

NEWS RELEASE

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CENTER SAYS SHORTAGE OF TEACHERS AN IMPENDING CRISIS – STATE ACTION NEEDED

North Carolina faces a chronic and growing shortage of public school teachers and must act now to increase the supply of new teachers and retain more of the existing pool of teachers, says the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research in a new study released today. The Center says the state's rapidly increasing school-age population, efforts to reduce class size, and a 20 percent or more annual teacher turnover rate in some school districts will take the teacher shortage to crisis proportions if the state does not act quickly to get more teachers in the pipeline now.

The Center's research shows turnover rates for each of the 115 city and county school systems in North Carolina for the last five years and the number of teachers produced by every public and private college or university in North Carolina. The Center also makes specific recommendations to increase the number of teachers produced and to help local systems better retain the teachers they have.

"On the supply side of the problem, North Carolina's public and private colleges and universities and community colleges need to produce more teachers," says Mike McLaughlin, editor of the Center's *North Carolina Insight* magazine, where the research is published. "And, on the retention side of the problem, the local school systems need to do more to nurture beginning teachers to prevent an early exit from the profession."

The Impending Crisis

Currently, there are 86,000 teachers in North Carolina's public schools. And, the state must hire about 10,000 teachers each year just to staff existing classrooms. Yet, all the state's public and private universities *combined* produce only about 3,100 teachers a year. Only 2,200 of these graduates end up teaching in North Carolina, and only about 1,400 are still teaching three years later. Thus, the Center says local school systems are increasingly relying on hiring out-of-state teachers and teachers entering the profession through lateral entry programs to bridge the shortfall. Lateral entry allows professionals with at least a four-year college degree to enter the teaching field and take up to three years to become fully-licensed teachers.

However, the Center says these stopgap measures will not be able to avert an impending crisis, caused by three factors. First, the State Data Center estimates that North Carolina's school-age population will increase from 1.4 million in 2000 to 1.6 million by 2010, adding demand for about 1,000 teachers a year. Second, Gov. Mike Easley has successfully pushed for reductions in class size in kindergarten and 1st through 3rd grades, creating demand for still more teachers. Third, the federal "No Child Left Behind" Act raises the bar by requiring "a highly qualified teacher in every classroom."

In addition to these factors, the Center says there already are acute shortages in particular subjects and geographic areas of the state. The subject areas of greatest shortage are math, science, special education, and foreign languages. Geographically, the 10 highest rates of teacher turnover the last five years were, in order, in the Hoke, Warren, Weldon City, Franklin, Edgecombe, Vance, Charlotte/Mecklenburg, Tyrrell, Hertford, and Person county school systems.

Center Recommendations To Address the Teacher Shortage

The Center recommends that the Governor ask the Education Cabinet to take on the teacher shortage as its

#1 priority. Created by statute in 1993, the Education Cabinet includes the Governor, the President of the University of North Carolina system (which is responsible for preparing the majority of the state's practicing teachers), the President of the N.C. Independent Colleges and Universities (32 of the 37 private colleges and universities have teacher education programs), the Chairman of the State Board of Education (the board that sets policy for public schools in North Carolina), and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The Center says the Education Cabinet should set specific targets for increasing production of new teachers, to reach 11,000 annually by 2010. Additionally, the Center says the Cabinet and the General Assembly should adopt a plan and specific targets to address teacher shortages in subjects such as math and science and in certain geographic areas of the state.

“Sharply increasing the supply of teachers is a critical part of solving the teacher shortage, but just producing more teachers without doing better at retaining the teachers we have has been compared to pouring water into a leaky bucket,” says the Center’s Mike McLaughlin.

To address the teacher retention problem, the Center recommends that the State Board of Education require school systems with teacher turnover in excess of 15 percent annually be required to file Teacher Retention Improvement Plans with the Board. The Center also recommends that the State Board of Education seek funds for low-wealth counties with no or low teacher salary supplements and with teacher turnover higher than 15 percent. School systems with Teacher Retention Improvement Plans would be the ones that qualify for these funds. The Center says this recommendation also would help the state comply with decisions by the state Supreme Court in the *Leandro* case to help low-wealth districts.

