

# New Performance Pay Plan for Teachers: APPROACH WITH CAUTION AND SKEPTICISM

By KRIS NORDSTROM, SENIOR POLICY ANALYST

November 2022



IF THERE IS ONE THING EDUCATION RESEARCHERS AGREE ON, it's that teachers are the most important in-school factor in determining students' academic success. However, for the past 12 years, North Carolina policymakers have focused on undermining teachers. As a result, enrollment in teacher preparation programs has plummeted, and districts are finding it increasingly difficult to fill vacancies.

In response to these challenges, leaders at the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) seek to radically overhaul the system for certifying teachers and granting pay increases. State leaders are pushing to end the current practice of paying teachers based on their credentials and years of

service. They want to replace the current system with a plan called Pathways to Excellence (PtE). Under this plan, teacher pay will be based on measures of effectiveness and willingness to assume additional responsibilities.

The hope is that PtE will improve the recruitment and retention of great teachers. It is unclear, however, whether such changes will be successful. There are many reasons for skepticism, including:

- **Major aspects of the plan, including how to measure teacher performance, remain undeveloped, and it is unclear whether the General Assembly will provide the staffing and funding necessary to implement the proposal fully**
- **A performance pay plan fails to address the underlying causes of declining interest in the teaching profession**
- **Performance pay has, at best, a mixed track record; no state has implemented a successful performance pay plan, and few locally implemented performance pay plans have improved test scores or teacher retention**
- **The plan potentially increases the share of teacher candidates from alternative programs; these candidates tend to have lower retention and effectiveness than candidates from university preparation programs**
- **The plan lacks support from teachers**

By pursuing this path, state leaders are distracting from evidence-based policies that are much more likely to improve the recruitment and retention of excellent teachers in North Carolina. The debate over performance pay will almost certainly distract from proven measures to increase teacher recruitment and retention, including:

- **Providing broad-based pay raises to make teacher pay competitive with other college degree requiring professions in North Carolina**
- **Improving classroom conditions by implementing the Leandro Plan, which will provide educators with the resources and additional supports necessary to help students thrive**
- **Restoring benefits that legislators have removed over the past decade, such as career status, master's pay, and retiree health care benefits**
- **Permitting collective bargaining so that teachers can directly negotiate for better working conditions and a voice in the policymaking process**
- **Allowing teachers the freedom to be professionals rather than trying to police how teachers approach controversial subjects and placing an overly narrow focus on tested subjects**
- **Expanding the social safety net to reduce the barriers to learning placed in front of students from families with low incomes**

Given PtE's thin research base and theoretical underpinnings, it is unclear why supporters are pushing for this version of a merit pay program for a statewide rollout.

That is not to say there isn't room to improve North Carolina's teacher licensure process or to develop new career pathways for teachers. However, such efforts should adhere to the following principles:

- **Major reforms should only be considered *after* policymakers have addressed fundamental shortfalls in teacher pay and working conditions**
- **Be developed collaboratively with educators**
- **Provide flexibility to meet local staffing challenges**
- **Implementation should be deliberate and iterative so that implementation challenges are addressed prior to a larger rollout**

Unfortunately, PtE fails to adhere to these principles. Advocates continue to push for a statewide rollout of a one-size-fits-all model that has limited input from educators (and is, in fact, opposed by the state's largest teacher advocacy organization, North Carolina Association for Educators (NCAE), and the N.C. Association of Colleges for Teacher Education).

North Carolina's teacher shortage demands bold, immediate action. Those actions, however, will be most effective if they respond to the problems creating the teacher shortage.

Policymakers have saddled North Carolina's schools with increasing challenges since the Great Recession. Lawmakers have cut school budgets, ignored crumbling school buildings, allowed teacher pay to languish behind inflation, and stripped educators of important benefits. More recently, policymakers have been fomenting bigoted public hatred against teachers who dare affirm the humanity of their Black, brown, and queer students or who dare to teach a nuanced, honest appraisal of history and current events.

PtE ignores that these challenges are all reasons why schools are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain great teachers. Its solutions are, at best, unproven and are unlikely to improve conditions for students. By distracting from schools' real problems, PtE could make things worse.

## What is Pathways to Excellence?

PtE emerged from the North Carolina Education Human Capital Roundtable in January 2021 though initial work began in the fall of 2018.<sup>1</sup> The Roundtable is “a group of state education leaders and practitioners working together to find innovative ways to address the state’s teacher shortage issue” that worked with staff from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) to develop the Pathways to Excellence plan.<sup>2</sup>

Broadly, the PtE model would make three large changes to how North Carolina teachers are paid:

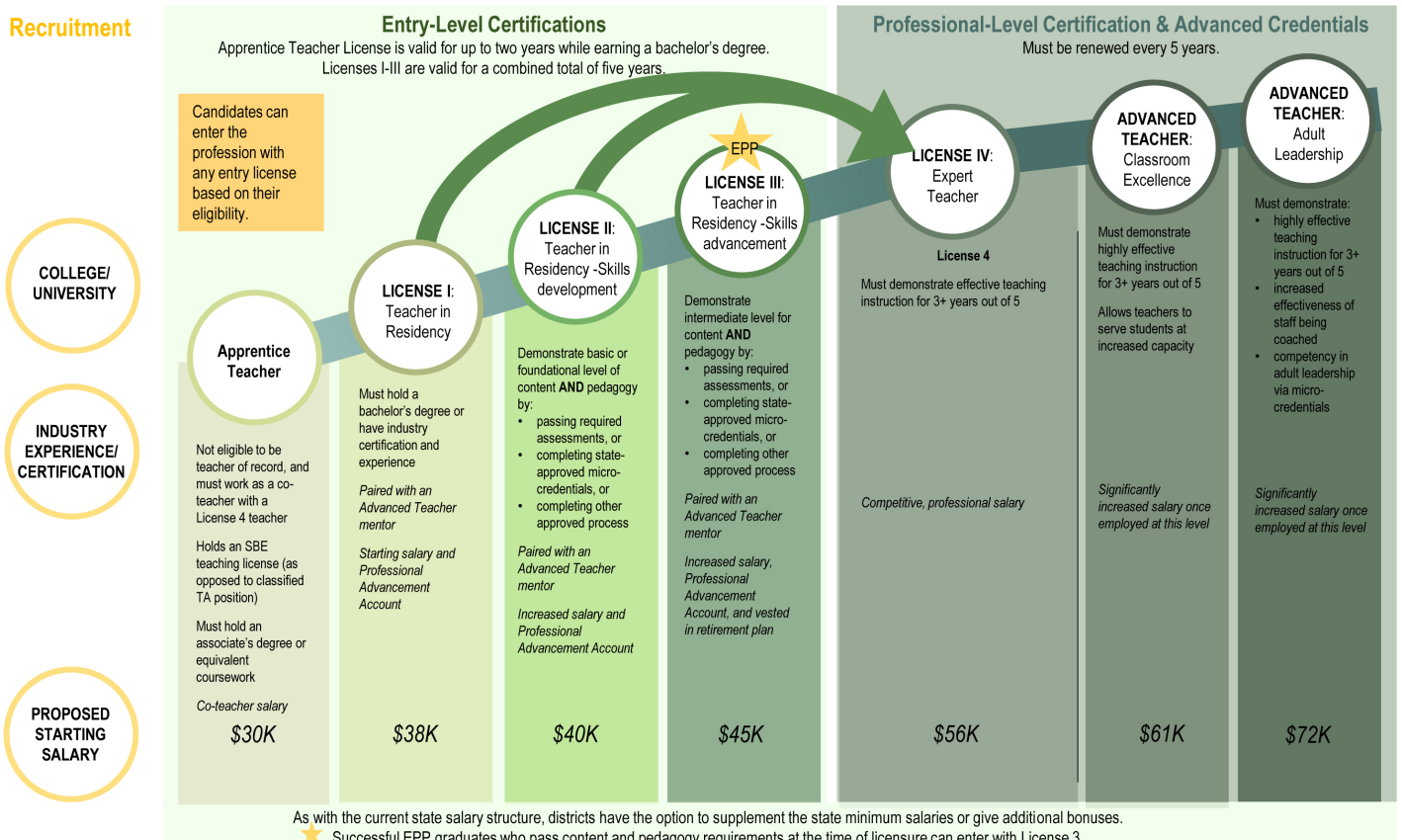
1. Eliminate North Carolina’s current teacher pay model under which teachers are paid based on their credentials (e.g., advanced degrees; National Board certification) and years of experience;
2. Lower initial barriers to entry into the teaching profession; and
3. Provide seven levels of teacher pay with a given teacher’s pay based on a combination of performance evaluation and willingness to assume additional responsibilities.

