

Consortium for  
Educational  
Research and  
Evaluation–  
North  
Carolina

# North Carolina Teacher Corps Start-Up and Teach for America Expansion

## Initial Findings on Recruitment, Training, and Employment

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Carolina



***Disclaimer:*** Some of the Appendices in this report detail Consortium for Educational Research and Evaluation–North Carolina (CERE–NC) fieldwork at Teach for America–Eastern North Carolina (TFA-ENC) sites during the 2011-12 school year. This fieldwork was conducted in preparation for CERE–NC’s North Carolina Teacher Corps (NCTC) evaluation work and is included in addition to the required components of this first report as described in the Detailed Scope of Work agreed upon between CERE–NC and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). These Appendices have been included as part of CERE–NC’s efforts to provide information relevant to the formative development of NCTC and to CERE–NC’s approach to its evaluation.

By including these additional components, CERE–NC does not intend to establish (a) a formal connection between the preliminary TFA-ENC findings and expected outcomes for NCTC, (b) guidelines for the direction of the development of NCTC, or (c) changes in the overall structure of the evaluation. All evaluation work will continue to be guided by the Scope of Work for the NCTC and TFA-ENC evaluations as approved by NCDPI in June 2011.

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**NORTH CAROLINA TEACHER CORPS START-UP AND TEACH FOR AMERICA  
EXPANSION: INITIAL FINDINGS ON RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, AND  
EMPLOYMENT**

**Executive Summary**

The Consortium for Educational Research and Evaluation–North Carolina is evaluating North Carolina’s use of Race to the Top (RttT) funds to develop a North Carolina Teacher Corps (NCTC) and to expand the presence of Teach for America (TFA) in the state. The evaluation’s goals are to assess the extent to which these programs contribute to an increase in the presence of effective teachers in high-need schools and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) targeted in the RttT proposal. This first report presents baseline measures for future evaluations of NCTC, describes early results of TFA’s expansion under RttT via its Eastern North Carolina (TFA-ENC) chapter, and provides formative feedback to NCTC in support of its growth and improvement.

***Initial Observations and Findings: North Carolina Teacher Corps***

*Recruitment*

- NCTC participated in 20 recruitment events across the state between February and June, 2012. Five of these events each attracted interest from 30 or more potential recruits, with the highest numbers at the Research Triangle Park National Career Fair (61) and an East Carolina University event (60).
- In all, 441 of the 481 candidates expressing interest came from the 20 recruitment events, and 113 eventually applied.
- Forty-two of the 113 applicants were invited to attend the inaugural NCTC Summer Institute, 34 of whom attended; of those 34, 29 remained in the program for the start of the 2012-13 school year.
- Almost 90% of the inaugural NCTC cohort attended North Carolina colleges or universities, in line with the program’s goal to recruit in-state individuals.
- Recruitment for 2013-14 began in September 2012 and will include two acceptance dates: December 2012 and March 2013.

*Inaugural Summer Institute*

- The NCTC Summer Institute took place over three weeks, with an initial three-day training session followed by a two-week in-school practicum. The Institute concluded with a one-day follow-up training session.
- The three-day training session provided corps members with training on state policies, the state’s new Common Core and Essential Standards, and basic pedagogy.

## *NCTC Start-Up and TFA Expansion*

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- The in-school practicum paired corps members with practicing teachers in year-round schools. NCTC also provided periodic after-hours Round Table meetings during the practicum period, during which issues and concerns raised by corps members were addressed.
- During their practicum experiences, corps members indicated that the Summer Institute was beneficial overall, but that both the training sessions and the practicum were too short, with a need for additional guidance and training on lesson-planning and subject-specific pedagogy.

### *Employment and Distribution of Corps Members (2012-13)*

- For the 2012-13 school year, NCTC fell short of its first-year goal of securing employment for 100 new corps members in high-need schools not served by TFA.
- To date, 22 of the 29 NCTC corps members have secured employment in 9 of the 18 eligible school districts.
- Two corps members are in RttT District and School Transformation (DST) schools, 17 are in LEAs with RttT DST schools, and 3 are in an LEA with a history of high teacher turnover.

### *Characteristics of Past and Current Eastern North Carolina Teach for America Corps Members*

- In total, TFA placed or retained 157 corps members in Eastern North Carolina at the beginning of school year 2011-12, and 219 corps members at the beginning of 2012-13.
- For the 2010-11, 2011-12, and 2012-13 school years, RttT funds helped TFA-ENC meet its overall goal for growth in Eastern North Carolina—TFA-ENC supported 20, 90, and 115 of its total number of corps members in those three years with RttT funds.
- Since 2008, about 87% of TFA-ENC corps members have completed two full years of teaching; however, the retention rate for the 2010 cohort (84%) was somewhat lower than the rate for the two preceding cohorts.
- TFA-ENC corps members who are dismissed or depart early do not appear to be different than those who stay in terms of GPA, leadership potential, or undergraduate institution selectivity.
- Between 2011 and 2012, TFA-ENC increased the number of corps members intentionally placed in school-level “pods” (clusters of three or more teachers); TFA-ENC formed pods in 21 of 44 participating schools in 2011-12, and in 33 of 51 participating schools in 2012-13.

### *Recommendations and Suggested Best Practices for North Carolina Teacher Corps*

#### *Recruitment*

- *Expand the use of Internet recruitment tools.* NCTC should consider providing recruits with immediate access to application materials at career fairs, and it should explore supplementing face-to-face recruitment with Internet-based and other social networking strategies.
- *Customize recruitment activities for multiple audiences.* To date, NCTC’s approach to recruitment has been similar for each event, even though the potential candidates who attend them are different; NCTC should make efforts to adjust its recruitment approach from event

to event to reflect these differences. In addition, NCTC should develop discussion points (to accompany current recruitment materials) that help set expectations for candidates with respect to both the opportunities and the challenges they will face in targeted schools.

- *Develop relationships with recruitment event sponsors and hosts.* Event sponsors or others on campus with ties to campus organizations and student groups that share values similar to those of NCTC may be good ongoing resources for corps member recruitment. Such relationships can result in extending recruitment to opportunities beyond the career fairs.

### *Summer Institute*

- *Extend and expand the Summer Institute.* As budget, recruitment, and partnering allow, NCTC should consider beginning Summer Institute earlier in the summer to allow for more time to: (a) cover in greater depth the mechanics of teaching (e.g., lesson planning); (b) extend modules so that they can better model effective teaching practices; and (c) extend each corps member's practicum experience.
- *Offer pre-Summer Institute in-school experiences.* Arranging informal observation time in schools for corps members before the Summer Institute begins—something now possible because of NCTC's earlier recruitment calendar—will provide important context and help set expectations for corps members as they transition to Summer Institute and their schools.
- *Seek Summer Institute partnerships.* An arrangement in which NCTC conducts part of its Summer Institute in partnership with other new teacher summer training and induction programs has the potential to (a) reduce costs, (b) pool intellectual resources and expertise, and (c) support the development of a larger, statewide network of first-year teachers.

### *Employment*

- *Dedicate more resources to multiple components of the employment process.* As time and resources allow, NCTC should: (a) consider de-emphasizing corps member LEA preference as a criterion in the employment process; (b) increase the amount of information provided to corps members about the employment process; and (c) consult with other programs to identify additional strategies for promoting individual corps members for specific positions.
- *Target schools and LEAs that demonstrate a capacity for supporting corps members and their development, and provide additional support for corps members in schools that do not.* Ideal employment settings are host schools with cultures or structures that facilitate a sense of community and integration for all staff members. In addition, NCTC should investigate ways to provide corps members with techniques for successful school integration, both prior to employment and throughout their first year of teaching.
- *Monitor closely the experiences of corps members employed in schools at which no other corps members are employed.* TFA-ENC focus group data indicate that, in some cases, corps member isolation may negatively impact retention. Expansion of social networking tool use may help.
- *Attempt to fit school-level cohort size to school, LEA, and corps member needs.* Evidence from TFA-ENC focus groups suggests that an optimal number of corps members at a single school is between three and five—larger clusters (or “pods”) hinder healthy integration of corps members into the larger school community, and small pods may not support retention goals.

## **Introduction**

Education experts and researchers agree that effective teachers are critical to the academic success of students, but all too often, students who struggle the most do not have access to them. Concern about the uneven access of low-performing, poor, and minority students to effective teachers is a foundational motivation for the United States Department of Education's Race to the Top (RttT) program, which encouraged applicants to propose ways in which states could work to counter this persistent trend. In response, North Carolina's proposal offered several state-level initiatives for achieving a more equitable distribution of effective teachers statewide, including:

- Strengthening the development of novice teachers in the lowest-performing schools (New Teacher Support Program);
- Making further use of blended classes for students in an attempt to expand curriculum offerings and provide effective instruction when effective teachers for a subject are not available locally (Virtual Public School Blended Learning);
- Employing strategic staffing approaches to optimize the distribution of available human capital (State and Local Strategic Staffing Initiatives); and
- Increasing the number of highly-qualified teachers in low-income rural areas and high-need urban schools.

For this last initiative, North Carolina's RttT proposal included support for two separate but related staffing approaches: (1) development of a North Carolina Teacher Corps (NCTC), a program that recruits and trains in-state talent for employment in teaching positions in high-need schools not served by Teach for America (TFA); and (2) expansion of the TFA chapter in eastern North Carolina (TFA-ENC).

### ***Descriptions of the Programs***

#### *North Carolina Teacher Corps*

*Mission and Goals.* The mission of NCTC is to recruit and develop successful recent graduates of North Carolina colleges and universities, as well as mid-career professionals, to serve as teachers in high-need<sup>1</sup> schools across the state. NCTC teachers—or “corps members”—enter the profession as lateral entry teachers and serve in high-need schools across the state, primarily in the subject areas of science, mathematics, and special education. Corps members are asked to make a minimum two-year commitment to their NCTC partner schools.

*Eligibility and Employment.* To be eligible for participation in NCTC, participants must either (a) hold a bachelor's degree in, or (b) have 24 semester hours of credit in, or (c) pass the Praxis II teacher licensing examination in the subject area of her or his potential teaching assignment. Participants also must meet North Carolina's minimum academic proficiency requirements for

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<sup>1</sup> Broadly defined; “high-need” can refer to schools formally identified via a federal or state program (such as District and School Transformation), but it also can refer to schools identified as high-need relative to other schools in an LEA, regardless of raw performance or other outcome measures.

lateral entry licensure.<sup>2</sup> Eligible candidates are invited to become corps members after successful completion of a multi-step screening process. They are then provided with a list of eligible partner Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to which they can apply. Corps members seek their own employment opportunities, with support from the program.

*Training and Ongoing Support.* NCTC provides new corps members with a three-day training session each summer, followed by a two-week teaching practicum. Ongoing support includes: teacher licensure coursework; a series of periodic professional development sessions tailored to candidate needs; instructional coaching site visits once to twice per month; face-to-face and online mentoring; an online information portal (the NCTC Wiki); and access to professional learning communities (both subject-area based and proximity-based).

*Expected Outcomes and Changes in Original Implementation Timeline.* The original implementation timeline projected employment of the first cohort of 50 corps members in schools for the 2011-12 school year, with 100 more corps members each employed in 2012-13 and 2013-14, for a total of 250 corps members over three school years. In April 2011, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) received approval from the United States Department of Education for changes in the timeline. The state's current Detailed Scope of Work for RttT activities (August 2012) outlines the revised list of expected activities and outcomes associated with the NCTC initiative:

- Develop a program to recruit in-state talent for high-need schools not served by TFA<sup>3</sup>:
  - Plan and recruit during the 2011-12 school year;
  - Train and secure employment for 100 participants in the first cohort for the 2012-13 school year; and
  - Expand the program for the 2013-14 school year by adding 150 new participants.

NCDPI hired an Executive Director for NCTC in January 2012, with two additional staff hired in February and June. Recruitment of the initial cohort began in earnest in February 2012.

### *Teach for America*

*Mission and Goals.* TFA trains corps members and places them in schools where they can contribute to the elimination of educational disparities. Specifically, TFA seeks to (a) recruit college graduates with a proven record of academic success at their undergraduate institutions, (b) expand and develop the leadership potential of their corps members, and (c) sustain their impact through alumni who continue to pursue solutions to expanding provision of high-quality education for all children. Corps members are expected to serve two-year terms in the low-income schools in which they are placed.

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<sup>2</sup> General lateral entry academic achievement requirements: Either an overall GPA of 2.5, or a minimum passing score on the Praxis I plus a GPA of 3.0 in her or his major or in her or his senior year, or five years of relevant experience in the chosen subject area (<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/licensure/lateralentry.pdf>).

<sup>3</sup> An exception was made in 2012-13 to allow NCTC corps member placement in Durham County, which is served by TFA, but only at one school.

*Eligibility and Employment.* TFA recruits on a national scale from a pool of recent college graduates and professionals. Specifically, TFA seeks candidates who demonstrate: (a) a belief that all students have the potential to succeed; (b) leadership and strong interpersonal skills; (c) achievement in academic, interpersonal, and professional environments; (d) perseverance, adaptability, and a desire for continuous self-improvement; (e) a high level of critical thinking skills; (f) organizational and management skills; and (g) a desire and willingness to work with people from different backgrounds. Applicants must hold a bachelor's degree and a minimum GPA of 2.5. Successful candidates pass an initial screening and complete two interviews. In 2012, TFA received approximately 50,000 applications and only accepted 5,000 (10%) as corps members.

During the application process, applicants to TFA rank their placement preferences from the full list of regions served by TFA nationwide. As a result, most of the applicants who ultimately are placed with the ENC chapter of TFA (about 80%) are not native North Carolinians. TFA-ENC works jointly with LEAs and corps members to secure employment opportunities.

*Training and Ongoing Support.* TFA provides corps members with a series of regional and site-specific training opportunities during the summer prior to their placement, including a five-week teaching practicum. New members of the TFA-ENC chapter in 2012 participated in the regional Summer Institute in Houston, Texas. Once corps members are engaged in teaching, ongoing support is provided via regionally-based staff who oversee coaching and observation activities as well as professional development sessions. TFA corps members also participate in professional learning communities and have access to various online resources to aid their teaching.

*Expected Outcomes.* The state's Detailed Scope of Work for RttT activities outlines the expected activities and outcomes associated with the TFA-ENC expansion initiative:

- Expand the Teach for America presence in North Carolina by 340 corps members between 2010-11 and 2013-14:
  - Expansion targets: Increase by 20 corps members in 2010-11, increase by 90 corps members in 2011-12, increase by 115 corps members in 2012-13, and increase by 115 corps members in 2013-14.

### ***Purpose of the Report***

The Consortium for Educational Research and Evaluation–North Carolina (CERE–NC)<sup>4</sup> is conducting the evaluation of North Carolina's RttT initiatives. The roles of the RttT Evaluation Team are to (1) document the activities of the RttT initiatives; (2) provide timely, formative data, analyses, and recommendations to help the initiative teams improve their ongoing work; and (3) provide summative evaluation results toward the end of the grant period to determine whether the RttT initiatives met their goals and to inform future policy and program decisions to sustain, modify, or discontinue initiatives after the grant-funded period.

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<sup>4</sup> CERE–NC is a partnership of the Carolina Institute for Public Policy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University, and the SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

An overriding goal of the evaluation of the development of NCTC and of the expansion of TFA-ENC will be to determine whether and to what extent they collectively or individually contribute to an increase in the presence of effective teachers in target schools and LEAs. This report begins the process of examining these plans by establishing baseline measures for first-year NCTC implementation in the areas of recruitment, training, and employment, as well as for early results of TFA-ENC expansion.

*Relevant Overall Research Questions for Teacher and Leader Supply and Distribution*

The NCTC and TFA-ENC evaluation is one of several included in the larger evaluation of the initiatives designed to impact the supply and distribution of effective teachers and leaders (listed above). There are four overarching questions that guide all of the evaluations of these initiatives:

- What is the nature and quality of the experience: a) for students and b) for participating teachers?
- Are students affected by these programs better off than similar students in similar schools and districts not served by these programs?
- Are these initiatives cost-effective and sustainable?
- To what extent do the initiatives meet critical needs for teachers and principals and improve equitable access to higher-quality teachers and leaders in targeted geographic and content areas?

*Questions Specific to the NCTC and TFA-ENC Evaluation*

In addition, there are specific evaluation questions that govern the evaluations of the NCTC and TFA-ENC initiatives. They include:

Capacity

1. Do TFA-ENC and NCTC meet demand for beginning teachers in high-need schools?
2. What does operating the TFA-ENC program and the NCTC program cost? Specifically, are either or both programs cost-effective, relative to the alternatives?

Preparation Quality

3. What is the quality of the NCTC Summer Institute experience? Specifically, how do teachers prepared by NCTC rate their experience, in terms of the preparation it provides them for their teaching assignments?
4. Has overall corps member quality changed as a result of TFA-ENC's expansion and/or the advent of NCTC recruitment efforts?

Initiative Effectiveness

5. Are NCTC teachers more likely than a) other new teachers in general and b) TFA corps members in particular to remain in teaching beyond their original commitment?

6. What role does recruitment of NC students have on retention of non-traditional, selectively-chosen teacher candidates?
7. What role does the “teaching pod” concept<sup>5</sup> have on retention of NCTC and TFA-ENC teachers?

### Teacher Effectiveness

8. Are TFA and NCTC teachers more effective than traditionally-prepared teachers? Specifically, how do outcomes of students served by TFA and NCTC students compare to students who took similar courses in the same schools with teachers who entered the profession via other portals?

It is important to note that, because TFA-ENC’s contracted use of RttT funds only applies to increasing the number of corps members serving in Eastern North Carolina, the evaluation questions with TFA components focus only on issues directly related to that expansion. The effectiveness of TFA corps members in terms of their estimated impact on student achievement is the focus of a separate series of reports completed annually by one of the three CERE-NC partners, the Carolina Institute for Public Policy (CIPP).<sup>6</sup> CERE-NC will continue to rely on the work of CIPP to provide estimations of TFA corps member effectiveness; NCTC corps member effectiveness will be incorporated in future CIPP reports as well, once the number of NCTC corps members in tested subject areas reaches a minimum number required for meaningful quantitative analysis.

### ***Structure of the Report***

The focus of this first report is on providing baseline data and evidence to support efforts to address several of these evaluation questions (Questions 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6). The report begins with an examination of the first year of NCTC recruitment (Evaluation Questions 1 and 6), followed by an overview and initial assessments of NCTC’s first Summer Institute for training the new corps members (Evaluation Question 3). The report then provides a descriptive analysis of current and (in the case of TFA-ENC) past cohort membership data, including information about their distribution across North Carolina (Evaluation Questions 1, 4, and 5). The body of the report ends with preliminary formative recommendations for NCTC, as well as a preview of the next stages in the evaluation of these initiatives.

