

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

--Vision of Teach For America

This year marks 29 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.

During the 2018-2019 school year, Edgecombe County Public Schools piloted a "micro school," consisting of eighth and ninth graders who tested a new model for schools and provided feedback throughout the year. Students did not take the typical four core classes and an elective. Instead, they engaged in daily project-based learning that was tailored to their individual needs and interests, and received personalized mentorship to develop the life skills that will help them be successful in whatever path they choose. The project was led by Edgecombe County Schools' superintendent Valerie Bridges, Erin Swanson, Director of Innovation, Jenny O'Meara, principal of Phillips Middle School, and Donnell Cannon, principal of North Edgecombe High School. Erin, Jenny, and Donnell are all alumni of Teach For America.



North Phillips School of Innovation, Led by Teach For America alumni Erin Swanson, Jenny O'Meara, and Donnell Cannon

In November, Donnell Cannon presented the lessons learned from the work of the microschool to the State Board of Education. *EdNC* covered the meeting, sharing the insights that Cannon discussed with board members:

*[Cannon said,] “We serve a school of the top 1% of the wealthiest kids that you could ever meet in your life. Those kids are rich with hope. They’re rich with values. They’re rich with purpose. And they’re rich with passion.”*

*After two days of planning sessions, Cannon was the final keynote speaker before the State Board got down to its monthly business. His message was to look beyond the aesthetically visible and dig deeper to understand each student.*

*He said that each of his students is one out of 220. The emphasis is on the one. They don’t try to teach all 220 the same way because that would ignore each child’s individuality. The success he’s had at North Edgecombe is because they’ve shunned standardization and focused on getting each child what they need. And that, he said, is equity.*

*The Board offered a collective impression, following Cannon’s talk, that they found a turnaround success. [...]*

*Cannon’s talk, which drew the three-day meeting’s only standing ovation, resonated as a solution to the growing issues of inequity Board members heard the past few days. He got an assist from Board member Amy White, who drew inspiration from Cannon’s talk in summarizing what she learned this week.*

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*"In summary, you have just shown us in real life what it takes to be a turnaround leader," she said. "My assumption, moving forward, is that turnaround does not come in a box. It is not a program. It's a leader."*<sup>1</sup>

EdNC created a video covering the talk, which includes the multiple strategies that North Phillips employed as they created this new, innovative model for how school is done. They shared: "When Cannon finished speaking and the sounds of the standing ovation he received died down, one audience member wondered aloud, 'Are you real?' "<sup>2</sup>

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

### Statewide Impact

Teach For America's greatest contribution continues to be the growing leadership force that we bring to North Carolina and support across our state. We 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 two of the talented individuals in our network and the impact they are making in North Carolina.

Seth Saeugling (E.N.C. '12) and Vichi Jagannathan (E.N.C. '11) were recently featured in *One Day Magazine*, Teach

For America's quarterly publication which explores how our diverse network of alums pursues our vision of educational equity in myriad ways.<sup>3</sup> The magazine is distributed to our alumni network of over 55,000 across the country as well as donors and other key stakeholders. We are honored that the work Seth and Vichi are leading in North Carolina is being shared broadly across the nation.

Seth and Vichi are the founders of the Tarboro-based Rural Opportunity Institute (ROI), a lab for social innovations, which exists to support Tarboro and Edgecombe county, first in figuring out the root causes of inequity in the area and then in finding the right tools to root them out. Over two years and thousands of hours of precision-tuned work led by



*Vichi Jagannathan and Seth Saeugling's makeshift office at Pattillo Middle School is packed with artifacts from Tarboro's systems mapping process.*

<sup>1</sup> Fofaria, Rupen R. "State Board Gets Master Class in School Turnaround." EducationNC, 8 Nov. 2019, [www.ednc.org/how-equity-can-drive-school-turnaround/](http://www.ednc.org/how-equity-can-drive-school-turnaround/). See Appendix B

<sup>2</sup> Shain, Taylor. "Running towards the Risk of Doing School Differently, Leading School Turnaround." EducationNC, 22 Nov. 2019, [www.ednc.org/what-does-it-take-to-lead-school-turnaround/](http://www.ednc.org/what-does-it-take-to-lead-school-turnaround/). See Appendix C

<sup>3</sup> Fabel, Leah, et al. "Meet the Unexpected Experts Transforming a North Carolina Town." Teach For America, One Day Magazine, 1 Oct. 2019, [www.teachforamerica.org/stories/meet-the-unexpected-experts-transforming-a-north-carolina-town](http://www.teachforamerica.org/stories/meet-the-unexpected-experts-transforming-a-north-carolina-town). See Appendix D

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Seth and Vichi, the community determined that unaddressed trauma, specifically trauma caused by adverse childhood experiences (ACES), has enabled generational cycles of poverty and pain in Tarboro. In response, Seth and Vichi are working with community members to launch solutions that are spreading through the town, reaching into systems from schools to law enforcement to individual families, and transforming them.

When Seth and Vichi started ROI in 2017, they did not predict that ACEs would emerge as the center of their work in Tarboro. Being completely open to possible outcomes is a hallmark of the approach they took, called human-centered design. Seth was trained in human-centered design while working in Oakland, California, where he moved in 2014 to be with his girlfriend after teaching high school special education in Eastern North Carolina. Vichi, who had earned a master's degree in electrical engineering at Stanford University prior to teaching high school science as a corps member, found her way back to the Bay Area to work for Microsoft around the same time.

Through work in the Bay Area, Seth used human-centered design to create a community doula pilot program. Outside of their day jobs, Seth and Vichi developed a kit to be used by parents of small children to promote healthy brain development. All around them, money poured into solutions, but almost all of the innovations were "touch-point solutions," Seth says. They weren't necessarily bad, but none of them came close to addressing the systemic problems Seth and Vichi saw their students battle every day as corps members in Eastern North Carolina.

Ultimately, living in the Bay Area created a dissonance, Vichi says. She and Seth were faced with a choice: "You can either choose to be part of the dissonance and say, 'I'm going to join you guys and ignore this other stuff I know,' or you can say, 'There's only one answer to this and it's to go back and learn more.'"

By Vichi's second year at Yale, she and Seth were making frequent visits to Tarboro while pursuing funding to start Rural Opportunity Institute. Both moved there permanently in June 2017, following Vichi's graduation, eager to see where the design process would lead. Silicon Valley didn't have the answers, but they believed the people of Tarboro did.

After two years, countless meetings and conversations, three iterations of a systems map, and probably a million sticky-notes stuck to poster paper, community members saw their lives reflected and were taking action. People who had never thought they had power felt activated to create change. People who had long held power felt supported to use it to address trauma in new ways.

"It's the outcome we would want to see," Vichi says. "It feels like part of a systemic shift—being able to shift from punitive responses to responses that are more healing, just as a result of being in a place with shared knowledge and common language."

It felt to her like a validation; People in Tarboro had the answers. "They just needed the support and capacity and space to be able to find them."

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.

## North Carolina Bi-Annual Legislative Report December 2019

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 seven percent of our 2016 corps stayed in the state a third year, marking a three percent increase from the previous 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.

