

North Carolina Third Quarter Legislative Report March 2019

“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 third quarter, Teach For America’s founder, Wendy Kopp, wrote an article on the progress she is seeing in Edgecombe County. Wendy currently serves as the CEO of Teach For All, a global network of independent nonprofit organizations that apply the same model as Teach For America in other countries.

Wendy discusses Edgecombe’s Commission on Educational Equity, saying:

I know about this endeavor because it involves a married couple, Dan Riley and Erin Swanson, two Teach For America alumni who put down roots in the community. They came together with about two dozen people, including students, teachers, parents, the schools superintendent, clergy members, business and non-profit leaders, and elected officials to collectively reconsider their aspirations in light of today’s challenges and opportunities.

Ultimately, Dan, his wife, who worked for the county public schools, and the then schools superintendent got to talking and found their way to tapping into a larger appetite for a community-led undertaking. In 2016, the superintendent launched the Commission on Educational Equity.

To learn more about what the future might hold for students growing up today, and to decide what they want to be true for them when they grow up, the Commission went on tours of local employers and set up panel discussions with regional experts. These activities helped expose the differences in the Commission members’ orientations. For example, some parents were thrilled that a Chinese tire company was building a factory in the area, which would create hundreds of jobs. Other people, like Dan, were concerned those jobs would eventually be replaced by automation. The students on the Commission grew smitten with some of the exciting positions they saw, like roles for electrical engineers, and discounted others, like assembly-line roles.

Ultimately, hours and hours of conversation and countless community meetings led the Commission to five wishes for their 25-year-olds: to know their passions and live them out, to have global awareness and agency, to productively engage in the community, to have clear and sustainable options to stay or return to the county, and to be resilient.

What the community wants to be true for their 25-year-olds now guides the direction of the schools. The Commission’s clarity of vision helped the school district win a grant to start a pilot program focused on project-based learning as a strategy for cultivating students’ interests. They’re now several months into an effort to see whether student-conceived courses will more effectively prepare students than traditional subject classes. The program even has a “Genius Bar,” a la Apple Store, where an expert from the community helps answer questions and guide students on their learning journey.

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At long last, schools around eastern North Carolina are being led by what the future holds and what the community wants, rather than what the past dictates.

May more communities follow Edgecombe County's lead.¹

We are honored that a rural district in North Carolina with many Teach For America alumni and corps members is inspiring education communities across the country and the world. We remain grateful for the state's generous 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 third quarter.

Statewide Impact

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

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.

In the third quarter, Public Impact released an article on the success of Opportunity Culture across the state. They said:

As the founders of the Opportunity Culture initiative to extend the reach of great teaching to many more students, we keep a tight focus on how students and teachers benefit from Opportunity Culture implementation in their schools. In North Carolina — the largest implementation state so far, with 80 schools this year — the latest student growth numbers give one great example.

In 2017–18, while only 27 percent of non-Opportunity Culture schools in North Carolina exceeded student learning growth targets, nearly double that — 53 percent — of Opportunity Culture schools exceeded growth.

Opportunity Culture schools in the state were also far less likely to fall short of growth targets — 15 percent of schools versus 27 percent of non-Opportunity Culture schools. These results excluded any school where it was known that Opportunity Culture was not implemented in a tested grade or subject.

Opportunity Culture districts and schools extend the reach of excellent teachers and the teams they lead to more students, for more pay, within regular school budgets. Most use Multi-Classroom Leadership, in which an accountable teacher-leader with prior high-growth student learning fully leads a small teaching team — guiding and preparing the team for excellent instruction, coaching teachers, and collaboratively improving with the team, all based on student data.

¹ Kopp, Wendy. "For Our Schools to Serve Our Communities: Let's Launch 25-Year-Old Projects Everywhere." EducationNC, 30 Jan. 2019, www.ednc.org/2019/01/30/for-our-schools-to-serve-our-communities-lets-launch-25-year-old-projects-everywhere/. See Appendix A

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These results are a testament to the importance of having the right instructional leadership roles and the hard work of multi-classroom leaders, team teachers, principals, reach associates, and other colleagues who provide support.²

We are proud that many Opportunity Culture teachers across North Carolina are Teach For America alumni, and we are excited to support their leadership across our statewide impact:

- **Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and Project L.I.F.T.: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools quickly decided to scale up Opportunity Culture across the district after launching it in one school zone in 2013–14.**
 - Molly Whelan (Charlotte 2009) Whitewater Middle School, Multi-Classroom Leader
 - Aimee Wagner (Greater Newark 2005) West Charlotte High School, Multi-Classroom Leader
 - Carolyn Sarkozi Potts (Charlotte 2010) Allenbrook Elementary School, Multi-Classroom Leader
 - Cora Polsgrove (Charlotte 2008) Shamrock Gardens Elementary School, Multi-Classroom Leader
 - Courtney Derrick (Charlotte 2007) Ashley Park Elementary School, Multi-Classroom Leader
 - Javonne Williams (Charlotte 2010) Albemarle Road Elementary School, Multi-Classroom Leader
 - Josh Johnson (Charlotte 2007) Couldwood Middle School, Multi-Classroom Leader
 - Kelsey LeBar (Charlotte 2012) Ashley Park Elementary School, Multi-Classroom Leader
 - Kristen Wawer (Charlotte 2008) Quail Hollow Middle School, Multi-Classroom Leader
 - Renee Meyrose (Charlotte 2004) Quail Hollow Middle School, Multi-Classroom Leader
- **Edgecombe County Public Schools: This rural North Carolina district began using Opportunity Culture models in 2017–18, and will have Opportunity Culture in all district schools by 2019–20.**
 - Brittany Brouwers (Eastern North Carolina, 2014) Coker Wimberly Elementary School, Multi-Classroom Leader
 - Hillary Braden (Eastern North Carolina, 2015) Phillips Middle School, Multi-Classroom Leader
 - Derick Stephenson (Eastern North Carolina, 2016) Martin Millennium Academy, Multi-Classroom Leader
 - Sayre Olson (Eastern North Carolina, 2016) North Edgecombe High School, Multi-Classroom Leader
- **Vance County Schools: This rural district collaborates with neighboring Edgecombe to improve the region, where many teaching positions had previously gone unfilled.**
 - Kimberli Stoffel (Eastern North Carolina 2015) Southern Vance High School, Multi-Classroom Leader
- **Guilford County Schools: Guilford, not included in the data shown above, just launched in seven schools and has more planned.**
 - Sharrone Honor (North Carolina Piedmont Triad, 2015) Hairston Middle School, Multi-Classroom Leader
 - Marissa McOmber (North Carolina Piedmont Triad, 2015) Hairston Middle School, Multi-Classroom Leader

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.

²Hassel, Emily Ayscue, and Bryan C. Hassel. “Opportunity Culture Schools Outpace State Results in N.C.” EducationNC, 2 Jan. 2019, www.ednc.org/2019/01/02/opportunity-culture-schools-outpace-state-results-in-n-c/?utm_source=EdNC%2BSubscribers&utm_campaign=5be1dbc97dWeekly_Wrap_CAMPAIGN&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_2696365d99-5be1dbc97d-274989217. See Appendix B

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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 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 background³
- 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 six webinars designed specifically for North Carolinians moving into final round of interviews. Approximately 60 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 30 calls over four 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.