The Evaluation Team completed several observations of TFA training activities and conducted site visits to TFA-ENC host schools in North Carolina’s Northeast region during the course of the 2011-12 school year, with a goal of refining the Team’s approach to addressing several of the NCTC evaluation questions. During the data analysis process, the Team determined that the initial findings could be of potential use to the NCTC Team as it conducted its first Summer Institute and prepared for the initial employment of the first cohort of NCTC Members. Thus, in addition to the required elements of the report listed above, this first report also includes data and

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<sup>5</sup> The “pod” concept refers to the idea of intentionally placing corps members in clusters at individual schools, which, though not required as part of North Carolina’s RttT plan, has informed TFA placement in recent years and may become an option for NCTC as it grows. The concept is discussed in greater detail later in this report.

<sup>6</sup> The most recent of these reports (February 2012) can be found at:  
<http://publicpolicy.unc.edu/research/PortalsEffectivenessReport.pdf/view>.

analyses related to TFA-ENC activities throughout, where relevant. For example, the report draws from these initial findings to address specific issues such as the “pod” concept (Evaluation Question 7), but also to inform discussions of recruitment, training, and retention more broadly.

As part of this preparatory work with TFA-ENC, the Team submitted a preliminary, informal memorandum to NCTC ahead of this first required report to share those initial findings. Because the data and analyses that informed that memorandum have helped to structure the Team’s approach to analyzing data gathered for the NCTC evaluation, they are included as appendices (Appendices I, J, and K).

## **Data and Methods**

### *Data*

#### *TFA-ENC and NCTC Cohort and Employment Data*

TFA provided descriptive data for members of their 2008-09 through 2012-13 cohorts to CERE-NC. Data were obtained through secure file transfer protocols with all personal identification stripped and replaced by a single unique identifier generated by CERE-NC partner CIPP to ensure confidentiality. The de-identified data include information about former and current corps member standing (e.g., whether the corps member were an alumnus/-a, an active corps member, or a corps member who left or was excused from the program early), cumulative grade-point average (GPA), undergraduate university or college, the selectivity of that university or college (as determined by *U.S. News & World Report*),<sup>7</sup> and a leadership potential score generated by TFA as part of its screening and admissions process.

NCTC provided similar descriptive data for their inaugural 2012-13 cohort. Data were obtained and de-identified in the manner described above. The de-identified data include information about intended licensure path and targeted licensure completion date, prior teaching experiences, desired teaching assignment grade(s) and subject(s), PRAXIS completion status, current alternative licensure qualification status, cumulative grade-point average, undergraduate university or college, the venue in which NCTC recruited the corps member, and a leadership experience score and candidate-commitment-to-the-NCTC-mission score, both generated by NCTC as part of its screening and admissions process.

#### *NCTC Recruitment Observation Data*

In Spring 2012, Evaluation Team members observed three of the 20 NCTC recruitment events and completed an approved observation protocol form (Appendix A). The events were held at university-sponsored career fairs located on campuses in the Eastern and Piedmont regions of the state. NCTC staff present at each event included the Executive Director and the Director.

#### *TFA and NCTC Summer Institute Observation Data*

*TFA Summer Institute.* Evaluation Team members attended and observed segments of three separate first-year TFA corps member pre-teaching events (two in Eastern North Carolina and one in Mississippi). Events observed:

- The TFA-ENC “Onboarding” event, a one-week session for orienting new TFA-ENC corps members to their region and to each other (Rocky Mount, NC; Evaluation Team attendance: June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012);

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<sup>7</sup> *U.S. News & World Report* methodology for generating college/university rankings: <http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2011/09/12/how-us-news-calculates-the-college-rankings-2012>

## *NCTC Start-Up and TFA Expansion*

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- A TFA National Summer Institute, one of the major, five-week super-regional summer trainings provided by the national TFA office in conjunction with participating regional chapters (Cleveland, MS; Evaluation Team attendance: June 27<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup>, 2011); and
- The TFA-ENC “Round Zero” event, a one-half-week final summer training before teaching begins (Rocky Mount, NC; Evaluation Team attendance, July 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>, 2011).

*NCTC Summer Institute.* Evaluation Team members also attended and observed representative segments of the inaugural NCTC first-year corps member training, all of which were held in Durham, North Carolina. The Team used an informal observation guide for observations of whole-group sessions (Appendix B). Events observed:

- A three-day Summer Institute opening program (July 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, 2012), which included a “Setting the Stage” all-day session, an “Effective Instructional Design” all-day session, and a “Creating a Positive Classroom Climate” all-day session (Evaluation Team attendance: all three sessions);
- A two-week in-school teaching practicum (July 19<sup>th</sup>-August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012), held in three Durham Public Schools partner schools (Evaluation Team observations: July 31<sup>st</sup> and August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012);
- Three after-hours “Round Table” sessions (July 24<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, and 31<sup>st</sup>, 2012), during which corps members gathered to share experiences and reflect (Evaluation Team observation: July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2012); and
- An all-day closing program (“Putting it all Together,” August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012; the Evaluation Team attended).

## *TFA-ENC Corps Member Survey*

A pre/post survey for TFA-ENC corps members was designed in early Spring 2011. Per negotiations with TFA-ENC, for the initial administration (at the beginning and end of the 2011-12 school year) the eight survey items were added to a longer survey administered by TFA-ENC in Fall 2011 and Spring 2012.

Items on the survey (Appendix C)—which were designed to elicit reflections from TFA-ENC corps members about experiences and impressions most directly relatable to the anticipated experiences of NCTC Members (advantages and disadvantages of being a part of a larger group, or “pod,” of corps members, feelings of isolation, likelihood of remaining in teaching beyond the two-year commitment)—were the same in the Fall and the Spring.<sup>8</sup> Results from the Fall 2011 survey and Spring 2012 survey are included in Appendix C, and technical notes are included in Appendix D.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> However, please see notes in Appendix C regarding inconsistencies in the response scales between the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 administrations.

<sup>9</sup> The TFA survey items parallel items on a separate survey that will be administered to NCTC Members beginning in Fall 2012. The NCTC survey includes three items specific to NCTC that are not included in the TFA survey; this instrument will be included in future reports.

*TFA-ENC and Non-TFA Novice Teacher Focus Groups*

In Summer 2011, after TFA-ENC completed school placement of all of its 2011 first-year corps members across ten LEAs and four charter schools, the Evaluation Team reviewed corps member distribution across those LEAs and schools and identified four school sites that reflected anticipated strategic employment procedures for NCTC (i.e., evidence of “pod” or intentional school-level clustering of corps members) and that also provided diversity in terms of school locale, size, type, demographics, and historical academic success.

The four sites selected included:

- One rural, traditional elementary school with a very high proportion of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (>75%), a very low performance composite (<35% of students at or above proficiency) based on North Carolina’s accountability model (the ABCs of Public Education [ABCs]), and a very high teacher turnover rate (>30%);
- One rural, traditional middle school with a very high proportion of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (>75%), a mid-low ABCs performance composite (<60%), and an above-average teacher turnover rate (>20%);
- One in-town traditional high school with a very high proportion of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (>75%), a mid-low NC ABCs performance composite (<60%), and a low teacher turnover rate (<10%); and
- One in-town charter secondary school with a high NC ABCs performance composite (>80%; no data available on free and reduced-price lunch eligibility or teacher turnover).

Evaluation Team members scheduled Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 focus groups with first-year TFA-ENC corps members at each of these schools and also, when possible, separate focus groups with early-career non-corps members (teachers at the same schools with less than three full years of teaching experience, typically trained in traditional teacher preparation programs). Non-corps members who were willing to participate were identified in two of the four schools. The focus group protocols are included in Appendix E.

***Methods***

*TFA-ENC and NCTC Cohort and Employment Data Analyses*

TFA-ENC cohort descriptive data were summarized and then analyzed for emerging patterns or trends that might help inform the development of NCTC recruitment and implementation. In particular, the analyses looked for associations between corps member characteristics and program completion. Variables of particular interest to the Evaluation Team included cumulative GPA, undergraduate university and college selectivity, and the TFA-developed leadership potential indicator. These three variables were examined using cross-tabulations, Pearson correlations, and logistic regressions to explore potential relationships among them, as well as relationships between these variables and outcome variables such as incidences of corps member dropout.

## *NCTC Start-Up and TFA Expansion*

October 2012

NCTC data were examined using only simple descriptive data analysis techniques (simple correlations and cross-tabulations) since the data were limited and composed of a very select sample, precluding more formal inferential approaches (Cohen et al., 2002; Wiersma & Jurs, 2008).

### *NCTC Recruitment Observation Analysis*

Three Evaluation Team members independently attended and observed one of three NCTC recruitment sessions. After completion of all observations, the attending Team members debriefed with each other as well as other members of the team. Observation narratives were combined and organized to reflect the three main components of the recruitment process, as identified by the Team: event logistics, organization and structure, and recruitment strategies.

### *TFA and NCTC Summer Institute Observation Analysis*

Every Evaluation Team member attended at least one of the TFA or NCTC Summer Institute events and wrote separate narratives about their observations. After each event, attending Evaluation Team members debriefed with each other, as well as with other members of the Team. Narratives then were combined and organized to reflect emerging themes.

*TFA Summer Institute themes:* Building corps member community, commitment, and enthusiasm; corps member integration into the school community; corps member integration into the community at large; becoming an effective teacher; support in the field; and support for out-of-field teaching.

*NCTC Summer Institute themes:* Building corps member knowledge and experience; preparation for the classroom; and material resources and continuous support.

### *Survey Analysis*

A preliminary review of the eight survey items suggested that Items 1 through 6 were indicators of a common factor: *Sense of Community*, and that Items 7 and 8 were indicators of a different, but related, common factor: *Strength of Community*. To supplement this preliminary review, two types of factor analysis were conducted using *Mplus* statistical software to identify (via exploratory factor analysis) and confirm (via confirmatory factor analysis) the underlying factor structure of the survey items. The factor analysis conducted on the Fall 2011 survey provided initial support for the theoretically predetermined two-factor structure, and the items loaded onto their respective factors as predicted by the preliminary review. Additional support for the two-factor structure was provided by the confirmatory factor analysis conducted on the Spring 2012 survey. Because the factors were deemed theoretically and empirically distinct, descriptive statistics analysis and reliability analysis was then conducted separately for each factor for both the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 surveys.

Both the preliminary review and empirical analysis provided evidence that the TFA-ENC corps member survey performed as intended, and that the survey was both valid and reliable. The preliminary review of the survey and of the items provided evidence of content validity. Descriptive statistics (e.g., arithmetic means and standard deviations of each item) and distributional properties were appropriate and aligned with expectations (Appendix C). Factor analysis provided evidence of structural validity, and reliability analysis provided evidence of

internal consistency. Finally, the results from the Fall 2011 survey were cross-validated with the Spring 2012 survey. (See Appendix D for technical notes about the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 survey results.)

### *Focus Group Data Analysis*

Each of the audio-recorded focus group sessions was transcribed. An *a priori* and emerging-theme coding scheme was utilized in the analysis of the transcripts. The research team engaged in a reflective process guided by focus group protocols and visit perceptions to arrive at seven basic themes, which were then further split into subcategories. Themes included: recruitment; placement; professional development (including informal support structures); teacher quality; integration; isolation; and retention.

Researchers defined these broad and the more refined subcategories to aid in the team coding process. Code definitions are included in Appendix I. Qualitative analysis software (Atlas.ti) was utilized in the management and coding of the transcripts. Each research team member coded at least one transcript in its entirety. After all of the data were coded by theme and subtheme, each researcher analyzed one of the seven thematic areas.

## **Initial Observations and Findings: North Carolina Teacher Corps**

### ***Recruitment***

The evaluation questions that guide this section are:

1. Do TFA-ENC and NCTC meet unmet demand for beginning teachers?
6. What role does recruitment of NC students have on retention of non-traditional, selectively-chosen teacher candidates?

While the findings reported in this section do not directly address either question, they will help inform assessment of both of these questions in future reports.

Between February and June 2012, NCTC participated in 20 recruitment events across the state, most of which took place at colleges and universities. As noted in the previous section, NCTC attracted a total of 481 interested students (Table 1, following page) and received 113 applications.

Each recruitment event varied in size and scope but was generally designed to provide undergraduate students with exposure to internships, permanent employment, or other work experience options. The Evaluation team observed three recruitment events, each of which hosted approximately 50 organizations, with more than 70 student participants at each session. NCTC staff estimate that other sessions hosted between 40 and 500 students. The following sections discuss the organization and structure of the recruitment events, as well as the recruitment strategies utilized by the NCTC staff and the results of their efforts.

#### *Recruitment Event Organization and Structure*

Each of the three events observed by the Evaluation Team provided NCTC with adequate space and time for recruiters to engage students actively. NCTC had adequate time to set up a display, explore the facility, and educate potential recruits on their respective programs.

One of the observed events organized vendors by content focus; e.g., vendors with a focus on education were grouped together in one part of the room, while those focused on engineering or other fields were located elsewhere. This event structure provided advantages and disadvantages to NCTC recruiters: Students with a specific interest in education were easily identifiable, but all education recruiters competed simultaneously for a small pool of students. At the second observed event, however, placement away from other education-related recruiters appeared to hinder NCTC recruiters from accessing larger pools of education-minded students, as their display was placed well away from the other related organizations.

The third recruitment event provided attendees with a list of vendors prior to the event, which gave students an opportunity to learn about NCTC and explore the NCTC website ahead of the event.

Table 1. Students expressing interest in NCTC, by recruitment event, Spring 2012

| <b>Event/Information Session</b>                    | <b>Participants<br/>Expressing<br/>Interest in NCTC</b> |
|---|---|
| <i>Western Region</i>                               |   |
| Metrolina (Charlotte Area)                          | 25  |
| Mars Hill   | 6   |
| CIAA College Career Expo (Charlotte)                | 32  |
| Appalachian State University                        | 9   |
| Western Carolina University                         | 7   |
| <i>Piedmont Region</i>                              |   |
| NC A&T  | 39  |
| National Career Fair (Research Triangle Park)       | 61  |
| Winston-Salem State University                      | 18  |
| Coast-to-Coast Career Fair (Raleigh)                | 14  |
| Fayetteville State University                       | 13  |
| UNC-Chapel Hill                                     | 18  |
| UNC-Charlotte                                       | 12  |
| Duke University                                     | 23  |
| High Point University                               | 12  |
| North Carolina Alumni Career Fair (Chapel Hill)     | 34  |
| Elon University                                     | 2   |
| NC State University                                 | 5   |
| UNC-Greensboro                                      | 0   |
| Wake Forest University                              | 6   |
| <i>Eastern Region</i>                               |   |
| East Carolina University                            | 60  |
| UNC-Wilmington                                      | 18  |
| UNC-Pembroke  | 8   |
| Eastern North Carolina Career Alliance (ENCCA) Fair | 17  |
| Fort Bragg  | 2   |
| <i>(Interest not linkable to formal event)</i>      | 40  |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>481</b>  |

### *Recruitment Strategy*

At each of the observed recruitment events, NCTC recruiters consistently and effectively described the features of the program, its mission, and its goals to potential recruits. The recruiters initiated conversations with potential recruits by first gauging their interest in teaching, then making connections between students' major content area(s) of interest and the mission of

NCTC. NCTC was described as a new program seeking college graduates who were interested in becoming licensed educators and serving high-need schools in North Carolina. The recruiters consistently engaged potential recruits in discussions about eligibility for NCTC, the application process, and program fit, giving them a full understanding of what their commitment would be as a participant. Typical topics discussed by NCTC representatives and recruits included covering costs for relocation and job security. Very few recruits shared or discussed concerns with NCTC representatives about participating in the program. The NCTC staff's interpersonal communication skills and knowledge of the program were strengths of the recruitment process and will no doubt continue to be a draw for future participants.

Visual displays on the recruitment table provided information on several of the key components and benefits of the program. A seven-foot vertical banner, placed adjacent to the table, displayed the NCTC title and slogan, in addition to the URL.<sup>10</sup> Folders with specific program information also were provided to potential recruits (examples are included in Appendix F). Common elements of the program that appeared to appeal to potential recruits included: the newness of the program; the opportunity to become certified teachers; the opportunity to teach in North Carolina schools; and the NCTC mission statement.

#### *Recruitment Results: Initial Cohort Size*

North Carolina's revised Detailed Scope of Work for its RttT initiatives (August 2012<sup>11</sup>) includes targets for the growth of NCTC in North Carolina. For the 2012-13 school year, the target size for the inaugural cohort was 100 corps members. As of this writing, the actual cohort size for the 2012-13 school year was 29.

While NCTC did not meet its first-year target, some contributing circumstances should be considered, the most significant of which was the truncated recruitment window for the first cohort. As noted above, NCDPI did not staff NCTC until January 2012, which left the program only about six months to recruit. By contrast, programs like TFA begin recruitment in earnest nearly a year before a cohort enters schools, and some candidates are recruited even earlier than that. It should be noted that NCTC already has generated a list of potential candidates for its 2013-14 cohort.

In addition, in response to the year-long delay in the start of the program,<sup>12</sup> the first-year target of corps members was revised from an original first-year target of 50. The increase to 100 reflects an effort to ensure that NCTC still meets its overall, four-year RttT target of 250 total corps members employed, despite the initial delay; however, NCTC staff had no data to inform their estimation of the most productive sources for candidates, and thus no data to guide any shifts in recruitment strategy necessary to ensure a larger first-year cohort.

In the end, of the 481 individuals who expressed interest in becoming members of the North Carolina Teacher Corps, only 113 (23%) ended up applying, of which only 95 (20%) were eligible for acceptance into the program (i.e., they either were deemed to have met or to be able

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/recruitment/ncteachercorps/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/rttt/state/plan/state-dsw.xls>

<sup>12</sup> In the state's original Detailed Scope of Work for RttT, NCTC was scheduled to recruit and place candidates in the 2011-12 school year, but the program was not staffed for 2011-12.

to meet requirements for alternative licensure). NCTC’s interview process further reduced the pool to 42. Of those 42, only 34 “enrolled” (attended the Summer Institute), four exited the program before completing Summer Institute and one exited immediately after, resulting in an inaugural cohort of 29 corps members, or about 6% of the total number of interested candidates.

*Selectivity*

Because research on related programs like TFA and the North Carolina Teaching Fellows<sup>13</sup> suggests that higher levels of human capital (as measured by variables such as GPA) are correlated with measures of effective teaching, the Evaluation Team has analyzed such characteristics for the initial NCTC cohort and will track trends across cohorts in future reports.