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

- The average GPA is 3.4
- 64% come from a low-income background<sup>4</sup>
- 66% are people of color
- 43% are teaching math or science
- 43% are the first in their families to graduate from college

We began recruitment for our 2020 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. We have shifted to a text messaging approach this year, as we have learned that candidates in the Generation Z age group respond most reliably to texts. We are also partnering closely with our national recruitment team to develop strategic lists of candidates to reach out to based on their competitiveness for acceptance in our program.

- **Text Messaging:** We have sent personalized text messages—including video content—to over 60 North Carolina connected applicants throughout our two recruitment windows to date. Of these, we have engaged with over 65% of applicants, encouraging them to select a North Carolina region as they complete their regional assignment preference. These applicants often have competing offers and we use these texts 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 is shared with our national recruitment team. This allows recruiters to advertise our local events to prospective applicants.

Emily Adcock is one of our incoming North Carolina Teacher Corps members. She is from Alexander, North Carolina and went to school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She will be teaching elementary school in our Charlotte Piedmont Triad region. When asked why she wants to join Teach For America, she said:

*"I am very interested in staying in North Carolina to teach. As I have explored and developed my interests, passions, and talents in college, the emerging patterns I have found are education, leadership, and social justice. I want to be a Teach For America teacher because I want to continue on a path of communal learning, leading, and pursuit of an equitable society. I want to learn how to focus and effect a vision of a better world within my community. I want to be a role model that will empower them [students and communities] with the tools and*

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<sup>4</sup> As identified by receiving a full or partial PELL Grant



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*confidence to advocate for themselves and others. I want to teach my students about life, prepare them for it, and of course, make sure they're enjoying it."*

### Regional Updates

#### Eastern North Carolina

ENC STEM was launched in 2013 by Teach For America alumni Liz Chen, Grayson Cooper, Elaina Sabatine, and Dale Hammer. Now in its sixth year, approximately 100 students participated in two weeks of ENC STEM summer programming at Northampton County High School.

Elaina Sabatine is the current director of ENC STEM. She said "For us, access to STEM is an issue of social justice. We talk to our kids about the importance of STEM education . . . but the opportunities that they have are contingent upon their proximity to resources, and that's kind of the challenge in eastern NC."<sup>5</sup>

Since the program's inception in 2013, they have impacted over 300 students across Eastern North Carolina. Sixty percent of the student body is female—and given the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields, this statistic is especially important. Twelve ENC STEM alumni have gone on to attend North Carolina School of Science and Math via their residential and online programs. ENC STEM alumni go on to stay in college at rates higher than their peers in the UNC System (82% vs. 79%).



*Students at the ENC STEM summer program perform an experiment using oil eating microbes.*

#### Charlotte

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' Board of Education recently created the city's first "Community Equity Committee." The board says the formation of the committee has been a long time coming and is an effort to better ensure equity across the district. Given Teach For America's commitment to educational equity for every child, regardless of their background or zip code, we are proud that three Teach For America alumni were selected to lead the important work on this panel.<sup>6</sup>



*Jason Terrell  
(Charlotte 2012)*

<sup>5</sup> Bendaas, Yasmin. "Eastern NC High School Students Blend Leadership and STEM Learning." EducationNC, 17 July 2018, [www.ednc.org/eastern-nc-high-school-students-blend-leadership-and-stem-learning/](http://www.ednc.org/eastern-nc-high-school-students-blend-leadership-and-stem-learning/). See Appendix E

<sup>6</sup> Morgan, Chandler. "CMS Board Votes on Inaugural Equity Committee Members, Adds Cornelius to List of Funded Municipalities." <https://www.wbtv.com>, 22 Oct. 2019, [www.wbtv.com/2019/10/22/cms-board-vote-membership-inaugural-equity-committee/](https://www.wbtv.com/2019/10/22/cms-board-vote-membership-inaugural-equity-committee/). See Appendix F

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Equity Committee members represent members of parent, student, educational, faith, and community groups with the expectation that they will become both thought partners in, and community advocates for equity. The Equity Committee meets regularly to review reports and monitor progress. Observations and recommendations based upon those discussions will be delivered to the Board.

Up to 40 people can serve on the committee, as the board set forth in guidelines during previous meetings. Jason Terrell, Sharika Comfort (both Charlotte 2012) and Ian Joyce (Charlotte 2014) were selected to join the committee.

Jason is the executive director of The Profound Gentleman, a nonprofit he founded aimed at improving retention rates for male educators of color. Sharika is the North Carolina Associate Director of Organizing Students for Education Reform, a national nonprofit. Ian is the executive director of GenOne, a nonprofit that he founded in Charlotte that partners with talented, first-generation students from disadvantaged backgrounds, helping them successfully navigate to and through college.

When asked about his experience with Teach For America, Ian said, “The mission and vision of TFA speaks deeply to my core values, and I hope to be amongst the shapers of a better educational future for others.”

### North Carolina Piedmont Triad

Whitney Gilbert is a 2014 North Carolina Piedmont Triad alumni. She teaches sixth grade science and math at Melvin C. Swan Middle School in Guilford County. Originally from Michigan, Whitney went to college at Saginaw Valley State University and moved to North Carolina to join the Teach For America corps.

Whitney recently won FSI Office’s Top 10 Teachers of the week.<sup>7</sup> This prestigious recognition honors high performing teachers across the Carolinas.



*Sharika Comfort  
(Charlotte 2012)*



*Ian Joyce  
(Charlotte 2014)*



*Whitney Gilbert  
(Piedmont Triad 2014)*

## Financial Reporting

Teach For America is steadfast in maximizing the state’s investment through fiscal responsibility and investing donors in our important work in North Carolina. We remain grateful for the state’s investment and are committed to making every public and private dollar work hard for students across our state. Our financial reporting for the 2018-2019 school year can be found in Appendix A.

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<sup>7</sup>Teacher of the Week Winners, [www.fsioffice.com/tow/winners.php](http://www.fsioffice.com/tow/winners.php). See Appendix G

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### APPENDIX A

In addition to our reports, the state has requested an annual update on the information below. This chart contains information regarding Teach For America's operations from June 1, 2018- May 31, 2019.