Earlier this year, the Human Capital Roundtable handed the PtE work to the Professional Educator Preparation and Standards Commission (PEPSC). PEPSC has convened several subcommittees, many of which include Human Capital Roundtable members, to continue the plan’s development.

PEPSC presented a summary of the PtE plan to the State Board of Education on April 7, 2022:<sup>3</sup>

## North Carolina Pathways to Excellence for Teaching Professionals

### Recruitment



The plan envisions four tiers of entry-level certification and three tiers of professional-level certification. Teachers gaining an entry-level certification would have a maximum of five years to earn a professional-level certification. Teachers advance by participating in training programs and demonstrating merit through some combination of test scores, observations, and surveys. Teachers with professional-level certification would need to continue demonstrating merit and be willing to take on additional responsibilities to receive additional pay raises, such as mentoring and supporting entry-level teachers.

The model begins at the **Apprentice Teacher** level.<sup>4</sup> Apprentice teachers must have an associate degree or 60 hours of university credit. They would work under the direct supervision of a License IV or higher teacher and have up to three years to meet the requirements for License I.

**License I** teachers must have a baccalaureate degree or higher and at least 18 hours of relevant content. An Advanced Teacher – Adult Leadership teacher would observe them for at least five hours per week. Additionally, they would be required to co-teach with a License IV Advanced Teacher – Classroom Excellence or higher, or observe such a teacher, for at least one hour per week. In addition to their salary, they would receive \$2,500 per year for professional development, micro-credentials, or additional university coursework. License I teachers would have two or three years to reach License II.

To qualify for **License II**, a teacher must “provide evidence of mastery of standards of practice” through some yet-to-be-determined combination of:

- **Achieving certain scores on licensure exams**
- **Completing certain micro-credentials on high-leverage instructional practices**
- **Scoring proficient or higher on Standards III and IV of the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System (NCEES)<sup>5</sup>**
- **Reaching some to-be-determined threshold in student surveys or “other reliable and valid qualitative or quantitative methods” that have yet to be developed.**

License II teachers must receive at least five hours of clinical observation per week.

Teachers entering through the traditional path of graduating from an accredited teacher preparation program and passing licensure exams would enter at the **License III** level. A teacher could also enter License III by providing “evidence of mastery of standards of practice” similar to License II, but at higher levels. The exact requirements remain a work in progress. License III teachers would be subject to weekly Peer Review by a License IV or higher educator. License III teachers will have up to six years to meet the requirements of License IV.

All teachers with less than a License IV will also take part in the Initial Teacher Success Program. This program, which does not currently exist, will provide differentiated supports to teachers with the goal of advancing them to License IV.

Like other licensure levels, License IV teachers must “provide evidence of mastery of standards of practice” through various measures. A teacher may use the following “tools” to demonstrate mastery:

- **Scoring “meets expected growth” or higher for at least three years within five years**
- **Scoring “accomplished” on Standards II, III, and IV of NCEES<sup>6</sup>**

- Meeting an undetermined threshold in student surveys
- “Other reliable and valid qualitative or quantitative methods can be identified or developed,” though it is unclear who will be identifying or developing these additional methods

License IV teachers will receive a contract that must be renewed every five years. Renewal requires completion of professional development or micro-credentials and meeting yet-to-be-determined performance standards via EVAAS or other measures that have yet to be developed. License IV teachers will receive coaching from master teachers and will be required to conduct peer observations. They will also receive guaranteed salary step increases of one percent each year. Additional legislative increases will be necessary to ensure salaries maintain pace with inflation.

License IV teachers can earn an additional annual stipend of \$5,000 by meeting the requirements for **Advanced Teacher Classroom Excellence (L-IV CE)**. To earn this stipend, teachers have to meet to-be-determined performance requirements. L-IV CE teachers would be “allowed” to have larger class sizes than other teachers (as currently written, accepting larger class sizes is not a *requirement* of L-IV CE licensure, but may be an informal expectation). They also would be required to participate in professional development, conduct model lessons, facilitate peer reflection for instructional practice improvement, and conduct peer observations.

License IV teachers can earn an additional annual stipend of \$10,000 by meeting the requirements for **Advanced Teacher Adult Leadership (L-IV AL)**. To earn this stipend, teachers have to meet to-be-determined performance requirements. It is unclear if these standards are higher than the requirements for selection to L-IV CE. L-IV AL teachers would accept additional responsibilities for mentoring and training their fellow teachers. They would also be required to participate in professional development and collaborate with district and school leaders to “address formative aspects of the N.C. Educator Evaluation Process.”

## Big, unanswered questions

If the above description of PtE sounds confusing and incomplete, that’s because it is both confusing and incomplete.

Teaching is a complex, nuanced practice. To date, nobody has cracked the code on how to measure teacher performance accurately. PEPSC has spent nearly a year debating various approaches but has not settled on a specific approach. The PtE plan’s current approaches (test scores, observations, student surveys, and yet-to-be-determined processes) all have substantial shortcomings.

