

Developing high-quality, high-retention preparation pathways will be instrumental to increasing the diversity of North Carolina’s educator workforce. Preparation involves the learning processes (e.g., curriculum, assessments, licensure), human capital (i.e., students, faculty, and staff), and the program culture (e.g., traditions, values, mission) that constitute how all educators are prepared in institutions of higher education (IHE)-based and alternative certification programs.

North Carolina boasts over [40 educator preparation programs](#), providing traditional IHE-based and alternative certification pathways. In 2018, 81 percent of students enrolled in educator preparation programs in the state were white and 86 percent of those who were licensed through an educator preparation program that year were white.¹ Alternative certification programs, which allow professionals with degrees in non-teaching fields to become certified through a short, intensive training process, are more diverse, with prospective educators of color constituting 45 percent of those enrolled. However, across North Carolina’s various educator preparation pathways, 70 percent of all students enrolled are white.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS BY EDUCATOR PREPARATION PATHWAY IN NC, 2018¹⁰

Race	4-Year IHE Preparation	Alternative Preparation
White	81%	55%
Black	12%	36%
Hispanic	3%	3%
Asian/ Pacific Islander	1%	1%
American Indian	>1%	2%
Two or more Races	2%	2%

Source

Barriers to Preparation

Students of color enrolled in, or seeking to enroll in, Educator Preparation Programs face a number of challenges as they pursue their degree. High school students of color are more likely to attend schools that are underfunded, low performing, and staffed with less effective educators, resulting in a lower likelihood that students of color will matriculate into postsecondary institutions.² Once they make it to college, low-income students and students of color are [more likely to be enrolled in remediation courses](#), which on average increase the time it takes to earn a degree (and thus the cost of the degree) and decreases their likelihood of completion.³ Placement in these courses may further feelings of isolation experienced by students of color, creating additional barriers for postsecondary completion. Students of color are also more likely to take on [significantly more loan debt than their white peers](#), and the [long-term earning potential in education](#) may lead to students determining they should pursue another career.

INSTITUTION DRIVEN BARRIERS

As currently designed, educator preparation programs themselves provide one of the most significant barriers for enrolling and graduating pre-service educators of color. Much of the conversation around success in increasing educator diversity is dominated by the enrollment and completion data of each cohort. This approach obscures the larger issue of how these institutions are addressing the systemic and institutional inequities within them that disadvantage aspiring educators of color. This can lead to hollow recognition for institutions that are not enacting policies designed to better prepare and sustain these individuals.⁴ Educator preparation programs must strive to create more inclusive spaces that work to de-center whiteness by critically examining their current climate and culture and revising policies that perpetuate white supremacist culture in K-12 and higher education.⁵

Teacher preparation does not exist in a race-neutral context.⁶ Often teacher candidates of color are [overburdened](#) with the responsibility of helping their white peers confront their identities, stereotypes, and biases. This is also true for faculty of color working in programs that fail to intentionally address the issue of race.⁷ In addition, aspiring educators of color face recurring microaggressions from peers, faculty, and institutional policies that can instill feelings of self-doubt, isolation, and discouragement.⁸ EPPs must critically reflect upon ways their program may contribute to upholding structural racism and develop policies that create an anti-racist and anti-biased culture. This includes recognizing the unique value and perspectives brought by students and faculty of color, actively working to increase their presence within the program, and affirming their identity through culturally responsive curricula and pedagogical approaches.

EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION EXAMS

One of the most frequently cited barriers for aspiring educators of color are Educator Certification Exams. In North Carolina, aspiring educators must pass (or place out of) the [Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators](#) to enroll in an EPP and pass the [Praxis Subject Assessment](#) to qualify for a license. Nationally, both Black and Hispanic candidates for certification lag behind their white counterparts in pass rates, effectively barring many of them from a career in teaching. For example, Black candidates are approximately half as likely to pass the elementary licensing exam as their white peers, and just over half of all Hispanic educators who take the exam earn a passing score.⁹ Due to unequal access to foundational knowledge and lack of exposure to test-taking strategies, which starts in the K-12 setting, educators of color are at a disadvantage when taking educator licensing exams.^{10,11} Further, cultural biases that are embedded in the assessments, as well as the cost of the test itself, create [additional challenges](#) for aspiring educators of color.

With the exception of math educators, evidence suggests that educator licensure exams are a poor predictor for educator quality among all educators.¹² Students of color more consistently experience increased levels of achievement with race-matching educators, with this effect being most prominent for those who are taught by Black educators that score relatively low on the licensing exam.¹³ Yet states have sought to increase the minimum passing score for such exams with the intention of increasing the quality of the educator workforce.