*Grade Point Average (GPA).* NCTC corps members’ average undergraduate GPA is 3.1, which is somewhat more modest than the average GPA for comparable programs like TFA-ENC (see **Historical and Current Placements and Distribution of Teach for America Corps Members**, below). Though these data only represent one small cohort, it is still perhaps worth noting that the majority of corps members (52%) had GPAs in the lower end of the allowable range of GPAs (2.50-3.09; NCTC requires candidates to meet requirements for lateral entry licensure, which includes a minimum 2.5 GPA requirement). Table 2 shows the distribution of 2012 NCTC corps member GPAs.

Table 2. Distribution of NCTC Inaugural Cohort GPA

| GPA Categories | NCTC Corps Member Cohort Entry Year |           |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|
|                | 2012                                |           |
| 4.0-3.7        | <i>N</i>                            | 5         |
|                | Percent of Cohort                   | 17.2%     |
| 3.69-3.4       | <i>N</i>                            | 6         |
|                | Percent of Cohort                   | 20.7%     |
| 3.39-3.1       | <i>N</i>                            | 3         |
|                | Percent of Cohort                   | 10.3%     |
| 3.09-2.8       | <i>N</i>                            | 7         |
|                | Percent of Cohort                   | 24.1%     |
| 2.79-2.5       | <i>N</i>                            | 8         |
|                | Percent of Cohort                   | 27.6%     |
| <b>Total</b>   | <i>N</i>                            | <b>29</b> |

*Post-secondary institution quality.* The Evaluation Team applied *US News & World Report* selectivity rankings to the colleges and universities from which most of the NCTC corps

<sup>13</sup> E.g., D’Agostino & Powers (2009); Henry, Bastian, & Smith (2012)

members were recruited,<sup>14</sup> to provide a baseline measure of one potential indicator of corps member quality against which to compare future NCTC cohorts. Although the usefulness of using school selectivity as a predictor of individual teacher quality is still a matter of debate,<sup>15</sup> measurement of school selectivity, in conjunction with other quantitative and qualitative data points, can contribute to our understanding of the components that can contribute to teacher impact. In addition, tracking changes across time in the selectivity of the schools from which corps members come can help to demonstrate whether and how candidate interest in NCTC changes statewide as the program becomes better established.

As indicated in Table 3, the greatest proportions of current corps members attended schools that were identified as “Selective” (34.5%) or that were not rated (34.5%).<sup>16</sup> Though these data might appear to suggest that NCTC is not as selective as a program like TFA (e.g., about 74% of TFA-ENC corps members came from “More Selective,” and “Most Selective” schools; see below), it is important to bear in mind that NCTC recruitment goals are different from those of other programs. For example, one primary NCTC recruitment goal is to recruit in-state talent. Doing so limits the number of more selective schools from which the cohort might be assembled. To that end, NCTC appears to be moving toward meeting its goal of 100% in-state teachers, with 86% of the first cohort of NCTC corps members holding degrees from North Carolina colleges and universities (compared to only 19% of TFA-ENC corps members).

Table 3. NCTC Inaugural Cohort by College and University Selectivity

| Selectivity                 | N         | Percent of Cohort | Percent of Cohort (excluding “NR”*) |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Premiere                    | 0         | 0%                | 0%                                  |
| Most Selective              | 1         | 3.4%              | 5.3%                                |
| More Selective              | 5         | 17.2%             | 26.3%                               |
| Selective                   | 10        | <b>34.5%</b>      | <b>52.6%</b>                        |
| Less Selective              | 3         | 10.3%             | 15.7%                               |
| Least Selective             | 0         | 0%                | 0%                                  |
| Not Rated                   | 10        | <b>34.5%</b>      | ---                                 |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>29</b> |                   |                                     |
| <b>Total excluding “NR”</b> | <b>19</b> |                   |                                     |

\*“NR” = Not rated by USN&WR

*Leadership potential.* Potential NCTC candidates are evaluated on the basis of their exhibited and perceived leadership characteristics. A score ranging from 1 to 5 is given to each candidate, based on application information, information in the candidate’s résumé, and interview responses. It is important to note that this score is not congruent with the TFA leadership potential score

<sup>14</sup> Some NCTC Corps Members are “second career” recruits.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., Clotfelter, C. T., Ladd, H. F., and Vigdor, J. L. (2010); Kane, T. J., Rockoff, J. E., & Staiger, D. O. (2008)

<sup>16</sup> Of the ten colleges and universities attended by Corps Members for which *US News & World Report* did not generate a selectivity rating, eight were located in North Carolina.

described later in this report and is thus not comparable. For the inaugural NCTC cohort, the average corps member leadership score was 3.38. Of note, corps members with higher GPAs also tended to receive higher leadership scores ( $r=.454$ ;  $p=.013$ ); additional data in future years of the program will help to verify whether this preliminary statistically significant relationship persists, as well as whether that information, combined with subsequent quantitative and qualitative measures of corps member effectiveness, can be of use to NCTC recruiters.

#### *Observations from Teach for America Recruitment*

The Evaluation Team had the opportunity to discuss recruitment with members of the 2011-12 TFA-ENC cohort. While differences in program objectives limit the degree to which TFA recruitment strategies might apply to NCTC, some of the details of those discussions provided insights into the TFA recruitment process that might be of use to NCTC staff.

In the focus group sessions, TFA-ENC corps members recalled being particularly impressed by the tight focus of TFA's recruitment strategy; specifically, they felt that TFA's recruitment process empowered them as potential candidates to face the challenge of the widening achievement gap in public school education. Corps members also emphasized that the TFA recruitment process created camaraderie among candidates that made them feel encouraged and confident in their skills as potential educators. In addition to these positives, however, some corps members identified what was for them an important disconnect between the recruitment process and the reality of their teaching experiences. They shared that, while their initial recruitment experiences sparked their excitement for teaching, the reality of their classroom experiences did not match the expectations that the recruitment process had generated. Taken together, these reflections suggest that recruitment for organizations like NCTC can benefit from encouraging a desire among candidates to positively impact education through service, but at the same time the process should convey the reality of the challenges that recruits likely will face.

#### *Changes in NCTC Recruitment for 2012-13*

NCTC began recruiting for its second cohort during recruitment for the first cohort (NCTC entered the Fall 2012 recruitment period with over 60 possible recruits identified for 2013-14 from its Spring 2012 work), and it began attending job fairs again in September 2012. The new NCTC recruitment calendar (Appendix G) also includes two acceptance periods; in addition to a late Spring (April 30, 2013) acceptance notification date, NCTC also will extend acceptances to some candidates by the end of December 2012.

NCTC also has expanded its approach to recruitment with an eye toward not only expanding the number of but also improving retention of potential candidates. First, NCTC has increased efforts to ensure that potential candidates are more aware early in the process of what will be expected of them before they begin teaching—namely, that they will need to meet requirements for lateral entry licensure (which for some candidates will include passing PRAXIS II) and that they will be required to attend a full-time pre-teaching Summer Institute for three weeks in the summer—to reduce the number of candidates who withdraw after acceptance for logistical reasons. Second, NCTC is providing PRAXIS II coaching for all accepted corps members ahead of Summer Institute. Finally, NCTC is attempting to reach more candidates by providing information sessions at colleges and universities that do not host or participate in job fairs, and it

now has a presence on the career websites of every college and university in the state that has such a website.

### ***Summer Institute***

The evaluation question that guides this section is:

3. What is the quality of the NCTC Summer Institute experience? Specifically, how do teachers prepared by NCTC rate their experience, in terms of the preparation it provides them for their teaching assignments?

### *General Description of the NCTC Summer Institute*

The inaugural North Carolina Teacher Corps Summer Institute training was conducted in Durham, North Carolina between July 16 and August 3, 2012. The institute consisted of an initial three-day orientation, followed by a two-week teaching practicum and an all-day closing session. NCTC also sponsored three after-hours Round Table sessions for corps members during the two-week teaching practicum.

The orientation period provided all corps members with an introduction to the roles and responsibilities of teachers that was facilitated by NCTC staff and District and School Transformation (DST) coaches. The purpose of the orientation was to provide corps members with as much of the essential information they would need as beginning teachers as could be delivered within the short timeframe, such as training on important state policies, an overview of the state's new Common Core and Essential Standards, and pedagogical training that extended their understanding and knowledge of how to succeed in the classroom.

Following the orientation, corps members were paired with mentor teachers at one of three year-round schools (two elementary and one middle school) in a cooperating district over a two-week period. This in-class practicum was designed to provide exposure and hands-on teaching experience in an authentic classroom environment. In an effort to provide a more productive experience, NCTC attempted to coordinate school training assignments for corps members that were similar to the schools and classrooms in which corps members hoped to be employed (i.e., the school level and subject area for which they were seeking employment).

During the practicum, NCTC also facilitated bi-weekly Round Table events at a central location, during which corps members received additional training. The Round Table trainings varied and were tailored to meet corps member's direct needs, based both on NCTC staff observations and on corps member feedback and requests.

The final day of Summer Institute reconvened all corps members to provide additional training on classroom and student behavior management practices, as well as an opportunity to reflect on the overall training process.

Reactions from corps members about the overall experience were largely positive; as one corps member noted, "Considering that this [program] was off the ground in January, I'm pretty impressed."

*Building Corps Member Knowledge and Experience*

*Session content.* The NCTC program is designed to attract individuals who assert a clear interest or desire to teach in North Carolina but typically lack any formal teacher training or teaching experience. Therefore, a primary goal of the program is to adequately train and support inexperienced educators, and to equip them with the necessary tools and knowledge they require to become effective teachers. NCTC's approach began with a series of policy and instructional-related group training sessions that are co-facilitated by DST staff. The primary modules are listed in Appendix H, which also includes assessments of specific strengths and possible areas for improvement for each module.

The main modes of delivery were lectures, presentations, and group activities. In general, Institute facilitators appeared to be adept at explaining the concepts and modeling the procedures and practices to help build corps members' fundamental understanding of how to plan for and teach a class. Aside from direct presentation segments, corps members were engaged in small-group activities and seemed to respond well to facilitator modeling of teacher behaviors and classroom practices.

The group activities provided several capacity-building opportunities that allowed corps members to: apply learned concepts and procedures; practice, observe, and critique each other; and develop a sense of confidence and self-efficacy. Several corps members noted that the small-group exchanges with the facilitators were perhaps the most beneficial training they received during the orientation. These activities also served to help corps members foster relationships with one another and begin to establish a more cohesive group mentality (i.e., a unified vision or mission).

The target cohort for the 2012-13 school year was 100, but two benefits of training the actual, smaller cohort appeared to be the ability to provide corps members with a greater amount of individual attention, as well as the opportunities the smaller scale provided for corps members to interact and engage with everyone else in their group. While it is difficult to determine the extent to which corps members may have developed a sense of unity over the course of the Summer Institute, the observed group interactions suggested a clear willingness to work and learn as a team.

NCTC benefited from the presence of DST staff, who were uniquely positioned to facilitate corps member understanding of and preparation for teaching in the target schools. DST coaches work entirely in high-need schools (many of which will be eligible to receive NCTC teachers) and are aware of the unique issues that will confront corps members. In addition to the credibility they brought to the Summer Institute, DST staff conveyed a balance of personal teaching and training experience that was well-received among corps members. It was not uncommon for corps members to shift the focus during a training segment by making a series of inquiries related to instructional practices or classroom management, for example, and DST coaches showcased a skilled ability to field these questions as a team, offering "best practice" responses complemented with relevant stories of personal classroom experience. Corps members particularly appreciated the shared classroom experiences, which provided them with contexts for clarifying topics as well as strategies that they could use in their own classrooms. In addition, facilitators helped allay some corps member fears by reminding them that they were not alone in

some of the work ahead of them, and may even have one advantage: All teachers would be adapting to the new Common Core standards this year, but only the corps members and other new teachers would be able to do so without first having to “unlearn the old standards.”

*Training session timeframe issues.* One major challenge for NCTC was to deliver a vast amount of information in a short period of time—from required policy and procedural material to the more practical, process-related training (e.g., lesson planning, instructional practices, techniques, etc.) necessary for preparing corps members to manage a classroom effectively. While corps members indicated that they valued their facilitators’ willingness to address questions and share personal experiences during the three-day training, it was evident that more than three days were necessary to cover all of the training material and also address all personal inquiries. In conversations with corps members during their practicum experiences, for example, some suggested that they would have benefited from receiving additional information about the practices that would most directly affect their performance in the classroom, such as instructional techniques related to their subject areas, more guidance for lesson planning, and information about the use of formative assessments. Another potential drawback of the Summer Institute’s limited timeframe was the greater likelihood that NCTC leadership and the DST staff would not be able to identify and address all of the corps members’ misconceptions about some of the topics discussed.

NCTC and DST staff made productive use of the time available, however, and were able to deliver essential information. Facilitators were cognizant of the potential to overwhelm corps members with an abundance of information without sufficient time to process, and they were able to avoid this outcome in part by breaking up the lectures and presentations with practical activities (e.g., reviewing the Common Core Standards and then aligning them with example lesson material). Attempts to make the information-heavy sessions manageable to process appeared to help reduce corps members’ anxieties and keep them motivated.

### *Preparation for the Classroom*

*Strengths of the practicum experience.* Similar to the TFA training model, NCTC provides the opportunity for corps members to participate, observe, and practice teaching in a classroom setting. Corps members are placed— either individually or in pairs—with mentor teachers (all of whom have three or more years of experience), and shadow the teachers for two weeks. The degree to which this experience was fully realized varied among corps members; some had more active and direct roles in the classroom than did others. Mentor teachers appeared to support varying degrees of involvement based on the lesson of the day and the immediate needs of students. Several cooperating teachers were observed taking the mentoring role very seriously, with some actively advising corps members throughout the process to help build their capacity to teach.

One of the benefits of the mentor teacher element of the Summer Institute training is the value of having a veteran teacher provide another perspective to corps members. The opportunity to process multiple perspectives on teaching from a variety of educators (i.e., NCTC staff, DST staff, and mentor teachers) allows for a more robust learning experience. Some mentor teachers even expressed interest in providing feedback about the practicum experience and how to make

that experience stronger for the next round of corps members. This type of mentorship and willingness to provide feedback is likely to be invaluable to the preparation of the corps member.

Another positive aspect of the practicum, and the advantage of managing a small cohort, is NCTC's effort to pair corps members with teachers and subject areas close to their particular interest(s). These pairings have the potential to provide greater opportunities for corps members to spend more time delivering instruction in a setting that is likely to be applicable to their eventual permanent employment. Despite NCTC's best efforts, however, not every corps member could be assigned to a teacher or class that aligned with her or his area of interest, which may have left some corps members with a less beneficial experience than others.

NCTC made a concerted effort to use corps members' feedback to make necessary adjustments to their practicum experience. One mechanism NCTC used to respond to corps members' feedback was the series of pre-scheduled Round Table events. For instance, after a few days in their schools, corps members expressed interest in having more instruction on and guidance around lesson planning. In response, NCTC staff arranged a Round Table event focused on lesson planning, provided a structured approach to developing a plan, and reiterated the elements discussed during the three-day orientation (e.g., applying Bloom's revised taxonomy). Round Tables also served as a forum to address ongoing concerns and fears about the job-hunting process.

*Practicum experience issues for consideration.* Every hour spent in a classroom practicing instruction and observing a veteran teacher is beneficial to learning the trade, and, as with the introductory segment of the Summer Institute, the duration of the practicum experience does not appear to have been long enough. Feedback from some corps members indicates not only an awareness of the need for more time in the classroom, but also the desire for it, specifically with respect to actual practice-teaching. Additionally, even given the short window, some mentor teachers noted that corps members' time spent in the classroom still could have been increased. One teacher noted that the daily schedule for corps members was challenging, in that it was not always clear to that mentor when corps members would be in school, as they often seemed to be called away for off-site activities, and they seldom stayed long enough on any given day to experience a full, regular teaching day.

Another element lacking from the practicum—though not surprisingly, given the tight schedule—was breadth of experience, which manifested itself in two ways. First, due to the compact nature of the Summer Institute and the nine days allotted for student teaching, most corps members had limited opportunities to observe and be observed by their peers. Having opportunities like that not only can strengthen relationships across the cohort (which the Evaluation Team's work with TFA-ENC corps members suggests can be a critical component for longer-term retention; see Appendix K), but also provide corps members with opportunities to practice and get in the habit of reflecting on their teaching. In addition, there was limited variability in corps members' experience working with different veteran teachers and classroom settings. A few of the corps members who were applying for any K-12 position were given flexibility to work with other teachers at different grade levels, but the majority remained connected to a single teacher and classroom.

*Resources and Ongoing Support*

*Resources.* Resources were provided to corps members electronically and physically during training segments. Materials such as books, checklists, and lists of strategies were provided during training with the expectation in many cases that corps members would review them on their own time. Other materials used during the training were intended to assist corps members once they secured employment. For example, to help with lesson-planning, corps members were provided an electronic template for planning with embedded links to online resources such as the list of Common Core Standards.

*Ongoing support.* NCTC staff provided on-site observations at each training school throughout the practicum experience. Observations were conducted to ensure that the training process was effective and productive, and to determine what areas of additional training corps members required.

Also, before, during, and after the Summer Institute, NCTC provided and plans to continue providing ongoing assistance for corps members who are trying to secure employment by assisting with scheduling interviews and providing guidance for the interview process.

Another component of NCTC's continuous system of support for corps members is their facilitation of all-core conferences provided once a month (six Saturday sessions will be held in total). These sessions are intended to expound upon topics covered during Summer Institute and address new topics as needs arise for corps members throughout the school year. A few topics that NCTC plans to review during these sessions include active engagement strategies, positive behavior management strategies, differentiating instruction, reading strategies in the content area, remedial reading strategies, assessment strategies, parent conference tips, etc.

One area for ongoing support that may require additional work—though it should be noted that it was not entirely absent from the Summer Institute—was the availability of support for teaching in highly-specialized areas, such as special education. As indicated in Appendices J and K, this is a training issue with which TFA also struggles. NCDPI representatives did, however, provide overviews of certain topics like special needs law and available support, and informal conversations about specific specialty-area needs may have occurred with individual corps members when Evaluation Team members were not present to observe them. The Team will continue to monitor corps members' impressions of this support and any subsequent in-year support during Fall and Spring focus group sessions.

*Observations from Teach for America's Summer Institute Experience*

As NCTC modifies and expands its Summer Institute, it may be helpful to consider incorporation of some of the elements of the TFA Summer Institute that also support the mission and goals of NCTC. Relevant details from RttT Evaluation Team visits to TFA Summer Institute sites, as well as focus groups conducted with TFA-ENC corps members during the 2011-12 school year, are presented here in summary form and are discussed in more detail in Appendix J.

A major component of the TFA Summer Institute is the opportunities it provides TFA to present corps members with a uniform, structured approach to classroom management, as well as with teaching materials for immediate use during their summer experiences. In addition, TFA

maintains a website where corps members can access numerous teacher resources and network with current and former TFA members.