- **EVAAS has been criticized for lacking transparency, producing highly volatile scores from one year to the next, and creating an overreliance on test scores. In 2017, teachers in Houston, Texas successfully sued to remove EVAAS from their evaluation system. The judge in that case noted that “high stakes employment decisions based on secret algorithms (are) incompatible with... due process.”<sup>7</sup>**
- **Student surveys may provide useful data point in conjunction with other measures, but are inappropriate to use as a standalone measure. Researchers have found that student surveys at the elementary school level contain little information about teachers’ underlying performance.<sup>8</sup> Surveys of college students are biased against**

female instructors, particularly as they age.<sup>9</sup> A list of survey questions being considered for PtE includes questions that measure things outside the teacher's control, such as, "How pleasant or unpleasant is the physical space in this classroom?"<sup>10</sup>

- **Peer evaluations** require a supply of trained, experienced teachers to conduct observations and evaluations. They also require providing evaluators with the time to conduct the evaluations. Peer evaluations might also require specialized content knowledge if, for example, an English teacher is evaluating a physical education teacher. It is unclear how many schools have sufficient training and staffing to conduct peer evaluations at the scale required by PtE.
- **Principal Evaluations**, as pointed out by Dr. Christina O'Connor, PEPSC commissioner and Director of Professional Education Preparation, Policy & Accountability at UNC Greensboro, are "highly subjective and there's not a lot of consistency."<sup>11</sup>

Unsurprisingly, PEPSC has been unable to settle on specific measures for each licensure level, even though this is the central question in any merit pay scheme.

Other big questions need to be answered before implementing PtE:

- **Will the NCGA fund the recommended salary levels?** PtE places additional burdens on already overworked teachers. PtE creates additional hoops for teachers to jump through to become "professional-level" teachers and have their licenses renewed. Additional raises require assuming even more responsibilities. PtE advocates claim that the extra work will be worth it to earn the higher salaries in the PtE proposal. But these salaries rest on appropriations from the General Assembly, and the current leadership has been hostile to teachers over the past decade.
- **Are there enough qualified, experienced educators to mentor and observe early-career teachers?** The model envisions dramatically increasing the number of early career "entry-level" teachers who will be working under the guidance of experienced teachers. Additional highly-experienced teachers are required to evaluate, monitor, and coach more experienced teachers. It is unclear whether a sufficient supply of such teachers exists, particularly in specialized content areas. For example, smaller districts may have only a handful of teachers trained in special education, foreign languages, or advanced coursework such as physics or calculus.

These are far from the only questions. The North Carolina Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (NCACTE) has detailed a litany of implementation questions that remain unanswered or undecided.<sup>12</sup>

Despite these critical unanswered questions, policymakers at DPI and PEPSC continue to push the plan forward. PEPSC approved the plan in November, passing it on to the State Board of Education. If the State Board of Education grants approval, it is expected that legislative leaders will consider legislation to implement PtE during the 2023 legislative session.

Legislators and PEPSC will likely work out the answers to these questions behind closed doors. As Superintendent Catherine Truitt explained at the October PEPSC meeting, "If we want to have any action occur in the long session, there will not be time for the State Board...to work with PEPSC. What we need to advocate for is that the legislature drafting staff will work with PEPSC and other stakeholders."<sup>13</sup>

This rushed timeframe bodes poorly for fans of transparent and deliberative policy development. As PEPSC commissioner Anthony Graham, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at Winston-Salem State University, noted, “I worry that if we don’t pay attention to the implementation component right now that we could be presenting a concept where bits and pieces will be cherry-picked and we would be asked to move in that direction because we didn’t give sufficient attention up front to the implementation science of it.”<sup>14</sup>

## A solution to the teacher shortage?

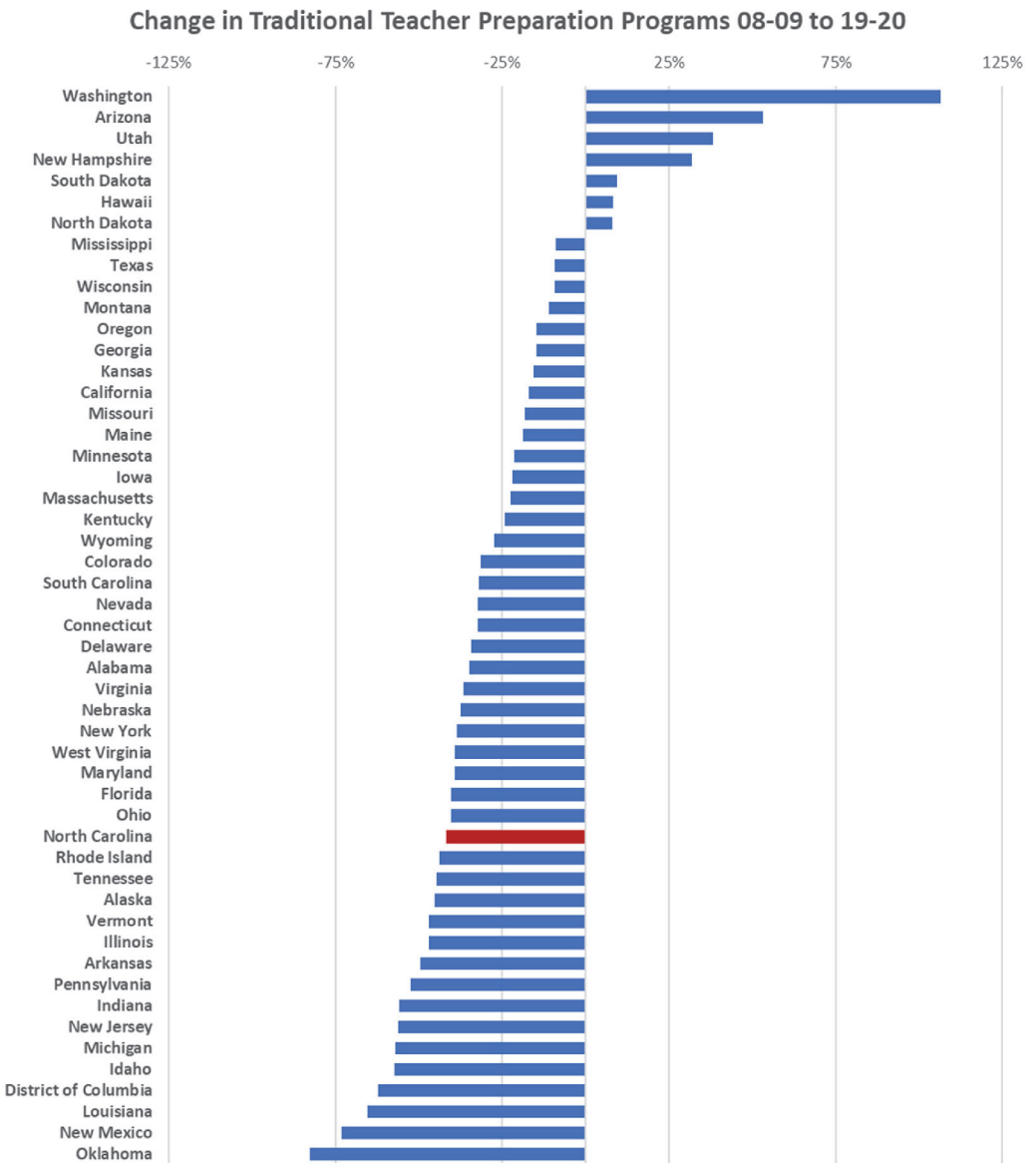
Supporters of PtE have touted the program as the solution to North Carolina’s struggles in attracting and retaining teachers. When the Roundtable introduced PtE to the State Board, members claimed to have “worked diligently...to identify and study barriers that have contributed to the teacher shortage and shrinking teacher pipeline.”