³ As identified by receiving a full or partial PELL Grant

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 third quarter, Robert Carrier (Eastern North Carolina, 2017) and his students had the opportunity to travel to Biogen's Community Lab in Research Triangle Park to conduct a lab on hemophilia — doing a quick lab on the human genome and developing a better understanding of how enzymes work with DNA. In the lab, the students had the opportunity to work with the latest technology in micropipettes and gel electrophoresis machines.

Carrier reflects on the experience, saying:

Every student has the same potential to do incredible things, but not the same opportunity. And when those opportunities are not equal, it creates a gap that only continues to grow. The zip code that a child is born into should not be the determining factor of their future, however, unfortunately that is the truth. If we as a nation want to realize the full potential of everyone, then those same opportunities should not just be given to a select few. If we want to truly make America the nation of possibilities, then there are changes in access to science education that need to be made.⁴

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.

In the third quarter, WRIAL wrote an article about the impact of teacher diversity on positive student growth and the disparities in the number of teachers of color in North Carolina, saying:

In North Carolina, where minority students make up 52 percent of the traditional public school body, 80 percent of teachers are white. For students of color, especially black and Hispanic boys, that means they may seldom – or never – have a teacher who looks like them during their kindergarten through 12th grade years.⁵

⁴ Carrier, Robert. "The Truth about Teaching Science in Rural North Carolina." EducationNC, 28 Jan. 2019, www.ednc.org/2019/01/22/the-truth-about-teaching-science-in-rural-north-carolina/?utm_source=EdNC%2BSubscribers&utm_campaign=80d800227fWeekly_Wrap_CAMPAIGN&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_2696365d99-80d800227f-274986417. See Appendix C

⁵ Hinchcliffe, Kelly. "North Carolina's Teacher Diversity Gap – WRAL Exclusive." WRAL.com, 24 Jan. 2019, www.wral.com/nc-s-teacher-diversity-gap-where-are-the-black-and-brown-teachers/18129132/?utm_source=EdNC%2BSubscribers&utm_campaign=11a88e82b7Daily_Digest&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_2696365d99-11a88e82b7-274989217. See Appendix D

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Charlotte alumni Mario Javon Shaw and Jason Terrell (Charlotte 2012) are working to change that reality. Across our North Carolina corps, over 51% of our corps members identify as people of color. Mario and Jason founded Profound Gentleman, an organization designed to support male teachers of color as a result of their experiences in the classroom as Teach For America corps members.

In March, Profound Gentleman hosted a conference that brought male educators of color from 18 states to Charlotte. The conference was its fourth annual Community Impact Assembly for more than 200 teachers from cohorts in cities around the country. The cohorts of teachers form social networks and provide professional development opportunities in hopes of retaining male educators of color. Nationwide, black men make up only two percent of the teaching workforce.

Attendees broke into groups comprised of individuals from different sectors — politics, philanthropy, education — and an educator shared a particular challenge he was facing. The break-out groups listened, asked clarifying questions, then gave advice from their own backgrounds and experiences.

“Teaching, sometimes, is an isolated field,” Terrell said. “You’re just in your own silo and you don’t really have the chance to hear the perspectives of non-teachers. So that was a great way for educators to get perspectives from lawyers and doctors and accountants. Folks who have kids, folks who may not have kids, but just maybe have other ideas about how education works from their own contexts.”⁶

Profound Gentlemen’s ultimate goal is retention of male educators of color once they are already in the profession. This year, they are testing out a new model, which is reaching undergraduate students before they join the profession. Through partnerships with UNC-Charlotte, Winston-Salem State, and Johnson C. Smith University, Terrell said college cohorts have formed with around 30 students, some of whom are majoring in education and some who are not.

North Carolina Piedmont Triad

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

- Nicollette Jones-Flowers teaches third grade at Fairview Elementary School. She graduated from Walden University.
- Wesley Simmons teaches third grade at Parkview Village Elementary School. He graduated from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. We are excited to share that we recruited Wesley through our North Carolina Teacher Corps efforts.
- Hannah Fearnow-Pegg teaches third grade reading at Montlieu Academy of Technology. She graduated from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. We are excited to share that we recruited Hannah through our North Carolina Teacher Corps efforts.

⁶ Bell, Liz. “Male Educators of Color Gather in Charlotte to Discuss Social and Professional Challenges.” EducationNC, 13 Mar. 2019, www.ednc.org/2019/03/13/male-educators-of-color-gather-in-charlotte-to-discuss-social-and-professional-challenges/. See Appendix E

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- Jaelyn Felder teaches high school Reading at Northeast Guilford High School. She graduated from Appalachian State University. We are excited to share that we recruited Hannah through our North Carolina Teacher Corps efforts.
- Rachel Williams teaches high school English at Eastern Guilford High School. She graduated from Duquesne University.

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 June quarterly report.

For our schools to serve our communities: Let's launch 25-year-old projects everywhere

 ednc.org/2019/01/30/for-our-schools-to-serve-our-communities-lets-launch-25-year-old-projects-everywhere/

by Wendy Kopp | January 30, 2019

January 30, 2019

Across Edgecombe County — an area of 52,000 people about an hour east of Raleigh — community members have been considering this question: What do we want to be true for our students by the time they're 25?

I know about this endeavor because it involves a married couple, Dan Riley and Erin Swanson, two Teach For America alumni who put down roots in the community. They came together with about two dozen people, including students, teachers, parents, the schools superintendent, clergy members, business and non-profit leaders, and elected officials to collectively reconsider their aspirations in light of today's challenges and opportunities.



The superintendent in the area, Dr. Valerie Bridges, says at 25 life has been launched. People are ideally on a path of some kind. It's a sign of how well all of the work the community put into supporting children when they were younger has come to fruition.

The need for these conversations comes as schools and the surrounding supports for children are less and less well-positioned to meet students' needs. Our education systems were created more than 150 years ago, when society's aspirations and circumstances were very different. Times have changed, but schools have not. To give children the best opportunity to fulfill their potential, we need all communities engaging in what I'll call 25-Year-Old Projects, just as they are in eastern North Carolina.

Edgecombe County is part of an economically depressed rural region that has wrestled with discrimination and the loss of industry. Families make an average of \$32,298 a year, more than \$20,000 less than the national average. The area is about 58 percent black and 36 percent white.

Dan became a teacher coach after teaching. He was living in the Raleigh-Durham area and driving into the rural areas to visit schools when he realized he was too disconnected from the communities where he was working.

He moved to the county seat, Tarboro, and he started trying to bring parents together to formulate a local vision about what they wanted for their children. He encountered one of two outcomes: either very few people showed up, or the resulting discussion was shallow. In an artificial setting, with people of different racial and economic backgrounds, Dan's neighbors were reluctant to engage.

He changed course, embedding his effort into pre-existing structures, like churches. “People felt more free to share because they were on their home turf, but it was still just an hour-long discussion,” he said.

Ultimately, Dan, his wife, who worked for the county public schools, and the then schools superintendent got to talking and found their way to tapping into a larger appetite for a community-led undertaking. In 2016, the superintendent launched the Commission on Educational Equity.