TFA separates the Summer Institute into three segments over the course of about seven weeks. The first session is notably different from the rest of the Summer Institute. During that week, TFA provides corps members with an orientation to the region in which they will work, as well as opportunities to build relationships with fellow corps members and TFA staff in their region (extending the relationship-building begun during the recruitment process). To help corps members foster a better understanding and appreciation of their communities, sessions also focus on integration into the local and school community and on confronting issues of poverty. In addition, all TFA-ENC corps members make day-long, planned group visits to various communities, during which they interact with members of their new communities.

The second and third sessions are very similar to the NCTC Summer Institute, except that they take place over six weeks instead of three. TFA maintains a large staff for Summer Institute to provide each corps member with a high level of support, including multiple classroom observations, feedback, and coaching. TFA also accommodates any corps member's request for additional observations. In the focus groups, corps members indicated that the teaching practicum was valuable preparation for their first year, but they reflected that increasing the amount of time they had in front of students during their practicum and matching their experiences to their Fall subject-area placements would have made the experience more effective; many also indicated that they would have preferred to have had longer—even if fewer—sessions in their summer classrooms, instead of the daily 45-minute teaching blocks experienced by most.

In addition to the summer trainings, TFA provides corps members with support during the school year through ongoing professional development sessions and the presence of a Manager of Teacher and Leadership Development (MTLD), who is assigned to support specific corps members throughout the region. TFA-ENC corp members noted, however, that there was a steep drop-off in support as they transitioned into their teaching placements. The provision of a MTLD, online training, small-group work sessions, and the periodic regional professional development sessions—the All-Corps Conferences—helped to offset this drop-off in support, but some corps members reported that the regional sessions were not well-linked to the training provided during Summer Institute.

#### *Changes for NCTC Summer Institute for 2012-13*

In addition to extending the recruitment calendar, NCTC also will provide training and preparation for taking the Praxis and for interviewing for teaching positions (largely online and self-directed, but with the possibility for some face-to-face work), as well as some online licensure coursework, ahead of its standard Summer Institute (Appendix G).

**Employment and Distribution of Corps Members (2012-13)**

The evaluation questions that guide this section are:

1. Do TFA-ENC and NCTC meet demand for beginning teachers in high-need schools?
5. Are NCTC teachers more likely than a) other new teachers in general and b) TFA corps members in particular to remain in teaching beyond their original commitment?

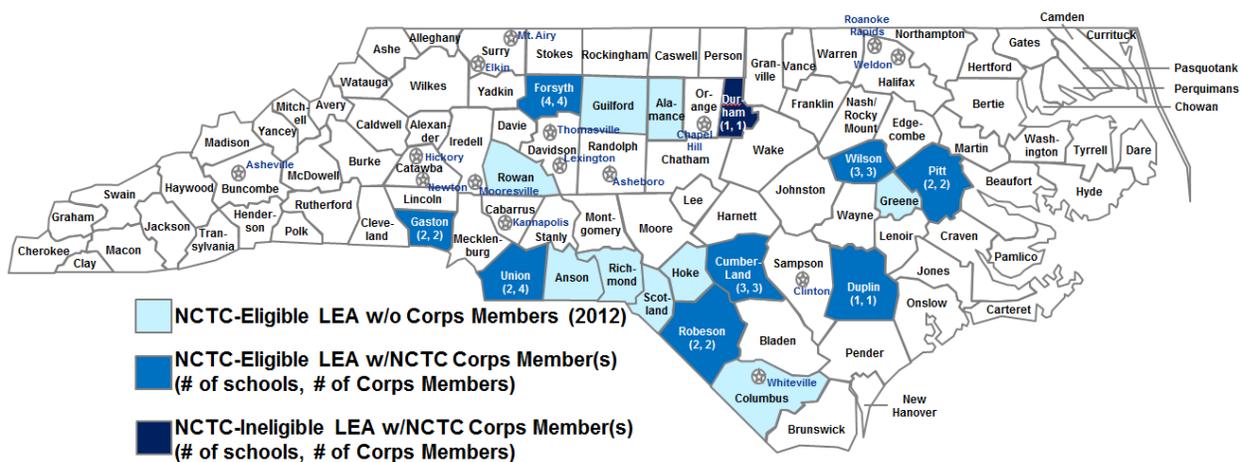
The data reported in this section will serve as a baseline for addressing these questions in greater depth in future reports.

*Initial Cohort Employment*

NCTC negotiated access to LEAs and schools on behalf of its inaugural cohort and assisted corps members throughout the hiring process. In many cases, NCTC also attempted to honor candidate preferences with respect to their place of employment, under the assumption that employment in a preferred LEA would help support retention efforts. As a result, some candidates limited their initial job searches to a subset of the full list of eligible LEAs. To date, 22 of 29 NCTC corps members have found positions in 9 of the 18 eligible school districts; of those 22, 2 are in RttT District and School Transformation (DST) schools, 17 are in LEAs with RttT DST schools, and 3 are in schools in an LEA with high teacher turnover.

The map below (Figure 1) details the LEAs in which corps members are eligible to work, and the LEAs in which they have found employment to date (as of September, 2012) for the 2012-13 school year.

Figure 1. NCTC Employment Map, 2012-13.<sup>17</sup>



*Observations from Teach for America’s Placement Process*

Like their NCTC colleagues, TFA corps members receive assistance with securing employment, but TFA appears to be more directly involved throughout all stages of the process. The focus

<sup>17</sup> Not all NCTC Corps Members had been placed at the time of this writing.

groups conducted with TFA-ENC corps members during the 2011-12 school year, as well as some of their survey responses, generated several insights about corps member placement that may be of benefit to NCTC as it continues to work through its own employment process in subsequent years. They are presented here in summary form and are discussed in more detail in Appendix K.

*Transparency.* Feedback from TFA-ENC corps members suggests that transparency is a key component of any effort on the part of NCTC to be more involved in employment. For example, some TFA-ENC corps members described their placement process as “mysterious,” which for a few even led to a perception that the process was somewhat capricious. In addition, some TFA-ENC corps members ended up being placed in positions outside their areas of expertise, which led to concerns about whether they could or should accept the assignments. These concerns were strongest amongst corps members who were placed in highly-specialized fields (like physics) and fields that normally require significant additional training (like special education).

*Connections between employment and retention.* More direct involvement in the employment process can have longer-term benefits for NCTC, such as the development of stronger relationships with LEAs that can speed up employment, and employment for corps members in situations that best match their skills with LEA needs. In addition, greater involvement may position NCTC to help reduce initial corps member feelings of isolation and optimize corps member opportunities for positive integration into their new schools—both of which can contribute to corps member retention.

A slim majority of TFA-ENC corps members indicated on both the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 surveys that they did not feel isolated at their schools (about 51% and 53%, respectively), but feelings of isolation increased from Fall to Spring, rising from about 7% who strongly and very strongly agreed that they felt isolated at the beginning of the year to about 16% who felt that way by the end of the year. Two variables that contributed to these feelings were the rural locations of the placement schools and the number of veteran teachers in the placement school. Rurality was an issue for corps member not so much because of the distance from the amenities of a larger metropolitan area (though some did note this concern) but more because of the limited number of housing options. As a result, many corps members looked for housing in other communities, which hindered their ability to feel connected to their schools. In addition, the absence of veteran teachers within a school—or more importantly, within a specific subject area or grade level—left some corps members feeling as if they had no one to turn to for guidance and support.

Corps members believed that the most important factor in facilitating their integration into the teaching life was the presence of similarly-aged, similarly-experienced, and like-minded colleagues, not necessarily just the presence of other people associated with TFA. They also cited the importance of strong matches between corps member values and the values of other teachers at their host schools, as well as the level of acceptance and support they felt from the community at large. Non-corps member teachers echoed these sentiments, noting that the strength of the match between the values and cultures of corps members and host schools (among other things) was an important factor that influenced successful corps member integration.

As noted in the next section, one of the ways in which TFA-ENC has attempted to use involvement in placement as a tool for mitigating feelings of isolation is by increasing the number of schools in which it places teaching pods of three or more corps members. Early indications from TFA-ENC's pod placement suggest that the idea may have some merit, and NCTC may want to consider a similar strategy as its numbers increase.

On a Fall 2011 survey of TFA-ENC corps members, over 90% indicated that they valued having other corps members in their schools; that proportion dipped only slightly (to 85%) by the end of the school year. In focus group sessions, TFA-ENC corps members indicated that placement with other corps members whom they could share the first-year teaching experience—and to whom they felt a degree of loyalty—provided them with the support they needed to complete their first year of teaching. Focus group data also suggest that corps member placement in pods facilitated the development of relationships and cohesion between corps members, and in cases where pods were not too large, even between themselves, other school staff, and the larger community. There does appear to be an optimal pod size of between three and five corps members—corps members in larger pods noted that such pod sizes tended to limit their exposure to veteran teachers and supported their own tendencies to interact only with other corps members, thus limiting their integration into their schools and communities. In fact, for 2012-13, TFA-ENC has reduced the size of one of its larger pods for these reasons.

#### *Changes in NCTC Employment Strategies for 2012-13*

For 2012-13, NCTC has adopted two new strategies for improving corps member opportunities for securing employment. First, NCTC will take advantage of its new early acceptance schedule to start working on finding school year 2013-14 employment for their first round of new corps members during the early months of 2013. Second, in addition to providing PRAXIS coaching to ensure that more corps members are eligible for lateral entry positions earlier in the hiring process (as noted above), NCTC also will provide coaching on effective interview strategies for lateral entry candidates.

## Characteristics of Past and Current Teach for America-ENC Corps Member

The evaluation questions that guide this section are:

1. Do TFA-ENC and NCTC meet demand for beginning teachers in high-need schools?
4. Has overall corps member quality changed as a result of TFA-ENC's expansion and/or the advent of NCTC recruitment efforts?

The data reported in this section will serve as a baseline for addressing these questions in greater depth in future reports.

Several of the TFA-ENC corps member demographics for the past four school years (2008-09 through 2011-12) suggest that TFA-ENC presence in the region has undergone notable transformations over that period. Some of those transformations (such as the notable uptick in corps members who joined for the 2011-12 school year) are reflective of support provided by North Carolina's RttT funding and the required expansion of TFA-ENC; reasons for other patterns are less clear.

### *Cohort Size*

#### *Growth*

North Carolina's revised Detailed Scope of Work for its RttT initiatives (August 2012) and its contract with TFA-ENC include targets for the growth of TFA-ENC in North Carolina. For the 2011-12 school year, the target size for the full complement of TFA-ENC corps members was 157, with 90 of those supported by RttT funds, and, for the 2012-13 school year, the target size was 217, with 115 supported by RttT funds.

In 2011-12, 157 corps members either returned (53) or were initially placed (104) in Northeast North Carolina schools, matching the contracted target for 2010-11. The 2011-12 cohort retained 89 corps members for the 2012-13 school year, and 130 corps members were added as part of the 2012-13 cohort, for a total of 219.<sup>18</sup> This total exceeded the target number as specified in TFA-ENC's contract. Placement totals by LEA are indicated in Figure 2 (following page).

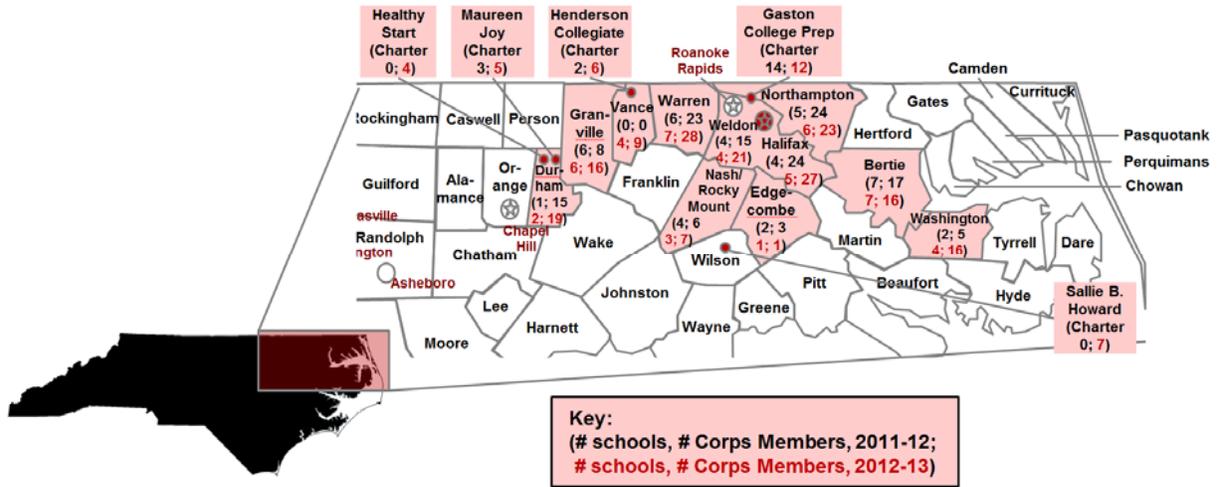
#### *Placement*

Beginning in the 2011-12 school year, TFA-ENC increased efforts to place clusters of corps members in the same school. The impact of these "pods" of corps members on retention and other aspects of corps members' experiences are explored in greater detail in the **Employment and Distributions of Corps Members** section, above, as well as in Appendix K. In 2011-12, TFA-ENC placed pods of three teachers or larger in 21 of the 44 schools in which corps members were placed; in 2012-13, TFA-ENC placed pods in 33 of its 51 schools.

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<sup>18</sup> Or 221, if an additional two corps members from the 2010-11 cohort who stayed on for a third year are included.

Figure 2. TFA-ENC Placement, 2011-12 and 2012-13.



*Retention*

For this section, retention rates were calculated based on the number of corps members who *started* Summer Institute, which includes corps members who never were placed in a school.<sup>19</sup> In total between 2008 and 2011, there were 347 such TFA-ENC corps members, and 303 of those (87%) were placed in schools and either completed their two-year commitments or remained in good standing through Fall 2012.<sup>20</sup> Two-year retention rates among the 2008 and 2009 cohorts (who completed their commitments in Spring 2010 and Spring 2011) were similar, with attrition rates of 11.1% and 8.7%, respectively. The two-year retention rate for the 2010 cohort, however, was lower, with an attrition rate of 15.9% (Table 4). In almost all cases, corps members across the four cohorts who left the program before completion of their two-year commitments did so voluntarily; only six corps members were dismissed. A brief discussion of relationships between early departure, dismissal, and cohort characteristics is included at the end of this section.

Table 4. TFA-ENC Corps Member Completion or Retention, by Cohort, 2008-2011

|   |                   | TFA-ENC Corps Member Cohort Entry Year |       |       |                   | Overall<br>(2008-11) |
|---|-------------------|--|-------|-------|-------------------|----------------------|
|   |                   | 2008                                   | 2009  | 2010  | 2011 <sup>^</sup> |                      |
| <b>Corps members who completed their commitment</b>         | N                 | 88                                     | 73    | 53    | 89                | <b>303</b>           |
|   | Percent of Cohort | 88.9%                                  | 91.3% | 84.1% | 81.7%             | <b>87.3%</b>         |
| <b>Corps members who resigned early or were terminated*</b> | N                 | 11                                     | 7     | 10    | 16                | <b>44</b>            |
|   | Percent of Cohort | 11.1%                                  | 8.7%  | 15.9% | 15.2%             | <b>12.7%</b>         |

\* Includes corps members who attended Summer Institute but either did not complete it or completed it but were not placed in a school; does not include corps members granted emergency release.

<sup>^</sup>Data are incomplete; includes data through Fall 2012 only; data for 2012 cohort not included.

<sup>19</sup> Among original members of the 2008 through 2011 cohorts, five corps members were granted releases for emergency reasons between the start of Summer Institute and the end of their teaching commitments; they were not included in any of these totals or calculations.

<sup>20</sup> Note: Data available only through Fall 2012; final retention data not available for the 2011 cohort until Summer 2013. The Evaluation Team will continue to track attrition rates through the end of the RttT period.

**Selectivity<sup>21</sup>**

*Grade Point Average (GPA)*

The average GPA among candidates who were extended offers to join TFA-ENC is very high (mean = 3.62), though the range is broad (2.75-4.00), indicating that TFA considers GPA but does not let that single factor drive selection (Table 5).

Table 5. TFA-ENC Invited Corps Member GPA by Cohort

|   | TFA-ENC Invited Corps Member Cohort Year |       |       |       |      | Overall      |
|---|--|-------|-------|-------|------|--------------|
|   | 2008                                     | 2009  | 2010  | 2011  | 2012 |              |
| <i>N</i>  | 99                                       | 80    | 69    | 117   | 155  | <b>520*</b>  |
| <i>Mean</i>   | 3.62                                     | 3.65  | 3.58  | 3.62  | 3.62 | <b>3.62</b>  |
| <i>Percent of Cohort in Highest GPA Range (4.0-3.7)</i> | 50.5%                                    | 50.0% | 40.3% | 44.4% | 49.7 | <b>47.4%</b> |

\*No cumulative GPA provided for three corps members in 2010 cohort.

*Post-Secondary Institution Quality*

TFA relies on *US News & World Report* rankings of US colleges and universities to derive its selectivity ranking of corps member post-secondary schools. TFA recruits heavily from what it labels “More Selective,” and “Most Selective” schools (the second and third most selective groups of schools<sup>22</sup>), which account for 74% of all accepted candidates across the five cohorts.

*Leadership Potential*

TFA staff members rate the leadership potential of the candidates at several points during the interview and selection process and assign (and continuously update throughout the recruitment process) subjective ratings of this potential on a 5-point scale, based on perceptions of a candidate’s previous leadership experience (as detailed in résumés and applications, and later clarified via interviews). The average leadership score among ENC-TFA candidates was about 3.34 (SD = .904). The majority (about 73%) of candidates were ranked by TFA as having “average” (3) or “high” (4) leadership potential, and 11% were ranked with the “highest” leadership potential (5). There are some interesting differences across cohorts, however. Examining the combined scores of “high” and “highest” across cohorts, 47.2% of the 2010 cohort, 44.4% of the 2011 cohort, and 43.2% of the 2012 cohort were assessed as having either “high” or “highest” leadership potential, but only 29.3% of the 2008 cohort and 23.8% of the 2009 cohort were ranked at this level (Table 6, following page).

<sup>21</sup> For the selectivity analyses, data for all potential corps members—even those who declined acceptance—were included (523 cases).

<sup>22</sup> Ratings are: “Premiere,” “Most Selective,” “More Selective,” “Selective,” “Less Selective,” “Least Selective,” and “Not Rated.”

