the juvenile justice system, or find themselves involved in criminal activity. Our current overreliance on punishment costs taxpayers as much as \$35 billion in lost taxpayer revenue, including the cost of keeping individuals in prison and paying for health care.

These policies have also historically impacted kids from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds at higher rates—the very students who often need time in the classroom most. Black students, for example, are nearly twice as likely as white students to be expelled from school without a secondary education option, according to recent civil rights data from the Department of Education.

This data is alarming to read. However, my experiences growing up poor and black in a low-income neighborhood in Greensboro, North Carolina and my experience working with students in classrooms gives me hope we can curb the school-to-prison-pipeline in North Carolina and across our nation.

After graduating from UNC Charlotte, I joined Teach For America and taught high school social studies at Rose Hill Magnolia Elementary School. My time leading a classroom confirmed much of what I felt as a young boy attending school in Greensboro: all students want to succeed but too many kids, particularly minorities and those living in poverty, are conditioned to believe they can't achieve at the highest levels.

In the years ahead, to best meet the needs of our students, I'm hopeful we continue to promote equity and opportunity for all the students and families in our communities, build stronger alliances with law enforcement and the justice system, and expand our partnerships and learning with in-school resource officers to further address the behaviors that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline.

I am a firm believer in a shared humanity. While there is oppression and discrimination in this life, I find it hard to hate. There are no solutions rooted in hate. When we approach disagreement in our schools or the broader debates regarding equity, safety, and necessary supports for our students, I hope we can all be more mindful of our shared humanity.

[Teach For America](#)

# High-quality early childhood education: The best investment our communities can make

 [ednc.org/2018/05/24/high-quality-early-childhood-education-the-best-investment-our-communities-can-make/](https://ednc.org/2018/05/24/high-quality-early-childhood-education-the-best-investment-our-communities-can-make/)

By Wren Davisson

May 24, 2018

Do you remember the last time you started a new job? What were your thoughts and worries that morning as you packed up for first day? Did you wonder what to wear? If people would be welcoming? Who will you eat lunch with? Now imagine you are just five years old and getting on a bus to start school for the very first time not knowing how you will be greeted or what to expect.

It was a warm Friday morning in late August when D'mari came through my classroom doors wearing a backpack that was about the same size as him. There were big juicy tear running down his face as he repeated over and over, "I don't want to go to kindergarten!" Little did I know at the time, the first day of kindergarten is, for many children like D'mari, their first experience in a formal learning setting. I also did not know, that research shows the first day of kindergarten can mark the tone for a child's academic experience for years to come.



I was 22 years old when I moved from West Lafayette, Indiana to Warren County, North Carolina as a Teach For America corps member. I was in a new environment, new career, and about to meet a bunch of kindergarten students who would change my career trajectory.

Lesson plans and activities take on many forms in a kindergarten setting, but each aid in the long-term social and academic growth of our state's youngest learners. I taught kindergarten in Warrenton, North Carolina for three school years and will never forget my 60+ students who sat on the carpet daily ready to learn. Thank goodness for Mrs. Davis, my teacher assistant, who had been working in kindergarten for many years before I arrived. Because of her, I had a model of how to work with a group of kindergarteners not just to teach them how to read and write, but also to build their social-emotional skills and guide them into first grade with the capacity to continue to learn.

These experiences, and the growth of my students, opened my eyes to the earliest stages of learning where access to stimulating learning environments and relationship building with peers, parents and caregivers are so critical to a young person's skill development and learning. This exploration of ourselves and our environment at the earliest stages of childhood enables our continued growth as adults. In fact, I now know that nearly 90 percent of brain

growth takes place in a child's first 2,000 days, long before he or she attends their first kindergarten class. It's during this critical time that children start down a path towards the happy, healthy, and successful adults they are capable of becoming.

After teaching kindergarten in Warrenton, I relocated to Durham, North Carolina and continued as a classroom teacher in a child-care center. The combination of my time in both a kindergarten and child-care classroom ultimately helped me develop a deep passion for the importance of the earliest years in a person's life. The experiences my students had in the five short years before starting school was hugely influential to their kindergarten experience and beyond.

In 2013, I stepped into the Transition to Kindergarten Program Coordinator at Durham's Partnership for Children. Durham's Partnership for Children is responsible for administering Smart Start funding from the legislature to support children and families birth to five years old be ready for kindergarten and beyond. In the role, I was tasked with supporting about 4,000 children and their families in Durham County as they prepare for kindergarten. I worked with elementary schools to provide clear parent communication about the registration and transition process and implemented welcome events to ease families into school. I also worked with local child care centers to provide them with the materials and information their families needed to start a smooth transition into school. I thought of D'mari and our first day of kindergarten in Warrenton often during this time as I had a much deeper understanding of the long and important process it is for a child and their family to arrive on the first day of kindergarten, excited, comfortable, and ready to learn.

Today, I continue to support young children across the state through my work with the North Carolina Partnership for Children and Shape NC, a statewide initiative that trains early childhood teachers and child care directors about best practices in child nutrition, physical activity, and outdoor play and learning for children birth to five.