Legislative Language	Teach For America Results
Total number of applications received nationally from candidates seeking participation in the program	Teach For America received 56,645 applications
Total number of applications received from candidates who are residents of North Carolina and information on the source of these candidates, including the number of (i) recent college graduates and the higher institution the candidates attended, (ii) mid-career level and lateral entry industry professionals, and (iii) veterans of the United States Armed Forces	<p>Teach For America received 2,800 applications from North Carolina residents. Eight hundred and fifty nine 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, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and Duke University.</p> <p>One thousand six hundred and thirty were mid-career level and lateral entry industry professionals. Two hundred and fifty nine 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 270 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	One hundred and sixty one accepted applicants were placed in North Carolina. Of these, 58 accepted applicants placed in North Carolina listed North Carolina as their hometown state or attended a North Carolina college or university.
The regions in which accepted candidates have been placed, the number of candidates in each region, and the number of students impacted by placement in those regions	Eastern North Carolina had an incoming corps of 80 teachers impacting over 3,800 students. Charlotte Piedmont Triad had an incoming corps of 89 teachers impacting over 5,000 students.
Success of recruitment efforts, including the Teach Back Home program and targeting candidates who are (i) working in areas related to STEM education, (ii) mid-career level and lateral entry industry professionals, and (iii) veterans of the United States Armed Forces	Eighty-six incoming teachers were STEM teachers. Five teachers in the incoming corps were veterans. Thirty-one 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 1,597 last year to 1,623 this year*</p> <p>Of 2015 corps members placed in our Teach For America North Carolina regions, 87% of them remained in North Carolina—a three percent increase from last year. Of those, 68% remained teaching*</p>
The total number of Teach For America alumni school leaders (assistant principals, deans, or principals)	There are currently 89 Teach For America alumni working as school leaders across North Carolina*

*\*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 Piedmont Triad
Funds expended by region of the state	2,618,850	3,381,150
Recruitment, candidate selection, and placement	977,120	1,307,496
Preservice training and preparation costs	205,359	203,151
Professional development and support	1,270,476	1,614,850
Alumni Support	165,895	255,654
Public Affairs & Engagement	-	-
Human Assets	-	-
Office of the CEOs	-	-
Administration	-	-
Information & Technology	-	-
Finance	-	-

Funds received through private fundraising, specifically by sources in each region of the state		
	Eastern North Carolina	Charlotte Piedmont Triad
<b>Foundation</b>	834,113	870,000
<b>Individual</b>	256,144	1,101,371
<b>Corporate</b>	101,060	428,416



# State Board gets master class in school turnaround

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 [ednc.org/how-equity-can-drive-school-turnaround/](https://ednc.org/how-equity-can-drive-school-turnaround/)

By Rupen R. Fofaria

November 8,  
2019



State Board member Freebird McKinney and vice chair Alan Duncan take part in a "Who Are You?" exercise as part of Donnell Cannon's talk to the Board about equity and turning around schools. Rupen Fofaria/EducationNC

The State Board of Education talked in planning sessions all week about strategies for turning around low-performing schools. On Thursday came a large dose of reality — and a sliver of hope.

Moments after giving a standing ovation for a principal discussing his school's turnaround efforts, the Board, at its monthly meeting, got a list of 69 failing schools that the state could take over if performance scores remain low.

Those 69 schools got the lowest scores when the state released its latest school performance grades. The state's formula bases 80% of that grade on student achievement and 20% on growth.

Critics say the formula means that demographic metrics such as race and income drive the scores more than the progress made by teachers and students during the year. But identifying a list of browner and lower-income school populations does have the benefit of identifying those students who are least prepared, as Board Chair Eric Davis called them during the kickoff of the Board's weeklong gathering.

It also helps to identify schools that sorely need the turnaround strategies the Board focused on this week, Board member Amy White said.

The Board had planned to consider which of those 69 schools to include in its Innovative School District (ISD), but after Senate Bill 522 passed the legislature last week and changed the rules for putting schools in the ISD, the board opted to wait.

"We all agreed that we were not ready for another school to be entered into the ISD next school year," Legislative and Community Affairs Director Cecilia Holden said. "The General Assembly listened."

And White said the focus isn't just on the 69 schools presented Thursday.

"The real number for our state is 487," she said at Wednesday's planning session, referring to the total number of low-performing schools. "So hear me when I say urgency. It's 487 leaders we need, so we need to get busy."

Board members found hope in a blueprint Donnell Cannon offered from North Edgecombe High School, which used equity principles and the state's Restart program to turn a near-failing school into one exceeding growth expectations the past three years.

## Teaching for the 1, not the 1.5 million

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Cannon is a young, black man who grew up in poverty, yet he talks about recognizing his privilege. He is the principal of a small, Title I school that sits in one of the poorest counties in the state, yet he talks about his students as one-percenters.

"We serve a school of the top 1% of the wealthiest kids that you could ever meet in your life," he said. "Those kids are rich with hope. They're rich with values. They're rich with purpose. And they're rich with passion."

After two days of planning sessions, Cannon was the final keynote speaker before the State Board got down to its monthly business. His message was to look beyond the aesthetically visible and dig deeper to understand each student.

He said that each of his students is one out of 220. The emphasis is on the one. They don't try to teach all 220 the same way because that would ignore each child's individuality. The success he's had at North Edgecombe is because they've shunned standardization and focused on getting each child what they need. And that, he said, is equity.



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

Equity is not about race, and it's not about equality, he said. Using the example of two children, one who needs water and one who needs food, Cannon said equality would mean giving them both either food or water. Equity means if your child needs water, you go get them water.

"And if she wants more water," he said, "you get her more water."

In the context of the state school system, it means finding ways to get each student what they need rather than force something upon them that is the best guess at an average of needs for all 1.5 million students.

At North Edgecombe, if a student is drawn to math, teachers try to integrate math into the instruction of other subjects. And if students aren't hungry for breakfast before school, the school offers a second-chance breakfast after the day begins.

"We're different – vastly," he said. "In many different ways. Many different life contexts, different life experiences, different cultural backgrounds, different rich and deep salient parts of our identities. And we never leverage those at school."

## How educators say turnaround can happen

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A panel of teachers and principals addressed the State Board the day before Cannon spoke. They offered a number of suggestions. Board members later marveled at how many of those strategies were used by Cannon and his leadership team in their turnaround efforts.

Their message resonated with three main takeaways: the State Board can't do this for the schools, exemplary schools that have completed turnaround should be studied, and leaders of turnaround schools must be empowered to lead through a local lens.

"We need to find the models of excellence," said Paula Wilkins, principal at Cook Literacy Model School. "Who are those teachers getting it done? What are the data points that show us that? And how do we study them? Because sometimes we always look at low performance. But why don't we look at the exemplars that are making it happen every day and use that to help us to turn the needle around in education to begin to replicate those practices?"

Carver Heights Elementary School principal Patrice Faison endorsed that proactive model, and turned the onus on the Board.

"You guys are spread so thin," she said, "you're going to either have to pick schools like [Wilkins] was talking about or you do nothing well."

The Board's focus, she said, should be taking away obstacles the state has placed on struggling schools.

"The first thing you can do is remove barriers," Faison said. "There are so many things that a principal or district has to do. And then when you're low-performing, you multiply those things. So instead of increasing my time to be in the classroom or to do some things, I am given extra evaluations I have to do."

A common barrier mentioned was teacher evaluations, which Board member James Ford reflected back to the educators as possessing "big bulkiness and impreciseness."

The educators told the Board that teacher evaluations in the form required by the state are not always helpful and not always indicative of a good teacher or a good principal. Which is important, they agreed, because good leaders are instrumental to turnaround.

"One of the huge attributes that you have to have as a teacher and a principal in a turnaround context is you have to be relentless," Wilkins said. "It's that idea of, when something is not working, what do you do to respond? ... It's having [a leader] who says, 'Alright, it's not working? What are you going to try that's different now?'"

Questions in the form of answers can sometimes feel like no answer at all. But in a state where some 500 schools are in need of turnaround, the prevailing message from Wilkins and the entire educator panel was to find where turnaround does work and replicate it.

