

## North Carolina Second Quarter & Annual Legislative Report December 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 28 years of partnership between Teach For America and the state of North Carolina. As a partner, Teach For America is 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 second quarter, we celebrated Veteran’s Day by recognizing and showing our gratitude to individuals and their families who sacrifice their lives in exchange for our freedom. Across North Carolina, we have seven veterans who are now in their first or second year of teaching with Teach For America. They embody humility, courage, and resilience. They are intentional about their relationships with their students and their desire to strengthen their communities. They have a strong impact on our mission at Teach for America, and we are humbled to elevate their work, their stories, and their passion for educational equity and excellence.

Gerard Falls, a 2013 Eastern North Carolina Teach For America alumni, is one of these veterans. Originally from Maine, Falls served in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division from 2004-2008 earning the rank of sergeant. After completing his enlistment, he attended Methodist University in Fayetteville, where he graduated in December 2012 with a BA in Global Studies. Gerard was admitted into the 2013 Teach for America, Eastern North Carolina corps. He served with Teach For America for two years as an 8<sup>th</sup> grade language arts teacher and high school swimming coach in Clinton, North Carolina. After completing his service with Teach For America, he joined The Capitol Encore Academy in Fayetteville, North Carolina for the 2015-2016 school year.



Gerard Falls  
2013 Eastern North  
Carolina Alumni,  
Served in 82nd  
Airborne Division  
Sergeant

Gerard, was inducted into the *Fayetteville Observer’s* “40 Under 40” class of 2017.<sup>1</sup> Gerard was the recipient of an educator’s grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and he spent most of the summer of 2014 in Maine and Canada recording oral histories in Acadian-French communities for the Maine Humanities Council. Gerard was selected by his peers as the 2015-2016 TCEA teacher of the year, and he went on to be runner-up for the 2016-2017 North Carolina Charter School Teacher of the Year. Gerard was a North Carolina Museum of Art Fellow in the Collaborative Teaching Fellowship program for the 2017-2018 school year.

Gerard is the chair and co-founder of a 501(c)(4) social welfare organization dedicated to strengthening inclusive communities, advancing evidence-based public policies, and organized, direct action with elected leaders representing the people of Cumberland County, North Carolina at the local, state, and federal levels of government.

We are honored to see veterans choosing to continue to serve our nation through teaching. We are grateful that we are able support the leadership of our corps members and alumni across the state, like Gerard. 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 them throughout their lifetime. We are pleased to update you on our progress in the second quarter as well as share our annual metrics (see appendix A).

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<sup>1</sup> “Gerard Falls.” *The Fayetteville Observer*, The Fayetteville Observer, 11 Mar. 2017, [www.fayobserver.com/news/20170311/gerard-falls](http://www.fayobserver.com/news/20170311/gerard-falls). See Appendix B

### 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.

Our alumni base across the state of North Carolina has grown from 1,520 last year to 1,668 this year—a growth of nearly ten percent. We continue to be committed to leveraging the scale and diversity of our network to make sure we are learning faster and smarter. Below is a spotlight on a few of the talented individuals in our network and the work they are leading in North Carolina.

#### Nancy Bullard

Originally from Randleman, North Carolina, Nancy Bullard attended college at Wake Forest University and completed her Teach For America corps service in Jacksonville, Florida. Upon completion of her corps commitment, Nancy returned to North Carolina where she currently teaches in the k-5 science lab at Huntington Farms Elementary school in Charlotte, North Carolina.

In the second quarter, Nancy was nominated for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST). This award is the highest honor bestowed by the United States government specifically for K-12 mathematics and science (including computer science) teaching.

Presidential awardees receive a certificate signed by the President of the United States, a trip to Washington, D.C. to attend a series of recognition events and professional development opportunities, and a \$10,000 award from the National Science Foundation. The National Science Foundation administers PAEMST on the behalf of The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.<sup>2</sup>



Nancy Bullard  
K-5 Science  
Teacher at  
Huntington Farms  
Elementary School

#### Mario Jovan Shaw & Jason Terrell

In the second quarter, MyFutureNC, EducationNC, and ncIMPACT at the School of Government conducted a research project called *Bright Spots NC: Innovative Efforts to Accelerate Attainment across North Carolina*.<sup>3</sup> The group put out a call for innovative programs through the myFutureNC Commission and eventually selected ten programs to highlight.

One of the themes that the commission identified as essential throughout the state was the teacher pipeline and educator preparedness. The commission highlighted the work of Profound Gentleman, which was founded by Mario Jovan Shaw and Jason Terrell, two



Mario Jovan Shaw &  
Jason Terrell  
Founders, Profound  
Gentleman

<sup>2</sup> "PAEMST Finalists for North Carolina K-12 Science." *USDA Office of Communications*, 18 Sept. 2018, [content.govdelivery.com/accounts/NCSBE/bulletins/20e2ef2](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/NCSBE/bulletins/20e2ef2). See Appendix C

<sup>3</sup> Hahn, Nation. "Ever Thankful for North Carolina's Bright Spots and Our Leaders Who Are Working to Build a Greater North Carolina." *EducationNC*, 26 Nov. 2018, [www.ednc.org/2018/11/21/ever-thankful-for-north-carolinas-bright-spots-and-our-leaders-who-are-working-to-build-a-greater-north-carolina/?utm\\_source=EdNC%2BSubscribers&utm\\_campaign=83a53e4e99-%2BWeekly\\_Wrap\\_CAMPAIGN&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_2696365d99-83a53e4e99-274986417](http://www.ednc.org/2018/11/21/ever-thankful-for-north-carolinas-bright-spots-and-our-leaders-who-are-working-to-build-a-greater-north-carolina/?utm_source=EdNC%2BSubscribers&utm_campaign=83a53e4e99-%2BWeekly_Wrap_CAMPAIGN&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_2696365d99-83a53e4e99-274986417) See Appendix D

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former Teach For America, Charlotte corps members, as one of the ten selected programs. Profound Gentleman works to support male teachers of color. This year, Profound Gentleman supported over 400 teachers in their program. In the first year, 100% of their members remained in the classroom upon the completion of the year.