To learn more about what the future might hold for students growing up today, and to decide what they want to be true for them when they grow up, the Commission went on tours of local employers and set up panel discussions with regional experts. These activities helped expose the differences in the Commission members’ orientations. For example, some parents were thrilled that a Chinese tire company was building a factory in the area, which would create hundreds of jobs. Other people, like Dan, were concerned those jobs would eventually be replaced by automation. The students on the Commission grew smitten with some of the exciting positions they saw, like roles for electrical engineers, and discounted others, like assembly-line roles.

These differences developed into discussions about post-secondary options. Should all students be prepared to attend college? Should the community advocate to bring back some vocational programs like brick masonry? What’s best for kids? Who decides?

These are healthy questions for a community to surface, and resolve, together. Only 37 percent of Americans believe children today will grow up to be better off financially than their parents. Especially for a country founded by strivers and built on forward progress, that’s a problem. We need to consider what we want to be true not only for ourselves and our communities, but also for our country and our global society, and we need to get clear on the implications of working towards this vision for today’s students. And indeed, through my travels to meet with educators around the world with Teach For All, it’s clear that this isn’t just a national shift that needs to take place. These discussions need to be happening in communities everywhere.

Ultimately, hours and hours of conversation and countless community meetings led the Commission to five wishes for their 25-year-olds: to know their passions and live them out, to have global awareness and agency, to productively engage in the community, to have clear and sustainable options to stay or return to the county, and to be resilient.

What the community wants to be true for their 25-year-olds now guides the direction of the schools. The Commission’s clarity of vision helped the school district win a grant to start a pilot program focused on project-based learning as a strategy for cultivating students’ interests. They’re now several months into an effort to see whether student-conceived courses will more effectively prepare students than traditional subject classes. The program even has a “Genius Bar,” a la Apple Store, where an expert from the community helps answer questions and guide students on their learning journey.

At long last, schools around eastern North Carolina are being led by what the future holds and what the community wants, rather than what the past dictates.

May more communities follow Edgecombe County's lead.

Editor's note: This perspective was first published on the Teach for All blog. It has been posted with the author's permission.

Perspective

Opportunity Culture schools outpace state results in N.C.

ednc.org/2019/01/02/opportunity-culture-schools-outpace-state-results-in-n-c/

by Emily Ayscue Hassel and Bryan C. Hassel | January 2, 2019

January 2, 2019

As the founders of the Opportunity Culture initiative to extend the reach of great teaching to many more students, we keep a tight focus on how students and teachers benefit from Opportunity Culture implementation in their schools. In North Carolina — the largest implementation state so far, with 80 schools this year — the latest student growth numbers give one great example.

In 2017–18, while only 27 percent of non-Opportunity Culture schools in North Carolina exceeded student learning growth targets, nearly double that — **53 percent — of Opportunity Culture schools exceeded growth.**



Opportunity Culture schools in the state were also **far less likely to fall short of growth targets** — 15 percent of schools versus 27 percent of non-Opportunity Culture schools. These results excluded any school where it was known that Opportunity Culture was not implemented in a tested grade or subject.

In Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Garinger High School posted the highest growth index of all high schools in the state, and fourth-highest overall. Garinger's principal, Kelly Gwaltney, is in this year's cohort of Opportunity Culture Fellows.

Opportunity Culture districts and schools extend the reach of excellent teachers and the teams they lead to more students, for more pay, within regular school budgets. Most use Multi-Classroom Leadership, in which an accountable teacher-leader with prior high-growth student learning fully leads a small teaching team — guiding and preparing the team for excellent instruction, coaching teachers, and collaboratively improving with the team, all based on student data.

These results are a testament to the importance of having the right instructional leadership roles and the hard work of multi-classroom leaders, team teachers, principals, reach associates, and other colleagues who provide support.

Opportunity Culture schools are disrupting the notion that teachers and students are on a fixed bell curve, creating an upward escalator for teacher and student success.

The results follow research released early this year showing that students on teaching teams led by Opportunity Culture multi-classroom leaders showed sizeable academic gains. In that study from the American Institutes for Research and the Brookings Institution released through the CALDER Center, team teachers were, on average, at the 50th percentile in the student learning

gains they produced before joining a team led by a multi-classroom leader. After joining the teams, they **produced learning gains equivalent to those of teachers in the top quartile in math and nearly that in reading.**

We are delighted to see all these results as Opportunity Culture continues to grow and as we continue to improve our advice to districts and free tools for educators based on research and the experiences of excellent Opportunity Culture educators. We plan to begin releasing free and low-cost support to boost reading results further in 2019, based on the science of reading, and we are lining up more third-party research about Opportunity Culture's effects on teaching and learning.

Opportunity Culture districts in North Carolina span urban to suburban to rural, very large to small:

- **Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and Project L.I.F.T.:** Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools quickly decided to scale up Opportunity Culture across the district after launching it in one school zone in 2013–14.
- **Edgecombe County Public Schools:** This rural North Carolina district began using Opportunity Culture models in 2017–18, and will have Opportunity Culture in all district schools by 2019–20.
- **Vance County Schools:** This rural district collaborates with neighboring Edgecombe to improve the region, where many teaching positions had previously gone unfilled.
- **Cabarrus County Schools:** 100 percent of this suburban district's Opportunity Culture schools achieved high growth last year.
- **Guilford County Schools:** Guilford, not included in the data shown above, just launched in seven schools and has more planned.

Working with these districts and their educators has been and continues to be a privilege. Our team is routinely inspired by Opportunity Culture multi-classroom leaders, teachers and principals. They are proving their belief and ours in the enormous, untapped learning potential of *all* students.

Opportunity Culture Perspective

The truth about teaching science in rural North Carolina

ednc.org/2019/01/22/the-truth-about-teaching-science-in-rural-north-carolina/

Biogen Perspective The truth about teaching science in rural North Carolina by Robert Carrier | January 22, 2019 January 22, 2019



Teacher Robert Carrier with students from Warren New Tech High School at the Biogen Community Lab. Yasmin Bendaas/EducationNC

When I first started teaching as a high school science teacher at Warren New Tech High School with Teach for America in Warren County, it amazed me how small the school was. All 150 of our students fit into a single hallway, 10 classroom building with four additional classrooms found in a modular portable building only a short walk outside. There are two teachers per subject with the majority of teachers having three preps. However, I quickly learned that this was not uncommon in Warren County, which contains three high schools for a total of roughly 500 high school students.

It is a true rural county with a population density of around 50 people per square mile, compared to Wake County or Mecklenburg County who have population densities of roughly 300 people per square mile and 550 people per square mile, respectively. You'll find rows of once great tobacco, a staple crop of the county, that once made Warren County the wealthiest in North Carolina. But its continuous focus on agriculture and lack of development in other financial investments brought Warren County to where it is today: one of 20 poorest counties in North Carolina with a per capita income of about \$17,850 compared to the North Carolina

average of \$24,750.

Its largest employer is the school system, where educators work tirelessly towards teaching a majority of students who are one or two grade levels behind compared to the rest of their North Carolina peers. With this knowledge, it allowed me to have a better understanding of my students, where they come from, and what kind of experiences and perspectives they bring into my classroom.