Over the past 13 years working in early childhood in North Carolina, I've witnessed firsthand the incredible gifts in every child, but also the great disparities in access to early education opportunities for families and kids in our communities. I better understand the challenges that my students and their families in Warrenton were facing that impacted them even by the time they started kindergarten.

I am grateful to see the field of early childhood is growing and becoming a bigger part of our national conversation. In the years ahead, I have all intentions of continuing to be an advocate for North Carolina's youngest children, as I know setting the stage early ultimately helps children have the opportunity to attain an excellent education.

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# Where we start: Empowering all our students

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 [ednc.org/2018/05/25/where-we-start-empowering-all-our-students/](http://ednc.org/2018/05/25/where-we-start-empowering-all-our-students/)

By Donnell  
Cannon

May 25, 2018

Recently, I was reflecting on the famous Dr. King quote, “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” I wholeheartedly believe the universe bends towards justice, but we are the ones who bend it. We are ones who choose love, courage, and work to expand opportunities that will shape individual and collective futures in our communities.

As a kid growing up in Richmond, Virginia, I knew I wanted to disrupt inequity though I did not necessarily have a profession in mind. There are innumerable people and fields that move systems of oppression towards fairness and equality, the field of education found me after studying history at Norfolk State University. It is where I plan to stay for a long time.



I first came to Eastern North Carolina in 2012 as a Teach For America corps member teaching social studies at Weldon Middle School. For me, my approach in the classroom then is not dissimilar to my approach as a principal today at North Edgecombe High School: value the diverse perspectives and backgrounds of every single person who walks through your door, believe in the potential of all children, build a safe and inclusive environment, and love. Love your kids, colleagues, and the work. This alone will not make possible an equitable and excellent education for all students in Edgecombe or elsewhere, but it is where we start.

As such, significant investments are being made at North Edgecombe to ensure we build a diverse coalition of teachers, administrators, and community partners grounded in these beliefs and capable of putting students on a path towards lifelong success. We explore a myriad of equity-driven approaches and consistently remind students and staff that everyone is a part of the change process.

Knowing 48 percent of children across our state live in poor or low-income homes, and knowing nearly half of these children have remained persistently poor, according to Public Schools First NC, I recognize the challenges ahead. Yet, at North Edgecombe and elsewhere, we must push on with critical optimism and build on the successes we’re seeing in the classroom while collaborating with others to expand our growing coalition of leaders committed to all kids.

I believe the culture has shifted in North Edgecombe. With it, so too will the narrative about what is possible for kids growing up in our area. In the years ahead, this is how I believe we shape the arc of history: by empowering all students to chase and achieve their dreams while building a more prosperous future for themselves and our communities in Eastern North Carolina.

This belief is audacious. Change is hard, but a transformative moment happens in an instance. They happen every day in classrooms and schools. I hope we never lose sight of the hard fought progress being made, both big and small. As we work collectively to shape a more prosperous future in our communities, I am hopeful an even larger, more diverse coalition of leaders emerge to improve our education system and the many systems impacting it.

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*Editor's note: Donnell Cannon serves on the board of EducationNC.*

Teach For America



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[www.charitynavigator.org](http://www.charitynavigator.org)

October 1, 2016

Elisa Villanueva Beard  
Teach For America  
25 Broadway  
12th Floor  
New York, NY 10004

Dear Elisa Villanueva Beard:

On behalf of Charity Navigator, I wish to congratulate Teach For America on attaining the coveted 4-star rating for demonstrating strong financial health and commitment to accountability and transparency.

The nonprofit sector is advancing and expanding. As our organizations evolve, so do the desires and interests of our supporters. Astute donors are yearning for greater accountability, transparency, and for concrete results from us. With more than 1.5 million American charities, Charity Navigator aims to accentuate the work of efficient and transparent organizations. The intent of our work is to provide donors with essential information to give them greater confidence in both the charitable decisions that they make and the nonprofit sector.

Based on the most recent information available, we have issued a new rating for your organization. We are proud to announce Teach For America has earned our fourteenth consecutive 4-star rating. This is our highest possible rating and indicates that your organization adheres to sector best practices and executes its mission in a financially efficient way. Attaining a 4-star rating verifies that Teach For America exceeds industry standards and outperforms most charities in your area of work. Less than 1% of the charities we evaluate have received at least 14 consecutive 4-star evaluations, indicating that Teach For America outperforms most other charities in America. This exceptional designation from Charity Navigator sets Teach For America apart from its peers and demonstrates to the public its trustworthiness.

*Forbes, Business Week, and Kiplinger's Financial Magazine*, among others, have profiled and celebrated our unique method of applying data-driven analysis to the charitable sector. We evaluate ten times more charities than our nearest competitor and currently attract more visitors to our website than all other charity rating groups combined, thus making us the leading charity evaluator in America. Our data shows that users of our site donated more than they planned to before viewing our findings, and in fact, it is estimated that last year Charity Navigator influenced approximately \$10 billion in charitable gifts

Your achievement and the 4-star rating will enhance your organization's fundraising and public relations efforts. Our favorable review of Teach For America's financial health and commitment to accountability & transparency is now visible on our website.

We wish you continued success in your charitable endeavors.

Sincerely,

Michael Thatcher  
President and CEO