### Daniel Riley

Daniel Riley is a 2005 Eastern North Carolina Teach For America alumni. He is currently a leadership coach at Teach for America who works with teachers in Edgecombe County. Daniel believes schools need to do more to make kids feel welcome and want to come to school. He has been working on the launch of the microschool within Edgecombe County Public Schools this year and said, “We just heard resoundingly in empathy work with kids that they don’t really feel cared for or loved.”



*Daniel Riley  
Local Leadership  
Coach, Edgecombe  
County*

During the 2018-2019 school year, Edgecombe County Public Schools will pilot the design at a “micro school,” consisting of eighth and ninth graders who will test the new model and provide feedback throughout the year. These scholars will not take the typical four core classes and an elective. Instead, they will engage in daily project-based learning that is tailored to their individual needs and interests, and receive personalized mentorship to develop the life skills that will help them be successful in whatever path they choose.<sup>4</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 North Carolina.

### North Carolina Teacher Corps (NCTC)

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

We know that personalized, individual, and tailored contact with applicants is one of the strongest strategies in influencing applicants to preference a North Carolina region. As such, we significantly increased our communication strategies on our regional end to match the support candidates received from our national recruitment team.

Eighty six percent of our 2015 corps stayed in the state a third year, an increase of three percentage points from last year. We believe that our North Carolina connected corps members are not only themselves choosing to put down roots in the state, but are inspiring other corps members (who may not have a previous connection to North Carolina) to stay as well.

We currently have 126 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 four of them graduated from a North Carolina college or university and 89 of them are North Carolina natives. Our NCTC corps members represent 26 different North Carolina

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<sup>4</sup> Osborne, Molly. “Exploring Chronic Absence from the Ground up in Edgecombe County.” *EducationNC*, 28 Sept. 2018, [www.ednc.org/2018/09/28/exploring-chronic-absence-from-the-ground-up-in-edgecombe-county/?utm\\_source=EdNC%2BSubscribers&utm\\_campaign=45103ff0da-Weekly\\_Wrap\\_CAMPAIGN&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_2696365d99-45103ff0da-274986417](http://www.ednc.org/2018/09/28/exploring-chronic-absence-from-the-ground-up-in-edgecombe-county/?utm_source=EdNC%2BSubscribers&utm_campaign=45103ff0da-Weekly_Wrap_CAMPAIGN&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_2696365d99-45103ff0da-274986417). See Appendix E

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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 3.43
- 57% come from a low-income background<sup>5</sup>
- 56% are people of color
- 40% are teaching math or science
- 15% are the first in their families to graduate from college

We began recruitment for our 2019 corps of teachers in October. Our North Carolina Teacher Corps initiative continues to be cited as a model for the entire organization, and we remain committed to improving our program year over year. Our strategies for the current year include:

- **NCTC Webinars:** We have hosted four webinars designed specifically for North Carolinians moving into final round of interviews. Approximately 40 applicants joined these webinars. These webinars highlight stories of current corps members, alumni, and students with North Carolina ties who choose to lead in our state.
- **Strategic Stewardship:** Our staff is calling all applicants with North Carolina ties who are rated as the most competitive and highly likely to be admitted to the corps. These applicants often have competing offers and we plan to use these calls as an opportunity to share more about the education landscape in North Carolina and why their leadership is needed in our state. We have conducted over 20 calls over two recruitment windows.
- **Statewide Calendar of Events:** We built a statewide calendar of events across our regions that is shared with our national recruitment team. This allows recruiters to 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, 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.

In the second quarter, *The Hechinger Report* wrote an article about the innovative initiatives that are underway in Edgecombe County. The article features Erin Swanson, the Director of Innovation for Edgecombe County Public Schools District. Swanson is a 2002 Teach For America, Eastern North Carolina alum.

Edgecombe County is a rural district with a high-poverty student body, but a new staffing model—called Opportunity Culture, which Swanson helped bring to Edgecombe—has made its schools newly desirable for teachers who want to be school leaders without leaving the classroom. Eight schools across Edgecombe County are using this model. Historically, those schools started the year with two to four empty teaching positions; Swanson said this year they had none, which she attributes to Opportunity Culture. Beyond the staffing solution,



Erin Swanson  
Director of  
Innovation  
Edgecombe County  
Public Schools

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<sup>5</sup> As identified by receiving a full or partial PELL Grant

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Swanson said the new model has led to profound collaboration among teachers and created a sense of momentum for other school improvement efforts.

“We know that in order to really do things differently,” Erin said, “to reimagine what education looks like for our kids, we have got to have the most amazing people at every level.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Charlotte**

Joining Teach For America means that our members have lifelong access to a professional support network and opportunities to build a meaningful career. In Charlotte, they join a network of more than 500 leaders who share a passion for education and are eager to work toward the day when all kids have access to an excellent education. As a way of harnessing this leadership, the Charlotte regional team hosted their first Network Summit on December 8, which brought together Teach For America corps members, alumni, and community members for a discussion around the need for bold, diverse leadership in education.

The Network Summit, “The NetSum” was a networking and professional development experience for our corps members, alumni, supporters, and stakeholders consisting of insightful talks, opportunities to connect, and a moment to supercharge leadership for education equity.

Speakers for the day included Mebane Rash, CEO and Editor-in-Chief of EducationNC, William P. Jackson, PhD, of Village of Wisdom, Casey Crawford, CEO of Movement Mortgage, and Kevin Loux, Community Impact Director at Leading on Opportunity. Over 150 participants were in attendance, and many of our corps member and alumni teachers brought students to participate.

Given the success of the first network summit, the team is already planning a follow up engagement in April 2019.

### **North Carolina Piedmont Triad**

In addition to having three teachers nominated as “Rookie Teacher of the Year” for their respective schools across Guilford County Schools, recent data released shows another win for the region’s student achievement outcomes.

Hayley Boling is a 2017 Teach For America corps member. Hayley is originally from Winston Salem, North Carolina and attended Duke University where she majored in Public Policy. As an undergraduate, Hayley was a political intern for the National Republican Senatorial Committee, a summer intern in Senator Richard Burr’s D.C. office, and a global education intern for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

In her first year of teaching at Melvin C. Swann Middle School, Hayley led her students to the highest growth of any math teacher in her school building last year.

