



Issue Brief: Retention & Recruitment

North Carolina's average teacher pay is below 3 of its 4 neighboring states and 5th out of 12 southeastern states.¹ Further, NC school districts began the 2024-25 school year with more than 8,300 vacancies statewide.² The goal is to provide the best teacher in every classroom and the best possible personnel throughout each school.

NCSBA Position & Recommendations

For purposes of retention, NCSBA recommends that the General Assembly **increase the number of salary steps to cover every other year between year 15 and year 24 at the minimum**; currently, the steps flatline after year 15 until year 25. NCSBA also recommends that the legislature provide **pay raises for every school employee** (with an extra focus on **STEM teachers, Exceptional Children teachers, and bus drivers**) and ensure NC's **average teacher pay is #1 in the Southeast** (which is equivalent to the top 20 in the nation). NCSBA further recommends that the legislature provide **supplemental pay**, including education-based salary supplements.

For purposes of recruitment, NCSBA recommends that the General Assembly **expand recruitment programs** to address the large number of vacancies and the lack of a teacher pipeline. NCSBA also recommends that the legislature provide **signing bonuses**.

Background

Currently, there are a variety of recruitment programs in North Carolina that target high school students (e.g., NC Teacher Cadet Program) and college students (e.g., NC Teaching Fellows), as well as retention programs for current teachers (e.g., Advanced Teaching Roles Program). However, results of the 2024 Teacher Working Conditions Survey show only minimal increases in teachers who say they plan to

¹ Educator Pay Data 2024, National Education Association, accessed October 2024.

² North Carolina School Superintendents' Association (NCSA) Vacancy Survey Data, September 9, 2024.

continue teaching at their current school.³ Additionally, the statewide teacher attrition rate for the 2022-23 school year was 11.45%, which is an increase from the 7.78% attrition rate in the 2021-22 school year.⁴ The attrition rate for beginning teachers was over 15%, which is higher than the approximately 11% rate for all other teachers.

While **a competitive market salary plays an essential role in attracting and retaining high-quality, full-time teachers**, North Carolina continues to receive a low ranking for average teacher salary compared to other states. According to data from the 2022-23 fiscal year, **North Carolina ranks 38th in the nation for average teacher salary and 42nd in the nation for average beginning teacher salary**.⁵ The current NC teacher salary schedule includes annual step increases for teachers with 0-14 years of experience, starting at \$41,000 for the 2024-25 fiscal year. Teachers with at least 15 years of experience stay on the same pay level through their 24th year. **Once teachers reach 25 years, they receive a final step increase**, which is \$56,000 for the 2024-25 fiscal year.⁶ It's worth noting that **essential instructional support personnel are paid on the same salary schedule** as teachers and also face these issues.

In addition to a comparatively low state-funded teacher salary, there are several other areas that show NC's under-commitment to teachers. In 2013, the General Assembly **phased out the teacher salary supplement for master's degrees** and other advanced degrees. Currently, only teachers who were already receiving that supplement prior to the 2014-15 school year continue to receive it.⁷ They also eliminated retirement health benefits for all new employees with a hire date on or after January 1, 2021.

Lack of support for teachers can also be seen in the significantly low increase in teacher assistant (TA) funding levels since 2014-15.⁸ TAs are essential for

³ 2024 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, accessed February 2025.

⁴ Report to the North Carolina General Assembly: 2022-2023 State of the Teaching Profession in North Carolina, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, March 2024.

⁵ Educator Pay Data 2024, National Education Association, accessed February 2025.

⁶ North Carolina State Salary Schedules, FY 2024-2025, State Board of Education, July 10, 2024.

⁷ 2013 Annotated Conference Committee Report, North Carolina General Assembly Fiscal Research Division, November 6, 2013.

⁸ North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profile, Table 16, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, accessed February 2024.

retaining teachers and improving student outcomes, as they provide instructional support that allows students to receive a more individualized education.

STEM Teachers: STEM competency and preparing learners to enter a world where that knowledge plays a vital and expanding role in North Carolina’s economic growth, public health, and tech advancement is of great importance. Yet, other fields can draw STEM-focused experts away from the teacher pipeline towards higher paying private-market jobs. **When surveyed, a number of school districts in North Carolina reported that they are facing a shortage crisis in filling vacancies for STEM teaching positions, especially in math and science.** STEM comprises a majority of historically hard-to-staff subjects yet focus on recruiting and retaining this specific population of teachers has been unrealized at the statewide level.