## Confirmation that equity must be the guide

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The Board offered a collective impression, following Cannon's talk, that they found a turnaround success.

Cannon's message was consistent with those of several other speakers over the course of the week, echoing the throughline of equity, which reinforced the Board's dedication to that guiding principle driving its strategic plan.

And, Board members said afterward, confirmation that inequity has created the current gaps between high-performing schools and those needing turnaround.

On Tuesday, Jim Johnson walked the Board through Census forecasts that show an America, and a state, that is growing more "brown" and working poor. He warned of dire consequences to everyone, regardless of race or income, if inequities are not addressed. And he called on the State Board to find solutions that would prepare these children better, as student data show that these demographics are least prepared.

On Wednesday, representatives from Alamance Achieves invited the Board to play a game they created called Cradle to Career. Some players were students, given a set of life conditions and throughout the game thrown either harsh or fortuitous life events. These players either took steps forward or backward depending on the situations, while other players were asked to make difficult choices in investing "dollars" into the individual "students." By game's end, you saw how different life situations and events hold some people back.

Cannon's talk, which drew the three-day meeting's only standing ovation, resonated as a solution to the growing issues of inequity Board members heard the past few days. He got an assist from Board member Amy White, who drew inspiration from Cannon's talk in summarizing what she learned this week.

"In summary, you have just shown us in real life what it takes to be a turnaround leader," she said. "My assumption, moving forward, is that turnaround does not come in a box. It is not a program. It's a leader."

"We talked for months about individualizing instruction for kids," White continued. "It's about individualizing strong practices in the schools, meeting the culture where it is, and making a difference. So if you come away with nothing from the past two days — it's about



flexibility and offering leaders who see and know what's going on in their communities the opportunity to make that change."

When White finished speaking, the entire room broke into applause. Board member Matthew Bristow-Smith had been next in line to speak.

He swallowed the words he had planned to say and offered simply, "Ms. White, I need to hand you this mic back so you can drop it."

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*Editor's note: Donnell Cannon serves on EducationNC's Board of Directors.*

News

# Running towards the risk of doing school differently, leading school turnaround

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 [ednc.org/what-does-it-take-to-lead-school-turnaround/](https://ednc.org/what-does-it-take-to-lead-school-turnaround/)

Taylor Shain

November 21,  
2019

When Donnell Cannon stepped in front of the State Board of Education during its November meeting, he was addressing an audience longing for a little pick-me-up. For two days, the State Board had heard about growing inequities among North Carolina's students and a dire need for school turnaround leaders.

The afternoon before Cannon spoke, a panel of turnaround principals gave the Board a list of attributes that turnaround leaders should possess. One Board member commented on the list of attributes, wondering if people with all of them actually existed.

Enter Cannon, a young, charismatic principal who says he teaches the richest kids in the state, despite the high levels of poverty in his school and county. Cannon offered the State Board a blueprint on how turnaround can work at schools, providing a glimpse into North Edgecombe High School.



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/E8UZQ4HIEck>

When Cannon finished speaking and the sounds of the standing ovation he received died down, one audience member wondered aloud, "Are you real?"

To be sure, school turnaround leaders exist in North Carolina's public schools. There just aren't enough of them in place to turn around every school in need of a boost. And after hearing about the problem repeatedly, Cannon's message of inspiration and practical experience resonated with Board members.

### Principals

**TEACHFORAMERICA**

ONE DAY MAGAZINE

# Meet the Unexpected Experts Transforming a North Carolina Town

The residents of Tarboro, North Carolina, came together to map their toughest problems. Along the way, they realized their unique power to solve them.

**By Leah Fabel**

October 1, 2019

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## TEACHFORAMERICA

Community College. They represented the diversity of this town of 11,000 in every way: educators, health care professionals, community activists, students, faith leaders, a sheriff's detective, the owner of the local brewery. And there were Seth and Vichi.

Seth Saeugling (E.N.C. '12) and Vichi Jagannathan (E.N.C. '11) are the founders of the Tarboro-based [Rural Opportunity Institute](#). Their quarterly community meeting is the reason 50 people put off other responsibilities for three hours in the middle of a workweek. But to their ongoing consternation, no one in Tarboro actually calls Rural Opportunity Institute by its name. They don't even use its less cumbersome acronym, ROI. They just call it "Seth and Vichi's work."

"Communication is our Achilles' heel," Vichi says. If she could explain ROI's work, the first thing she'd say is that it's not at all about Seth and Vichi. In fact, that's the whole point. Rural Opportunity Institute, a lab for social innovations, exists to support the Tarboro community and the Edgecombe County community more broadly, first in figuring out the root causes of inequity in the area and then in finding the right tools to root them out.

The remarkable thing is that it's working in ways even Seth and Vichi have trouble grasping. Over two years and thousands of hours of precision-tuned work, the community has determined that unaddressed trauma, specifically trauma caused by adverse childhood experiences, has enabled generational cycles of poverty and pain in Tarboro. In response, Seth and Vichi are working with community members to launch solutions that are spreading through the town like wildfire, reaching into systems from schools to law enforcement to individual families, and transforming them.

Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are defined broadly as traumatic things that happen to kids or that kids witness at home: physical or sexual abuse, addiction, mental illness, hunger, insecure housing. Having an incarcerated parent is considered an ACE. So is experiencing frequent discrimination or being the child of a divorce.

ACEs are incredibly common: In one of the largest and most cited [studies](#), 67% of adults had at least one ACE, and 13% had four or more. Numerous studies have shown that among people who identify as Black or Latinx, the prevalence of ACEs is significantly higher. Regardless of race or economic background, the higher a person's "ACE score," the greater the link with negative life outcomes like heart disease, diabetes, mental illness, unwanted pregnancies, depression, cancer, addiction, and more.



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she cites a past president of the American Academy of Pediatrics in calling ACEs “the single greatest unaddressed public health threat facing our nation today.”



Vichi Jagannathan (left) and Seth Saeugling's makeshift office at Pattillo Middle School is packed with artifacts from Tarboro's systems mapping process.

## Related

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## The First Try

When Seth and Vichi started ROI in 2017, there was no way to predict that ACEs would emerge as the fulcrum of their work in Tarboro. Being completely open to possible outcomes is a hallmark of the approach they took, called human-centered design. It is built on the idea that people who experience a challenge are best suited to solve it. Developed in Silicon Valley in the late 1980s, human-centered design gave us the computer mouse, the touchscreen, and most of your favorite apps.

More recently, human-centered design has been adapted to solve problems that have nothing to do with technology. For example, school districts often use variations of the approach to redesign schools, engaging students, parents, and teachers as the “expert users” who know what’s needed for an optimal learning environment. Social entrepreneurs use it to design ways to alleviate poverty. At its most basic, the approach works like this—Step 1: Have a lot of conversations and focus groups with relevant users to determine the core problem. Step 2: Brainstorm possible solutions. Step 3: Choose a solution and run with it, leaving plenty of room to iterate and change course if outcomes are not as hoped.

Seth was trained in human-centered design while working in Oakland, California, where he moved in 2014 to be with his girlfriend after teaching high school special education in Eastern North Carolina. Vichi, who had earned a master’s degree in electrical engineering at Stanford University prior to teaching high school science as a corps member, found her way back to the Bay Area to work for Microsoft around the same time.