When asked about her work with Teach For America, Hayley said, “I LOVE this work, and I love Teach For America.”



*Hayley Boling  
Math Teacher  
Melvin C. Swann  
Middle School*

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<sup>6</sup>GARCIA MATHEWSON, TARA. “Teacher Leaders Improve Learning, Attract Teachers to Underserved Districts.” *The Hechinger Report*, 28 Nov. 2018, [hechingerreport.org/using-teacher-leaders-to-improve-schools/](https://hechingerreport.org/using-teacher-leaders-to-improve-schools/). See Appendix F

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### **Financial Reporting**

Teach For America is steadfast in maximizing the state's investment through fiscal responsibility and investing donors in our important work in North Carolina. We remain grateful for the state's investment and are committed to making every public and private dollar work hard for students across our state. We look forward to updating the state on our progress in our March quarterly report.

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### APPENDIX A

In addition to our quarterly reports, the state has requested an annual update on the information below. This chart contains information regarding Teach For America's operations from June 1, 2017- May 31, 2018.

Legislative Language	Teach For America Results
Total number of applications received nationally from candidates seeking participation in the program	Teach For America received 49,000 applications
Total number of applications received from candidates who are residents of North Carolina and information on the source of these candidates, including the number of (i) recent college graduates and the higher institution the candidates attended, (ii) mid-career level and lateral entry industry professionals, and (iii) veterans of the United States Armed Forces	<p>Teach For America received 2,450 applications from North Carolina residents. Eight hundred thirty were recent college representing a range of colleges. The top five contributing colleges were: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, Duke University, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and University of North Carolina at Greensboro</p> <p>One thousand three hundred fifty were mid-career level and lateral entry industry professionals. Ninety-seven of these candidates were veterans of the United States Army.</p>
The total number of North Carolina candidates accepted by TFA	Teach For America accepted 250 candidates from North Carolina.
The total number of accepted candidates placed in North Carolina, including the number of accepted candidates who are residents of North Carolina	Three hundred eighty seven accepted applicants were placed in North Carolina. Of these, 115 accepted applicants placed in North Carolina listed North Carolina as their hometown state or attended a North Carolina college or university.
The regions in which accepted candidates have been placed, the number of candidates in each region, and the number of students impacted by placement in those regions	Eastern North Carolina had an incoming corps of 99 teachers impacting nearly 5,600 students. Charlotte Piedmont Triad had an incoming corps of 145 teachers impacting nearly 8,100 students.
Success of recruitment efforts, including the Teach Back Home program and targeting candidates who are (i) working in areas related to STEM education, (ii) mid-career level and lateral entry industry professionals, and (iii) veterans of the United States Armed Forces	Ninety-eight incoming teachers were STEM teachers. Four teachers in the incoming corps were veterans. Fifty-three teachers in the incoming corps were mid-career level and lateral entry industry professionals.
Success of retention efforts, including the Teach Beyond Two and Make it Home programs, and the percentage of accepted candidates working in their placement communities beyond the initial TFA two-year commitment period and the number of years those candidates teach beyond the initial commitment	<p>Our alumni base across the state of North Carolina has grown from 1,520 last year to 1,668 this year—a growth of 9.7 percent.</p> <p>Of 2015 corps members placed in our Teach For America North Carolina regions, 86% of them remained in North Carolina—a three percent increase from last year. Of those, 68% remained teaching*</p>

*\*This includes only FY18 alumni survey data. All alumni employment data is self-reported, largely on our annual survey.*



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Category	Eastern North Carolina	Charlotte	North Carolina Piedmont Triad
Funds expended by region of the state	3,205,511	2,330,520	463,969
Recruitment, candidate selection, and placement	599,764	364,677	70,996
Preservice training and preparation costs	323,625	143,151	5,603
Professional development and support	1,862,249	1,342,441	373,688
Alumni Support	367,586	410,840	1,596
Public Affairs & Engagement	52,029	69,239	12,031
Human Assets	257	172	56
Office of the CEOs	-	-	-
Administration	-	-	-
Information & Technology	-	-	-
Finance	-	-	-

Funds received though private fundraising, specifically by sources in each region of the state			
	Eastern North Carolina	Charlotte	North Carolina Piedmont Triad
Foundation	419,233	698,666	50,000
Individual	205,212	1,072,502	20,897
Corporate	530,286	398,466	53,842



## Gerard Falls

Posted Mar 11, 2017 at 4:17 PM

Updated Mar 11, 2017 at 4:17 PM

### The Fayetteville Observer 2017 40 Under 40

**Gerard Falls**, The Capitol Encore Academy, 32

**Stats:** Teacher, one of eight siblings, Methodist University graduate, community activist, foodie and outdoor enthusiast.

#### In what ways do you give back to your community?

I'm involved in community outreach at The Capitol Encore Academy. I've volunteered with Teach For America, the Red Cross and as an assistant swim coach for a collection of Sampson County high schools.

#### What is your proudest professional success?

The classroom and curriculum that I've designed and implemented over the four years that I've been a teacher. I've been able to create a classroom where students engage with the challenges facing our community and the larger world. I'm proud to have been named the runner-up for the North Carolina Charter School Teacher of the Year in 2017, and I'm proud that my students have shown growth each of the years I've been teaching.

#### Tell us about a moment that changed your life:

The most formative conversation I had that led me to my current commitment to education and social justice was with my platoon sergeant when we were deployed together in Iraq. Sergeant First Class O'Neal told me about growing up in rural eastern North Carolina during the 1970's. He wondered how things would have been different for him if he'd grown up in a place where his race had no bearing on his opportunities.

#### Hometown:

Old Town, Maine



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## PAEMST Finalists for North Carolina K-12 Science

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September 18, 2018

## K-12 Science Section

K-12 STANDARDS, CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION

### 2018 North Carolina Finalist for the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching Announcement



#### Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching

The **Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST)** is the highest honor bestowed by the United States government specifically for K-12 mathematics and science (including computer science) teaching.