Table 6. TFA-ENC Cohort by Leadership Score

| Leadership Potential Ranking | TFA-ENC Corps Member Cohort Entry Year |                   |      |                   |      |                   |      |                   |      |                   | Total*      |              |
|------------------------------|--|-------------------|------|-------------------|------|-------------------|------|-------------------|------|-------------------|-------------|--------------|
|                              | 2008                                   |                   | 2009 |                   | 2010 |                   | 2011 |                   | 2012 |                   |             |              |
|                              | N                                      | Percent of Cohort | N    | Percent of Cohort | N    | Percent of Cohort | N    | Percent of Cohort | N    | Percent of Cohort | N           | Percent      |
| <b>High (4, 5)</b>           | 29                                     | 29.3%             | 19   | 23.8%             | 34   | 47.2%             | 52   | 44.4%             | 67   | 43.2%             | <b>201</b>  | <b>40.1%</b> |
| <b>Average (3)</b>           | 43                                     | 43.4%             | 43   | 53.8%             | 22   | 30.6%             | 43   | 36.8%             | 70   | 45.2%             | <b>221</b>  | <b>44.1%</b> |
| <b>Low (1, 2)</b>            | 26                                     | 26.3%             | 18   | 22.5%             | 6    | 8.3%              | 11   | 9.4%              | 18   | 11.6%             | <b>79</b>   | <b>15.8%</b> |
| <b>Overall Average Score</b> | 3.07                                   |                   | 3.05 |                   | 3.63 |                   | 3.53 |                   | 3.41 |                   | <b>3.34</b> |              |

\*No leadership scores provided for one corps member in 2008 cohort, for 10 in 2010 cohort, and for 11 in 2011 cohort.

As with GPAs, the range of ratings in this category also suggests that TFA does not allow this variable to drive selection exclusively, either; fully 15.8% (about 1 out of every 6) of accepted candidates for TFA-ENC were rated at the two lowest levels (1 and 2).

Interestingly, there is a weak but statistically significant inverse relationship between leadership potential ratings and GPA among accepted candidates across the five years ( $r=-.194$ ;  $p=.000$ )—as leadership scores rise among candidates, mean GPAs tend to fall, and vice versa. The Evaluation Team will continue to monitor these data and engage in conversations with TFA representatives to determine whether these early findings, if they persist, are the result of intentional selection policies or merely an anomaly in this TFA-ENC applicant pool.

**Cohort Characteristics and Early Departure or Dismissal**

Because one of the emphases of the NCTC initiative is on extending the retention of corps members beyond their commitment years, the Evaluation Team investigated possible connections between TFA-ENC corps member characteristics and early departure and dismissal. The analyses included three characteristics—GPA, leadership score, and college and university selectivity—to determine if any of them appeared to be correlated with early departure and dismissal, but in no cases did there appear to be any connection between these characteristics and a corps member’s likelihood to either decline a position with TFA-ENC or fail to complete her or his two-year commitment.<sup>23</sup> The narrative analysis section on retention included in Appendix K provides additional insights into reasons for early departure of corps members.

<sup>23</sup> A logistic regression using TFA corps member status (in good standing or not in good standing) as the dependent variable was regressed onto three independent variables: (1) undergraduate institution selectivity; (2) leadership potential; and (3) cumulative GPA. None of these three independent variables was found to have a statistically significant relationship to corps member status ( $n=239$ ;  $p[selectivity]=.310$ ;  $p[GPA]=.715$ ;  $p[leadership]=.801$ ). The analysis was completed for corps members in the 2008 through 2010 cohorts only; the 2011 and 2012 cohorts, as well as any corps members who left the program for personal emergencies, were excluded from this analysis because they are all still active corps members in groups that may experience additional dropout.

## Preliminary Recommendations and Suggested Best Practices for NCTC

This first report established some baseline data that will make summative evaluation possible toward the end of the RttT grant period, but the majority of the report is intended to be formative in nature. The Evaluation Team presents here recruitment, training, and employment recommendations for NCTC as it moves into its first full year of activity.

### *Recruitment*

Last year's recruitment results (29 corps members) fell well short of the target for Year 1 (100 corps members), despite the fact that NCTC recruitment efforts attracted interest from a large number of people (481)—a candidate-to-corps-member recruitment yield of only about 6%. In addition to the changes already under way in NCTC's recruitment process for 2012-13 (noted above), Evaluation Team observations of NCTC recruitment efforts and reviews of recruitment strategies practiced by similar programs suggest several other actions NCTC should consider, not only to raise the raw number of potential candidates but also to reach a more diversified candidate pool and potentially increase recruitment yield.

- *Expand the use of Internet recruitment tools.* The first year of NCTC recruiting suffered from a late start and did not meet expected targets, but with an earlier start for 2012-13, NCTC may be able to attract a larger number of interested candidates. To ensure that NCTC draws from the largest pool possible, the program should consider an expanded marketing approach that includes a stronger Internet presence. For example, establishing a unique URL for NCTC, one that is independent from the current host site (the NCDPI website), could help establish a clear identity for NCTC as a stand-alone program. In addition, providing potential corps members access to the website while at the recruitment event would expedite the application process and also reduce the number of recruits lost as a result of lag-time between recruitment and application, or general resistance to the steps necessary to complete a paper application. Also, active recruitment strategies that include popular social networking sites (such as Facebook) have proven successful for similar organizations (like TFA)<sup>24</sup>—particularly for recruitment of currently-enrolled university students—and may help NCTC to boost its number of potential recruits. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the expansion of Internet recruitment tools may provide NCTC with a platform on which to begin to support the development of the cohort camaraderie cited by many TFA-ENC corps members as an important component of their early TFA experiences (see *Employment* recommendations, below).
- *Customize recruitment activities for multiple audiences.* Acquiring as much information as possible about the organization of and anticipated vendor attendance for each recruitment event ahead of time may be beneficial to NCTC recruitment efforts. Although the information NCTC will present at each event likely will be similar (e.g., requirements and benefits of the program), it may be helpful to prepare materials and discussion points that identify the strengths of NCTC in comparison to the other programs present at a given recruitment event. As noted by TFA-ENC corps members in focus groups, these discussion

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.facebook.com/teachforamerica>; see also <https://www.facebook.com/peacecorps> for another example.

points might include ways to set appropriate expectations for candidates with respect to both the opportunities and the challenges that they will face in targeted schools.

- *Develop relationships with recruitment event sponsors and hosts.* Given the annual nature of university and regional career fairs, it may be beneficial for NCTC to begin to create and sustain multiple ongoing relationships at each recruitment site to support recruitment efforts beyond official recruitment events. For example, one important goal on college and university campuses might include leveraging those relationships to make connections to student organizations and clubs that share values similar to those of NCTC.<sup>25</sup> In addition, NCTC may want to consider establishing a presence in a wider array of venues, including those that capture mid-career candidates, such as military personnel who are exiting service (for example, NCTC could enlist additional help from Troops to Teachers, which was the referral source for some members of the inaugural cohort). Finally, relationship-building may help ensure not only access to but also possibly preferential treatment at future recruitment opportunities, especially at the schools at which NCTC has experienced the most success (for 2012, sites like East Carolina University and North Carolina A&T; Table 1, above).

### ***Summer Institute***

- *Extend and expand the Summer Institute.* In addition to the planned training extensions for 2013 described above and in Appendix G, as budget, recruitment, and partnering allow, NCTC should consider beginning Summer Institute earlier in the summer to allow for a longer Institute (e.g., incorporating more of the interactive sessions with trainers that appeared to work so well, covering in greater depth the mechanics of teaching, and extending other modules so that they can better model effective teaching practices) and the opportunity to extend not only the cohort's time in the practicum but also the number and variety of experiences available to corps members (e.g., subject variety [especially for elementary teachers], peer observation, and formal reflection). In comparison, even at seven weeks long, the more expansive TFA Summer Institute experience still did not seem long enough to some of the TFA-ENC corps members who participated in focus groups and reflected on the impact of Summer Institute on their first year of teaching. Of particular importance will be finding ways to provide more in-depth training in specialized fields and for working with special-needs populations.
- *Offer pre-Summer Institute in-school experiences.* NCTC should consider providing corps members—especially those who are offered admission during the Winter acceptance window (Appendix G)—with time in schools *before* Summer Institute begins, to help give the corps members some context for the training they receive during Summer Institute. While this in-school experience does not necessarily need to involve direct instruction, even a week of in-school observations prior to the Summer Institute could help provide the schema necessary for corps members to benefit optimally from the information they receive during Institute about teaching at the first Institute, this instruction was delivered largely in an experiential vacuum for most corps members. It may also help address the issue raised by several TFA-ENC corps members regarding disconnects between their pre-experience impressions of the work ahead and the realities they faced once they arrived at their schools.

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<sup>25</sup> For example, the Carolina College Advising Corps at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and groups sponsored by the Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership at Duke University.

- *Seek Summer Institute partnerships.* NCTC should consider partnering with one or more of the other new teacher summer training and induction programs offered across the state every summer (listed below). These partnerships may be able to help the program by (a) reducing costs, (b) pooling intellectual resources and expertise (for example, via access to best-practices instruction on training modules common to most or all of the partnering institutes), and (c) supporting the development of a larger, statewide network of first-year teachers. With assistance from NCTC and the other partnering organizations, such a network could contribute to the formation of a supportive community that could assist its members with securing jobs and other early-career struggles (such as resource and curriculum development). In addition, introduction of some commonality across summer licensure and training programs for new teachers may help move the state toward delivery of a common set of messages, values, and beliefs for all starting teachers, regardless of the portals from which those teachers come. In addition, a common Summer Institute may help with candidate employment by allowing the state to host a larger, on-site job fairs at the joint Institute (to be attended by LEA representatives).

Potential partners might include New Teacher Support Program (NTSP, also RttT-funded), NC Teach (ECU), Teach for America, NCDPI's District and School Transformation division (with whom NCTC already has partnered for the first Summer Institute), Troops to Teachers, NC INSPIRE (UNC-General Administration), and North Carolina New Schools Project's NC STEM Teacher Education Program (NC STEP)—many of which operate lateral entry programs similar to NCTC's.<sup>26</sup> NCTC already has begun to explore these partnerships via meetings in Fall 2012 with representatives from NC INSPIRE, NCSTEP, and NTSP. In an ideal partnership arrangement, NCTC would not subsume its whole Summer Institute into the larger common Summer Institute, but would instead merge only those training segments that are common across most or all of the summer programs (e.g., instruction on Common Core/Essential Standards and on basic teaching procedures); training modules specific to NCTC and its mission would continue to be offered during a separate, NCTC-only session.

### ***Employment***

Opportunities for intentional placement of NCTC corps members were rare for the first cohort, given cohort size and the late start of the program, and they are likely to remain challenging, as long as primary responsibility for securing employment is left up to the candidates. Those opportunities should grow, however, as the program establishes longer-term relationships with target LEAs and schools, and as cohort sizes grow. The following “best practices”—derived in part from the Evaluation Team's analysis of TFA-ENC focus group and survey data from 2011-12—are offered in anticipation of the possibility for more active, direct, and extensive involvement in the employment of future NCTC cohorts.

- *Dedicate more resources to multiple components of the employment process.* Early evidence suggests that employment of every corps member in a timely fashion (i.e., before the start of the school year) is likely to be a recurring challenge until the program is better established in the target LEAs; even several weeks into the 2012-13 schools year, 7 of 29 corps members

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<sup>26</sup> In preparation for its summative evaluation report (due in 2014), the Evaluation Team will dedicate some of its time and resources over the next two years to exploring similarities and differences between NCTC and other program in the state with the same or similar structures and goals; see **Next Steps**, below.

still were not employed. As time and resources allow, NCTC should look for ways to increase its involvement in three components of that process. First, NCTC should consider de-emphasizing the importance of corps members' expressed preference with respect to the LEAs in which they would most like to find employment; taking corps member preferences into consideration at this stage in the program's development not only reduces their chances for employment but also may dampen enthusiasm among LEAs—especially those least preferred by corps members—for the program. In addition, data from TFA-ENC corps members indicate that NCTC corps members are likely to benefit from increased availability of information about the employment process—from information about anticipated hiring calendars to strategies for interviewing to the types of positions for which they are most likely to secure employment (especially when those positions are in areas that typically will be out-of-field for most corps members, such as special education). As noted above, NCTC already has begun this process by developing plans to offer interview coaching for the 2013-14 cohort. Finally, NCTC may benefit from consulting with programs with similar goals to identify additional strategies for promoting individual corps members for specific positions.

- *Target schools and LEAs that demonstrate a capacity for supporting corps members and their development, and provide additional support for corps members in schools that do not.* Based on feedback from TFA-ENC corps members, it likely will be beneficial for NCTC to assess all of the potential host schools within the set of approved schools prior to future NCTC member employment for their ability to provide adequate support to corps members. Ideal employment sites are host schools with cultures or structures that facilitate a sense of community and integration for all staff members. Evidence from TFA-ENC focus groups suggests that, in addition, NCTC should investigate ways to provide corps members with techniques for successful school integration, both prior to employment and throughout their first year of teaching.
- *Monitor closely the experiences of corps members employed in schools at which no other corps members are employed.* Regardless of the eventual size of the typical NCTC cohort, school-level and even LEA-level single corps member employment is likely to continue. In some cases, such employment outcomes may be ideal, depending on corps member disposition and the employment site context. In other cases, as indicated by TFA-ENC focus group data, such isolation may negatively impact retention. In addition, expansion of the availability and use of social networking tools (such as Facebook or Google+) to keep corps members connected not only to each other but also to the wider pool of new teachers may help. The Evaluation Team will take advantage of the large number of single-corps member employment situations in 2012-13 to gather more data about the impact of such situations for future reports.
- *Attempt to fit school-level cohort size to school, LEA, and corps member needs.* Two lessons from the 2011-12 TFA-ENC pods were that bigger is not always better, and one size does not fit all. Optimization of the number of corps members at a given school appears to depend on LEA and school needs and cultures. For example, evidence from TFA-ENC focus groups suggests that a high concentration of corps members within a specific school is not necessary for ensuring cohort support if several faculty members at the host school share several characteristics in common with their fellow NCTC teachers, such as age, experience level, or teaching philosophy. Even so, there does appear to be in most cases an optimal range of between three and five corps members—larger school-level clusters (typically six or more

corps members) often hinder healthy integration of corps members into the larger school community, and two-teacher clusters may not be large enough to support NCTC's retention goal.

## **Next Steps**

Over the course of the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years, the Evaluation Team will continue to monitor expansion of TFA-ENC, but in accordance with our scope of work, we will focus most of our resources on tracking the development of NCTC. Building on the procedures, protocols, and preliminary findings developed through fieldwork with TFA-ENC corps members during the 2011-12 school year (described below and in Appendices E, I, J, and K), the NCTC evaluation will include multiple site visits to host schools and surveys of corps members, as well as ongoing observations of recruitment events and professional development activities.

### ***School Year 2012-13 Tentative NCTC Evaluation Schedule***

- Initial NCTC school visits (focus groups, interviews)—Early Fall 2012
- NCTC and TFA-ENC pre-experience surveys—Early Fall 2012
- NCTC recruitment follow-up observations—Fall 2012. In addition to observing recruitment events in Fall 2012, the Team also will gauge the effectiveness of the recruitment process through conversations with accepted corps members as part of the focus group sessions planned for Fall 2012 and Spring 2013.
- Final NCTC school visits (focus groups, interviews)—Spring 2013
- NCTC and TFA-ENC post-experience survey—Spring 2013
- ***Interim Report***: NCTC impact on teacher retention<sup>27</sup>—July 2013 (draft); Fall 2013 (final release)

In addition to these activities, the Team also will begin efforts to more fully catalog and describe programs similar to NCTC already in operation across the state, not only in an effort to differentiate NCTC from these other programs but also in preparation for the summative cost-effectiveness analysis of the program, to be completed in 2014

### ***Plan for Analysis of NCTC Data***

As noted above, during the 2011-12 school year, the Evaluation Team was fortunate to have the opportunity to field-test many of its research tools and protocols for the NCTC evaluation with TFA-ENC corps members. While many of the questions that guide this evaluation were not developed with the TFA experience in mind, the similarities between the two programs made field-testing not only feasible but desirable.

As a result of this field-testing, the survey was refined slightly, and the Team was able to develop an *a priori* coding scheme in preparation for analysis of NCTC focus group data that will be gathered beginning in Fall 2012 (Appendix I). This coding scheme is subject to amendment, pending response patterns from data collected during NCTC focus group sessions.

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<sup>27</sup> *Note*: Because the NCTC program did not begin until the 2012-13 school year, data for this report will be limited and largely qualitative in nature.

The protocols and tools that were field-tested, as well as results of the analyses conducted on the data collected, are included in Appendices E, J, and K. Please note that only those components of the TFA-ENC data analyses that apply directly to approved evaluation questions are included in the main body of this report; the Evaluation Team will not generate recommendations or draw conclusions about TFA-ENC operations that are not governed by the state's approved Detailed Scope of Work and the approved evaluation questions.

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## Appendix A. NCTC Recruitment Observation Protocol

**Observer Name:**

**Date and Time:**

**Location of Recruitment:**

**Number and Type of Recruitment Activities/Events Observed:**

*Directions:* Please use the following question prompts to record your observations of the NCTC recruitment event(s) you observed. Questions are grouped under four main themes: NCTC Organization/Structure, Potential Recruits/Teachers, NCTC Staff, and Additional Comments. If more than one recruitment event was observed please indicate where appropriate.

### I. NCTC Organization & Structure

|  |
|--|
| 1. How is NCTC described/explained to potential recruits/teachers?   |
| 2. What elements of NCTC seem to appeal most to potential recruits/teachers?   |
| 3. What elements of NCTC appear of most concern to potential recruits/teachers?  |
| 4. What types of resources were used to promote NCTC?<br><br>How was NCTC organization/structure described on these resources? |

### II. NCTC Potential Recruits/Teachers

|   |
|---|
| 1. Are potential recruits/teachers responding favorably or unfavorably to the program? Explain                  |
| 2. Are potential recruits/teachers considering other programs?<br><br>If so, which ones and for what reason(s)? |



## Appendix B. Informal NCTC Summer Institute Observation Guide

**Observer Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Institute/Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Module/Segment Observed (use a different form for each module/segment):**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Event Logistics: # of Participants; # of NCTC Staff and Roles; Event Layout, etc.:**

\_\_\_\_\_

### **Institute Organization/Structure/Components:**

|  |
|--|
| 1. Briefly describe the content and purpose of the module/segment.   |
| 2. Briefly describe the pedagogical approach(es) used by the module/segment leader?  |
| 3. What elements of the module/segment appear to be high quality, relevant, and/or useful for corps members? In what ways?   |
| 4. What elements of the module/segment appear to lack quality, relevance, and/or usefulness for corps members? In what ways? |
| 5. What resources/materials are provided? How are they used?   |
| Additional Notes:  |

**Corps Members – General Observations:**

|  |
|--|
| 1. Do corps members appear to be responding favorably or unfavorably to the module/segment?<br>Explain |
| 2. Do corps members express any concerns about the module/segment? If so, what are they?               |
| 3. What elements of the module/segment appear to appeal most to corps members?                         |
| Additional Notes:  |

**NCTC Staff – General Observations:**

|  |
|--|
| 1. Describe the interactions between NCTC staff and corps members.                   |
| 2. Describe the preparedness of NCTC staff (including guest speakers, mentors, etc.) |
| Additional Notes:  |

### Appendix C. Teach for America Corps Member Survey Items and Initial Results

Items and results from the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 administrations; please see notes under Spring 2012 table regarding results converted from that administration.