My childhood education was a bit different compared to the one that I am currently working in. I grew up in suburban Victor, New York, a small town just outside the city of Rochester that has been growing tremendously over the past 15 years. When I was in first grade, the entire class population was a little more than 150 students. When I graduated high school 12 years later, my class size had grown to 300 students. With this change in numbers came changes happening to my town. Farmland and wooded areas were replaced with neighborhoods and shops. Close access to Route 90 and Route 490 made travel into Rochester easy.

But I think a large contributor to the influx of students was the education that the Victor Central School District provided. With strong results and easy access to resources, I first started to notice the opportunity we had when starting 7th grade year it was a requirement to take technology classes, art classes, and music classes. As well, all of the science classrooms had a second room attached for lab space, something I was not used to. These opportunities continued into high school, taking five technology classes and diving deeper into science with taking AP Chemistry and AP Physics.

Coming to Warren County, these experiences were very far from a possibility for my students.



Robert Carrier, left, with a group of students from Warren New Tech High School at Biogen's Community Lab. Yasmin Bendaas/EducationNC

The science classes currently offered are the requirements, Earth and Environmental and Biology, as well as Chemistry and Physics. However, at most other high schools in eastern North Carolina, including the other two high schools in Warren County, Chemistry and Physics are combined into Physical Science, and students only need three science classes to graduate.

We also have two technology classes, one focused on digital media and another on basic engineering, but this is uncommon compared to anything else in Warren County or Eastern North Carolina. Warren New Tech High School is a part of the New Tech Network, a nationwide collection of high schools founded on the idea of project-based learning initiated by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation. Because of this New Tech Network, our students have the opportunity to experience education by completing more projects, doing more presentations, and collaborating with their classmates more than you would typically find at a high school. However, where this education falters for the students is the lack of up-to-date technology available for the students to use to make 21st century results and the depth of knowledge and understanding that the students experience.

Whether in the science or technology classroom, student experiences with the latest technology look like Chromebooks and calculators that are over five years old. Lab equipment looks like something that was donated from another school who received new equipment before 2010.

Lab tables have all the gas nozzles and sinks, yet no piping to drain the water, or tanks to provide the gas. It is a school that looks like it has met all of the requirements, but when digging deeper into the details, it is easily seen that these students are not receiving the 2019 education that they deserve.

With improper supplies, it makes conducting laboratory experiments a figment of imagination—rare occasions that slightly introduce students how to conduct an experiment and follow the scientific method. Lost for the students are the inquiries about why things work, and instead filled with expectations of “What do I need to learn to pass the final exam?”

Another reason for this is that students are just taught the “what” of science, not the “why.” They haven’t been asked to explore in detail, or taught in detail, the studies and findings that prove everything that we know about. They go through class taking their notes and memorizing the content, never questioning why things are the way they are. The only time that these moments of questioning occur are when they are introduced to something new. The best way I’ve found to witness the students’ excitement and wonder is when we have conducted laboratory experiments with the resources we have. But because of the limited resources, what they get to experience is only just the surface of all the incredible explorations that science and technology can provide.

Thankfully, I had the opportunity to bring my students to Biogen to conduct a lab experiment that showed them more of the outstanding potential that science has to offer.

The Biogen Experience

In early December, my students had the opportunity to travel to Biogen’s Community Lab in Research Triangle Park to conduct a lab on hemophilia — doing a quick lab on the human genome and developing a better understanding of how enzymes work with DNA. In the lab, the students had the opportunity to work with the latest technology in micropipettes and gel electrophoresis machines. And more important, they were given the questioning and learning of why everything is working the way it does.

The Biogen staff did a fantastic job going into the necessary details and findings to prove why everything that we were doing was happening. At the end of the day, the excitement, wonder, and questioning were there. Students were focused on the lab that they had conducted and wondered why we didn’t do those same things at school. They had been given some taste of what possibilities science provides during my class lessons and labs, but they knew after going to Biogen that there was so much more to learn.



Robert Carrier oversees his students working with gel electrophoresis machines at the Biogen Community Lab. Yasmin Bendaas/EducationNC

Students' science education has allowed all of the incredible technological advancements that we have today. Science classes build problem-solvers, critical thinkers, and inquirers that will continue to create our next generations of scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs, inventors, and so many more crucial careers that move our nation forward in the information era. But when the science education in our school systems varies because of resources and quality teachers, it creates a disparity in opportunities to be a part of the frontline of technological development.

Every student has the same potential to do incredible things, but not the same opportunity. And when those opportunities are not equal, it creates a gap that only continues to grow. The zip code that a child is born into should not be the determining factor of their future, however, unfortunately that is the truth. If we as a nation want to realize the full potential of everyone, then those same opportunities should not just be given to a select few. If we want to truly make America the nation of possibilities, then there are changes in access to science education that need to be made.

This perspective is the first of our Biogen series this week. Follow along at <https://www.ednc.org/category/biogen/>.

Biogen Perspective

NC's teacher diversity gap: 'Where are the black and brown teachers?'

In North Carolina, 80 percent of public school teachers are white.

Posted January 24

Updated January 30

By Kelly Hinchcliffe, WRAL education reporter, and Lena Tillett, WRAL anchor/reporter

RALEIGH, N.C. — Wake County teacher Carl Tyson sat dumbfounded next to his former student, Trey Stevens. After all these years, why did Trey come back to his class to say he was a favorite teacher? Of all of the teachers, why was he so special?

"I'm trying to figure out the defining moment," Tyson said, clearly honored but confused.

Trey, now a sophomore at Fuquay-Varina High School, explained it was Mr. Tyson's PE class at Holly Grove Middle School and his reading club, "Boys, Books and Bow Ties," that left an impression. He is also one of the only black male teachers Trey has had in school.

"I trusted you," Trey whispered, his words soft but powerful.

Stunned, Tyson turned away, buried his face in his hand and cried.

"When you hear a kid ..." Tyson trailed off, his eyes tearing up again. "Trust has to be earned ... For him to say he trusts me, that says volumes."

Researchers say that kind of connection is crucial, especially between students and teachers of color, and can help minority students perform better in reading and math, score higher on standardized tests and be more likely to attend college. Known as the "role-model effect," researchers say students of color benefit both academically and emotionally from seeing teachers who look like them.

Yet in North Carolina, where minority students make up 52 percent of the traditional public school body, 80 percent of teachers are white. For students of color, especially black and Hispanic boys, that means they may seldom – or never – have a teacher who looks like them during their kindergarten through 12th grade years.