Presidential awardees receive a certificate signed by the President of the United States, a trip to Washington, D.C., to attend a series of recognition events and professional development opportunities, and a \$10,000 award from the National Science Foundation. The National Science Foundation administers PAEMST on the behalf of The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

The following teachers are being recognized as the North Carolina Finalist for the 2018 PAEMST in the science category. Their applications have been forwarded to the national selection committee for consideration to name the awardee from North Carolina.

## Nancy Bullard

*Huntington Farms  
Elementary School  
Charlotte, NC  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg  
Schools*

Nancy Bullard, in the middle of the picture, was presented the finalist letter by the current and former head of Elementary Science in Charlotte-Mecklenburg School, Ms. Darlene Petranick and Wayne Fisher.

Nancy currently teaches in the K-5 Science Lab. Nancy's application included a video of her class studying chick embryo development and their biological needs.



## Andrea Gladden

*Icard Elementary School  
Connelly Spring, NC  
Burke County Public  
Schools*

Andrea Gladden, in the picture on the right, was presented the finalist letter by the Superintendent of Burke County Public School, Dr. Larry Putman.

Andrea currently lead Project Lead the Way for grades 6-8. Andrea's application included a video of her class engineering a robotic hand to learn more about the structure and function of the human body.

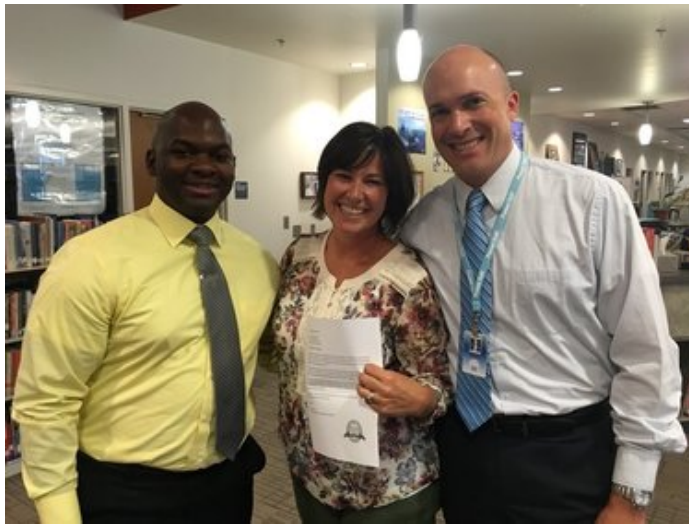
## Katheryn Matthews

*Valle Cruis School  
Sugar Grove, NC  
Watauga County Schools*

Katheryn Matthews, in the middle of the picture, was presented the finalist letter by her principal Mr. Preston Clark

and the Superintendent of Watauga County School, Dr. Scott Elliott.

Katheryn currently teaches all curriculum in 1st grade. Katheryn's application included a video of her class comparing the properties of soil samples from different place and describing their capacity to retain water.



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# Ever thankful for North Carolina's bright spots and our leaders who are working to build a greater North Carolina

ednc.org/2018/11/21/ever-thankful-for-north-carolinas-bright-spots-and-our-leaders-who-are-working-to-build-a-greater-north-carolina/  
by Nation Hahn | November 21, 2018

November 21, 2018



## Bright spots drive change.

From the very beginning of EducationNC, we have believed in lifting up bright spots across North Carolina — all of the bright spots, including examples of innovation and collaboration, programs showcasing the capacity of our state to tackle complex programs, leaders who are willing to do anything for all of our students and all of our people, and communities that underscore what is possible when we believe in a greater North Carolina.

Every day, Team EdNC spreads out across the state to tell stories, conduct research, and engage communities in a statewide conversation about education. The myFutureNC Commission launched in late 2017 with an emphasis around identifying a statewide educational attainment goal for North Carolina and an action plan for how the state might achieve the goal. Attainment happens when students graduate with a degree or credential that lands them a job paying a living wage to support a family.

In 2018, we rode shotgun across the state we all love with our colleagues at the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation and the UNC School of Government as part of the myFutureNC process.

myFutureNC held nine listening sessions over the spring and summer, along with focus groups and additional meetings of the Commission. A variety of themes surfaced across the birth-to-career continuum, including the importance of character development and soft skills, the necessity to prioritize equity in education, the need to connect education and business, and a call for educating students and parents alike on the career opportunities ahead for the next generation of workers.

As those themes bubbled up, our team and the folks at ncIMPACT at the School of Government began to discuss the need to lift up local success stories. This conversation turned into a research project called Bright Spots NC: Innovative Efforts to Accelerate Attainment across North Carolina.

We put out a call for innovative programs through the myFutureNC Commission and eventually settled on 10 programs. For the record, we easily could have spotlighted 40.

For more on the process, spend time with our webinar announcing the findings:



As we join our friends and family this Thanksgiving, it is my sincere hope this series will spark conversations about all of the folks who are working to build a greater North Carolina one day at a time. I have never been more optimistic about the future of our state. Please watch and share our videos:

Bright Spots: Strategic Twin Counties Education Partnership (STEP)

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Bright Spots: Project SECURE at Wake Tech

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Bright Spots: Wilson Youth Master Plan

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Bright Spots: Gold Rush Grant at UNC Charlotte

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Bright Spots: K-64 in Catawba County

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Bright Spots: Made in Durham

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Bright Spots: Alamance Career Accelerator Program

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Bright Spots: Project SEARCH

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Bright Spots: STEM East

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Bright Spots: Profound Gentlemen

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## Thankful

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We are thankful to our colleagues at the myFutureNC Commission, ncIMPACT and the UNC School of Government, and all of the programs who opened their doors to allow us to visit them and share their story with our state.

If you wish to spend time with the entire series, you can find all of our posts by [clicking here](#). For each of the policy briefs created by ncIMPACT, [head over to their website](#). The myFutureNC process continues, and they have a plethora of resources over at [myFutureNC.org](https://myFutureNC.org).

I am particularly grateful to Anita Brown-Graham for her tireless leadership, Emily Gangi Williamson for her depth of skills around making partnerships work, and, of course, my colleague Robert Kinlaw for telling these important stories with his usual care, creativity, and wisdom.

Happy Thanksgiving.