#### Fall 2011

| Factor                | Item  | N  | Mean | Very strongly agree | Strongly agree         | Somewhat agree | Agree a little      | Do not agree at all |
|-----------------------|---|----|------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Sense of Community    | I value having other TFA members at my school.  | 75 | 4.6  | 73.3%               | 17.3%                  | 5.3%           | 1.3%                | 2.7%                |
|                       | I feel isolated at this school.   | 76 | 1.9  | 2.6%                | 3.9%                   | 22.4%          | 19.7%               | 51.3%               |
|                       | I receive valuable feedback about my teaching from other TFA members of my school.                      | 74 | 3.0  | 17.6%               | 17.6%                  | 27.0%          | 25.7%               | 12.2%               |
|                       | I feel supported by other TFA members at my school.   | 74 | 4.2  | 52.7%               | 29.7%                  | 6.8%           | 5.4%                | 5.4%                |
|                       | Having other TFA members in my school has been critical to my decisions to continue teaching each year. | 67 | 3.2  | 23.9%               | 22.4%                  | 22.4%          | 13.4%               | 17.9%               |
|                       | I plan to stay beyond my two-year commitment to teaching.   | 65 | 2.3  | 4.6%                | 13.8%                  | 23.1%          | 21.5%               | 36.9%               |
| Strength of Community | Frequency of discussing school-related issues with other corps members                                  | 67 | 1.7  | Never               | Less than once a month | Monthly        | Bi-weekly to weekly | Daily               |
|                       | Frequency of participation in non-school-related activities with other corps members                    | 69 | 2.5  | 7.5%                | 4.5%                   | 4.5%           | 22.4%               | 61.2%               |
|                       |   |    |      | 11.6%               | 5.8%                   | 17.4%          | 53.6%               | 11.6%               |

| Factor                | Item  | N   | Mean <sup>1</sup> | Very strongly agree <sup>2</sup> | Strongly agree <sup>3</sup> | Somewhat agree | Agree a little <sup>4</sup> | Do not agree at all <sup>5</sup> | N/A <sup>6</sup> |
|-----------------------|---|-----|-------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|
| Sense of Community    | I value having other TFA members at my school.  | 122 | 4.6               | 57.4%                            | 27.9%                       | 7.4%           | 1.6%                        | 0.0%                             | 5.7%             |
|                       | I feel isolated at this school.   | 122 | 2.2               | 4.9%                             | 10.7%                       | 15.6%          | 12.3%                       | 53.2%                            | 3.3%             |
|                       | I receive valuable feedback about my teaching from other TFA members of my school.                      | 122 | 3.2               | 10.7%                            | 22.1%                       | 23.8%          | 12.3%                       | 21.4%                            | 9.8%             |
|                       | I feel supported by other TFA members at my school.   | 122 | 4.2               | 39.3%                            | 30.3%                       | 13.9%          | 5.8%                        | 4.9%                             | 5.7%             |
|                       | Having other TFA members in my school has been critical to my decisions to continue teaching each year. | 122 | 3.4               | 22.1%                            | 17.2%                       | 13.9%          | 14.0%                       | 20.5%                            | 12.3%            |
|                       | I plan to stay beyond my two-year commitment to teaching.   | 122 | 2.2               | 5.7%                             | 6.6%                        | 6.6%           | 29.5%                       | 45.9%                            | 5.7%             |
| Strength of Community | Frequency of discussing school-related issues with other corps members                                  | 122 | 1.3               | Never                            | Less than once a month      | Monthly        | Bi-weekly to weekly         | Daily                            | N/A <sup>6</sup> |
|                       | Frequency of participation in non-school-related activities with other corps members                    | 122 | 2.3               | 0.8%                             | 4.9%                        | 4.1%           | 12.3%                       | 72.1%                            | 5.7%             |
|                       |   |     |                   | 5.7%                             | 10.7%                       | 14.8%          | 50.0%                       | 13.1%                            | 5.7%             |

Notes for Spring 2012 administration and results

General note: An error in the administration of the Spring 2012 survey led to Items 1-6 being rated on a 7-point scale. The results have been converted to allow for better comparison with the Fall 2011 administration. As a result, caution should be taken in interpreting differences across the two sets of results.

<sup>1</sup> Converted (for Items 1-6) to match Fall 2011 administration metric (multiplied by 5 and then divided by 7)

<sup>2</sup> Option originally labeled “Strongly agree” for Spring administration

<sup>3</sup> Option labeled “Agree” for Spring administration

<sup>4</sup> Combination of “Neutral” and “Somewhat disagree” responses from Spring administration

<sup>5</sup> Combination of “Strongly disagree” and “disagree” responses from Spring administration

<sup>6</sup> Response option available only for Spring administration

## Appendix D. Technical Notes: Teach for America Corps Member Survey

Reliability and validity evidence for the TFA-ENC corps member survey was gathered using multiple psychometric methods at both the item and scale levels of analysis. The analyses included a rational review of the survey and of each item, descriptive statistics analysis (e.g., arithmetic means, standard deviations, distributional properties), exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and reliability analysis. This same analytical strategy—except EFA, which was not necessary because the factor structure was identified in the Fall 2011 administration—was conducted for the Spring 2012 administration.

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Descriptive statistics were analyzed at the item and scale levels of analysis. The analysis consisted of measures of central tendency (e.g., median and arithmetic mean) and dispersion (e.g., standard deviation), as well as item- and scale-level distributional properties (Tables D.1 [below] and D.2 [following page]).

*Table D.1.* Fall 2011 Descriptive Statistics.

| <b>Item/Factor</b>    | <b><i>N</i></b> | <b><i>Mean</i></b> | <b><i>SD</i></b> | <b><i>Skewness</i></b> | <b><i>Kurtosis</i></b> |
|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Item 1                | 75              | 4.57               | 0.87             | -2.550                 | 6.926                  |
| Item 2                | 76              | 4.13               | 1.06             | -1.023                 | 0.324                  |
| Item 3                | 74              | 3.03               | 1.28             | 0.109                  | -1.025                 |
| Item 4                | 74              | 4.19               | 1.13             | -1.553                 | 1.716                  |
| Item 5                | 67              | 3.21               | 1.42             | -0.251                 | -1.201                 |
| Item 6                | 65              | 2.28               | 1.23             | 0.536                  | -0.814                 |
| Item 7                | 67              | 4.25               | 1.21             | -1.724                 | 1.946                  |
| Item 8                | 68              | 3.49               | 1.15             | -1.048                 | 0.285                  |
| Sense of Community    | 60              | 3.60               | 0.73             | -0.729                 | 0.386                  |
| Strength of Community | 66              | 3.86               | 1.04             | -1.328                 | 1.143                  |

Table D.2. Spring 2012 Descriptive Statistics (converted to same metric as Fall 2011).

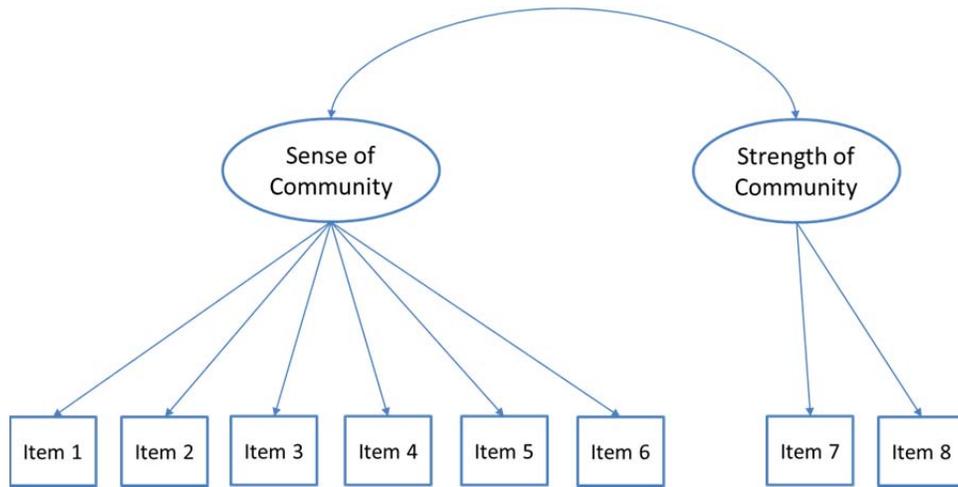
| <b>Item/Factor</b>    | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean*</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>Skewness</b> | <b>Kurtosis</b> |
|-----------------------|----------|--------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Item 1                | 115      | 4.64         | 0.72      | -1.360          | 1.418           |
| Item 2                | 118      | 2.19         | 2.02      | 0.494           | -1.243          |
| Item 3                | 110      | 3.22         | 1.86      | -0.523          | -0.966          |
| Item 4                | 115      | 4.20         | 1.45      | -1.840          | 3.394           |
| Item 5                | 107      | 3.38         | 2.02      | -0.500          | -1.094          |
| Item 6                | 115      | 2.24         | 1.88      | 0.426           | -0.909          |
| Item 7                | 115      | 3.28         | 0.87      | -2.297          | 4.645           |
| Item 8                | 115      | 2.55         | 1.06      | -0.917          | 0.266           |
| Sense of Community    | 95       | 3.57         | 1.03      | -0.681          | 0.179           |
| Strength of Community | 115      | 2.92         | 0.84      | -1.451          | 1.699           |

\* Converted (for Items 1-6) to match Fall 2011 administration metric (multiplied by 5 and then divided by 7)

### **Factor Analysis**

Both exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted (Figure D.1, following page). The 2-factor model demonstrated acceptable fit in Fall 2011 ( $\chi^2 = 25.249$ ;  $p = .153$ ; CFI = .97; TLI = .95; RMSEA = .07; SRMR = .06) according to accepted guidelines for determining model fit. The 2-factor model was then cross-validated in Spring 2012 ( $\chi^2 = 31.931$ ;  $p = .032$ ; CFI = .94; TLI = .92; RMSEA = .08; SRMR = .05). With one exception, the items loaded well onto factors that matched their grouping on the survey instrument: Five of the first six items into Factor 1 (Sense of Community) and the final two items into Factor 2 (Strength of Community). The exception (“I plan to stay beyond my two-year commitment to teaching”) also was categorized by a very low mean, relative to the other items in the first group of questions. It is possible that, unlike the other five items in this grouping, there are many more outside factors—factors beyond those holding the other five items together—that play into each respondent’s decision to stay beyond the two-year commitment.

Figure D.1. TFA-ENC Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 Survey Response Path Diagram



Note. The simplified path diagram indicates that two latent underlying factors (i.e., Sense of Community and Strength of Community) account for the variability in the observed responses to Items 1-6 and Items 7-8, respectively. The double-sided arrow between Sense of Community and Strength of Community indicates that the two factors are correlated (Fall 2011:  $r = .91, p < .001$ ; Spring 2012:  $r = .90, p < .001$ ).

**Reliability Analysis**

Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s coefficient alpha [ $\alpha$ ]) was examined for both factors (Tables D.3 and D.4). By default,  $\alpha$  between .70 and .90 is considered desirable. Both factors demonstrated acceptable levels of  $\alpha$ . Strength of Community fell trivially below the arbitrary .70 cutoff, but was unduly attenuated by having only two items ( $\alpha$  is sensitive to the number of items in a scale).

Table D.3. Fall 2011 Alpha Coefficients.

| Factor                | N  | $\alpha$ |
|-----------------------|----|----------|
| Sense of Community    | 60 | .73      |
| Strength of Community | 66 | .69      |

Note:  $\alpha$  = Cronbach’s coefficient alpha.

Table D.4. Spring 2012 Alpha Coefficients.

| Factor                | N   | $\alpha$ |
|-----------------------|-----|----------|
| Sense of Community    | 95  | .66      |
| Strength of Community | 115 | .68      |

Note:  $\alpha$  = Cronbach’s coefficient alpha.

**Appendix E. Focus Group Protocol, Fall 2011 and Spring 2012**

***First-Year TFA-ENC Teacher Focus Group Questions***

*Overall / Intro*

- How would you describe your TFA experience to this point?

*Initiative Effectiveness / Recruitment and Retention*

- If the option had been available to take part in a program based in your home state, or if TFA had allowed you to choose your state of placement, would you have considered applying for a position through that program, rather than through TFA? If so, why? If not, why not?
- What do you think are the benefits of being placed with other TFA members at your school? What are the drawbacks?
- Do you think being placed with other TFA members affects your thinking about returning next year to this school?
- Have you experienced any feelings of isolation during your time here at [name of school]? In [name of community]? If yes:
  - What role does being away from your family play in these feelings?
  - What role does being away from a larger city play?
  - What other factors do you think contribute to these feelings of isolation?
  - Has being with other TFA members helped reduce these feelings? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Do you plan to remain in teaching at this school next year? Why or why not? Are you considering remaining in teaching beyond your commitment? Why or why not?

***Non-TFA New Teacher Focus Group Questions***

*Overall / Intro*

- How would you describe your first-year experience to this point? Your experience working with TFA members at your school?

*Initiative Effectiveness / Recruitment and Retention*

- When you were an undergraduate, were you aware of opportunities like *Teach for America* or *NCTC* [*Insert brief description of each program here, if necessary*]?
  - Did you consider applying for a position through one or more of those programs? Why or why not?
  - Would you make the same choice again? Why or why not?
- How would you describe the preparedness for teaching in this school of the TFA teachers? Do you believe they were as well-prepared for their first year of teaching as you were?
  - Could you please elaborate on your perceptions of their content knowledge mastery?
  - Could you please elaborate on your perceptions of their instructional delivery effectiveness?
  - Could you please elaborate on your perceptions of their classroom management skills?
- TFA places teachers in groups of three or more at some schools. Do you think that having several TFA teachers at your school has impacted their individual or collective effectiveness?
- Have you experienced any feelings of isolation during your time here at X [name of school]? In [name of community]?
  - What role does being away from your family play in these feelings?
  - What role does being away from a larger city play?
- Do you think TFA teachers feel isolated at this school? In this community? Why or why not?
- Are you planning to return to this school next year? Why or why not?
  - [If returning]: Are you considering remaining in teaching for more than two years? Why or why not?
  - [If not planning to return]: Are you planning to return to teaching somewhere else? If so, where?
  - [If not planning to return to teaching]: Are you planning to stay in education in some capacity? If so, describe.

## Appendix F. NCTC Recruitment Materials

### What is NCTC?

# NC Teacher Corps

The NC TC is an initiative to recruit, develop, and retain potential educators who are recent college graduates or mid-career professionals interested in pursuing teacher licensure through alternative certification routes and are committed to teaching in districts and schools in North Carolina where they are needed the most.

### Who is eligible to participate?

Recent college graduates and mid-career professionals who do not already have a teaching license and who are committed to expanding educational opportunities for students in high needs communities in North Carolina. While target degree areas are those related to math, science, and special education, partnering districts may have other vacancy needs.



### What does it mean to be an NCTC member?

To be a NCTC member means you are committed to making a difference in North Carolina by expanding the educational opportunities for students who need you most.

As a NCTC member, you will be a full-time teacher and receive a full salary and be eligible for comprehensive health benefits from your school district even though you have not completed teacher certification.

You will receive ongoing support while working on your teaching certification and you will participate in intensive training opportunities designed to ensure your success in the classroom.

### What are the requirements to qualify for the program?

- Participants must meet the North Carolina lateral entry licensure requirements
- Participants must have a desire to teach in high needs schools in North Carolina
- Participants must commit to teaching for a minimum of 2 years in a partnering school district
- Participants must submit 3 letters of recommendation
- Participants must attend the 4 week NCTC Summer Institute
- Participants must be hired by a partnering LEA
- Participants must attend 5 Saturday training sessions during the school year

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North Carolina students need you!

**MAKE A CHOICE TO  
MAKE A DIFFERENCE...  
TEACH!**



The mission of NCTC is to recruit potential teachers who are successful graduates of North Carolina colleges and universities with degrees in programs other than education and who are committed to expanding educational opportunities for students in school districts across North Carolina where they are most needed.



North Carolina Department of Public Instruction  
301 N. Wilmington Street | Raleigh, NC 27601  
(919) 807-3355

[www.ncpublicschools.org/recruitment/ncteachercorps](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/recruitment/ncteachercorps)

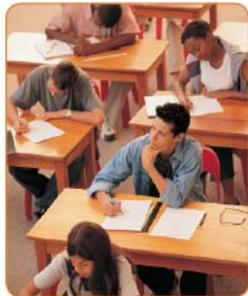


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Fax: (919) 807-4065

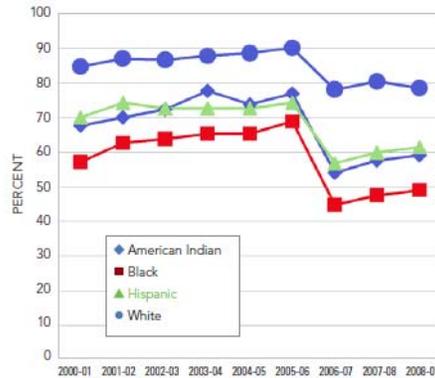
 **PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA**  
State Board of Education | Department of Public Instruction

North Carolina's 8.6 percent rate tops the national average of extremely poor children, which is 7.9 percent. (from ncchild.org)



Disparities in performance among racial and ethnic groups are evident in North Carolina and national assessments.

Fig. 2: Percent of Students Performing at or above grade level on Algebra 1 EOCs 2000-2001 through 2008-2009



Where will their futures take them without great teachers?