Exceptional Children (EC) Teachers: Per an October 2024 report to the General Assembly, there are approximately 213,211 total public school students with disabilities (3-21 years of age) in North Carolina, but we are confident the true figure is higher (PSUs with less than 10 students with disabilities are withheld from the official count for privacy reasons).⁹ **Yet, EC teachers are becoming one of the toughest positions to fill.** At the beginning of the 2024-25 school year, school districts statewide reported **787 EC teacher vacancies**.¹⁰ Further, in 2022, nearly 81% of school districts across the state reported having a higher number of students with disabilities than is covered by the 13% State funding cap.¹¹ It is critical, therefore, that lawmakers continue to raise the funding cap with the goal of eliminating it. **NCSBA believes additional pay and support will go a long way in retaining these essential teachers.**

Additionally, the 1975 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) says the federal government will cover 40% of the extra cost of educating a student with disabilities,¹² but it is consistently reported that federal funding has never reached that target.¹³ In fact, roughly 18% funding in 2005 is the closest federal funding has

⁹ Students with Disabilities – Definition of Residence, Report to the General Assembly, October 2024.

¹⁰ “NC public schools have over 8,000 vacancies this fall. And that’s an improvement,” Liz Schlemmer for WUNC, September 16, 2024.

¹¹ Report to the North Carolina General Assembly: North Carolina Special Education Funding Recommendations, Department of Public Instruction and RTI International. August 12, 2022.

¹² Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, 20 U.S.C. § (1975), accessed February 2025.

¹³ “More money is not enough: The case for reconsidering federal special education funding formulas,” Tammy Kolbe, Elizabeth Dhuey, and Sara Menlove Doutre for Brookings, October 3, 2022.

come to meeting the threshold.¹⁴ **As a result of these funding discrepancies, local school districts are forced to cover additional costs, which not only affects hiring and retaining EC teachers but also limits access to special education curriculum, equipment, and technology.** As a result, other educational programs and services are cut.

Bus Drivers & Non-Certified Personnel: School districts statewide continue to struggle filling non-certified personnel positions, particularly bus drivers. Reports show that bus routes are getting cancelled, and many students are either getting to school late or not getting to school at all. **At the beginning of the 2024-25 school year, school districts statewide reported 1,315 bus driver vacancies.**¹⁵ This bus driver shortage is a crisis that is both a safety and academic issue because students are expected to securely arrive at school on time and back home at the correct stop.

These positions are not particularly easy to fill because bus drivers are required to complete training and testing prior to employment, which still doesn't guarantee their tenure as a bus driver. Requirements for a commercial driver's license (CDL) for bus driving include completing a school bus driver training class, passing up to four different knowledge tests, successfully completing behind-the-wheel training, and passing skills tests.¹⁶ A CDL is also required for similar State agency and private sector jobs, many of which pay a higher base salary. **Districts are losing out on bus drivers to a higher-paying pipeline into the private sector created by the demand for CDL licenses.**

In addition to the bus driver vacancies reported at the beginning of 2024-25, **school districts across North Carolina reported 2,983 non-certified personnel vacancies.** That's over 35% of the total reported vacancies for that school year. As of July 1, 2022, any State funded noncertified personnel hired by a public school is legally required to be paid \$15 per hour.¹⁷ While this compensation is an improvement compared to previous years and can be used as a recruitment tool, it has the **potential to decrease retention because a new hire can receive a similar income as someone who has been employed by a public school for several**

¹⁴ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Consortium of State School Board Associations, August 2024.

¹⁵ "NC public schools have over 8,000 vacancies this fall. And that's an improvement," Liz Schlemmer for WUNC, September 16, 2024.

¹⁶ School Bus Endorsements: Requirements, North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles, accessed February 2025.

¹⁷ Section 7A.8 of S.L. 2022-74, accessed February 2025.

years.¹⁸ The lack of a differentiated salary for longevity and seniority can lead to workplace dissatisfaction and turnover for even the most dedicated and successful non-certified school personnel.

¹⁸ SL 2022-74, Non-Certified Salary FAQ (2022-23 School Year), North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, accessed February 2025.