Spoiler alert: Robert Kinlaw is a super star. We spent hours together documenting [#BrightSpotsNC](#). With every moment, I wanted to be young again so I could have the chance to grow up to be as talented and caring as he is. [#2018Highlight](#) <https://t.co/MBqloZkNRn>

— Anita Brown-Graham (@Anita4NC) [November 20, 2018](#)

[Bright Spots](#)



# Exploring chronic absence from the ground up in Edgecombe County

ednc.org/2018/09/28/exploring-chronic-absence-from-the-ground-up-in-edgecombe-county/

by Molly Osborne | September 28, 2018

September 28, 2018

“School can be boring. It’s a lot of work. People don’t like to use their brains, and some people get picked on.” –  
Miracle, a student at Phillips Middle School in Edgecombe County



If you had to say why so many students miss school in the United States, would you say this? Probably not.

Adults are quick to give reasons for why students miss school – families don’t have transportation or parents don’t make their kids go to school – but what is often left out of the conversation is the fact that many kids don’t want to go to school because they don’t like it.

Over the past five months, EducationNC has been researching the topic of chronic absenteeism in Edgecombe County through the use of [Reach NC Voices surveys](#), focus groups with community members, interviews with school leaders and educators, and going door-to-door in communities to talk about this issue. We’ve learned a lot along the way, especially about our own assumptions.

The chronic absence rate in Edgecombe County for the 2015-2016 school year was about 20 percent, meaning one in every five students in Edgecombe County missed 15 days of school or more. The rate for white students is 28 percent compared to 20 percent for black students, 15 percent for Hispanic students, and 33 percent for American Indian students. For individual schools, the chronic absence rate ranges from a low of 1.2 percent at Edgecombe Early College High to a high of 33.3 percent at Southwest Edgecombe High.

Chronic absences matter. Research has found that chronically absent students are less likely to read proficiently by third grade and less likely to graduate from high school. [A study of sixth-grade students in Baltimore City Public Schools](#) found chronic absenteeism to be the strongest predictor of not graduating from high school.

Just knowing the chronic absence rate of a school or district is not enough, however. Understanding why students are chronically absent is crucial to designing solutions that reduce chronic absences. [Ethan Hutt](#), a nationally renowned researcher and co-editor of an upcoming book on chronic absenteeism, believes few school districts truly know why their

students are missing school: “What I would encourage districts to do — it sounds so simple to say, but a lot of districts don’t actually know the answer to this — is find out why students are missing school and really investigate.”

EducationNC decided to investigate.

We started by surveying Edgecombe County residents. We published [the survey](#) online and on social media, and we asked residents to fill the survey out at various events around the county. In total, 86 people took the survey over the course of three months. Of those respondents, 60 percent were white, 23 percent African-American, and 19 percent Hispanic or Latino. Sixty-two percent of respondents were women with 38 percent men, and 76 percent had a bachelor’s degree or higher compared with 18 percent reporting high school or GED as the highest level of formal education.

We asked respondents how they were involved in schools. About one-third responded that they are a parent, one-third responded that they just care about schools, and 20 percent responded that they are teachers or school administrators.

Seven of every 10 respondents had heard the terms “chronic absenteeism” or “chronic absence,” whereas the other three in 10 either had not heard the terms or were unsure. Three-quarters of respondents stated chronic absenteeism is an issue in their community, with only 7 percent responding it is not an issue.

We asked, “What are some reasons why children miss school in your community?” Most respondents stated multiple reasons, and the most commonly cited reasons were sickness and health issues (22 percent of responses), lack of transportation if students miss the bus (21 percent), lack of parental support for attendance (17 percent), family challenges such as a family emergency or having to take care of younger siblings (10 percent), and students not enjoying school (9 percent). These responses were largely in line with the [statewide response to this question](#). Responses included the following:

“Sickness. Kids don’t see doctors regularly.”

“No motivation to go or support system to encourage attendance.”

“Before I had my own transportation, if my children missed the school bus then that was a missed day of school.”

“Illness, no back up transportation if bus is missed, don’t enjoy school, bullying, not thinking a day off once in a while matters. MOST PARENTS DO CARE. We are all doing the best we can do.”

We also asked, “What are some strengths of your community that help children get to and/or stay in school?” Again, respondents answered with a variety of different strengths, but the most commonly referenced strength was the school bus system, which accounted for 23 percent of responses. The next most commonly stated strength was community involvement, followed by school events, teachers, sports, and mentors. Some notable responses included:

“Mentors. I would love to see local companies and organizations build mentoring into their HR program. Allow and encourage employees to mentor at schools 1 hour a week. What a difference it would make.”

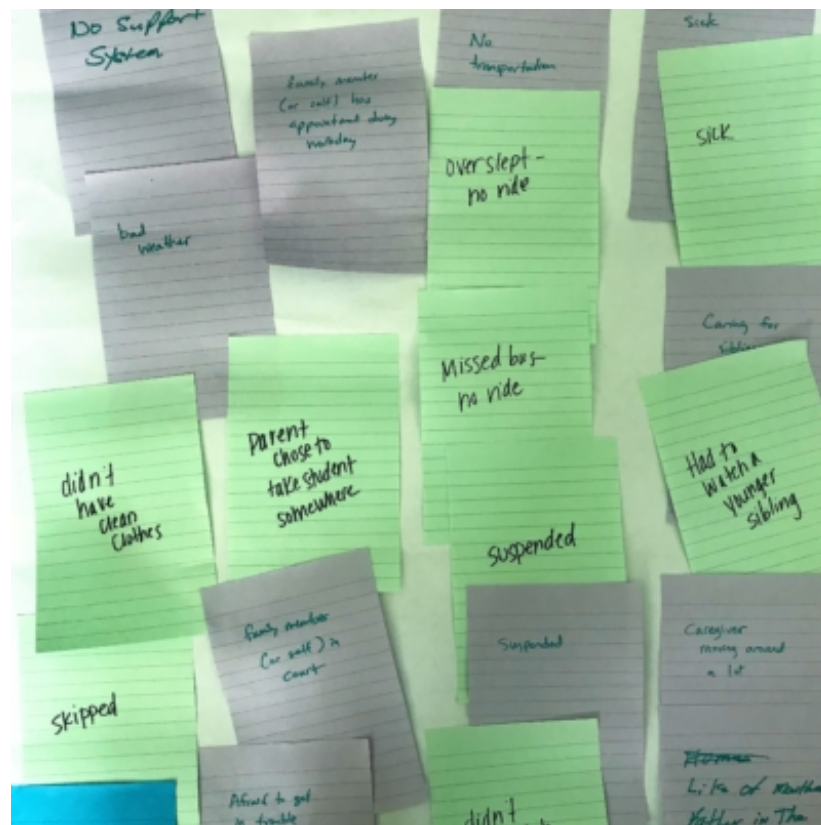
“Public transportation and strong legacy of sports.”