Teacher Turnover

Nearly one in three new teachers leaves the profession after three years on the job, and about 40 percent leave after five years. Half of the new teachers in urban districts leave in the first five years.

For example, the Hoke County School System had the highest teacher turnover in the state over the last five years, losing 25.5 percent of its total teaching work force. That school system is the lead plaintiff in *Leandro v. The State of North Carolina*, a lawsuit the state lost that is forcing the state to provide more resources to help financially strapped poor school systems. Four other school systems – Warren (22.5 percent), Franklin (20.8 percent), and Edgecombe (20.6 percent) county systems, as well as Weldon City Schools (21.5 percent) – had average turnover above 20 percent over the last five years (1998-2003).

Barnett Berry, executive director of the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality in Chapel Hill, says poor and minority students suffer the brunt of high teacher turnover. In a paper on recruiting and retaining teachers for hard-to-staff schools, he says, “Poor children and those of color are far more likely to be taught by inexperienced, underprepared, and ineffective teachers.” Berry adds, “High turnover among new teachers leaves students in hard-to-staff schools facing a revolving door of untried novices who do not have the skills to help them reach higher academic standards.”

Current Resources in Producing New Teachers

While the Center’s research on North Carolina’s teacher shortage revealed a strong need to increase enrollment in teacher education programs, it also uncovered exemplary efforts to meet the state’s growing need for teachers. Among these are the **North Carolina Community College System’s 2 + 2 Program**, in which students are able to pursue a teaching degree through two years at their local community college and then two years through

a cooperating four-year college or university with a recognized teacher education program, Internet-based classes, extension courses, and other means.

N.C. Community College System President Martin Lancaster calls the program the “home-grown teacher initiative.” He says, “Studies show teachers teach where they are taught.” That makes the program particularly useful in rural areas where teacher retention is a problem.

Other noteworthy statewide programs designed to deal with the teacher shortage include the N.C. Teaching Fellows Program, Troops to Teachers, and N.C. Teach. Administered by the nonprofit Public School Forum of North Carolina, the **Teaching Fellows Program** awards 400 top-ranked high school seniors a four-year scholarship in exchange for teaching four years in a low-performing school in North Carolina. About 82 percent of the Fellows were still employed in the schools after they met their teaching requirement, and 73 percent were still employed between their fifth and tenth years of teaching.

N.C. Troops to Teachers is designed to help former military personnel start teaching careers. The majority of the federally funded program’s 328 teachers in North Carolina teach in high-need areas such as math, science, and special education, says Paul Gregg, the coordinator for the N.C. program.

N.C. Teach is a lateral entry program operated at 13 regional sites by the University of North Carolina in conjunction with the N.C. Department of Public Instruction. Aimed at mid-career recruits with a bachelor’s degree, it recently won a national award for its success in adding rigor to this non-traditional path to the classroom and for increasing retention rates. Thus far, 1,000 North Carolina teachers have been licensed through N.C. Teach.

UNC system President Molly Broad says, “If you believe, as I do, that education is the defining domestic policy of our state and nation, we simply cannot afford to fail in our efforts to ensure that every North Carolina child has access to an effective and caring school with highly qualified teachers. In short, it is both a social and economic imperative.”

The Center’s research on the teacher shortage in North Carolina was funded in part by grants from Progress Energy of Raleigh and the Hillsdale Fund of Greensboro. The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit research corporation created in 1977 to evaluate state government programs and to study public policy issues facing North Carolina. The Center receives general operating support from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation in Winston-Salem, with additional funding from 13 other foundations, 150 corporate contributors, and almost 800 individual and organizational members across the state. In addition to publishing *North Carolina Insight*, the Center recently has conducted in-depth studies on ways to improve voter turnout in North Carolina, on charter schools, on the pros and cons of state lotteries, and on how all 50 states govern their public universities. The Center also publishes *Article II*, a citizens’ guide to the N.C. legislature.

Copies of the issue of *North Carolina Insight* containing the Center’s research on the teacher shortage are available for \$10, which includes tax, postage, and handling. To order, write the Center at P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602, call (919) 832-2839, fax (919) 832-2847, or email tbromley@nceppr.org.

For more information on the Center’s study of the teacher shortage in North Carolina, call Mike McLaughlin, editor of *North Carolina Insight*, at the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research at (919) 832-2839.