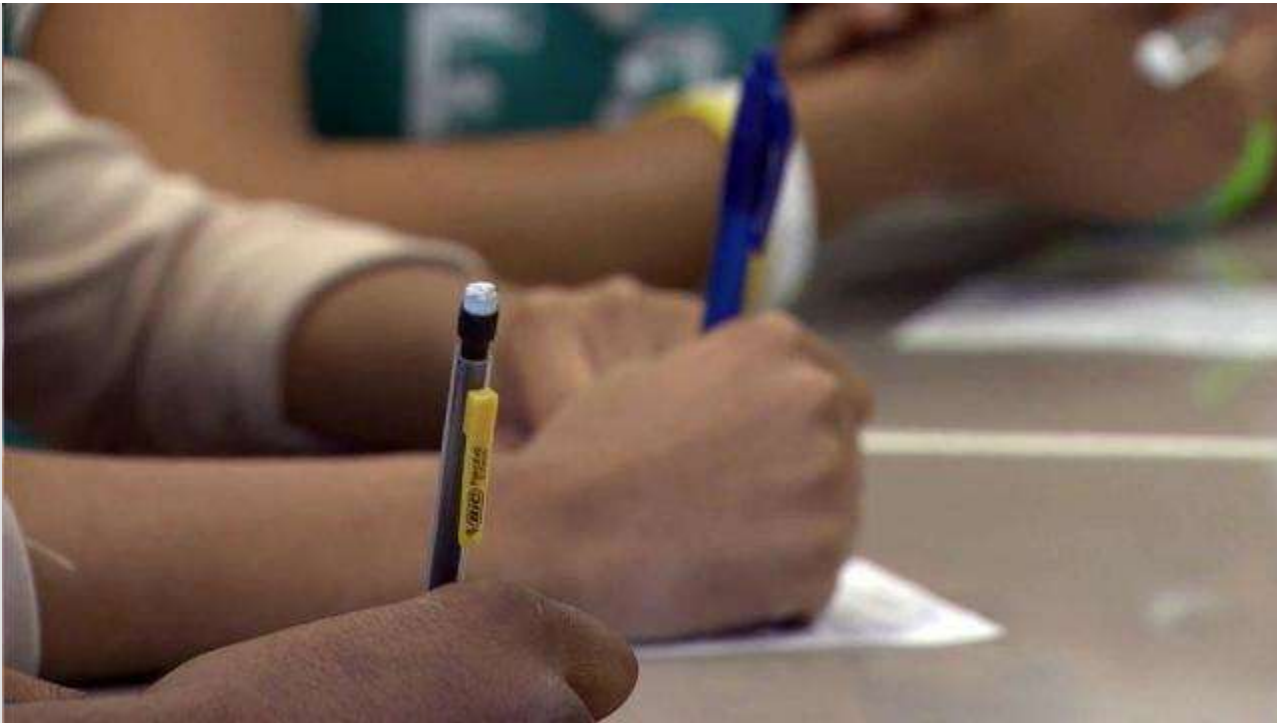
WRAL News analyzed data showing the race and gender of nearly 100,000 teachers and 1.4 million students in North Carolina's 115 public school systems. Eleven school districts in the state had no Hispanic teachers last school year, and eight school systems had no black teachers. One district had no teachers of color at all.

The lack of teacher diversity was especially noticeable in rural school systems. But even in larger school districts, which have more racial diversity among students, teachers still tended to be predominantly white and female.

Clay County Schools, a small district in the far western part of the state, had no minority teachers at all last school year. One hundred percent of its teachers were white – a statistic its new superintendent would like to change.

“I’d love to have some diversity,” said Clay County Superintendent Gary Gibson. “Our minority kids are doing very well, and I’m glad for that, but I’d certainly love to have someone in the classroom that’s a role model for the ones we have here.”

“I’m not running into any opposition in us having a more diverse workforce,” Gibson added. “It’s just it’s really difficult to get teachers as a whole into an area that’s this rural. It takes a lot of time and effort, and we are thankful when we get people to come and stay with us.”



Statewide, 80 percent of all public school teachers are women and 80 percent are white. [Nationally](#), 77 percent of public school teachers are women and 80 percent are white.

The number of minority teachers in the U.S. has doubled over the past few decades, according to the [Brookings Institution](#), a public policy organization based in Washington, D.C. However, those increases have not kept pace with the growth of students of color, and researchers say the diversity gap is expected to widen.

By 2060, population projections from the U.S. Census Bureau show, public school students will be even more diverse than they are now, and researchers estimate the teacher diversity gap will persist for black students and worsen for Hispanic students.

“Given these bleak findings, the chances of success for districts’ laudable goals to build a teaching corps that mirrors their student populations crumble in the face of reality – even looking forward nearly 50 years,” the [Brookings researchers](#) wrote.

'I don't see anybody else that looks like me'

Teacher Carl Tyson has seen the diversity gap up close. During his first teaching job at West Lake Middle School in Cary, he was the only black male teacher in the building for the 13 years he worked there.

“I remember it so vividly because in my mind I’m thinking, ‘Man, I don’t see anybody else that looks like me,’” he said. “I would have liked to see more (black male teachers) because we were a very diverse school.”

Having more black men would not only have benefited the students, Tyson said, it would have helped him as well, “just to have that common bond.”

“For 13 years, you do feel strange because when you walk into a building and you're the only African-American male, you're like, ‘Man, OK. Who can I confide in?’” Tyson said.

Now at Holly Grove Middle School, where he was named the 2014 Teacher of the Year, Tyson works alongside four other black male teachers. He smiles as he talks about his colleagues.

“There is a relationship that we have. There is a language that we speak, that we bring from our communities,” he said. “So there is a comfort there that I know someone who looks like me.... It brings me joy that I have a group of friends like that.”

Tyson has never asked any of his principals to hire more black male teachers, he says, because he didn’t feel it was his place. Instead, he has always hoped they would simply notice the need.

“I would hope they would see that if we are becoming more diverse in our school system that we need to look at the data and see the necessity to have teachers of color, Hispanic teachers, Asian teachers, African-American teachers,” Tyson said. “I think it is crucial, because kids want to see, ‘Is there anybody in the school that looks like me?’”

Wake County superintendent sees 'urgent need'

In the Wake County Public School System, students of color made up more than half – 54 percent – of the student body last school year, but only 20 percent of the teachers were minorities. Of the approximately 10,600 teachers in Wake County last year, only 3 percent were black men and 0.5 percent were Hispanic men.

For Wake County schools Superintendent Cathy Moore, hiring more teachers of color is not only “an urgent need,” it’s personal. When she was named superintendent last May, she became the first

woman and first Latina to hold the job. And when she began her career as a high school French teacher in Nash County in the 1980s, she was the only Hispanic teacher in the school.

“Our students of color, our black and brown students, Latino and African-American students, must see teachers and experience adults in a building that are like them so that they can see themselves in those roles as they grow older,” Moore said.

As a child in New York City and then Charlotte, Moore didn’t have any Latino teachers. She was so accustomed to people mispronouncing her maiden name, Quiroz, that she didn’t always correct them. But on her first day as a teacher in rural Nash County, she decided to change that.

“People have always said my maiden name incorrectly. My maiden name is Quiroz (kee-řose). And so it was ‘kwurh-rahz’ and all kinds of, you know, they try to say it in English,” she recalled. “And when I became a teacher and I wrote my name on the board for the first time, I remember thinking to myself, ‘I can teach them how to say my name correctly.’”

Staff members quickly caught on, including the school’s secretary, an older woman with beehive hair and a long, Southern drawl.

“One day, my older sister called the school because she needed to leave me a message,” Moore said. “And so she spoke to the secretary and said, ‘I’d like to leave a message for ‘Ms. Kwurh-rahz,’ because that’s how everybody said my name. And so the secretary said, ‘Ma’am, she’s in class right now and for future reference, it’s (pronounced) ‘kee-řose.’”

Moore laughs at the memory but says the story shows why diversity in schools is important. Being the only Hispanic teacher in her school, she was able to share her culture. In turn, she noticed how much that meant to some of her students.