It is unclear how such a study led the Roundtable to create PtE.

The Roundtable and other advocates for the PtE plan correctly identify the teacher shortage as a major problem facing North Carolina’s schools. Since 2008-09, enrollment in university-based teacher programs has fallen in most states. In North Carolina, enrollment has fallen more than 40 percent, among the largest drops in the nation.

North Carolina’s public schools are feeling the steadily declining supply of new entrants into the profession. Teacher vacancies doubled between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years. North Carolina’s traditional public schools reported 3,800 vacancies at the start of the 2020-21 school year, compared to 1,829 at the start of the prior year.<sup>15</sup>

According to data from



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Higher Education Act Title II State Report Card System

the North Carolina School Superintendents' Association, North Carolina's public schools started the 2022-23 school year with at least 4,469 teacher vacancies.<sup>16</sup> Policymakers looking to reverse these trends should start by identifying root causes. Why are the numbers getting worse?

Roundtable members explored these questions before landing on the PtE plan as the solution. "The Roundtable worked diligently for over two years to identify and study barriers to the state's teacher shortage and shrinking teacher pipeline," according to a letter sent to State Board Chair Eric Davis in early 2021. After these two years of study, their only recommendation to address these problems is the PtE.

Roundtable materials describing and promoting PtE argue that the plan alone "has the potential to put North Carolina at the forefront of education innovation in the United States and to make the education sector a strong foundational element of our state's economy."<sup>17</sup>

These are strong claims to make about a plan that changes licensure requirements and creates a performance pay system. Unfortunately, academic research does not back these claims. Nor does PtE address the underlying issues driving North Carolina's struggles to recruit and retain teachers. By promoting PtE as the lone plan to overcome North Carolina's teacher shortage, other, more promising alternatives are being neglected.

For example, in explaining the Belk Foundation's support for PtE, Johanna Anderson, the former executive director of The Belk Foundation said, "North Carolina teachers are working harder than ever to educate students, and it is increasingly concerning that teachers lack the professional supports and opportunities they deserve."<sup>18</sup>

Few would disagree with Anderson's statement, but it is difficult to understand how PtE is the best policy option to address a lack of professional supports and opportunities. Are teachers clamoring for professional supports to focus even more intently on boosting standardized test scores? Are they leaving because they lack opportunities to train other teachers or take on even larger class sizes?

## What's driving recruitment and retention challenges?

To put it bluntly, General Assembly leaders have waged a 12-year crusade against teachers.

North Carolina teacher salaries are increasingly falling short of teacher salaries in other states. In the 2010-11 school year, North Carolina's average teacher salary fell 16 percent below the national average. That gap has grown to 19 percent, according to the most recent estimates. Teacher salaries have increased in nominal terms since 2012 but have decreased by 3.8 percent when adjusted for inflation.<sup>19</sup>

North Carolina continues to offer some of the least-competitive teacher salaries in the nation. Our teachers earn 24.5 percent less than their North Carolina peers in other professions, one of the largest gaps in the nation.<sup>20</sup>

Raises from the 2022 state budget are unlikely to help. While legislative leaders congratulated themselves for offering teachers a 4 percent pay raise, persistent inflation means that teachers will actually see their purchasing power fall by 4 percent this year. When adjusted for inflation, starting salaries have fallen 14 percent over the past seven years.<sup>21</sup> The meager raises offered in North Carolina contrast to the substantial across-the-board pay raises offered to teachers this year in Mississippi and Alabama.<sup>22,23</sup>

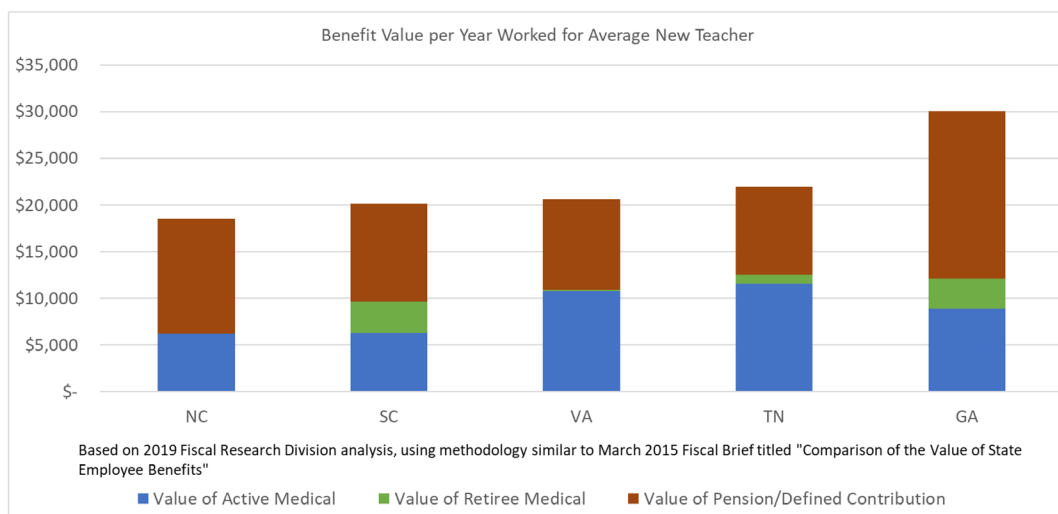
The problem is not just salaries. Legislative leaders have taken several steps to make North Carolina a less hospitable place for teachers:



- **Adding measures of standardized test results to teacher evaluations:** In 2012, the General Assembly added standardized test results to North Carolina’s teacher evaluation system, a move creating more incentives for teachers to narrow their curriculum to tested materials.
- **Eliminating career status:** Before 2013, experienced teachers were granted career status, which provided teachers with due process rights and protection from arbitrary dismissals. This protection was particularly important for teachers teaching controversial subjects and those who publicly advocate for their students.
- **Eliminating the salary supplement for master’s degrees:** Teachers once received a salary supplement of 10 percent for earning a master’s degree. The General Assembly eliminated this supplement for teachers who began their master’s program after August 1, 2013.
- **Eliminating longevity pay:** Before 2014, teachers received salary bumps ranging from 1.5 percent to 4.5 percent for reaching certain longevity milestones. The elimination of longevity pay was coupled with lowering the base pay rates for most experienced teachers—moves meant to discourage experienced teachers from staying in the classroom.
- **Eliminating retiree health care for new hires:** Teachers hired after January 1, 2021, are no longer eligible to receive health care benefits when they retire.
- **Fanning the flames of bigoted moral panics:** State leaders have fanned the flames of bigoted moral panics against “critical race theory” and LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Lawmakers, led most enthusiastically by Lt. Governor Mark Robinson, have falsely claimed that teachers are trying to indoctrinate students.