Lessons from the Field | Highlights of Successful Programs Nationally and in North Carolina

To substantively increase the pool of qualified educators of color, states must invest in building high-retention, supportive pathways into teaching. In addition, there are a number of research-based practices that can improve educator preparation, including offering ongoing mentorship, tutoring, exam stipends, job placement services, and other supports that ensure successful completion of preparation programs.¹⁴ However, developing these programs alone will not affect meaningful change. In addition, educator preparation programs must also reflect upon their current practices through a critical race theory lens to inform institutional changes that ensure their climate and culture is inclusive and sustaining for preservice teachers of color.

INVESTING IN HISTORICALLY MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTIONS

North Carolina is home to 11 accredited historically minority-serving institutions (HMSIs) that are leading the way in recruiting and preparing educators of color. For decades these institutions have been a driving force in increasing postsecondary access for students of color and preparing racially and ethnically diverse educators. The state's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have traditionally been the primary conduit through which North Carolina's educators of color emerge. Nationally, educators of color who attended an HMSI were more likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree from a school/ department of education than educators of color who attended a predominantly white institution (PWI).¹⁵ While policymakers and higher education leaders should look to the institutional knowledge and methods of HMSIs to inspire reforms in the state's PWIs, the work of preparing a racially and ethnically diverse educator workforce must be centered by the efforts of the state's historically minority-serving institutions.

Doing so will require significant long-term investments on the part of policymakers. Despite bipartisan support for their important role in providing higher education to students of color, many HMSIs, and especially HBCUs, [are facing significant financial challenges](#). Even with the recent boost in federal funding via the FUTURE Act, Dr. Michael Lomax, President and CEO of the [United Negro College Fund](#) (UNCF), has [called for additional long term commitments](#) from state and federal governments to overcome the long-standing inequities faced by HBCUs.

NC A&Teach

In 2020, the [National Math and Science initiative](#) partnered with the UNCF to design [UTeach STEM](#) teacher preparation programs at HBCUs across the nation, including NC A&T State University. This initiative, funded by the Fund II Foundation, seeks to identify and recruit undergraduate STEM majors into teaching and represents an increased private commitment to educator diversity. The program, dubbed [NC A&Teach](#), seeks to [integrate culturally relevant pedagogy and inquiry-based instructional methods into discipline-specific content](#) and provides participants with extensive field experience and a veteran middle or high school STEM teacher to act as a mentor.

REFINING PROGRAMMATIC CURRICULUM AND CULTURE

As North Carolina’s student population continues to become more diverse, culturally responsive pedagogy is a critical element in adapting to the demands of a multicultural classroom. Culturally responsive teaching is a student-centered approach that recognizes students’ cultural strengths in all aspects of learning to promote student achievement and provide a sense of well-being about the student’s cultural place in the world. While much of the research suggests that educators of color are able to find success in the classroom due to the soft skills and cultural competencies they acquired from their lived experience, pre-service educators of color do not innately enter educator preparation programs with a universal understanding of culturally responsive teaching.¹⁶ In North Carolina, many, but not all, EPPs provide multicultural courses for their pre-service teachers to ensure that teachers are prepared to excel in a culturally-diverse classroom environment.

In many cases, EPPs assume their curricular commitment to culturally responsive pedagogy represents a sufficient effort to address equity within their program.¹⁷ In doing so, these institutions fail to address the invisible and embedded practices of the university, and often the faculty, that deny or ignore cultural and linguistic differences, thus constraining progress made as a result of culturally responsive curricula. Instead, these institutions should commit to strategically centering the voices and experience of people of color by:

- Developing systems to solicit regular feedback from participants of color and ensure diverse teacher candidate representation in program or department advisory committees to give voice to their experiences and inform policy.
- Increasing the diversity of teacher education faculty, mentor teachers, and other professional staff involved in the preparation of candidates. When this is financially or practically challenging, institutions can alternatively offer professional development for white faculty on diversity, equity, and inclusion to address bias and foster a culture that is receptive to discussions of power, race, and gender.¹⁸
- Developing communities of sociocultural support through mentoring programs, affinity groups, or cultural/linguistic programming to provide a space for reflecting on shared experiences and support for teacher candidates of color.^{19, 20, 21}

TEACHER LICENSURE EXAM REFORM

States can maintain rigorous educator certification processes while not unnecessarily limiting access for educators of color. This can be achieved by reforming the licensing process to provide more opportunities to take the exams, subsidizing testing fees, improving the accessibility of test prep programming, and increasing accountability among educator preparation programs for licensing exams.