“When students realized that I wasn’t a typical white female, that I had a background, I was born in another country, that I spoke Spanish as a native language, there were students who did migrate to me, who felt an identity, who felt a camaraderie,” Moore said. “(I was) someone that knew a little bit perhaps about them and where they were coming from.”

As Moore climbed the education ranks – eventually becoming assistant principal, principal, area superintendent and deputy superintendent – she started noticing more of the diversity gap between students and teachers. With her new hiring powers, she began visiting historically black colleges and universities to try to recruit more teachers of color.

“I think that you can seek the most qualified or experienced candidates and seek teachers that represent your community and your goal and desire to have a diverse workforce,” Moore said. “I think that those can be combined, and must be combined, if we are in fact going to do this work.”

Last week, [Gov. Roy Cooper identified teacher diversity as one of his top three legislative priorities](#) for the the 2019-20 legislative session.

“That means more men and it means more people of color in the profession,” Cooper said. “I strongly believe our state government, our law enforcement, our education system ought to look like the people that it serves and protects ... It is important for us to have a diversity of teachers to reflect the diversity of students we have at our public schools.”

Advancing the academic success of black males

Researchers who analyzed teacher race in North Carolina and Tennessee say black students who had just one black teacher by third grade were 13 percent more likely to enroll in college. Those who had two were 32 percent more likely. Still, the researchers said, “little is known about the long-run, sustained impacts of student-teacher demographic matches.”

At Winston-Salem State University, education professor Dawn Hicks Tafari focuses on the importance of the relationship between teachers and students of color. Her class, “Advancing the Academic Success of Black Males,” is one of the university’s most popular teacher preparation courses and fills quickly each time it’s offered.

Tafari, an assistant professor of urban education, often plays hip hop music in class, softly enough so her students can talk during group work but loud enough so they know it’s there. Nothing she does is by chance. From the music she plays to the books she assigns her students to read, all are a nod to African-American culture, a message to her students that they belong in her classroom, they are safe and valued - a lesson she hopes they’ll pass on to their own students someday.

That sense of belonging and security in school is what inspired her to create the class. She got the idea after teaching in Brooklyn, where she noticed teachers were often in a hurry to refer black boys for special education, kick them out of the classroom or send them to the principal’s office.

“These black boys were dropping out of high school at ridiculous rates,” Tafari said. “And I said, ‘Well, what’s going on? Why is this happening to black boys?’ ... And then I realized, well you know what, they don’t see anybody that looks like them. So black boys don’t find education, they don’t find the classroom to be a safe space for them.”

Black male students are “used to their cultural capital not being valued. They’re used to being told that they don’t belong,” Tafari said. “When I don’t incorporate who you are, the things you like, the music you listen to into my curriculum, into the things that I’m talking about in the classroom, I’m telling you that you don’t belong.”

When she plays hip hop music in class, she often asks her students to analyze the lyrics to learn about black masculinity and education. Even the books she assigns are chosen with diversity in mind.

“The two authors of the textbooks that we read this semester are both black men. So the black males who come to my class see themselves,” Tafari said. “They know that it’s not just the old white men who write textbooks. They know that it’s people who look like them who write textbooks and both of these men are still alive. So they’re not even like some ancient artifacts.”

Growing up in the Bronx, Tafari says, she had mostly white women as teachers. She didn't have a black male teacher until 10th grade history, and even then, he was a substitute. Her first permanent black male teacher was in college. Otherwise, she mostly saw black men in custodian roles in her schools.

Tafari believes the lack of male teachers is due to low pay compared with other professions and "the stigma associated with working with children." She is working to change those perceptions and encourage more black men to become teachers. In the meantime, she is working on a counterpart class about advancing the academic success of black females.

"All children win when the teaching workforce is diverse," Tafari said. "When teachers are a monolithic group, white children don't gain from that either, because they're not experiencing the world as it really is."

'Where are the black and brown teachers?'

In some North Carolina school systems, teacher diversity comes in the form of international teachers. For years, Vance County Schools has recruited teachers from outside the U.S., mostly from Jamaica and other Caribbean islands, to help fill vacancies and bring more diversity to its classrooms. Last year, the school system had 83 percent minority students and 58 percent minority teachers. While white students only comprised 17 percent of the student body, 42 percent of the teachers were white.

"I think you have to be very intentional ... and unapologetic about wanting to have a balance that meets the needs of your students," said Vance County Schools Superintendent Anthony Jackson. Students "should be able to leave here with a healthy understanding of not only the world but of people."

Last school year, 50 of Vance County's teachers – about 13 percent – came from outside the U.S., according to data from the state Department of Public Instruction. Statewide, North Carolina public schools employed 1,610 international teachers, about 1.7 percent of all teaching staff.

"We've built a great community where they are very comfortable here," Jackson said. "Once a year we have a recruitment fair just for those teachers in Jamaica and we hire probably anywhere between 12 to 15 a year to help us out in those hard-to-staff areas - math, science, foreign languages and exceptional education."

Kedecia Stewart of Jamaica was named the 2017-18 Vance County Teacher of the Year and the state's North Central Region Teacher of the Year. During her time in North Carolina, she has noticed the teacher diversity gap as well.

"Representation matters. It matters to see and hear from somebody that looks like you. I can speak for me as a professional. It matters to me as well because when I go in my professional settings, I am a minority," she said. "For this entire year that I've been on the campaign with all the teachers of the year, I am a minority."

Kedecia Stewart, a teacher at Pinkston Street Elementary, is WRAL's Teacher of the Week for Feb. 14, 2018.

Web Editor: Evan Matsumoto

Reporter: Renee Chou

Vance County desperately needs more black male teachers, Stewart says. Last year, about 11 percent of the school system's 400 teachers were black men, while 33 percent of the students were black boys. She would like to see more college scholarships offered to high school boys who want to study teaching.

"A lot of the times they might want to do this, but it is hard for them because the vision is blocked by finances. It's blocked by, 'I will be rejected.' It's blocked by, 'This is not a tradition. This is not the norm,'" Stewart said. "But if we create pathways for these young men to go into teacher preparation programs, that would be a good start."

Besides black men, Hispanic men – and Hispanic teachers in general – are much needed in North Carolina's classrooms, school leaders say.

"We have a lot of individuals in our community who speak Spanish in particular. And so, where are those teachers?" Jackson, Vance County's superintendent, said. "If you look at the demographics of our communities, they're changing. And so not only are you going to have kids of color, you're going to have kids who speak other languages, and are we really ready for that dynamic in the classroom?"

North Carolina's Hispanic student population has surged in the past decade. Last school year, 18 percent of the state's public school students were Hispanic, compared with 2.5 percent of teachers. In Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, the district has seen "an explosion" in the number of Hispanic students in the past 20 years, according to Deputy Superintendent Kenneth Simington.

"Just like with African-American teachers, recruiting Latino teachers is a struggle," he said. "We've gone from really 1 to 2 percent of our students being Latino to more than 20 percent, approaching 25 percent, of our students being Latino. So finding teachers who also look like Latino students is an important piece for us."

Winston-Salem/Forsyth school leaders have turned to Puerto Rico to bring in more Spanish-speaking teachers. Although the partnership has been successful, Simington said, diversity gaps remain.