After the past decade, North Carolina teachers have far fewer employment benefits. The benefits they continue to receive, health care and a pension, are less generous than those offered to teachers in neighboring states.<sup>24</sup>

## Benefits Comparison to Neighboring States



Working conditions have also deteriorated.

Legislative budget cuts have eliminated 9,412 teacher assistants, a decrease of 22 percent. Overall, there has been a 4 percent reduction in school personnel since the 2010-11 school year.<sup>25</sup> With less personnel, it becomes increasingly difficult for teachers to access coaching, mentoring, and professional development opportunities. Time for planning and collaboration becomes increasingly scarce.

In 2022, Only 57 percent (down from 64 percent in 2020) of teachers agree they have enough non-instructional time during the day to plan for instruction, attend meetings, and hold conferences with students and families. This trend has implications for teacher retention because the second highest reported working condition influencing teachers' decisions to continue teaching at their schools is sufficient time during the work day. The lack of adequate staffing has left just 62 percent of teachers agreeing that class sizes allow them to meet the needs of all students.<sup>26</sup>

Over this same period, the physical condition of our schools has deteriorated. School capital needs have increased from \$8.2 billion to \$12.8 billion, an increase of 57 percent.<sup>27</sup>

Policymakers at the General Assembly have spent the past decade making North Carolina a less hospitable environment for teachers. These materially negative changes in teacher working conditions are likely driving recruitment and retention challenges and should therefore be centered in any policy efforts to improve recruitment and retention in the future.

## **Pathways to Excellence is unlikely to improve recruitment and retention...or student performance**

No state has implemented a plan similar to the PtE proposal, so it is difficult to know for sure what its impact will be on teacher recruitment and retention or student performance. But the available research on performance pay plans indicates that the impact will be negligible at best.

The available research on performance pay's impact on teacher retention is best described as thin and mixed. A 2017 Vanderbilt University meta-analysis of teacher performance pay was unable to find enough studies to draw firm conclusions on how performance pay affects teacher retention.<sup>28</sup> Most studies noting a positive impact on retention examined programs providing large bonuses for teachers in high-poverty schools. Such studies provide little useful evidence for PtE.

Evidence indicates that PtE is unlikely to boost student performance. The same 2017 Vanderbilt meta-analysis examined 28 performance pay studies in the United States and found a positive but very small impact on student test scores. Notably, the authors found that rewarding teachers as a group is almost twice as effective as rewarding them individually. PtE follows the ineffective route of granting individual rewards instead of group rewards.

Debates on *how* to pay teachers tend to obscure the more important question of *how much* we pay teachers. The research shows that the competitiveness of teacher salaries is much more important for improving the quality of entrants to the teaching profession and student outcomes.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, teacher evaluations—one of the ways teachers can demonstrate effectiveness under PtE—have no positive impact on student test scores. High-stakes teacher evaluations were found to decrease new teachers' job satisfaction and significantly increase the workloads of principals and other school administrators.<sup>30</sup>

## Opening the floodgates of alternative certification teachers?

There is a major risk to the PtE model: It may result in an influx of teacher candidates from alternative preparation programs (sometimes referred to as “lateral entry”) rather than from traditional university-based educator preparation programs (EPPs).

Early literature from the Human Capital Roundtable touted PtE as a way to “expand the pool of qualified candidates.”<sup>31</sup> It creates new licensure levels (Apprentice Teacher, License 1, and License 2) to allow swifter on-boarding of teaching candidates from alternative preparation programs.

NCACTE notes that EPP-prepared candidates have higher retention rates and better student outcomes.<sup>32,33</sup> NCACTE is unconvinced that PtE “will elevate EPP completion, [or] increase the teacher pipeline with qualified candidates,” noting that under the Licensure 1 and 2 pathways, no required teacher educator training of any kind is required.<sup>34</sup>

The Roundtable disagrees that PtE will lead to fewer teachers coming from EPPs. Megan Boren, an SREB staff member supporting the Roundtable’s work, notes that “they built their framework to incentivize more teachers to seek university-based preparation while not unfairly [or] inappropriately limiting talent that must come through other quality prep routes.”<sup>35</sup> It is unclear what those incentives are beyond a higher proposed starting salary for License 3 (EPP-prepared) teachers.

Regardless of who is correct, this is undoubtedly a risk that must be weighed against any potential benefits.

## Educators are not on board

Teachers appear to be largely opposed to the PtE proposal. This opposition bodes poorly for PtE, as teacher buy-in is vital for the success of education interventions.

To its credit, DPI has sought teacher feedback on PtE. Unfortunately, the feedback process on PtE is fatally flawed in limiting responses to the PtE framework. A more useful evaluation would solicit teachers for ideas on attracting and retaining teachers.<sup>36</sup>

Of course, many teachers disagree with PtE’s underlying assumption that the best way to attract and retain teachers is by lowering initial barriers of entry into the profession and making pay raises contingent upon measures of teacher effectiveness.

North Carolina’s largest teacher union, NCAE, has been forthright in its opposition PtE.

“North Carolina needs a teacher licensure program that respects teachers’ expertise, rewards their time in the profession, and offers support throughout the duration of their career,” said Tamika Walker Kelly, president of NCAE.<sup>37</sup>

NCAE’s response aligns with historical measures of North Carolina teachers’ views on performance pay plans. A 2014 UNC-Wilmington survey found widespread opposition among teachers to performance pay proposals:<sup>38</sup>

- **Less than ten percent of teachers agreed that performance-based pay would incentivize teachers to work more effectively, attract more effective teachers into the profession, or help retain more effective teachers in the profession**
- **Eighty-nine percent of teachers agreed that performance-based pay would disrupt the collaborative nature of teaching**

- **Only one percent of the teachers agreed that tying merit pay to career status would have a positive impact on teacher morale, retention, or the quality of teaching, while the majority of teachers indicated this reform would have negative impacts**
- **Less than one-fourth of teachers agreed that the teacher evaluation process would improve their teaching or student achievement**

It is worth noting that these teacher opinions in 2014 reflect an impressive alignment with the econometric research on performance pay and teacher evaluations that was published in subsequent years.