Seth and Vichi hadn’t been close friends as corps members—they taught in towns separated by about 35 miles of soybean and tobacco fields. But in the Bay Area, they connected over a shared interest in innovation. “We were blown away by the resources, the energy, the networks of people solving problems,” Seth says. “We were hungry.”

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parents or small children to promote healthy brain development. All around them, money poured into solutions big and small; friends' whimsical online widgets would net millions of dollars. But almost all of the innovations were "touch-point solutions," Seth says. They weren't necessarily bad, but none of them came close to addressing the systemic problems Seth and Vichi saw their students battle every day as corps members in Eastern North Carolina.

Ultimately, living in the Bay Area created a dissonance, Vichi says. She and Seth were faced with a choice: "You can either choose to be part of the dissonance and say, 'I'm going to join you guys and ignore this other stuff I know,' or you can say, 'There's only one answer to this and it's to go back and learn more.'"

"Adverse childhood experiences are the single greatest unaddressed public health threat facing our nation today."

**attributed to Dr. Robert Block, former president of the American Academy of Pediatrics**

Vichi moved on to Yale University's business school in the fall of 2015. While there, she and a friend from the corps, Liz Chen (E.N.C. '10), won a competition giving them \$80,000 to design and build a sex ed app called Real Talk, furthering an idea the two had started as teachers. It was one more touch-point solution, Vichi says, but it came

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By Vichi's second year at Yale, she and Seth were making frequent visits to Tarboro while pursuing funding to start Rural Opportunity Institute. Both moved there permanently in June 2017, following Vichi's graduation, eager to see where the design process would lead. Silicon Valley didn't have the answers, but they believed the people of Tarboro did.

For the better part of 2017, Seth and Vichi conducted interviews, formal and informal, aiming to get at what problems in Tarboro most needed to be solved. Erin Swanson (E.N.C. '02), the director of innovation for Edgecombe County Public Schools, facilitated ROI's first community meeting, introducing their work to leaders from the school system, like Lauren Lampron (E.N.C. '10), the principal of Tarboro's W.A. Pattillo Middle School, and community leaders like the head of the county's health department, a well-known pastor, and a county commissioner.

By September 2017, Seth and Vichi had completed dozens of interviews and held many more meetings. At almost every turn, people turned their energy toward tackling the challenges posed by ACEs and unaddressed trauma. Theoretically, Seth says, community members could have named joblessness or housing as their priorities, or something else. But Seth and Vichi were blown away by how quickly participants coalesced around the same critical problem to solve. "That was really powerful," he says, "people naming trauma almost without being asked."

## Refining The Approach

In a traditional human-centered design process, the next step would have been to brainstorm as many solutions as possible to address ACEs. But that didn't feel like it would work, Vichi says. She and Seth went over all of their notes and feared they'd simply come up with more solutions that didn't address root causes. "We literally felt like we were going to brainstorm a doula program and Real Talk again," Vichi says. "And we said to each other, 'We didn't do all this to do that.'"

Instead they searched and found an online course for an approach called systems mapping. Systems mapping has its roots in engineering—a point in its favor for Vichi, the trained engineer. Think of an electrical grid—some mess of wires and nodes that sends electricity to, say, a lightbulb. Imagine that one of those wires breaks, or it connects to the wrong node. The lightbulb won't light up, or it'll be dimmer than it should be.

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Mapping systems across a whole town requires community members to devote hours of their time to sharing their experiences, ideas, and values in ways that can feel challenging and vulnerable. When Seth and Vichi started asking about where ACEs showed up in Tarboro, they were, by extension, asking individuals to talk about the traumas in their own lives.

But at the end of the process, you get a map: a visual representation of a community's beliefs, systems, and behaviors. The map makes it obvious where the broken places are causing the community—the lightbulb—not to shine as brightly as it could. It also reveals a community's assets and the places where a couple of tweaks could ripple in positive ways throughout the grid.

“You can either choose to be part of the dissonance and say, ‘I’m going to join you guys and ignore this other stuff I know,’ or you can say, ‘There’s only one answer to this and it’s to go back and learn more.’”

**Vichi Jagannathan**



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The map that emerged, created with the input of more than 300 community members over months of meetings and working groups, looks something like a multicolored, misshapen peony, or it could be a map of flight patterns.

The easiest way to understand the map is not to look at it but to interact with it. Start at any one point—say, “mental/physical health problems.” That point connects to four other points by arrows, including “strain on existing systems/orgs.” With the help of tiny plus and minus signs along the arrows, you can read the connection between those two points like this: “The more that mental and physical health problems exist in Tarboro, the greater the strain on its existing systems.” Then, keep following the arrows to another point: “The greater the strain on Tarboro’s existing systems, the less community capacity is available to offer support and solve problems.” Keep going: “The less community capacity is available, the less there exists information and resources for treating trauma.” And on and on.

The arrows and points form interconnecting loops. The loops unlock stories. No blame is attached to any one system, and no solutions are suggested. The map simply shows people who they say that they are, and in doing so, it reveals opportunities for change.

During one of Seth and Vichi’s first presentations of the finalized map, a woman raised her hand. She said, “I’m watching my grandson’s face go through this map,” Seth recalls. She explained that one of the hundreds of possible loops tracked almost perfectly with her grandson’s difficulties in the school system. Soon others were doing the same. “You could trace any loop on the map and tell somebody’s story,” Seth says. “It was people saying, ‘Wow, I see my voice showing up here.’ And it was people who didn’t take part in the process of creating the map, seeing it upon completion and saying, ‘Holy cow, this is my experience.’”

“That was a turning point,” Seth says. “We were overwhelmed by the connectedness of oppression.”

After finalizing the systems map, Seth and Vichi convened a group of community members to figure out how to respond to the findings. If ACEs and unaddressed trauma were the problem, and they were showing up in all of these ways on the map, what were the solutions? The group developed a three-pronged approach that includes spreading knowledge of trauma and its impacts; promoting healing from trauma through learning and sharing new practices; and connecting people throughout the community to opportunities to grow as leaders in the work.

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In October 2018, Resources for Resilience offered their first training session in Tarboro —two full days, open to anyone, of what felt like a cross between professional development and group therapy.

Plenty of organizations across the country have a vision to address trauma, but it's harder to find those that have succeeded, Seth says. He and Vichi hoped the trainings would be a start.



© Photo Travis Dove

Felicia Cofield spends long hours at City Hall (above) advocating for neighbors impacted by the region's flooding.

## The Community Advocate

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one recruiting people to a law firm membership program, offering lower-cost legal services should members ever need them. She's also active in her church and neighborhood, a reliable vessel for friends' stories and troubles.

Much of her neighbors' traumas stem from the region's experience with flooding. In 1999, Hurricane Floyd put much of Edgecombe County underwater, particularly low-lying areas where housing is most affordable. Cofield's son was 6 months old at the time. She recalls evacuating her home, carrying her son close as waters rose as if filling a tub. She and her son made it to her car, but it stalled as the waters climbed higher. Cars passed by on the road, already packed with people. Cofield, holding her baby and unable to swim, wasn't sure they'd survive. Finally, a car carried them to higher land. The flood filled her house, destroying it. The memory still haunts her.