Fig. 1: Percent of Students Grades 3-8 scoring at or above Level III on EOGs, Reading and Math Composite, 2000-2008

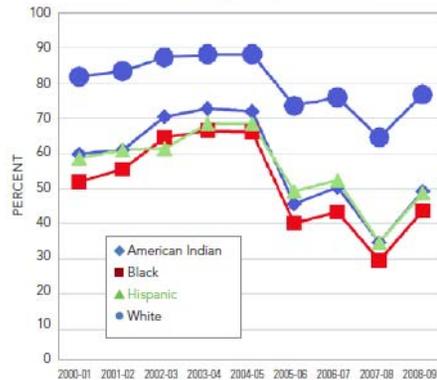
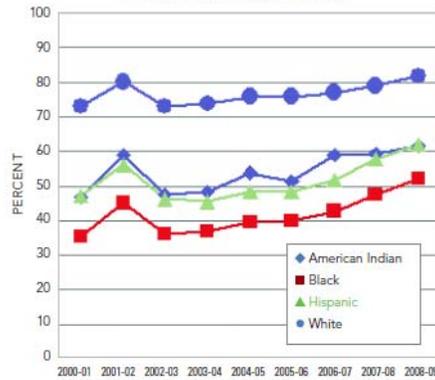


Fig. 3: Percent of Students Performing at or above grade level on Biology EOCs 2000-2001 through 2008-09



North Carolina's economic future depends on preparing students of every racial and ethnic background for college and/or workforce success. The social and economic cost of those lost talents is a price North Carolina cannot afford to pay (from *Exposing the Gap, Revised*, NC Justice Center)

**Make a Choice to Make a Difference!**

Charts from: *Exposing the Gap, Revised*, 2010. NC Justice Center

**Appendix G. Revised NCTC Recruitment and Pre-Training Calendar, 2012-13**

| <b>PHASE I RECRUITMENT - COHORT II</b>                |  |
|---|--|
| <b>WHAT</b>   | <b>TIMEFRAME</b>   |
| Career Fairs, Info Sessions, and Career Site Postings | September 3 <sup>rd</sup> through October 31 <sup>st</sup> |
| Application Deadline                                  | November 21 <sup>st</sup>                                  |
| Interviews  | December 3 <sup>rd</sup> through 14 <sup>th</sup>          |
| Candidates Notified                                   | No later than December 20 <sup>th</sup>                    |

| <b>PHASE II RECRUITMENT - COHORT II</b>               |  |
|---|--|
| <b>WHAT</b>   | <b>TIMEFRAME</b>                                       |
| Career Fairs, Info Sessions, and Career Site Postings | January 15 <sup>th</sup> through March 1 <sup>st</sup> |
| Application Deadline                                  | March 15 <sup>th</sup>                                 |
| Interviews  | March 20 <sup>th</sup> through April 12 <sup>th</sup>  |
| Candidates Notified                                   | No later than April 30 <sup>th</sup>                   |

| <b>COHORT II TRAINING</b>                 |   |
|---|---|
| <b>WHAT</b>                               | <b>TIMEFRAME</b>  |
| Praxis Preparation, Interview Skills, TBD | January 15 <sup>th</sup> through June 30 <sup>th</sup> (online and face to face options, Study materials for check out) |
| Online coursework                         | May/June  |
| Summer Institute                          | July 15 <sup>th</sup> -August 2 <sup>nd</sup>   |

**Appendix H. Primary NCTC 2012 Summer Institute Modules**

| Module Title  | Strengths   | Weaknesses  |
|---|---|---|
| <i>Day 1: Setting the Stage</i>                     |   |   |
| Mission of NCTC                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NCTC’s purpose clearly defined</li> <li>• Coverage of plight of high-need schools conveyed sense of urgency</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation of content through mixed media may have interfered with instructional message</li> </ul>  |
| Overview of policy and procedures                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitators were professional and respectful</li> <li>• Module provided legal content critical to protect teachers</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passive engagement among corps members</li> <li>• Time frame too short given depth of material to cover; some policies remained unclear</li> </ul>   |
| Universal principles of Common Core state standards | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities linked to Common Core</li> <li>• Appropriate pacing</li> <li>• Constructive feedback</li> <li>• Friendly atmosphere</li> <li>• Corps members actively engaged</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of content depth</li> <li>• Corps members’ misconceptions not addressed</li> <li>• Principles not addressed throughout entire day as intended</li> </ul>  |
| First days of schools (classroom management)        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic highly relevant to effective teaching</li> <li>• Presenters used varied instructional formats, including whole- and small-group work, distributed talk</li> <li>• Concrete examples provided through videos</li> <li>• Frequent opportunities for modeling and practice</li> <li>• High level of engagement among corps members</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rote teaching provided as an example of effective classroom management</li> <li>• Unclear references to “scientifically proven” techniques</li> <li>• Few opportunities for corps member questions</li> <li>• Specific strategies presented without larger context of the craft of teaching</li> </ul> |
| Setting the stage                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importance of teacher role in student success highlighted</li> <li>• Concrete strategies provided</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Session primarily passive in nature</li> <li>• Corps member concerns about employment not fully addressed</li> </ul>   |

| Module Title                                 | Strengths   | Weaknesses   |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Day 2: Effective Instructional Design</b> |   |  |
| NC Standard Course of Study                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities (e.g., NCSCOS vocabulary review, identifying online resources, aligning standards) increased corps members’ understanding of the standard course of study</li> <li>• Communication was positive and supportive</li> <li>• Facilitators were professional and established credibility</li> <li>• Effective pacing</li> <li>• Adequate time provided to address individual questions and concerns</li> <li>• Facilitators provided “real life” examples</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More time needed to identify misconceptions and field questions regarding the Common Core and Essential Standards</li> <li>• Volume of participants’ questions took time away from addressing a greater breadth of information</li> </ul>   |
| Effective instruction                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Materials/resources provided with examples for application</li> <li>• Training structure allowed for small-group activities and one-on-one assistance</li> <li>• Facilitators modeled effective teaching and classroom management practices</li> <li>• Hands-on activities supported active participation and opportunities to practice instructional techniques</li> <li>• Time allocated for corps members to develop lesson plans for their first day of teaching</li> <li>• Facilitators provided “real life” examples</li> <li>• Communication was positive and supportive</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater depth needed to clarify practices regarding differentiated instruction and lesson design</li> <li>• More time required to practice techniques learned during small-group sessions</li> <li>• Volume of participants’ questions took time away from addressing a greater breadth of information</li> </ul> |

| Module Title   | Strengths   | Weaknesses  |
|--|---|---|
| <b><i>Day 3: Creating a Positive Classroom Environment</i></b> |   |   |
| Welcome/reflections  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modeled a strategy for beginning class each day</li> <li>• Demonstrated classroom homework review procedures</li> <li>• Allowed participants to explore different grouping strategies</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient time to allow all participants to share</li> </ul>  |
| Navigating the network   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helped participants learn how to function with their future teacher peers</li> <li>• Presenters modeled effective instructional strategies</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitators did not clearly state their rationale for some activity selections</li> <li>• Facilitators did not correct false or misleading statements made by some corps members</li> </ul> |
| Creating a successful and safe learning environment            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used a wide variety of instructional approaches</li> <li>• Emphasized teacher classroom management processes and procedures</li> <li>• Allowed corps members to experiment with different strategies for transitioning to different portions of a lesson</li> <li>• Stressed the importance of work-life balance of corps members</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time allotted for the session was insufficient</li> <li>• Session covered a broad range of topics that at times only appeared to be tangentially related to one another</li> </ul>           |
| Working with students with special needs                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presented basic information on special education</li> <li>• Provided participants with extensive resource materials for their own personal libraries</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Session was lecture-based</li> </ul>   |

## Appendix I. Coding Scheme for Focus Group Results

**Integration:** the degree to which corps members work their way in or are worked into different contexts associated with their placement.

- *Integration Community:* community living (i.e. integration into a rural context)
- *Integration School:* degree to which corps members have been assimilated into the school culture; i.e, corps members are interacting well/poorly with school members

**Isolation:** the degree to which corps members feel disconnected from based on proximity

- *Isolation Family:* discussion about feelings of separation from family
- *Isolation Geographic:* feelings of separation due to distance from where they want to be (e.g., far from city/cultural centers)

**Professional Development:** pre-service and on-going training/mentorship that bolster teacher quality

- *PD Ongoing Training:* Catch All “in school” professional development training
  - *PD Ongoing Training ACC (TFA Only):* Once a month TFA-ENC training
  - *PD Ongoing Training Mentoring:* mention of mentor relationship with TFA Staffer assigned to their area, or mentoring at the local school, any level of guidance from anyone else who is helping them
- *PD Preparation:* Non-corps member’s perceptions of corps members preparedness for the teaching experience
  - *PD Preparation Cultural Sensitivity:* training targeted specifically toward being sensitive to cultural differences that corps member may encounter in their school; e.g. working with rural students from low SES backgrounds, ethnic differences,
  - *PD Preparation Pre-service Training:* Explicit discussion about pre-service training experiences or lack thereof
- *PD Support Systems:* Informal or non-TFA-provided professional development support, such as local PLCs, organic networks of corps members, etc.

**Placement:** How teachers get assigned to schools and classes (content area) within schools

- *Placement Pods:* intentionally placing 3 or more teachers within the same school

**Recruitment:** How teachers became a part of the program; also, whether a state-based program (like NCTC) would have appealed to them

- *Recruitment Selectivity:* use of specific criteria to select teachers or comparing/contrasting teachers on the basis of their quality

**Retention:** indication of a teacher's (TFA & Non-TFA) intention to stay at their school, in teaching or education. (Typically beyond the two year commitment)

- *Retention Education:* will remain in education, not necessarily as a teacher
- *Retention Same School:* will remain in teaching at the same school
- *Retention Teaching:* will remain in teaching, but not at the same school
- *Retention Leavers:* do not intend to stay in teaching or education

**Teacher Quality:** the perceived quality of a teacher in any of a number of categories including but not limited to effectiveness

- *Teacher Quality +/- Tenacity:* description of corps member's ability to persist in the face of adversity/challenges
- *Teacher Quality Classroom Management:* Any technique or strategy utilized to run the classroom effectively and/or behavioral management of students
- *Teacher Quality Delivery of Instructional Content:* comments about delivery of instruction that has to do with the topic itself: e.g. she really knows her geometry (one of three aspects of effectiveness)
- *Teacher Quality Delivery of Instructional Pedagogy:* comments about the delivery on instruction that has to do with how the content is taught; e.g. she really knows how to teach geometry (one of three aspects of effectiveness)
- *Teacher Quality Delivery of Instruction Rigor (Broader):* Includes expectations for students as well as the depth of instruction beyond the minimum standards (strategy + concept) (one of three aspects of effectiveness)
- *Teacher Quality Non-TFA TQ:* (Catch All) for discussions by non-TFAers about their own teaching quality or by TFAers about the quality of their non-TFA colleagues

## **Appendix J. Initial Learnings: Lessons from Teach for America’s Summer Training**

### ***General Description of the TFA Summer Institute***

Teach for America conducts three separate first-year TFA corps member pre-teaching events (two in each chapter’s base region and one in a location central to a more broadly defined super-region) over the course of about seven weeks each summer. TFA brings corps members together first as region-based cohorts (the “Onboarding” event, a one-week session for orienting new TFA corps members to their region and to each other), then as much larger cohorts at their Summer Institutes (one of the major, five-week super-regional summer trainings provided by the national TFA office in conjunction with participating regional chapters), followed by a return to cohort meetings in the various regions (the “Round Zero” event, a final half-week summer training before teaching begins). TFA-ENC corps members started their Institute experience together in Rocky Mount, and they convened in Rocky Mount again afterwards to prepare lessons for the coming year.

The purpose of the first segment (the first gathering of the regional cohort in their eventual teaching locale) appears to be to engage the corps members in the life of the communities into which they will be integrated. The purpose of the Summer Institute is much more pragmatic: to give corps members experience as teachers, as well as to provide them with instruction-related training. The Summer Institute attended by the Evaluation Team in 2011 (the Delta Institute, in Mississippi) included corps members from Alabama, Charlotte, Eastern North Carolina, Indianapolis, the Mississippi Delta, Nashville, and South Louisiana. Corps members at this Institute taught in impromptu summer schools across the Mississippi Delta. The purpose of the last segment (the “Round Zero” segment) is to move corps members from lesson-plan training to unit-level and course-level development.

Other facts and findings:

- The regional meetings held before and after the national Summer Institute give TFA-ENC opportunities to foster corps member identity as both a regional group and as smaller, school-based groups.
- TFA maintains a large staff for Summer Institute and the regional meetings, in part to ensure that there are enough staff members available to arrange for and manage the physical needs of their corps members (such as housing) during the summer sessions.
- In addition to one-on-one staff visits to teaching sites, TFA-ENC also uses its periodic, school-year All Corps Conference gatherings as a way to offer professional development once corps members are placed. However, not all corps members believe that this training is well-linked to the training provided during Summer Institute.
- TFA staff check the quality of the Summer Institute experience daily, and in response they either modify the experience immediately (when possible) or discuss and note changes for later years. TFA-ENC corps members confirmed that TFA was very sensitive to member feedback about the Institute and were willing to make immediate adjustments.

### ***Building Corps Member Community, Commitment, and Enthusiasm***

Observations and informal conversations with new corps members suggested three unofficial lessons learned by the corps members during their Summer Institute experience: (a) be flexible (monitor and adjust); (b) take risks, both to achieve goals and also to model academic risk-taking for students; and (c) be mindful of the sense of urgency surrounding this work.

TFA leadership made that urgency and the seriousness of the commitment clear through a frequently repeated message: “You cannot quit.” To soften the somewhat sharp edges of that statement, they often book-ended it with reassurances that the commitment “is absolutely worth it” because of the children corps members will impact and because of the ways in which it will change them personally. It was not uncommon for TFA to refer to the experience as participation in “the Civil Rights movement of our time.”

Another thread running through discussions of community and commitment was the importance of both independence *and* interdependence. For example, TFA leadership continuously reminded corps members that they needed to “take charge of your lives” and take the initiative to “get what you need” in order to be successful and solve problems they encounter in their school settings, but during one of the TFA-ENC sessions, the focus was on building community, working collaboratively, and capitalizing on the size of “pods” (the intentional grouping of multiple corps members in the same school) into which corps members would be placed.

### ***Integrating into the School Community***

As revealed during many of the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 TFA-ENC focus groups, an ongoing challenge for TFA in general is successful integration of new corps members into existing school environments. Currently, TFA’s approach to preparing corps members to meet this challenge is to (a) work on increasing corps member investment in the success of their schools, (b) encourage them to learn about and understand their schools’ contexts, and (c) provide them with a structured approach to classroom management.

In support of the first of these, much of the Summer Institute curriculum includes an emphasis on establishing a common understanding among corps members of the concept, “Culture of Achievement,” as well as on getting corps members to work toward their own visions of what that might look like in their classrooms. There was a clear emphasis on “hitting a home run” early in the year with students in a way that supports this concept, primarily to help win over what was characterized as a potentially cautious stakeholder group. The importance of this kind of early success was particularly stressed for corps members who were being placed into relatively large pods that in some cases would make their group the majority of the teachers in a school.

TFA also encourages corps members to set challenging goals for students, even if those goals run counter to current school culture. The idea of setting what feels like an “impossible” goal is often repeated. Doubting abilities yields small goals. To aid in earning the school’s and the community’s acceptance of these goals, TFA instructs corps members to work on ways to generate early buy-in for their courses from not only students but also their parents; TFA even goes so far as to refer to this process as developing a “sales pitch.”

### ***Integrating into the Community at Large***

The national TFA office prepares corps members for integration by providing cultural sensitivity and understanding training through a Diversity, Community, and Achievement curriculum, which is a series of courses about building relationships. The ENC chapter expanded this work by coordinating multiple opportunities for their new corps members to begin the process of integrating into their new communities—both to gain an understanding and appreciation of those communities and to allow members of the communities to learn about them. In particular, TFA-ENC arranged for new corps member interactions with community representatives across the TFA-ENC region. For example, in Spring 2012, groups of new TFA-ENC corps members made day-long visits to various communities; TFA-ENC even provided them with a scaffolded structure for processing these meetings, including histories of the various counties and reflection questions like “What type of community am I working in?” “What are the community members’ experiences and perceptions?” “What has shaped this community?” and “What is the community story?”

These activities appeared to be good starting points for TFA-ENC corps members to acknowledge and begin to understand the importance of owning and being responsible for their own cultural sensitivity and awareness, both as teachers and as temporary fellow citizens of this community. The activity also provided an opportunity for community members to warm up to the TFA-ENC group, perhaps establishing a baseline relationship that can grow over the course of the cohort’s time in the community. It is important to note, however, that the impact of the various visits observed during the early Summer 2012 session were lessened by the fact that they took place before final corps member teaching placement; many of those in attendance will not end up working in the specific communities they visited.

### ***Becoming an Effective Teacher***

Clearly, one of the most important functions of the Summer Institute experience is to provide a group of largely untrained and inexperienced first-year teachers-to-be with the tools and skills they will need to not only survive but also be successful during their first year in the classroom. TFA’s primary strategy for doing so is the provision of in-class experiences for their corps members for a large portion of the summer. Corps members typically teach their courses in teams, to maximize the number of corps members that the summer teaching opportunity can accommodate. The downside to this approach is that corps members are limited in the amount of time they have in front of students each day; many indicated that they would have preferred to have had longer—even if fewer—sessions in their summer school classrooms instead of the 45-minute teaching blocks experienced by most. Corps members thought it was too difficult to cover objectives in these summer school sessions before having to “move on” to another objective. Also, corps members reflected that these in-class experiences were most effective when they matched actual Fall subject-area placements for corps members, but many corps members (roughly 40% each year) do not know their placements at the start of Summer Institute.

TFA made a concerted effort to provide each corps member with multiple classroom observers during the Summer Institute period, all of whom made sure to provide much positive reinforcement and coaching in addition to their critiques. TFA also accommodates any corps member’s request for additional, unscheduled observation. Overall, the amount of visible support

staff was significant, making TFA's often-questioned estimated cost per corps member more understandable.

TFA hires a large number of former corps members for its Summer Institute staff; very few people with no previous connection to TFA appear to work at Summer Institute. This arrangement has advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, the former corps members know what lies ahead for new corps members and can anticipate many of their needs, and their involvement contributes to longer-term loyalty to and support for the program among alumni. On the other hand, this staffing arrangement may limit the breadth of the experiences and the expertise upon which staff can draw, and it reduces opportunities to inject non-TFA perspectives; former TFA corps members may view new corps members' experiences through the lenses of their own experiences only.

One strength of the Summer Institute schedule—which incorporates daily teaching with daily professional development sessions—is that it integrates content and curriculum sessions with immediate opportunities to practice learnings from those sessions in a real classroom setting. TFA corps members participate in curriculum sessions throughout the Institute, with a particularly intensive slate of sessions the first week. Trainings also are layered, in that for most topics, multiple related modules are presented throughout the Summer Institute. For example, one of the Summer Institute training cycles included several literacy instruction-based modules. Even with the large amount of pedagogical coverage provided (relative to the time available), however, several corps members noted that they would have preferred even more and more formal sessions on curriculum, instruction, and pedagogy.