The North Carolina Public School Forum also solicited teacher feedback on PtE, conducting seven focus groups with over 120 participants. Their participants noted several shortfalls, including the proposal's complexity and the lack of existing personnel to implement the model.<sup>39</sup>

A collection of emails received by PEPSC tends to echo these concerns and are almost entirely against the proposal.<sup>40</sup>

NCACTE has also issued a statement against PtE.<sup>41</sup> Their statement notes several problems, including:

- **A secretive drafting process that failed to engage educators, human resources directors, and university staff**
- **The overly complex and burdensome nature of the plan**
- **A lack of meaningful annual teacher salary increases**
- **An emphasis on alternative entry as “the future of teacher preparation” at the expense of traditional teacher preparation programs that have been proven to be the most effective pathway**

Members of the Roundtable, PEPSC, and DPI are aware of the lack of support for the plan. They have taken active steps to squelch independent feedback, instead hoping that a professional public relations campaign will sway rightfully skeptical teachers.<sup>42</sup>

## **General Assembly should pursue popular research-based interventions to boost recruitment and retention**

There are no easy solutions that will quickly reverse the harm inflicted on our state's teacher pipeline over the past decade. It will take consistent, sustained investment in pro-teacher policies to reverse these negative trends. Most notably, state leaders should:

- 1. Provide large across-the-board salary raises to make teacher salaries competitive with other professions in North Carolina.** North Carolina teachers earn just 75.5 cents on the dollar compared to similar professionals in other industries in the state.<sup>43</sup> That gap is one of the largest in the nation. The low lifetime earnings potential of North Carolina teachers is certainly a major factor in plummeting enrollment in teacher preparation programs. In addition to substantial across-the-board pay increases, policymakers may consider:
  - a. Increased pay for hard-to-staff schools or hard-to-staff positions.** The state could provide districts with additional resources based on historical teacher turnover

- patterns or district characteristics associated with high teacher turnover and then allow the districts to craft pay proposals that address their specific staffing needs.
- b. *Relief from higher education costs.* Scholarship programs and student loan relief can help eliminate financial burdens that might discourage promising candidates from pursuing teaching as a profession. For example, the Teaching Fellows program has combined scholarship loans with supplementary enrichment opportunities and has proven effective at increasing the supply of effective teachers with lower turnover.
- 2. Fully implement the Leandro Plan.** The Leandro Plan will dramatically improve teacher working conditions by providing teachers with the supplies, materials, and support staff necessary to help all students meet state achievement standards. The Leandro Plan will also restore funding for professional development and the mentoring of early career teachers, two positive elements of the PtE proposal. The improvements will be most notable in high-poverty rural districts with the greatest challenges recruiting and retaining teachers. The Plan will also fund the recommendations of the DRIVE Task Force, investing in teacher preparation programs to increase the supply and diversity of new teachers and creating mentoring and support programs that will help retention, especially for teachers of color.
  - 3. Reverse the anti-teacher policy changes of the 2010s.** During this decade, North Carolina lawmakers have eliminated career status, master's pay, funding for National Board Certification applications, longevity pay, and retiree health benefits. All of these benefits should be restored.
  - 4. Allow teachers to collectively bargain.** Research indicates that districts with strong teacher unions have more teachers with stronger qualifications, higher retention rates for high-quality teachers, higher dismissal rates for low-quality teachers, and lower high school dropout rates.<sup>44</sup> Collective bargaining can also serve as a pathway to meaningfully incorporate teacher voice into the policymaking process. Promoting teacher voice is among the most effective strategies for reducing teacher attrition, particularly for novice teachers.<sup>45</sup>
  - 5. Treat teachers like the highly trained professionals they are.** Too many lawmakers are under the false impression that they know more about teaching than our highly trained educators. In recent years, lawmakers have sought to police how teachers address controversial subjects such as U.S. history and health. They have also created accountability systems emphasizing standardized test results at the expense of other goals, such as critical thinking, self-reliance, and the ability to work effectively with others. Policymakers should foster trust with teachers by eschewing punitive and onerous evaluation schemes and meaningfully involving teachers in the policymaking process.
  - 6. Increase the social safety net.** One of the greatest challenges teachers face is that too many students arrive at school unprepared to learn. These challenges are often a byproduct of the additional mental and physical stressors and adverse experiences placed on children from families with low incomes. A large and growing body of evidence shows that increasing family income or benefits, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and health insurance, improves student performance and

reduces behavior problems.<sup>46</sup> By boosting family incomes, providing health care, and eliminating food and housing insecurity, policymakers can improve teacher working conditions and make teaching a more attractive career option.

## How to move forward with licensure and pay reform

There is nothing sacrosanct about North Carolina's teacher licensure process and teacher pay systems. Policymakers should continue to explore alternatives to our current licensure and teacher pay systems to improve the recruitment and retention of effective and diverse teachers. In doing so, policymakers should adhere to four principles that will increase the likelihood of improving recruitment and retention.

1. **Major reforms should only be considered *after* policymakers have addressed fundamental shortfalls in teacher pay and working conditions.** North Carolina's teacher vacancies are already at appalling levels. It does not make sense to implement an unproven plan that places additional burdens on teachers and administrators at a time when staffing challenges are so dire. PtE advocates contend that the additional burden is the necessary price educators must pay to secure higher salaries. However, there is no guarantee that the program will be funded at levels that make the trade-off worth it for educators. Policymakers should take immediate and dramatic steps to improve teacher pay and working conditions before exploring unproven new approaches to licensure and teacher pay, especially when those approaches place additional burdens on educators.
2. **Develop solutions collaboratively with educators.** If the goal of licensure and pay reform is to improve the recruitment and retention of teachers, then the opinions of teachers will be vital to shaping those reforms. After all, teachers are the undisputed experts on the factors that will entice their colleagues to remain in the classroom or depart for other opportunities. Unfortunately, policymakers have largely ignored teachers' voices in the development of PtE. Despite overwhelming negative feedback from teachers, DPI staff and PEPSC members continue to push forward in ways that ignore fundamental shortcomings. However, no district should be required to implement PtE unless it has been agreed to by a majority of that district's teachers.
3. **Provide flexibility to meet local staffing challenges.** Staffing challenges vary across districts. Some districts have debilitating turnover and vacancies, while others are fully staffed with low turnover. One district may have difficulty finding elementary teachers, while another might be unable to find special education or science teachers. And in some districts, challenges may be concentrated in certain schools, while in other districts staffing challenges are more universal. Given the heterogeneity of these challenges, state policy should provide flexibility that allows districts to deploy resources in ways that address their specific needs. Unfortunately, PtE is a one-size-fits-all policy that fails to account for districts' varying needs.
4. **Implementation should be deliberate and iterative so that implementation challenges are addressed before a larger rollout.** Major elements of the PtE proposal remain undeveloped. After a year of development, there is still no consensus on how teachers can demonstrate effectiveness outside of test score data or principal evaluations. There are major concerns that all schools will have the necessary staffing to support early-career teachers and to conduct required observations. Undoubtedly, there will be additional

implementation challenges that nobody has considered. A limited proof-of-concept pilot in a small number of schools or districts would allow practitioners to identify solutions to implementation challenges. Once the program's implementation challenges have been addressed, a subsequent, larger pilot program can be conducted to determine whether the PtE reforms have the hoped-for impact on recruitment and retention. By implementing it in a deliberative manner, policymakers will limit the potential harms of deploying an unproven program statewide.

Unfortunately, PtE has failed to adhere to these policymaking principles.

By emphasizing the “broken” nature of our licensure and pay systems, PtE advocates may be inadvertently dissuading lawmakers from making immediate investments in teacher pay that are vital to addressing schools' acute staffing challenges. After all, why should they increase appropriations before the system is “fixed”?