In October 2016, Hurricane Matthew brought more devastating floods. Cofield's house escaped the worst of the damage; only her roof and her HVAC system needed repair. But others saw everything they owned swallowed up all over again. Cofield started helping friends and neighbors apply for relief funding. Nearly three years later, she's still at it. Hundreds of neighbors are still in temporary housing, awaiting payouts from the state's backlogged distribution system.

Cofield attended the Resources for Resilience training on a hunch that it would help her to help her friends and neighbors. And she was right, she says. "But in the meantime, it was helping me to overcome my stress and trauma at the same time. It's helping me to deal with me—to make sense of things that have happened," she says.

She attended one session with a pounding headache, unable to focus. But when the facilitator led a breathing and relaxation exercise, she gave it a try. "When I finished it, that headache was gone. That amazed me," she says.

After going through the training, Cofield says she's more calm—less likely to let anger drive her reactions and more likely to step back and focus on how she has made it through frustration before. She has invited many people to attend upcoming trainings, including her mother and members of her church.

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Through his own healing, Pastor Kelly Andrews (in black) aims to help others heal.

## The Pastor

Pastor Kelly Andrews grew up on a tenant farm in Edgecombe County before joining the military and serving three years in Iraq during the Gulf War. He came home and taught high school history before entering the ministry full time at Tarboro's Eastern Star Missionary Baptist Church.

Andrews heard about ROI's work in 2017 when a friend invited him to attend an early community meeting. He had his doubts. Countless outside groups with good intentions had tried to help Edgecombe County in his lifetime, but hardly any followed through, he says. He assumed Seth and Vichi would be the same.

But when he met them, he felt his cynicism recede. "They didn't come in saying, 'This is what you need to do.' But they provided the space and the climate for ideas organically to happen," he says.



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provided a personal revelation, he says. They allowed him to explore the challenges he experiences as a pastor as well as some of the dysfunction he faced throughout his childhood. “Being able to understand that, and articulate it, has been very empowering,” he says. “And that’s not something I can keep to myself. Part of my mission and purpose is to help others heal as well.”

The more you talk to people who have taken part in ROI’s work, the more Andrews’s and Cofield’s experiences begin to feel like the norm. Talk to enough people and you get the sense that the whole town is going through an awakening.



© Photo Travis Dove

Byron Hall (left) focuses on giving the teen dads he mentors space to open up about their feelings and concerns.

## The Mentor



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whole life, I thought I was a plague,” he says. He connected to ROI through his part-time work as a mentor to teen fathers in Tarboro.

Learning about ACEs was like finally receiving the right diagnosis. It explained Hall’s anxiety, his anger, his struggles to control his temper. And being in a community of people who were all exploring childhood trauma gave him the courage to talk about his own, and gave him the tools to change. “I had to time travel and dig into all this stuff that happened to me that made me a hard, rough person. I always thought feelings made you soft. But for my own children, I have to be softer,” he says. “They’re not going to grow up the way I grew up.”

In August, Hall led the second meeting of ROI’s community board. The board, which includes Cofield, came together in June as a next phase of ROI’s work—an effort to provide leadership opportunities to community members and ensure the work is aligned with their needs. Hall led board members through discussions of whom to recruit for upcoming Resources for Resilience trainings (about 180 people had attended already) and whom to recruit to expand the board. They talked about the need to find mentors for the board members, too. Hall said he wanted a mentor who could teach him professional habits—stuff he missed by not having a model. And he wanted to learn how to write grants so he can continue his teen mentoring full time without the constant threat of funding running out.

“I tell people I feel like a broke Batman,” Hall says. “I walk around with the knowledge of ACEs on my utility belt.” Operating with an understanding of trauma “equals the playing field,” he says. “By doing work on my own issues, I’m giving the people who I know the strength to work on their own.”

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Learning about trauma has compelled Pattillo Middle School Principal Lauren Lampron (right) to rethink student discipline.

## The Principal

By late 2018, the Resources for Resilience trainings had become a well-known piece of ROI's work, but they weren't the only effort. Since March of that year, Seth and Vichi had been working with a professor at East Carolina University and Pattillo principal Lauren Lampron to design a biofeedback pilot program focused on helping students to identify stress and respond to it in a healthy way.

Biofeedback tools use a person's biological responses, like heartrate, to detect stress and other feelings. Once identified, simple tools like breathing exercises can bring the heartrate back to a calmer zone. It's not new—elite athletes and high-level executives have been benefiting from biofeedback tools for years. But it hadn't been tried in Tarboro.

Starting in April 2019, six Pattillo students, all of whom had struggled with behavior and attendance, started and closed each school day in a designated homeroom where they

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breathing exercises were helping. As the pilot went on, the students sometimes asked to use the equipment midday when they felt anxious or needed to de-escalate a tense situation.

The sample size is too small to draw broad conclusions, but among the students who participated, attendance improved and behavioral incidents decreased. Overall anxiety levels decreased by 57%, according to an East Carolina University analysis. Lampron is expanding the pilot to more students this school year.



© Photo Travis Dove

Many friends Matt Johnson played baseball with as a kid at this park have become victims of the opioid crisis he battles as a sheriff's detective.

## The Officer

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His grandfather was his rock. Johnson lived with him, along with his grandmother, mom, cousins, and aunt. For most of Johnson's life, his aunt struggled with a fierce heroin addiction that nearly sucked the family dry, both financially and emotionally. "It formed a lot of biases and beliefs I was unaware I had," he says. His grandfather died in a car accident while rushing Johnson's aunt to the hospital for treatment.

In 2015, Johnson joined the Edgecombe County Sheriff's Office with the goal of locking up the users and the pushers who perpetuated the county's drug crisis. But the more he understood the challenges of addiction, the less effective it seemed to toss addicts in jail. In June, he went through a weeklong training to become a certified recovery coach. "I know it sounds counterproductive for a law enforcement officer, but incarceration is not a fix," he says.

In November 2018, Johnson attended an ROI community meeting where he heard a presentation about the biofeedback pilot at Pattillo Middle School. The sheriff's detective thought, "Why couldn't we use this at the jail? What group of people better fits the description of unaddressed trauma leading to destructive behaviors?"

"It's understanding that nobody wakes up and decides they want to be a heroin addict, but some chain of events or some traumatic moment has led to that point."

**Matt Johnson**



**TEACHFORAMERICA**

ones? If biofeedback could help inmates manage their stress, that would improve their lives during incarceration and afterward, as well as make life easier for the jail staff.

Atkinson, who was named North Carolina's Sheriff of the Year in 2018, signed on. Seth and Vichi helped Johnson secure funding through a University of North Carolina program pairing public health graduate school students with outside partners to complete the students' capstone projects. The students researched and recommended the company HeartMath, which provided their devices at discount; HeartMath had never heard of a county jail using biofeedback.

"We're shifting from a punitive approach, which has proven since the Dark Ages not to work, to a reformative approach," Johnson says. "It's understanding that nobody wakes up and decides they want to be a heroin addict, but some chain of events or some traumatic moment has led to that point."

