

# Keeping Good Teachers in High-Poverty NC Schools

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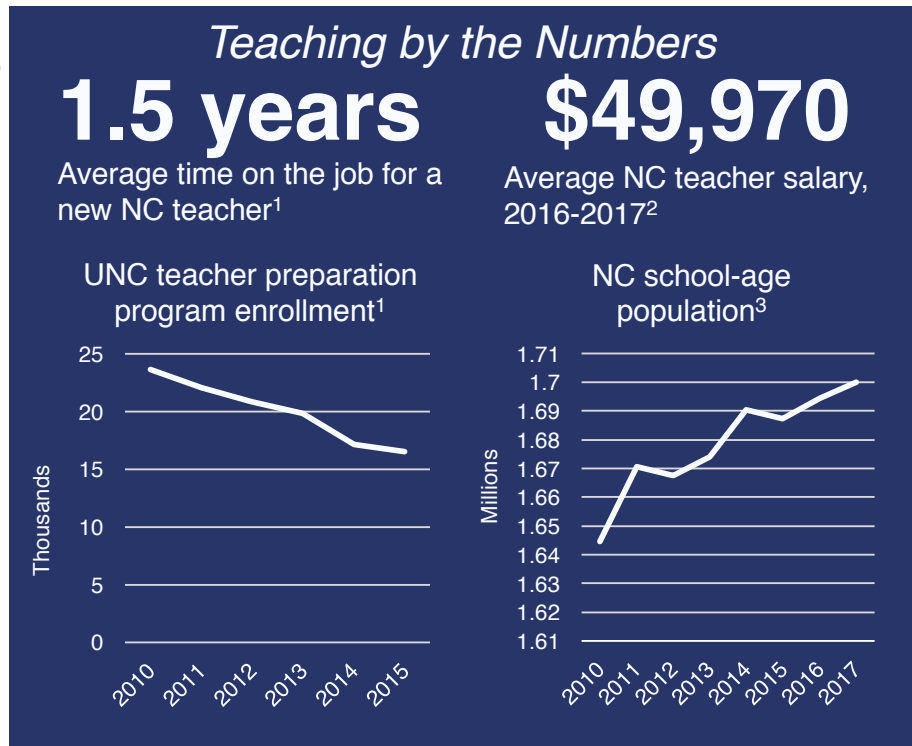
## Key Points

- Teachers are leaving urban, high-poverty schools – even those in districts with high salary supplements.
- This teacher turnover creates unnecessary staffing costs and has negative impacts for disadvantaged students.
- A mentorship program and targeted base salary increase for high-performing teachers in low-performing schools are key to long-term retention.

## The Problem

North Carolina faces a shortage of high quality teachers in urban, high-poverty schools. Even within the state’s wealthy districts with high teacher salary supplements, such as Wake County, teachers are leaving high-poverty, low-performing schools in favor of higher-performing schools in more affluent areas<sup>4</sup>. As a result, students in high-poverty schools are often taught by the least experienced teachers and experience the greatest rates of teacher turnover.

A few factors make North Carolina’s teacher retention problem unique. First, North



Carolina is one of the few states where teacher salaries have not rebounded since the Great Recession<sup>5</sup>. In fact, salaries have decreased in real terms since 2008. Second, the population of school-age children in North Carolina is increasing even as this population shrinks nationally<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, the supply of new teachers through traditional teacher preparation pathways is decreasing<sup>1</sup>.

With a decreasing supply of teachers for a growing population of students, it is evident that North Carolina

needs more high quality teachers. The best way to guarantee this is to focus on reducing teacher turnover among incoming teachers.

## Why it Matters

Good teachers are key to students’ education and life outcomes. We traditionally define teacher quality as a teacher’s ability to increase student performance beyond what is expected for students of a similar background. It is the most important predictor of students’ educational outcomes<sup>6</sup>. With all other

## Why Teacher Recruitment and Retention Initiatives Fail

- **Too complicated:** If eligibility requirements are too complex and there is no direct communication about the program with teachers and administrators, it is less likely to increase retention rates.<sup>14</sup>
- **Low incentives:** Increasing the teacher retention rate in low-performing schools to the level of average schools requires an estimated \$10,000 salary premium.<sup>15</sup>
- **Focused on short term:** Programs like Teach for America expand the immediate hiring pool of teachers but increase attrition in the long term.<sup>16</sup>
- **Too much weight on standardized tests:** Some performance-based initiatives have improved retention only among teachers of tested subjects like reading and math.<sup>12</sup>

factors held constant, increasing teacher quality improves students' future chances of attending college and earning a higher income<sup>7</sup>. Yet, the most disadvantaged students typically receive the least effective teachers<sup>6</sup>.

Teachers make most of their gains in quality within their first four years of teaching<sup>8</sup>. These early teachers are also the most at risk for leaving: North Carolina's early teachers leave the profession at a rate 60% higher than other teachers<sup>9</sup>. It is critical to provide comprehensive support to new teachers in low-performing schools.

## The Solution

**Mentorship program for all new teachers:** Early feedback and mentorship is key in promoting teacher efficacy. A statewide mentorship program in Alaska was able to increase new teacher retention by 15 percent by focusing on<sup>10</sup>:

**Preparedness:** Providing a background for the teaching profession and the local area.

**Professionalism:** Promoting teamwork, helping new teachers find outside resources, and refining teaching strategies.

**Community socialization:** Connecting to the community's culture and building relationships between colleagues.

**Student focus:** Connecting to students and identifying what motivates them.

Mentors should work to help new teachers understand and make improvements on their evaluation. It is crucial to focus the professional development portion of the mentorship program on existing state teaching standards. This action avoids imposing burdensome new requirements on teachers and helps them receive useful feedback and support in their early years.

**Targeted salary incentives:** North Carolina's teacher evaluation system combines test-based value added scores and observational rubrics<sup>11</sup>. Based on this system, highly

effective teachers in designated schools should receive state-funded annual bonuses of at least \$10,000—regardless of the bonuses or supplements they may already receive. Schools would be designated by the state to include low-performing, high-poverty schools in urban areas. Similar programs in Tennessee and Washington, D.C. were able to increase overall student score achievement at a lower cost per pupil than other interventions like summer school or lower class size<sup>12, 13</sup>.

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