By ignoring the feedback of educators, policymakers are at risk of developing a plan exacerbating, rather than alleviating, school staffing challenges.

By creating a one-size-fits-all approach, potentially effective solutions are being ignored.

By pushing PtE forward without finalizing the plan or considering implementation issues, advocates risk derailing a plan that – it's impossible to say for sure – could possibly be effective.

Advocates for successful licensure and pay reform should confront how failure to adhere to the above principles has lowered the odds that the proposal will have the hoped-for impact on teacher recruitment and retention. Policymakers should abandon PtE for a fresh approach that delays major reforms until basic conditions are improved, is developed collaboratively with educators, provides local flexibility, and has a careful implementation plan.

Unfortunately, advocates are taking the opposite approach, pushing an incomplete PtE plan forward for consideration in the 2023 legislative session.

## CONCLUSION

North Carolina's policymakers are correct in prioritizing efforts to improve teacher recruitment and retention. North Carolina's school staffing challenges are unprecedented. Tens of thousands of students sit in classrooms led by substitutes or unqualified teachers. This situation is a tragedy that demands immediate action. Students deserve *proven* measures to ensure that every classroom is led by a qualified, well-trained teacher as soon as possible.

PtE is, at best, unproven. Major components of the proposal remain undeveloped. The botched rollout has lowered the likelihood that the program will have the intended effects on recruitment and retention. Continued emphasis on licensure and pay reform distracts from proven efforts to boost teacher pay and improve teacher working conditions.

It is time for advocates to hit the pause button on PtE and instead unite behind policies that we know will help provide students the educators they deserve. ■

## END NOTES

- Justin Parmenter, “Who’s really behind North Carolina’s controversial merit pay push? The answer is becoming clearer.” Notes from the Chalkboard, July 24, 2022, as found at: <https://notesfromthechalkboard.com/2022/07/24/whos-really-behind-north-carolinas-controversial-merit-pay-push-the-answer-is-becoming-clearer/>
- Additional information on the Roundtable and its work can be found on SREB’s website at: <https://www.sreb.org/north-carolina-education-human-capital-roundtable>. Members (and their appointees): Jill Camnitz (NC State Board of Education, Designee of Chair Davis); Patrick Miller and Andrew Lakis (Professional Educator Preparation Standards Commission); Geoff Coltrane (Education Cabinet, Governor’s Office); Thomas Tomberlin and Andrew Sioberg (DPI, Designee of State Superintendent); Thomas West and Phil Kirk (NC Independent Colleges and Universities, Designee of President); Laura Bilbro-Berry (UNC, Designee of System President); Lisa Eads (NC Community College System, Designee of System President); Latanya Pattillo (Governor’s Teacher Advisor); Freebird McKinney (2018 State Teacher of the Year); Tabari Wallace (2018 State Principal of the Year); Brenda Berg (BEST NC CEO).
- Thomas Tomberlin and Andrew Sioberg, “North Carolina Pathways to Excellence for Teaching Professionals,” presentation to the North Carolina State Board of Education, as found at: <https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/Meetings/Attachment.aspx?S=10399&AID=319532&MID=12459>
- Details on PTE license levels from PEPSC Monthly Meeting on October 13, 2022, as found at: <https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/Meetings/Attachment.aspx?S=10399&AID=338401&MID=13107>
- NCEES Standard III is “Teachers Know the Content They Teach.” Standard IV is “Teachers Facilitate Learning for their Students.”
- NCEES Standard II is “Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students.”
- American Federation of Teachers, “AFT, Houston Federation of Teachers Hail Court Ruling on Flawed Evaluation System,” May 4, 2017, as found at: <https://www.aft.org/press-release/aft-houston-federation-teachers-hail-court-ruling-flawed-evaluation-system>
- Andrew Bacher-Hicks, Mark J. Chin, Thomas J. Kane, Douglas O. Staiger, “An experimental evaluation of three teacher quality measures: Value-added, classroom observations, and student surveys,” *Economics of Education Review*, Volume 73, 2019, as found at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2019.101919>
- Colleen Flaherty, “Ratings and Gender Bias Over Time,” *Inside Higher Ed*, October 31, 2022, as found at: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/10/31/ratings-and-bias-against-women-over-time>
- Justin Parmenter, “North Carolina merit pay plan would tie teacher compensation to student survey responses,” Notes from the Chalkboard, May 28, 2022, as found at: <https://notesfromthechalkboard.com/2022/05/28/north-carolina-merit-pay-plan-would-tie-teacher-compensation-to-student-survey-responses/>
- Justin Parmenter, “PEPSC committee member: Principal evaluations should not be used to make high-stakes career decisions,” Notes from the Chalkboard, June 24, 2022, as found at: <https://notesfromthechalkboard.com/2022/06/24/pepsc-committee-member-principal-evaluations-should-not-be-used-to-make-high-stakes-career-decisions/>
- North Carolina Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, letter to PEPSC Commission Members, October 1, 2022, as found at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jgFXNB6BK2qIXzckRCOSQ6xp63iKVZl/view>
- Alex Granados, “PEPSC will take another month to put forward model on teacher licensure, evaluation, and pay,” *Education NC*, October 13, 2022, as found at: <https://www.ednc.org/pepsc-will-take-another-month-to-put-forward-model-on-teacher-licensure/>
- Greg Childress, “Commission designing new teacher pay system says plan is not yet ready for prime time,” *NC Policy Watch*, October 12, 2022, as found at: <https://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/2022/10/14/commission-designing-new-teacher-pay-system-says-plan-is-not-yet-ready-for-prime-time/>
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, “2020-2021 State of the Teaching Profession in North Carolina” and “2019-2020 State of the Teaching Profession in North Carolina,” both as found at: <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/districts-schools-support/district-human-capital/surveys-and-reports>
- T. Keung Hui, “NC schools have more than 4,400 teaching vacancies. How will that affect students?,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, August 26, 2022, as found at: <https://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/education/article264526776.html#storylink=cpy>
- North Carolina Education Human Capital Roundtable, “Pathways to Excellence for NC Teaching Professionals,” Southern Region Education Board, as found at: [https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/1pagerfaq\\_032921.pdf?1617045793](https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/1pagerfaq_032921.pdf?1617045793)
- Alex Granados, “Becoming a teacher in North Carolina might be changing, and it could mean more money for educators,” *EdNC.org*, March 10, 2022, as found at: <https://www.ednc.org/2022-03-10-new-licensure-system-proposal-gets-more-detail/>
- National Education Association, *Rankings and Estimates*, as found at: <https://www.nea.org/research-publications>
- Sylvia Allegretto, “The teacher pay penalty has hit a new high: Trends in teacher wages and compensation through 2021,” *Economic Policy Institute*, August 16, 2022, as found at: <https://files.epi.org/uploads/251657.pdf>
- Kris Nordstrom, “North Carolina’s teacher shortage: the inevitable result of the General Assembly’s decade-long effort to degrade the profession,” *NC Policy Watch*, September 30, 2022, as found at: <https://ncpolicywatch.com/2022/09/30/north-carolinas-teacher-shortage-the-inevitable-result-of-the-general-assemblys-decade-long-effort-to-degrade-the-profession/>
- Geoff Pender, “Lawmakers pass largest teacher pay raise in Mississippi history,” *Mississippi Today*, March 22, 2022, as found at: <https://mississippitoday.org/2022/03/22/lawmakers-pass-largest-teacher-pay-raise-in-mississippi-history/>
- Kris Nordstrom, “Alabama is schooling North Carolina on teacher pay,” *The Progressive Pulse*, July 7, 2022, as found at: <https://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/2022/07/07/alabama-is-schooling-north-carolina-on-teacher-pay/>
- North Carolina General Assembly Fiscal Research Division, “Teacher Compensation and Benefits: Considerations for the House Select Committee on An Education System for North Carolina’s Future,” February 21, 2022, as found at: <https://webservices.ncleg.gov/ViewDocSiteFile/42748>
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, “Highlights of the North Carolina Public School Budget” March 2022 and February 2011, as found at: <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/district-operations/financial-and-business-services/demographics-and-finances/student-enrollment-school-personnel-and-reports#highlights-of-the-nc-public-school-budget>
- Martin, Cynthia, Alessandro Montanari, and Stephanie Benedict. “North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey: Initial Data Results.” June 1, 2022. [https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/Meetings/TempFolder/Meetings/2206\\_ES\\_P\\_NB\\_NCTWCS\\_2022\\_Initial\\_Data\\_Results%20PPT\\_3255285ylpq3ukda1held4zwhonbbw.pdf](https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/Meetings/TempFolder/Meetings/2206_ES_P_NB_NCTWCS_2022_Initial_Data_Results%20PPT_3255285ylpq3ukda1held4zwhonbbw.pdf).
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, “Five-Year K-12 Facilities Needs Report,” 2010-11 and 2020-21 Facility Needs Surveys,