"The struggle is real for us to attract teachers and retain teachers," Simington said.

Vance County's superintendent echoes that sentiment and says school systems need to be more intentional in recruiting teachers of color.

"Where are the black and brown teachers? ... We've got to have that honest conversation," Jackson said. "I think first we have to be willing to have that conversation and come to the table and recognize that probably 50 percent of what we think we know about why they're not coming is wrong."

He would like to see teacher recruitment begin as early as middle school, when students can be taught about the teaching profession as a possible career choice. But first, schools need to recognize opportunities to promote teaching as a profession.

“I had this epiphany,” Jackson said. “Every year, I get invited to career days to just visit and walk through it. And I was walking through career days the last few years and I would look around, and it hit me one day -- there is a table for everyone. I mean, there was even a table for a mortician and an undertaker. Which profession did not have a table? Teachers. And I said, ‘A-ha!’ We are systematically removing this choice from our students’ menu. We have to be more intentional about putting that in front of them.”

As Jackson wrapped up his interview with WRAL News, he saw another opportunity to recruit teachers of color and took his plea to the camera recording the interview. Looking directly into the lens, he made his pitch: “If you are a teacher of color out there and you want to work for us, we have a job for you.”

'You're smart for a black girl'

Back at Holly Grove Middle School, Trey Stevens sat quietly next to his former teacher, Carl Tyson. The two reminisced about Tyson’s reading club, “Boys, Books and Bow Ties,” that left such an impression on Trey as a middle school student.

Now that he’s in high school, does Trey still have the bow ties his teacher carefully sewed for him and the other students? No, Trey said. He turned them back in.

“OK, well, we gotta fix that,” Tyson said, explaining the power of his hand-crafted neckwear. “I’ll tell you this: Put on a necktie, nobody notices. Put on a bow tie, you get attention.”

Carl Tyson had never sewn in his life before he began making pre-tied bowties and began a business creating the garments from recycled materials.

Reporter: Scott Mason

Photographer: Robert Meikle

That attention to detail, both in bow-tie making and teaching students, made an impression on Trey’s parents as well. They are thankful for Tyson’s guidance in their son’s life, especially because he is one of the few black male teachers their son has had.

Their daughter Erika, who graduated from Wake County schools in 2014, had one teacher of color.

“I think it's disappointing, highly disappointing,” said Calvin Stevens. “You think Wake County is, you know, diverse.”

“It’s supposed to be top-notch,” his wife, Andrea Stevens, added. “It’s supposed to be like the best education in the state.”

Wake County school leaders say they are working to recruit more teachers of color. The district's recruitment team has not been able to visit as many college campuses due to budget cuts, according to Wake schools'

spokeswoman Lisa Luten. However, they "still have a strong focus on recruiting teachers of color at all universities and maintaining relationships with HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities)," she said.

Luten provided a copy of Wake County schools' college recruitment schedule for the past six years. Last spring, the district's recruiters visited several HBCUs, including North Carolina Central University, North Carolina A&T State University and Shaw University.

Still, Calvin and Andrea Stevens would like to see more progress made with teacher diversity. The couple grew up in Greenville, N.C. Like their children, they had very few teachers of color. And the similarities don't stop there.

In school, Calvin Stevens says, some teachers questioned his intelligence and "wanted to prove that I wasn't as smart as my test scores would say," even though he was accepted to college in the 10th grade. He remembers a male teacher pulling him aside and saying, "You're going to have to be twice as smart as all the white kids in your class, and I'm going to help you get there."

"I thought it was the weirdest thing, but I understood what he was saying as I got older," Calvin Stevens said. "It was kind of like, wow, why do I have to be better? Why do I have to be twice as good as all my classmates? But as I look back, I understand what he was meaning then."

That experience, in part, led Calvin Stevens to choose to attend North Carolina A&T State University, a historically black college.

"I was accepted to almost every college I applied to. I chose A&T for two reasons – my dad went there and two, it was the first time in a long time that I felt home again or felt I had a relation to the teachers," he said. "Because my entire life in high school, I didn't have any teachers of color."

A generation later, the Stevenses' daughter Erika says she faced similar problems in high school. She remembers being one of the only black students in her honors classes, which were taught by mostly white women. Any teachers of color she saw typically taught lower-level classes.

As one of the few black students in higher-level courses, she felt pressure to prove to her teachers she was smart and belonged there. But she says some of her teachers and peers made hurtful comments to her.

"It was mostly white females, and it was always like, 'Oh Erika, you're smart for a black girl.' I was like, 'Well, I'll be the smartest black girl,'" she said.

Sitting on her parents' couch as she told the story, Erika seemed to laugh off the old remarks. But moments later, she grew quiet and began to cry. Her mother quickly moved closer, wrapping her arms around her daughter.

The memories were more painful than Erika had let on. Overcome with emotion, she nestled in her mother's shoulder and sobbed.

Male educators of color gather in Charlotte to discuss social and professional challenges

ednc.org/2019/03/13/male-educators-of-color-gather-in-charlotte-to-discuss-social-and-professional-challenges/

by Liz Bell | March 13, 2019

March 13, 2019

For Skip Brown, who has taught elementary school in Durham for over 20 years, his role as a black male teacher is one he knows has been influential for many of his male students of color.

"I make those special relationships with all my kids," Brown said. "The relationship they have back with you may be a little deeper for those boys of color."

Sitting at the Profound Gentlemen conference last weekend that brought male educators of color from 18 states to Charlotte, Brown said being the only black male educator in his school comes with challenges and can feel isolating. In his current school, he is the only black male educator, though that was different in the past. His black male colleagues, Brown said, have gone on to administrative roles.

"It can sometimes be a little lonely in the building when you're the only one like you in the building," he said. "And how are you perceived in your building? Are you the disciplinarian so they're going to send you all the students that have discipline issues? That's not fair. Everybody needs to learn how to deal with those issues. Or when you speak up in faculty meetings, are you automatically dismissed, or do they listen to what you have to say?"

Profound Gentlemen, an organization that focuses on supporting male educators of color professionally and personally, held its fourth annual Community Impact Assembly for more than 200 teachers from cohorts in cities around the country. The cohorts of teachers form social networks and provide professional development opportunities in hopes of retaining male educators of color. Nationwide, black men make up only 2 percent of the teaching workforce. In North Carolina, 80 percent of the teaching force is comprised of white females. WRAL outlined the gap between teacher diversity and student diversity across the state in January. North Carolina's student population is 52 percent students of color.

Researchers say the impact of having a teacher who looks like you can lead to better learning outcomes and can increase the chance of high school graduation.

"That's mind-boggling. Just your presence alone," Brown said of that impact. Jason Terrell, co-founder and executive director of the organization, calls this impact "profound," which is how they thought of the name of the organization. Terrell said the weekend was comprised of the same things that happen on much smaller scales day-to-day across the country.



“The biggest thing of this experience is, this is kind of like a combination of all our programs wrapped in one, so we do smaller versions of these throughout the year in our respective cities,” Terrell said. “But this is a time when everybody comes together to a large one. And I think that’s the biggest part, is that building community piece. I think a lot of educators experience feeling that sense of isolation and not feeling like they have a larger community or network of support.”