North Carolina has already taken steps to address state licensure exam pass rates by allowing candidates three years to pass the Praxis Subject Assessment while still being allowed to teach under a Professional Educator’s Initial License. Additionally, in 2019, the legislature passed House Bill 107, requiring Educator Preparation Program reporting systems to disaggregate performance measures by demographics. Doing so will increase transparency among the programs, including their ability to prepare prospective educators for licensure. However, this does not benefit potential undergraduate teacher candidates in EPPs who cannot be admitted to teacher training programs without passing the Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators assessment.

Educator preparation programs can also make intentional reforms to improve licensure pass rates. The Academy for Teacher Excellence (ATE) at the University of Texas at San Antonio, a Hispanic-Serving Institution, restructured its preparation efforts to address the needs of its students, 86 percent of whom were Hispanic. By providing students with continuous support using a cohort model and adapting its curricula to make it more culturally relevant and aligned to the state certification standards, the ATE’s licensure pass rate increased from 60 percent to 97 percent from 2002 to 2007.²²

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Community Colleges represent an underutilized resource in recruiting and preparing candidates into the educator pipeline. Black and Hispanic students are more likely to enroll in two-year institutions but have lower transfer rates to four-year institutions.²³ The North Carolina Community College System offers extensive course articulation agreements which allow community college coursework that leads to an associate degree to count toward a bachelor’s degree in an educator preparation program. North Carolina is a leader in course articulation agreements, with over 11,000 students transferring community college credits to schools in the UNC System in the fall of 2018, a 27 percent increase since these agreements were introduced in 2014.²⁴

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO FIRST ENROLLED AT A TWO-YEAR INSTITUTION AND LATER TRANSFERRED TO A FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTION (2011 COHORT)

<i>Black Students</i>	28.4%
<i>Hispanic Students</i>	37.2%
<i>White Students</i>	44.7%

Source

NCCC's Career and College Promise Pathways

NC Community College System's [New Teacher Preparation Curriculum Standards and Career and College Promise \(CCP\) Pathways](#), launching in the fall of 2020, will expand two-year degree programs in education and allow high school students to graduate with college credits toward teacher education. While it is not explicitly designed to create a clear pathway for racially and ethnically diverse educators, by reducing the financial burden of postsecondary attainment and simplifying the transfer pipeline of aspiring educators, this program is reducing the impact of two major barriers for students of color.

STRONG CLINICAL PLACEMENTS AND PRACTICES

Pre-service educators, regardless of racial and/or ethnic identity, benefit from high quality field experiences with accomplished veteran educators. With this in mind, stakeholders should identify and propagate programs that provide these clinical opportunities and reflect upon how these models can be applied to preparing and retaining educators of color. Additionally, these field experiences should be designed to expose students to diverse contexts and mentors, while also introducing students to the schools, students, and communities they are likely to serve.²⁵

Teacher Residency Model | Not to be confused with the [North Carolina Residency License](#), Educator Residency Programs place postgraduates in year-long internships at a public school where they receive mentoring, coaching, and graduate-level coursework, culminating in certification. This high-retention pathway is built upon strong partnerships between districts and IHEs and provides participants with an affordable path to certification in exchange for a commitment to teach in a district for an additional three to four years. A hallmark of residency programs is the practical experience candidates receive during their year-long mentorship with an accomplished veteran teacher. This offers an opportunity for hands-on experience in a controlled environment, alongside graduate coursework through the university partnership.²⁶

A number of teacher residency programs across the nation have an expressed mission to increase the diversity of the educator workforce. The [Boston Teacher Residency program](#), an AmeriCorps program, commits to graduating cohorts that are comprised of at least 50 percent people of color. Currently, 49 percent of the program's graduates identify as people of color, with 35 percent identifying as Black or Latino/a. Additionally, 71 percent of Boston Teacher Residency graduates remain teaching in Boston Public Schools through their sixth year, compared to only 51 percent of their peers.

ALTERNATIVE PREPARATION | PROVIDING BOTH QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Alternative preparation programs represent an enticing solution for preparing more educators of color. These programs are often less expensive, offer flexible scheduling, allow participants to teach while earning their certification, and educators of color are more likely to enroll in alternative pathways than their white peers.

However, even when controlling for student, teacher, and school characteristics, alternatively-certified teachers are [less likely to be retained than their traditionally-certified counterparts](#). There is significant variation as to the methods and quality of alternative preparation programs, but on average these teachers engage in fewer hours of coursework and student teaching.²⁷ Research suggests that these factors are key indicators of novice teacher retention, as teachers who enter the classroom with limited preparation are two to three times as likely to leave their schools.²⁸

Even so, these programs are an important source of educators of color. Strengthening alternative preparation pathways will be key in developing a robust and multifaceted pipeline, and states can do so by requiring that they incorporate research-based best practices [including mentoring opportunities, asset-based approaches, and professional learning communities](#).

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