## Data Talks

Seth and Vichi take a rigidly agnostic approach to tools like the Resources for Resilience trainings and biofeedback. Their intent is to be accountable to what the community determines it needs, not to become the salespeople for any one solution.

Vichi says she was surprised that Pattillo's biofeedback pilot produced such positive results. "If we trusted the people in Silicon Valley to have understood [Eastern North Carolina] and built something perfect for them, that'd be one thing. But I fundamentally believe that they made it for NASA and football players," she says. "But I'll do what the data says."

In late July, Vichi met Edgecombe County Manager Eric Evans in his fourth floor office in the county building in downtown Tarboro. Seth had presented ROI's work at a meeting of local government officials for Eastern North Carolina counties, and Evans's interest was piqued. Prior to Vichi's arrival, Evans and the county's assistant manager had already looked into the promise of the work, particularly the biofeedback tools. Their public-facing employees, like the people who staff the notoriously stressful Department of Motor Vehicles, might benefit from an opportunity to de-stress during the day. And it might improve their attendance and health outcomes on the job, Evans said.

Vichi also asked Evans if he might host a Resources for Resilience training session for county employees. Evans made a note to check for dates.





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Teachers at Pattillo Middle School (joined by Seth Saeugling, middle) spent four days in August learning how the classroom can be a place of healing for students.

## Contagious Courage

Over a mid-July breakfast at Tarboro's Country Sunrise Grill, Pattillo principal Lauren Lampron said that part of the power of Seth and Vichi's work is how quickly it spreads. When she started as a principal in 2014, she subscribed to accepted beliefs that strict discipline would create space for a culture of learning. But she soon saw that it created deep inequities in her school, particularly along lines of race. When Seth and Vichi started to bring the community together to discuss what issues most needed to be addressed, Lampron felt part of "a collective of people who'd given themselves permission" to understand ACEs and unaddressed trauma, and how to heal.

"When the sheriff is championing the fact that we should do something different, and a nurse, and a religious leader, and other people, now I have the permission to do this, too," Lampron says. "It's given me courage."

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managing student behavior and helping students heal and grow. She also invited Resources for Resilience to run a two-day training for all her staff members, making Pattillo the first school in the district where every staff member is informed about trauma, its impacts, and how to address its symptoms. Two more days of professional development were led by an expert on restorative justice.

Sitting at a small sunlit table at a Tarboro bakery, Vichi seemed genuinely surprised by the idea that the work she and Seth started had taken on a life of its own. After two years, countless meetings and conversations, three iterations of a systems map, and probably a million sticky-notes stuck to poster paper, community members saw their lives reflected and were taking action. People who had never thought they had power felt activated to create change. People who had long held power felt supported to use it to address trauma in new ways.

“It’s the outcome we would want to see,” Vichi says. “It feels like part of a systemic shift —being able to shift from punitive responses to responses that are more healing, just as a result of being in a place with shared knowledge and common language.”

It felt to her like a validation; People in Tarboro had the answers. “They just needed the support and capacity and space to be able to find them.”

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EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA

# Eastern NC high school students blend leadership and STEM learning

 [ednc.org/eastern-nc-high-school-students-blend-leadership-and-stem-learning/](http://ednc.org/eastern-nc-high-school-students-blend-leadership-and-stem-learning/)

By Yasmin Bendaas

July 17,  
2018



Students at the ENC STEM summer program perform an experiment using oil eating microbes. Yasmin Bendaas/EducationNC

High school students pored over tables topped with beakers, lab flasks, and test tubes at the North Carolina School of Science and Math last week. Pipettes in hand, the students prepared to conduct an experiment to test the best conditions for oil-eating microbes as they simulated saving the Gulf of Mexico from an oil spill.



Students use a pipette to fill beakers at the NC School of Science and Math. Yasmin Bendaas/EducationNC

“We’re looking at how scientists work together to solve environmental problems in their community,” said Caroline Harris, an instructor and project officer for Eastern North Carolina STEM.

Eastern North Carolina STEM (ENC STEM) launched in 2013 with programming to provide STEM learning opportunities for high school students in disadvantaged communities. Now in its sixth year, approximately 100 students participated in two weeks of ENC STEM summer programming at Northampton County High School. Of those students, 70 were selected to complete the third week at the North Carolina School of Science and Math (NCSSM).





"It gives me a college feel because I have to wake myself up for all my classes. I [have] to be in class on time every day. I [have] to get used to walking around a big campus," said Montaya Greene, a recent graduate of Northampton High School who will be attending Fayetteville State University in the fall.





Seventy students spent their third week of the ENC STEM program at the NC School of Science and Math. Yasmin Bendaas/EducationNC

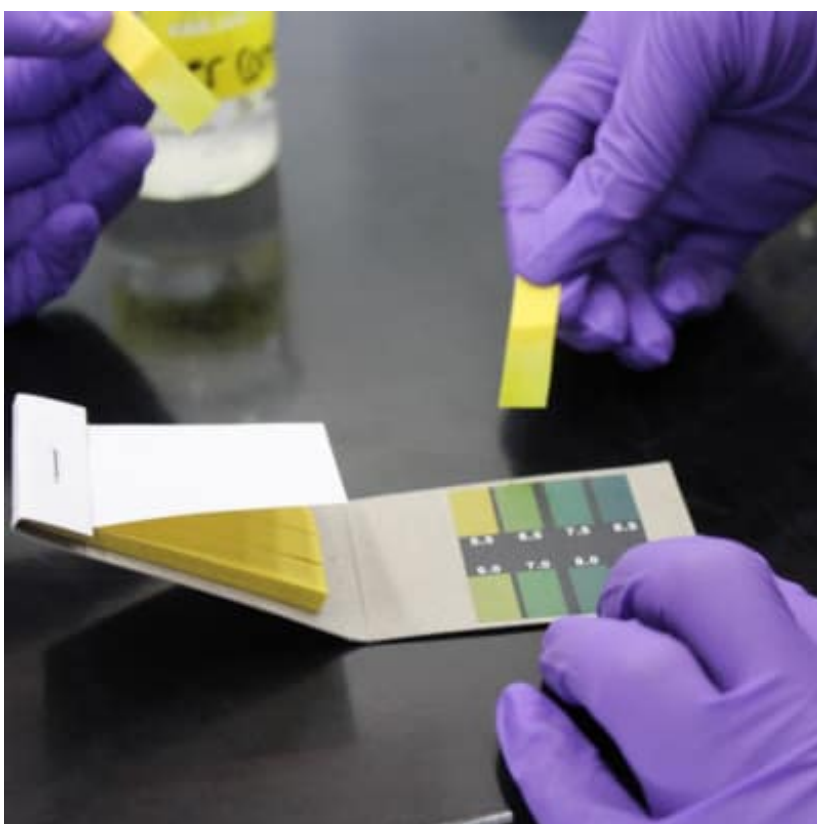
“Our students have unlimited potential in eastern North Carolina. Unlimited,” said Andrew Lakis, Executive Director of Teach For America-Eastern North Carolina. “But the unfortunate reality is they don’t have the access to opportunity that they should have.”