- as found at: <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/district-operations/school-planning>
28. Pham, L. D., Nguyen, T. D., & Springer, M. G. (2021). Teacher Merit Pay: A Meta-Analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 58(3), 527–566. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831220905580>
  29. Bruce D. Baker, *Does Money Matter in Education?* (Second Edition), 2016, as found at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED563793.pdf>
  30. Bleiberg, Joshua, Eric Brunner, Erica Harbatkin, Matthew A. Kraft, and Matthew Springer. (2021). The Effect of Teacher Evaluation on Achievement and Attainment: Evidence from Statewide Reforms. (EdWorkingPaper: 21-496). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: <https://doi.org/10.26300/b1ak-r251>
  31. North Carolina Education Human Capital Roundtable, “Vision Graphic,” as found at: [https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/ncgraphic\\_dec8.pdf?1617045981](https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/ncgraphic_dec8.pdf?1617045981)
  32. Kevin C. Bastian and Jacqueline M. Kumar “The Retention of UNC Prepared Teachers in North Carolina Public Schools” Education Policy Initiative at Carolina, October 2020, as found at: [https://epic.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1268/2021/08/EPIC\\_Program\\_Retention\\_Final.pdf](https://epic.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1268/2021/08/EPIC_Program_Retention_Final.pdf)
  33. Kevin C. Bastian, “The Effectiveness of UNC System Educator Preparation Program Graduates, Education Policy Initiative at Carolina, February 2019, as found at: [https://epic.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1268/2021/08/Program-Effectiveness\\_Final.pdf](https://epic.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1268/2021/08/Program-Effectiveness_Final.pdf)
  34. North Carolina Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, letter to PEPSC Commission Members, October 1, 2022, as found at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jgFXNB6BK2qIXrzckRCOSQ6xp63iKVZl/view>
  35. Megan Boren, email to Kris Nordstrom, May 3, 2022
  36. Julie Pittman, “Teacher Feedback: Pathways to Excellence in Teaching,” presentation to the Professional Educator Preparation and Standards Commission, May 27, 2022, as found at: <https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/Meetings/Attachment.aspx?S=10399&AID=325363&MID=12683>
  37. Greg Childress, “State education leaders advance new and controversial teacher compensation proposal,” NC Policy Watch, August 2, 2022, as found at: <https://ncpolicywatch.com/2022/08/02/state-education-leaders-advance-new-and-controversial-teacher-compensation-proposal/>
  38. Megan M. Oakes, Janna Siegel Robertson, “North Carolina Public School Teachers: Reactions to Teacher Evaluations and Merit Pay,” May 2014, as found at: <http://people.uncw.edu/robertsonj/documents/NC%20Teacher%20Evaluation%20and%20Merit%20Pay%20survey%20results%20Report.pdf>
  39. Chanté Russell, “Pathways to Excellence for Teaching Professionals Focus Group Results,” NC Public School Forum, June 13, 2022, as found at: <https://www.ncforum.org/2022/pathways/>
  40. PEPSC Subcommittees Co-Chairs Meeting, August 25, 2022, Supporting Documents, “2208\_Feedback from field” as found at: <https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/Meetings/Attachment.aspx?S=10399&AID=333869&MID=12895>
  41. Justin Parmenter, “NC Colleges of Teacher Educators push back hard on controversial licensure proposal,” Notes from the Chalkboard, August 10, 2022, as found at: <https://notesfromthechalkboard.com/2022/08/10/nc-colleges-of-teacher-educators-push-back-hard-on-controversial-licensure-proposal/>
  42. Justin Parmenter, “NCDPI Chief of Staff: ‘If teachers come out against [merit pay plan] it’ll be dead on arrival.’” Notes from the Chalkboard, July 5, 2022, as found at: <https://notesfromthechalkboard.com/2022/07/05/ncdpi-chief-of-staff-if-teachers-come-out-against-merit-pay-plan-itll-be-dead-on-arrival/>
  43. Sylvia Allegretto, “The teacher pay penalty has hit a new high: Trends in teacher wages and compensation through 2021,” *Economic Policy Institute*, August 16, 2022, as found at: <https://files.epi.org/uploads/251657.pdf>
  44. Han, E.S. (2020), The Myth of Unions’ Overprotection of Bad Teachers: Evidence from the District–Teacher Matched Data on Teacher Turnover. *Ind Relat*, 59: 316-352. <https://doi.org/10.1111/irel.12256>
  45. García, E., Han, E. S., & Weiss, E. (2022). Determinants of teacher attrition: Evidence from district-teacher matched data. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 30, (25). <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.30.6642>
  46. Matt Barnum, “Want to boost test scores and increase grad rates? One strategy: look outside schools and help low-income families,” Chalkbeat, September 26, 2018, as found at: <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2018/9/26/21105783/want-to-boost-test-scores-and-increase-grad-rates-one-strategy-look-outside-schools-and-help-low-inc>

**Media contact:**

**KRIS NORDSTROM**

**Senior Policy Analyst, Education & Law Project**

919/856-3195 | [kris@ncjustice.org](mailto:kris@ncjustice.org)



PO Box 28068 | Raleigh, NC | 27611-8068

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