“Strong teachers and administration with progressive ideas.”

“Transportation, community leaders and teachers who do home visits.”

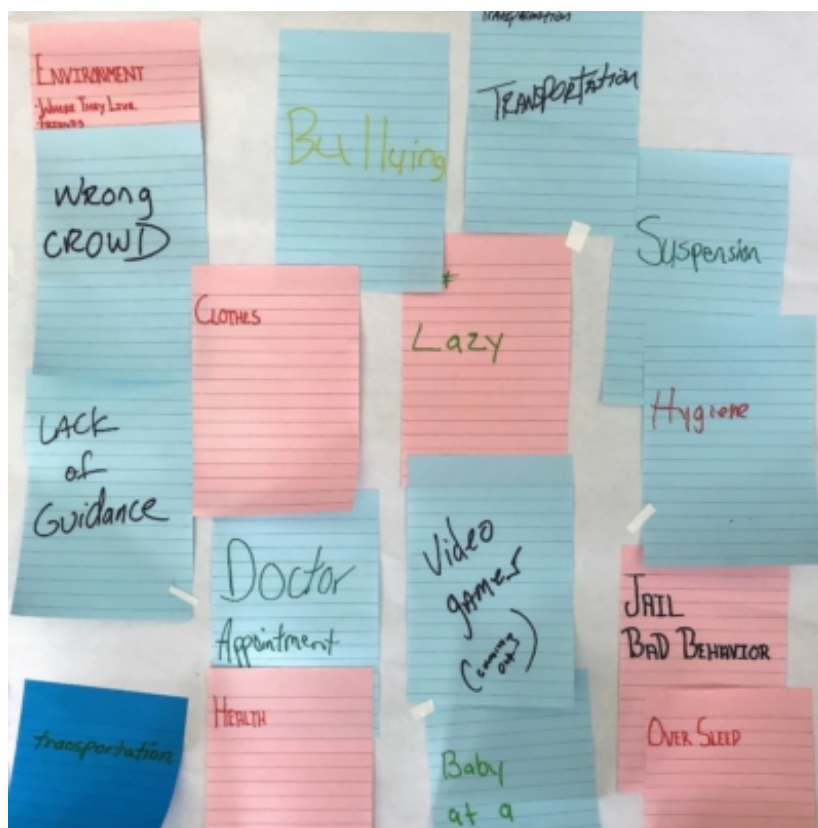
In April and May, we invited teachers, administrators, faith leaders, law enforcement, nonprofit leaders, students, and parents to join us for a series of dinners focused on chronic absenteeism. At the first dinner, we reviewed the definition of chronic absenteeism and asked participants why they thought students missed school in their community.

Working in groups, participants came up with several reasons why students miss school, including: bullying, students not being interested in school, illness and health issues, being suspended, no transportation after missing the bus, not having clean clothes, watching a younger sibling, no connection to teachers or school staff, vacation, and many more. One student told us that at her high school, students who were late to class – no matter if it was three minutes or 15 minutes – were locked out and missed the entire class.





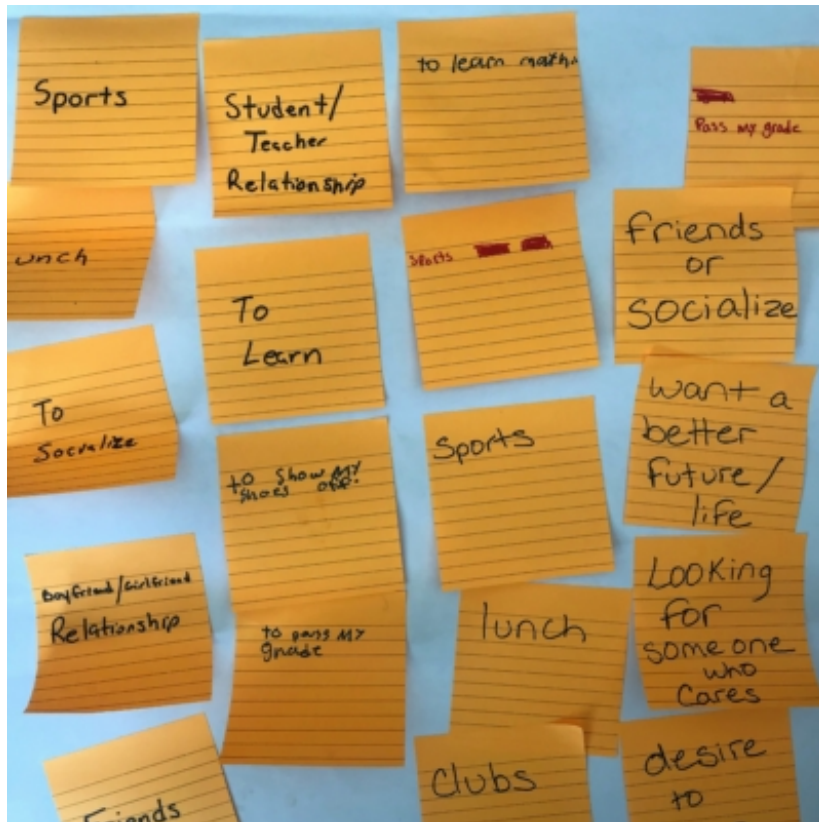
Edgecombe County residents listed reasons students don't come to school. Molly Osborne/EducationNC