Students learn to experiment with oil-eating microbes at the ENC STEM summer program. Yasmin Bendaas/EducationNC



"We're looking at how scientists work together to solve environmental problems in their community," said instructor Caroline Harris. Yasmin Bendaas/EducationNC



Students test pH using testing strips. Yasmin Bendaas/EducationNC

ENC STEM was founded by Teach For America-Eastern North Carolina alumni. Elaina Sabatine, co-director of ENC STEM, said the organization's leadership team is comprised of math and science teachers who recognized the importance of quality STEM education.

"For us, access to STEM is an issue of social justice," Sabatine said. "We talk to our kids about the importance of STEM education . . . but the opportunities that they have are contingent upon their proximity to resources, and that's kind of the challenge in eastern NC."



High schoolers conduct an experiment in the NC School of Science and Math residential program held by ENC STEM. Yasmin Bendaas/EducationNC



A student prepares her experiment in week 3 of the ENC STEM program. Yasmin Bendaas/EducationNC

That's why students' course loads included a leadership course not directly related to STEM titled, "Social Justice and Advocacy."

"Ultimately, our instructors have the flexibility to create the course that they want," Sabatine said. "Those instructors wanted students to have the opportunity to work on a topic that was relevant and interesting to them."

Away from the test tubes and math problems, students formed groups to create a final narrative project on a topic from their leadership class. Topics included mass incarceration, autism discrimination, police brutality, the wage gap, and teen suicide.





Groups of students work on their social advocacy project presentations as part of their ENC STEM leadership course. Yasmin Bendaas/EducationNC

"We chose teen suicide because I feel like it really connects to my life, being that a person in my family has done that while they were a teen. It happens so frequently," said rising senior Rashera Galloway. "The largest rate increase for teen suicide is among black adolescents. I'm a black female. I know how it feels...We are in school. We have sports. I live in a low income community, so I [have] to help supply for my family, too. I feel the stress."

"Sometimes people don't know what to do. They don't know who to call. I feel like it just needs to get noticed. It goes under-acknowledged," said Galloway.

Alyssa Garner, Galloway's project partner, said that learning more about teen suicide can save teens who have a whole life ahead of them.

"It could be one of our friends that could commit suicide tonight, and some of us might not know because we didn't recognize the signs that they were depressed and going through things," said Garner. "I feel like if everyone gets more involved in learning about teen suicide and the major cause of it, we can check on our friends and family more."





Alyssa Garner (left) and Rashera Galloway (right) work on their presentation focused on teen suicide as part of their Social Advocacy leadership course for ENC STEM. Yasmin Bendaas/EducationNC

Across the table, Dayzsha Joyner and Aniziah Glenn compiled presentations on the gender wage gap.

"A lot of people know about the gender wage gap, but not a lot of people speak on the gender wage gap. It's very transparent that it's happening, but not many people are leaning towards changing it," said Joyner, a rising senior who said she had experienced a difference in pay at her place of employment. "It's not like women don't want to work...If a woman is there to work and she's doing the same thing as a man, then there's no way that a man should get more money than she [does]."

Joyner and Glenn said the leadership course served as an outlet for an issue they could relate to and were passionate about. However, their primary interests remained in STEM. Joyner hopes to be a neurosurgeon and study biochemistry in college, while Glenn said her favorite subject has always been math.

"In math right now, we are learning matrices, and I haven't really been exposed to that until I started this [program]," Glenn said. "I see that it also ties with biology because we are learning about amino acids and how it relates to matrices."



"It pushed me a lot," Anthony Shaw (left) said of the ENC STEM program. Yasmin Bendaas/EducationNC

For other students, ENC STEM simply helped them open up to others.

"I was building a character trait that I didn't really have: to start a conversation," said Anthony Shaw, a rising junior at KIPP Pride High School. "I feel like in college it will help me a lot. If I can go up to professors and introduce myself and get the type of help that I need, then I can push through."

## Energizing NC

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Energizing NC

# CMS board votes on inaugural equity committee members

By [Chandler Morgan](#) | October 22, 2019 at 2:59 PM EDT - Updated October 23 at 5:47 PM

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (WBTV) - Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' Board of education voted Tuesday night on the members who will make up the district's inaugural "Community Equity Committee." The board says the form of the committee has been a long time coming and is an effort to better ensure equity across the district.

Up to 40 people can serve on the committee, as the board set forth in guidelines during previous meetings. The first 20 were be "group" voted in by the board as a consent item during the meeting . The other 20 were individually voted in as an action item.

The 39 members selected tonight range from staff members and teachers from the CMS district, but there's also a lot of diverse community leadership groups and parents. The 39 members of the Community Equity Committee are:

- Derrik Anderson
- Devonya Govan-Hunt
- Shericka Kemp
- Arun Nair
- Kimberly Muhich
- Jason Colvin
- Gilbert Gilchrist
- Lucille Frierson
- Lionel Means
- Dee Rankin
- Justin Perry
- Zhenia Martinez
- John Murchison
- Kobi Brinson
- Boe Clark
- Sonia Gwyn
- Jayden Davis
- Victor Armstrong
- Jason Terrell
- Stella Smolowitz
- Margueritta Brown
- Bettie Butler
- Connie Cabbs
- Christina Corpening
- Frank Garcia
- Pamela Grundy
- Leslie Gutierrez
- Ian Joyce
- Chance Lewis
- LeDayne Polaski
- Richard Purcell
- Adam Rhew
- Amelia Stinson-Wesley
- David Taylor
- Yolanda Trotman
- Sharika Comfort
- Christopher Corcoran
- Kimberlee Cox-Benjamin
- Saronda Easter





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**December Specials**

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### Week 1 Top 10

Alverna Bridges  
Robert Gray  
David Evette  
Daniel Bailey  
McKenzie Fortner  
Andrew Hogan  
Elizabeth Waligora  
Crystal Champion  
Shari Pope  
Laura Pittman

### School

Neuse Charter School  
Chapman High School  
Landrum High School  
Airport High School  
GE Massey Elementary  
Spring Hill High School  
The Cleveland Academy of Leadership  
Township Three Elementary School  
Independence High School  
Lucama Elementary School

### City, St

Smithfield, NC  
Inman, SC  
Campobello, SC  
West Columbia, SC  
Lincolnton, NC  
Chapin SC  
Spartanburg, SC  
Shelby, NC  
Charlotte, NC  
Lucama, NC

### Week 2 Top 10

Laura Smith  
Kim Johnson  
Frances Clark  
Christy Smith  
Mallory Elks  
Kim Flowers  
  
Whitney Gilbert  
Jeffrey Quick

### School

Oakdale Elementary School  
James H. Hendrix Elementary School  
West Johnston High School  
Northwestern High School  
Pumpkin Center Primary School  
Seven Oaks Elementary School Media  
Magnet  
Melvin C. Swann Jr. Middle School  
Spring Hill Middle School

### City, St

Rock Hill, SC  
Boiling Springs, SC  
Benson, NC  
Rock Hill, SC  
Lincolnton, NC  
Columbia, SC  
  
Greensboro, NC  
Wagram, NC