Mario Jovan Shaw, Profound Gentlemen’s chief impact officer, and Jason Terrell, the organization’s executive director, welcome educators to its annual conference. Liz Bell/EducationNC



Jason Terrell, Profound Gentlemen executive director. Liz Bell/EducationNC

Parts of the weekend were not solely for educators, but individuals from different parts of the community.

"It's not just for teachers. It's really for the community," Terrell said. "We allow students to come. We invite teachers to bring their students if they can. ... We also had two particular events that we allowed community members to come."

On Friday, attendees broke into groups comprised of individuals from different sectors — politics, philanthropy, education — and an educator shared a particular challenge he was facing. The break-out groups listened, asked clarifying questions, then gave advice from their own backgrounds and experiences.

"Teaching, sometimes, is an isolated field," Terrell said. "You're just in your own silo and you don't really have the chance to hear the perspectives of non-teachers. So that was a great way for educators to get perspectives from lawyers and doctors and accountants. Folks who have kids, folks who may not have kids, but just maybe have other ideas about how education works from their own contexts."

In one group, Shaquise Elie, a high school social studies teacher in Brooklyn, New York, shared his struggle of feeling an additional burden at school besides teaching — educating his white colleagues on issues of race and culture.

“I feel like black teachers constantly do the heavy lifting,” Elie said. “We’re double-burdened with the responsibilities of our jobs and teaching our peers on everything from instruction to culture. How do I practice self-care so that I’m not overburdened?”

He went on to explain what he means by “heavy lifting:”

“Black teachers often times don’t have the ability to sort of tap out of things that relate to culture and sort of stresses that the kids get, may it be micro-aggressions that come from teachers, and letting white teachers know that some of the things that they’re doing is harmful, which is not particularly in our job descriptions, but when we want to protect our kids and we want our kids to feel safe in our school communities, we have to let them know the things that they’re doing.”

Elie said students and staff from his school were planning a school-wide conversation about race due to black students not feeling they had a voice in a majority-LatinX school population. He had multiple white teachers ask him how to facilitate that conversation. Meetings to plan for the conversation were opt-in, and, Elie said, he felt those teachers who were already prepared to have racial conversations were the ones who chose to attend.



Shaquise Elie, high school social studies teacher in Brooklyn, New York, shares his challenges as a black male educator. Liz Bell/EducationNC

"It's almost like you're having to be the spokesperson for your black students because the school is not stepping up and taking on that charge," said Charles King, a middle school English teacher in Atlanta and Profound Gentlemen cohort leader. "And I think that spans wherever we are."

Individuals in the room from educators to philanthropists to racial equity consultants gave varying opinions and advice. Dawaine Cosey, director of culture, empowerment, and restorative justice at Ron Brown College Preparatory High in Washington, D.C., said he feels, as educators of color, it is inevitable to have a connection to students of color.

"We become their safe place," Cosey said. "We become the uncle or the dad. It feels heavy because it is heavy. That is the reality of the work being black in nonblack spaces."

Cosey said he feels white educators, especially those who feel unprepared or uncomfortable talking about race, should listen instead of lead.

"I don't think conversations of race should be led by people who are not persons of color particularly because you don't get it," said Cosey.

A consultant on diversity and racial equity advised Elie to respond to his white colleagues with questions that help them think critically about the roles of race in school and beyond. A fellow black male educator and member of a Profound Gentlemen cohort emphasized the importance of taking time off and doing things for yourself from time to time to avoid burnout.

Teacher Advisor to Gov. Roy Cooper LaTanya Pattillo said she has felt the same expectation to have all the answers in situations that are majority white, whether it be a classroom or a board meeting.

“The other side of it is, and people ask me, ‘If not you, who?’” Pattillo said. She recommended being honest about feelings but also recognizing the opportunity to help others understand.

“They’re coming to you, which can be looked at a variety of ways, but they’re coming to you, which presents you with an opportunity to educate,” she said. “Whether or not you want to take that on depends on the day, how you feel, all of that, right? But understand that there is purpose in that, and there is opportunity in that. I think what could be really helpful is to recognize those relationships during the course of the day and cultivate those relationships so that when there’s not an issue, you’re building this and if something comes up you can address it, and address it in a way that’s not antagonistic or that people might not feel defensive about.”



Jason Terrell, Profound Gentlemen executive director, and Kristi Orange, Profound Gentlemen board chair. Liz Bell/EducationNC



Dwight Miller, program associate with The Levine Foundation. Liz Bell/EducationNC



De-Mi Woodfork, a behavior specialist in an elementary school in Memphis, Tennessee, is part of a Profound Gentlemen cohort in Memphis. He said the social network and professional development has given him more confidence to put his ideas out there. He said he came to Charlotte over the weekend to meet other male educators of color who have similar challenges.

“What brought me to this conference is, one, being able to congregate with people who are like you, who are struggling the same struggles, or fighting the same battles, rather, that you’re fighting,” said Woodfork. “And in the classroom, in the schools, you don’t see too many who look like you and who can support you in the challenges you are facing.”

Woodfork said, as a behavior specialist, his discipline approaches can be seen as hostile in a majority-white school environment, but, in the school he is in now, which has a good deal of diversity, there is an understanding and gratitude for his approaches. Woodfork, who used to be in the military, said he uses JROTC values to provide children who are consistently acting out with the structure and tools they need.

Groups of educators went on school visits around Charlotte as part of the conference. Woodfork said he enjoyed the opportunity to see new ideas to take back to his school.

“So being able to come around other men who are implementing different ways of helping the kids... it’s a learning experience,” he said. “It’s a world-changing experience. Because I can go back home and say, ‘Hey, we’re going to do this this way because they tried this here and it was very successful.’ So to be able to learn from everybody as well, not just come together [in] fellowship, but to learn from each other is one of the things that brought me here.”



WhiteWater Middle School's Verizon innovation lab. Liz Bell/EducationNC



Donnell Cannon, North Edgecombe High School principal, observes students in a robotics course at WhiteWater Middle School in Charlotte. Liz Bell/EducationNC



Profound Gentlemen cohort members discuss WhiteWater Middle School's innovation lab and how technology has impacted learning. Liz Bell/EducationNC

Profound Gentlemen's ultimate goal is retention of male educators of color once they are already in the profession. This year, they are testing out a new model, which is reaching undergraduate students before they join the profession. Through partnerships with UNC-Charlotte, Winston-Salem State, and Johnson C. Smith University, Terrell said college cohorts have formed with around 30 students, some of whom are majoring in education and some who are not.

"Our goal is to get these guys exposed to what education looks like," Terrell said. "Most of them never had a teacher who looked like them before so they don't really see themselves in the classroom."

Also on the horizon for the organization, Terrell said, is expanding to reach more men of color across the state, especially in rural areas.

Brown, the Durham third grade teacher, said he feels this kind of network can help keep male educators of color in the teaching profession, especially those just starting out their teaching careers. Recruitment of male educators of color, he said, is a different story.

"Attracting more men toward the profession will take a fundamental change nationwide," Brown said. "It is very difficult for any student, any person, to have an apartment, to have a decent car, and to manage student loans. You can't do all three. You can only do two of those. So it's going to have to start off with increased pay."

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