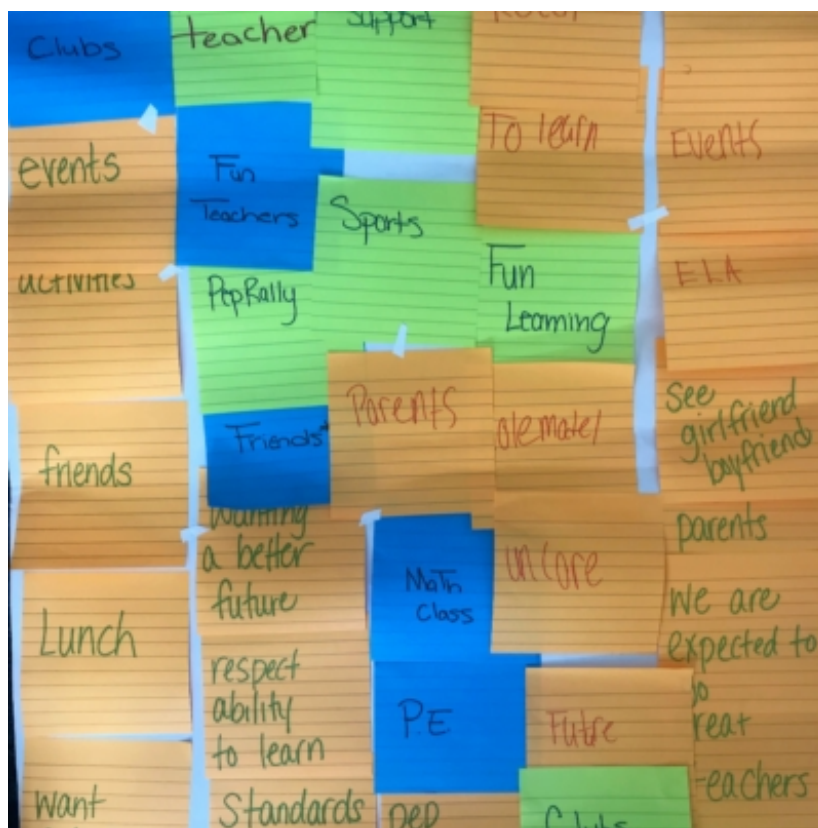


Community members at an EducationNC dinner focused on chronic absenteeism. Yasmin Bendaas/EducationNC





Residents listed strengths of their community in getting kids to school. Molly Osborne/EducationNC





For the second dinner, we focused on the strengths of the community when it comes to school attendance. Participants worked together to think about why students come to school and how their community could collaborate to ensure students stay in school.

We heard various different strengths, but unlike in the survey, the majority of responses focused on how to increase student motivation and enjoyment of school. Students at the dinner talked about the impact of finding teachers who cared about them and teachers who made their lessons interesting and relevant. They also emphasized aspects of school culture, such as sports, pep rallies, prom, and other events, that made them excited to come to school.

On a hot July day, four groups of EdNC staff and Edgecombe County educators set off to different neighborhoods in the county to knock on doors and talk to parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and students. We asked them why they think students miss school and what the community can do to make sure students get to and stay in school.

We heard a wide variety of answers. Residents told us there is a need for additional sports, there is strong community involvement in schools because schools actually care and visit them, and that bullying is a cause of absences and needs to be addressed. As we walked around, people told us stories of their own school experiences. One resident said,

“I used to be that kid. Dad passed away young (six years old) [and] I had to work. Lord knows I was behind the ball. I still am. I can hardly spell. Some kids are missing it to be hard kids, and some kids are missing it to survive.”

Another resident told us he had dropped out his junior year to join the military. He said he had poor grades in school because he had to help out on his mother’s farm.

Our CEO, Mebane Rash, joined Phillips Middle School principal Jenny O’Meara and assistant principal Jessica Parker at a neighborhood called Mobile City. Miracle, a student at Phillips Middle, walked them through the neighborhood and told them why she thinks kids don’t go to school.

We learned from this experience that talking to students and families in their own homes is crucial in moving past our own assumptions and getting a better understanding of why students miss school. Principal O’Meara said the experience of going door-to-door to talk with students has helped her immensely:

“I took Mebane to a specific neighborhood because kids have to walk nearly a mile to get to the bus and a lot of kids are absent. My hypothesis was they miss school because they don’t have a ride, and they miss the bus because they have to walk so far. We only talked with students that day. As we were talking to the kids, it was so insightful because it came out that that had nothing to do with it, and I was shocked by that.

Their answers were more around bullying and feeling uncomfortable around peers. That was really enlightening and incredibly helpful because that led me to think differently. Instead I’m thinking about how do I create a space where every kid feels welcome and loved.”

This school year, O'Meara is focused on ensuring all students feel welcome and loved. She has instituted a 20-minute home room so students spend the first 20 minutes of the day with an adult who cares about them. She has worked with her teachers to utilize the school social worker to a greater extent.

“Teachers didn’t even realize we had a social worker because she was split between multiple schools,” O'Meara said. “Putting the right structures in place has mattered this year. I’m seeing more communication which matters for kids.”

She also credits her teachers for working to create that space where every kid feels loved and welcome: “I think I have the right people here. They’re here for children. That makes a huge difference just having teachers [kids] like.”

Dan Riley, a leadership coach at Teach for America Eastern North Carolina who works with teachers in Edgecombe County, said he believes schools need to do more to make kids feel welcome and want to come to school. He has been working with both O'Meara's and Cannon's students who are part of the microschool this year and said, “We just heard resoundingly in empathy work with kids that they don’t really feel cared for or loved.”

Riley said making school a place where every kid feels loved and secure is a big focus of the microschool. EducationNC will be working with students to document the microschool throughout the year and share lessons learned, including how they are working to make every student feel loved. Stay tuned to see the results!

### Chronic Absenteeism

## **Future of Learning**

# Using teacher-leaders to improve schools

*“Opening the door for innovation” by extending the impact of the best teachers to more students*

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by **TARA GARCÍA MATHEWSON**

November 29, 2018

**E**ditor's note: This story led off this week's *Future of Learning* newsletter, which is delivered free to subscribers' inboxes every Wednesday with trends and top stories about education innovation. [Subscribe today!](#)

Edgecombe County Public Schools in rural North Carolina has long had trouble filling all of its open teaching positions. Historically, there just hasn't been enough interest among qualified candidates. But that's changing.

Edgecombe is still a rural district with a high-poverty student body, but a new staffing model has made its schools newly desirable for teachers who want to be school leaders without leaving the classroom. The model stems from an idea laid out in a paper almost a decade ago by Emily Ayscue Hassel and Bryan Hassel, co-presidents of Public Impact, an education advocacy organization. That idea is simple: Students chalk up three times the learning gains in classrooms with the most effective teachers (those in the top quintile), so if it's not possible to hire only the most effective teachers, why not expand those teachers' reach?

The first schools to implement what Public Impact calls an “Opportunity Culture,” did so during the 2013-14 school year, and Edgecombe County Public Schools is set to become the first district to bring the model systemwide. So far, eight of its 13 traditional schools have hired teacher-leaders who not only put their great teaching to use in front of students, but also coach their colleagues to spread their best practices. Next year, the remaining five schools will do the same. In each school, teacher-leaders get paid more to compensate them for taking on the extra work and responsibility of their expanded roles.

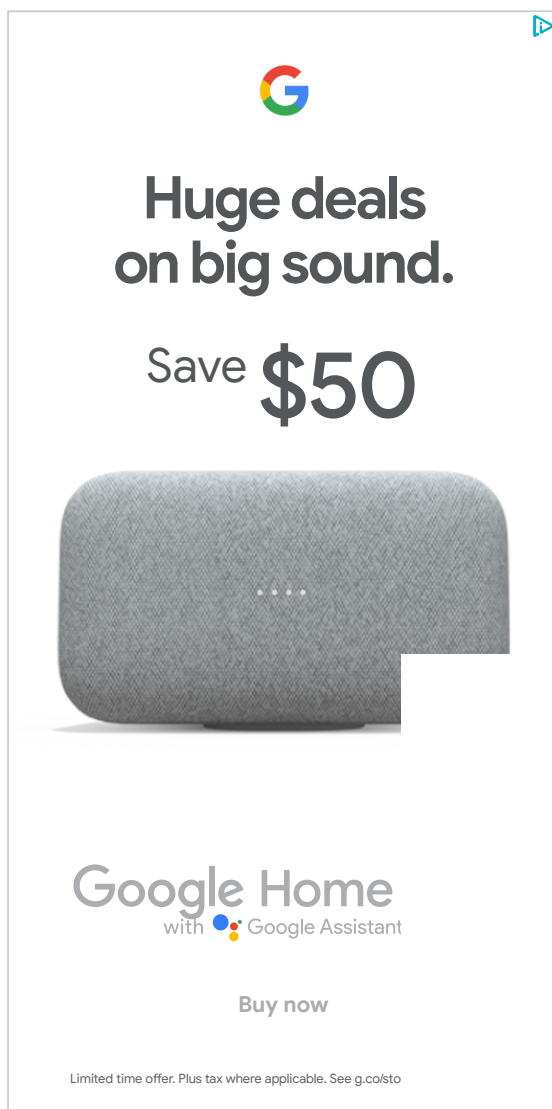
Erin Swanson, the district’s director of innovation, said administrators latched onto the model as both a recruitment tool and a way to retain good teachers who might otherwise be tempted to leave Edgecombe County Public Schools for more money elsewhere or school leadership positions outside of teaching. They’d also had a hard time supporting the many early-career teachers who dominate their staffing pool and saw Opportunity Culture as a way to do that better.


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While the eight schools using this model have historically started the year with two to four empty teaching positions, Swanson said this year they had none, which she attributes to Opportunity Culture. And beyond the staffing solution, Swanson said the new model has led to profound collaboration among teachers and created a sense of momentum for other school improvement efforts.

“It really opens up a door for more innovation,” Swanson said.

Each school that embarks on creating an Opportunity Culture does so in a unique way, based on its needs. One of Edgcombe’s elementary schools created three teacher-leader positions to focus on improving literacy among students in third grade and younger. A middle school recognized its area of need was in high-quality math

instruction, so it hired a teacher-leader to work in that subject. Another elementary school has a teacher-leader supporting English language arts teachers in grades three through five, as well as one focused on supporting both special and general education teachers to improve services for students with special needs.

**Related: [Eliminating funding that supports educators? That's no way to cut the federal budget](#)**

Schools also pay for the teacher-leaders differently. Public Impact encourages sustainability, asking schools to fit the extra pay for teacher-leaders into their core budgets, rather than turning to grant money, for example. Some schools hire fewer teachers overall, increasing the number of students each teacher-leader works with by having paraprofessionals help out in their classrooms. Some pull money from other parts of their school budgets to cover the supplemental salary.

Making all these decisions takes time. That's why Edgecombe County Public Schools rolled out the model districtwide over the course of three years. Already, though, the district is seeing results from its early adopters on standardized test scores. Based on state expectations for student growth, a middle and elementary school went from underperforming during the 2016-17 school year to meeting growth expectations last year, according to Swanson. North Edgecombe High School has exceeded growth expectations two years in a row and entered the top 20 percent of schools in the state on that measure. All three schools that started using the model last year met or exceeded growth expectations.

These are major accomplishments in Edgecombe County. Swanson said that Opportunity Culture could be transformational.

"We know that in order to really do things differently," she said, "to reimagine what education looks like for our kids, we have got to have the most amazing people at every level."

About 250 schools nationwide are either designing an Opportunity Culture or have already created one, according to Public Impact.

That means approximately 1,600 teachers and 50,000 students are teaching and learning under this model, the group says.

Educators have been particularly enthusiastic about the extra coaching and support from the teacher-leaders, according to Sharon Barrett, vice president of communications for Public Impact. Teachers essentially get real-time professional development targeted to the exact areas in which they need to improve. And while they are opening themselves up to critiques, it's not by the people who conduct their formal observations (which have consequences for their pay and job security).

"There's a feeling of 'we're all on the same team,' and people feel more open to having their challenges exposed because they know they're going to get the support," Barrett said.

*This story about [innovation through teacher-leaders](#) was produced by [The Hechinger Report](#), a nonprofit, independent news organization focused on inequality and innovation in education. Sign up for the [Hechinger newsletter](#).*



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**Tara García Mathewson**

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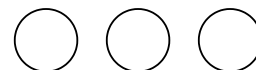
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