Perhaps in deference to the limited time of the training period, TFA encourages a scripted approach to teaching. Based on informal observations of corps members in their summer school classrooms, the upside of this approach is that most corps members experience a structured, more controllable classroom experience. The downside, however, often is an inauthentic level of interaction with the students—atmospheres in many of the classes observed often felt artificial. Also, as alluded to earlier, all TFA corps members are responsible for a detailed and structured behavior management plan; they are provided with guidance, but they can also structure it to their own teaching styles

Most corps members enter their summer school experiences with an extensive array of supporting materials for instruction. For example, in several high school English classes observed, teachers all seemed to have copies of the same short stories (“The Lottery,” “Thank You, Ma’am”) as part of their lesson plans. In addition, all corps members are provided with two standard reference texts: the TFA manual and the TFA-produced book, *Teaching As Leadership*, both of which bring together all of the major TFA themes and goals (Set Big Goals, Invest Students and Their Families/Influencers in Working Hard to Reach the Big Goal, Plan Purposefully, Execute Effectively, Continuously Increase Effectiveness, Work Relentlessly) in one place. As noted in the analysis of focus group interviews below, however, many corps members eventually end up wishing that such resources had been provided to them in a more organized way, perhaps even in the form of prepared curricula.

Finally, the potential impact of the TFA Summer Institute did appear to suffer from two notably missing elements. First, there appeared to be no mechanism in place for redistributing teachers

once their in-class experiences began. Ideally, weak pairs of teachers could have been split up and re-paired with stronger teachers in an effort to maximize what the weaker teachers learn from their peers. Second, there was almost no opportunity for corps members to observe master teachers, each other, or even themselves on video. Corps members are encouraged to engage in (and some *do* engage in) a culture of reflection and of observing one another regularly and providing constructive feedback to improve practice. Some corps members noted that once they were placed in their summer school settings, however, not all corps members carried the concept forward.

### ***Support in the Field***

In addition to providing corps members with hard copies of teaching materials for immediate use during their summer experiences, TFA also maintains a password-protected site ([www.tfanet.org](http://www.tfanet.org)) where members can access numerous teacher resources. The site also provides a portal for networking with current and former corps members. To address issues of content mastery for elementary teachers, who often must teach every core subject in the course of a day, those teachers were provided with a list of Content Leaders who would be on call to assist any new corps members who reached out to them. At the regional level, TFA chapters also provide online training and small-group work sessions to help corps members integrate state-specific standards into their content planning processes.

Less apparent was the availability of support for teaching in highly-specialized, out-of-field classes (like special education and English Language Learners classes), a not-uncommon situation, especially in hard-to-staff schools where such courses are often the last ones staffed.

## **Appendix K. Initial Learnings: Lessons from Teach for America Focus Groups and Surveys**

In preparation for the evaluation of the North Carolina Teacher Corps (NCTC) initiative, the Team conducted site visits to current Teach for America host schools in North Carolina's Eastern region during the course of the 2011-12 school year. This section presents results of analyses of the data gathered during those site visits via focus groups conducted with both TFA-Eastern North Carolina (TFA-ENC) and early-career non-corps members.<sup>28</sup> Where appropriate or applicable, these analyses also are informed by results from the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 surveys. While each of the seven topics below stands on its own as a self-contained theme, there are multiple instances in which concepts from one topic resonate directly with another.

After TFA-ENC completed school placement of all of its 2011 first-year corps members in ten LEAs and four charter schools in Eastern North Carolina, the Evaluation Team reviewed corps member distribution across those LEAs and schools and identified four school sites that reflected anticipated placement procedures for NCTC (i.e., "pod" or intentional school-level cluster placement of corps members) and that also provided diversity in terms of school locale, size, type, demographics, and historical academic success.

Evaluation Team members scheduled Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 focus groups with first-year TFA-ENC corps members at each of these schools and also, when possible, separate focus groups with early-career non-corps members (teachers at the same schools with less than three full years of teaching experience, typically trained in traditional teacher preparation programs). Non-corps members who were willing to participate were identified in two of the four schools. The initial findings below were generated from the Team's initial analysis of the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 focus group data.

### ***Recruitment***

The recruitment process for any service organization is the first and perhaps most important opportunity to both attract candidates to the program and impress upon them the goals of the organization. When current TFA-ENC corps members were asked to discuss what attracted them to join TFA, many of them recalled being awed by the organization's ability to recruit quality candidates and empower them to make a difference in education. In addition, corps members discussed feeling a great sense of camaraderie with other TFA recruits as they were all preparing to embark on a new experience with the same focus.

One corps member explained, "What TFA does in a way that no other organization I've ever seen does, is get the absolutely most effective people and put them in places where they otherwise wouldn't be." Another corps member added, "[T]hey [TFA] go to colleges across the country and get highly idealistic, results-oriented people with track records of success across

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<sup>28</sup> As noted in the main text, the series of RttT evaluation reports of which this is the first will not focus on estimates of TFA corps member impact on student achievement. Readers who are interested in formal studies of the academic impact of North Carolina TFA corps members are encouraged to read the series of reports completed annually by one of the CERE-NC partners, the Carolina Institute for Public Policy (CIPP), on this topic, the most recent of which can be found at: <http://publicpolicy.unc.edu/research/PortalsEffectivenessReport.pdf/view>.

sectors of discipline and convince them that public education and the achievement gap are things worth dedicating several years [to].” Other corps members’ comments more generally addressed being encouraged and feeling confident in their skills as they embraced the challenge of changing education outcomes:

“Summing it up, TFA, prior to you starting to teach, is like this awesome organization. They convince you to join and they convince lots of people, like all the applicants [from] all of these great schools, these great applicants, ‘You don’t want to go make a lot of money. Teach, work twice as much, make half as much,’ and it works. They convince people. And then I thought, prior to arriving at the teaching location and training, I thought I was pretty solid.”

“We were chosen to come into TFA because they picked us out as leaders. They said, ‘You are the sort of person who goes in and changes things. If you don’t like the way something is, you make your own’ and that’s what I’ve always done and I’ve always been . . . considered, I guess, pretty good at it.”

When asked if their decision to be a part of TFA would have changed if there were a similar “in-state” program, some corps members said it would have and noted how valuable it would have been to have a program that did not require moving so far from home. For instance, one corps member explained:

I was living in Florida when I applied, so I wanted, desperately, to come back to North Carolina, just because it is where I grew up and one, I knew I’d be closer to family, and I thought that if I was going to go through this massive adventure, I should have somebody nearby where I could run home and . . . cry for a little while and then come back.

Other members simply agreed that given the opportunity, an in-state teaching program would have been a better fit:

If you had asked me . . . in May when I accepted, I probably would have said that I would have done out-of-state, but now, with looking back, with having moved across the country, I probably would have made the decision to stay.

I do want to say that if North Carolina had a state program and I was from North Carolina, I would do it, because it’s a bigger state and . . . it’s so diverse, like . . . oh my gosh, Asheville is so dramatic from Wilmington, you know . . . it’s so different, whereas my state is pretty much all the same, like flatlands . . .

### *Recruitment: Selection*

In discussing their perceptions of the selection process for TFA and of the characteristics of TFA candidates, corps members surmised that, in addition to discerning discipline-specific qualifications related to the teaching profession, the organization used the interview and application process to identify candidates who had the personality traits necessary to fully carry out its mission. For example, perseverance was particularly emphasized as an important trait for TFA corps members, given the impending challenges they would face. One teacher noted that TFA “selects people who are organized but also have a history of persevering and not quitting.”

Another corps member recalled that in the interview “They ask you if you’ve ever dropped any classes or something and I think any of that’s a red flag that you don’t persevere.”

Another important theme that emerged from recruitment discussions was the disconnect between expectations for the TFA experience that were instilled during the recruitment phase and corps members’ subsequent disappointments after they experienced teaching first-hand. Several corps members agreed that the high expectations that TFA set for its members from the start were welcomed initially, but after experiencing teaching in such an intense environment and on a day-to-day basis, an extended career in teaching became less appealing. One corps member said it best: “In TFA they put so much emphasis on that we are so driven and you’re so driven to overcome and this, that, and the other, and they . . . wind up picking a bunch of people for TFA who are not accustomed to working their butts off and still failing.”

### ***Placement***

A critical but often overlooked component of teacher corps programs is the process of corps member placement—not only in LEAs and schools, but also in subject areas. The Fall and Spring focus groups revealed two distinct aspects of the placement process worth noting: the importance of transparency in the placement process; and potential positive and negative outcomes of corps member placement in school-based clusters, or *pods*.

#### *Placement Transparency*

A common theme among TFA-ENC corps members was the degree of mystery they associated with their placement. While it is not necessary—or perhaps even desirable—to involve corps members directly in the placement process, it is worth noting the anxiety surrounding the placement process, and the potential for corps members to believe that the process is somewhat capricious. Said one corps member, “[T]here’s a little bit of confusion as to how people get placed and why they get placed in certain subjects.” Another added:

[I]t almost felt like there’s a secrecy surrounding how people are placed, because a lot of my questions weren’t answered during that process. . . . Like emails not responded, and this is before I’d met anybody . . . [I]f they had sat us down and explained how placement worked, I think that would have eased a lot for a lot of people.

#### *Value of state-specific placement for recruitment, and role of choice in Corps Member placement.*

As detailed elsewhere in this report, a key component of the NCTC program that implementers hope will help with recruitment is that it offers North Carolina candidates who might otherwise have chosen a similar program (like TFA) a guaranteed position in a school in their home state. Though some TFA-ENC corps members expressly looked for a placement away from home (“I really wanted to branch out. I just wanted a new experience. . . . I am young and this is the time to go out and experience something else and not just be a homebody”), the majority of the corps members who participated in the focus groups indicated that proximity to home would be a very appealing draw for a program like NCTC:

When I was looking at TFA, I was actually looking to stay kind of close to home.

This is as far as I applied and it's farther away than I thought, and my first choice was in my home state. So . . . I would like to be closer to home, [so that] if I wanted to go home for the weekend or something, [I could] have that option.

I'm from New York so if there had been an option in the area for New York City, that would have been my first choice.

If there had been one in West Virginia, and if TFA had been in West Virginia or if there had been a similar program like it sounds like NCTC is, if there had been a West Virginia version of that, I would have been there in a heartbeat.

Participants in the Spring focus groups, informed by a full year of involvement with TFA, pointed toward an additional potentially beneficial outcome of home-state placement: they noted that, had they been placed in their home states, they might have had a competitive advantage over out-of-state corps members in their ability to relate to students:

I think it would have been beneficial in some ways to stay in my home state, because I think I would understand the students a lot better. I think coming to the South . . . I'm an outsider in a whole bunch of ways. I talk differently. I have a whole bunch of other things that are different about me and it can be sometimes hard to relate. . . . I think that in some ways [it] might have been helpful to be in [my home state] and to at least [be able to] say, "Oh, you're talking about your neighborhood. I at least know where that is. Oh, I know who that person is that you're talking about. I know the local establishments," and I just feel like I could connect with students better.

*Placement and Corps Member content background.* Perhaps the most important placement transparency issue is that of subject-area placement. In many cases, NCTC Members—like TFA corps members—will enter the program directly upon completion of an undergraduate major or graduate program in a content-specific field. As demonstrated by the number of TFA corps members who successfully transition from their university area of expertise to a sometimes very different teaching subject (say, English major to social studies teacher), many of the NCTC candidates will be able to handle placements not directly related to their own fields of study. There is a limit, however, to the degree to which such a switch is reasonable or even feasible:

I know . . . teachers who are certified already to teach elementary school and now they're teaching high school. . . . Someone who might have a proficiency in math or history and science could be placed teaching English, and it's like, there's a need and it's great that you're filling that need and certainly we're competent individuals, so I'm sure that most people can rise to the occasion. But I would think that as a first-year teacher you're struggling and you're always encountering numerous casualties of the job from day to day. I would think it might go more smoothly and be an overall more intentional experience if they really felt more . . . groundedness in the content material.

This concern is especially relevant in cases in which corps members are asked to take on highly specialized fields like physics, or fields that normally requires significant additional training, such as special education:

[I]t was just sort of a whirlwind of what happened, being placed in [a special education] position, and I kind of struggled in the beginning, not really having the needed resources for E[xceptional] C[hildren]. . . . [I]t was really hard for me to adjust . . . .

I had a choice before school started to teach in the high school and do Special Ed . . . or stay [in another situation], and it was the pressure on both sides and TFA saying, “You can do whatever you want, whatever you need to do,” and kind of being pushed by the county like “No, don’t do self-contained. We’re throwing you to the wolves.” And I was . . . breaking because I didn’t know what to do . . . .

Such placement decisions also impact non-corps member perceptions of TFA, another important consideration:

I know when [a corps member in a special education placement] got very upset one time, she was like, “They should have investigated, they should have made sure that when they were sending me here, they knew about the program . . . .” [S]he feels like they just put her in something and they don’t even know where or what was happening with it . . . .

### *Placement in Pods*

*Overall value of pods.* In addition to placing North Carolina candidates in North Carolina schools, NCTC also may choose to place those candidates in same-school or same-LEA *pods* (clusters of three or more teachers) when possible. The pod concept assumes that isolation not only can play a critical role in a corps member’s decision to leave a program like NCTC but also that even small groupings of like-minded first- and second-year teachers can help create a community that will strengthen the collective NCTC experience, as well as impact student outcomes. For the 2011-12 school year, TFA-ENC already began intentionally placing several of their corps members in school-level pods, and early indications are that, at least in some respects, the pod idea has merit. On the Fall 2011 TFA-ENC survey, over 90% of surveyed TFA-ENC corps members indicated that they strongly or very strongly agreed with the statement, “I value having other TFA members at my school,” and that proportion had dipped only slightly by the end of the school year (about 85% on the Spring 2012 survey). As one corps member put it, “I think there’s something about being a first-year teacher that just brings you together. There’s nothing like . . . same-year people who are going through the exact same thing.”

For some, placement in a pod provided a way for them to feel a part of a larger community as soon as they arrived at their school—a feeling that otherwise might have taken longer to develop, if it even developed at all, had they been on their own. A TFA-ENC corps member who started her first year by herself reflected, “I felt very, very isolated. Not only because of the lack of involvement from TFA, but having no one to talk to. I didn’t even feel comfortable telling the others in the school that I was TFA, so I was almost embarrassed.”

Corps members who were part of pods indicated that their first year was quite different. One corps member asserted:

I feel very much a part of the community because I'm surrounded by people who do the exact same thing and who are about the same age. . . . [I]f I was this 22-year-old . . . teacher at a school with a bunch of 40-year-old . . . teachers, I would feel out of place and probably . . . be miserable because I wouldn't have anyone to talk to.

Added another, "[Y]ou get that sense of a community, and the more TFA people you're with at a school, I think the deeper that sense of community becomes."

Others sensed a shared purpose in addition to the feeling of belonging to a larger community:

R1: I feel like having that major support and everybody being on that same wavelength of student achievement or "We're gonna improve this school and this is what it takes" was a huge plus for this school because I feel like not having everybody on board or maybe not having everybody be that excited about things like that does affect school performance and does affect just the way the kids feel in the school, whether they like it or don't like it. I think it's a plus to have a network like this.

R2: And we came in and . . . the second-years were so on it, like there were expectations that were set for the kids. Every kid has the same expectations set because of what the second-years did, because they had that mentality. And we all came in and it was the same school so the whole school adopted these expectations, adopted that system . . . . It's like this core with the same mentality that it works. Like having like-minded people or this group that's towards one same goal is a plus.

Several corps members suggested that the pod made it easier to ask for help from other corps members (on the Fall 2011 survey, over 83% indicated that they discussed school-related issues with other corps members at least once every other week, and by the Spring, that proportion remained about the same [84%]), not just because of proximity but also because being a part of a pod provided them with a better understanding of who their fellow corps members were and when and how they could be approached. One corps member stated, "We all have the same goal in mind and we generally have the same idea as to how I'm going to reach the goal, so I can go to any classroom here and say, 'What do you think about this?' and . . . they understand where you're coming from . . . ." Others added:

I think it's a lot easier that we are in the same school . . . . I feel the fact that [other TFA corps members in the network] are not here, I feel like it kind of being a burden to them when I do reach out for help. I prefer coming to [corps members in] this network [pod] first because I can see what their workload is, I can see what their mood is that day, and it's just a lot better to be like, "Hey, can you answer this question?" or, "I'm kind of confused about this," rather than reaching out to another corps member at another school or at another place.

[P]artly because we are young but also partly because we're going through the same experience, we do rely on each other for a lot of help and just emotional support, and we hang out together. And because a lot of times with the administration and the staff already here who are more settled here, who are older, I mean we have mentors but they

are kind of doing their own things. They have families, they go home. But the people in TFA know exactly what we're going through and our general mindsets about going into things, and so I find that really helpful.

As noted earlier, Spring 2012 focus groups often shared more nuanced evaluations of their pod experiences than they did in the Fall that revealed potential additional benefits associated with pod placement. For example, several corps members noted the value not just of pod placement in general but also of *subject-alike* pod placement:

I think that my benefit is not so much TFA at school but TFA in content area at my school. So that [another TFA-ENC corps member] literally teaches right next door to me and he has the same planning period and he has the same subject that he's trying to teach, even if it's a different grade. Like we're dealing with the same things, we're in the same P[rofessional] L[earning] C[ommunity] with the rest of our department.

Still others commented on the link between pods and a critical component not only of retention but also of integration: their ability to connect with their communities:

[W]e're learning about the culture together, makes it easier. Like it's . . . having another group of often young, white females who are also learning about these communities in [] County has been helpful.

Perhaps most tellingly, even non-corps members in some of the pod schools understand the potential importance of and noticed the impact of the pods. As one observed, "It's always good to go into a situation with somebody that you know." Said another, "I don't think they feel isolated, in that they have themselves. . . . They have themselves to bounce things off on."

*Pod Placement and in-program retention.* Having a group of corps members with whom they could share the first-year teaching experience—and to whom they felt a degree of loyalty—provided several corps members with the support they needed to keep them from leaving TFA in their first year, as noted in these testimonials from different TFA-ENC pod sites:

[N]ot being like an outsider on your own and having people you can rely on, relate to things, that you can bounce ideas off of, it's just . . . I feel like I wouldn't survive here by myself honestly.

[T]he thing about having a whole group here, I think it would be a lot harder to quit. If I were the only one here . . . that thought might creep into my mind a little bit more, that I'm the only one here, who's really gonna miss me so much? I think we work so closely together that I feel like I would be letting you down, as other TFAs at my school, if I chose to leave.

I think we've weathered this storm this year, together and I think that we mentioned it in the Fall and I still feel this way, that I would be letting them down, the other four TFAs at my school if I didn't return, so I think there's been a good sense of . . . teamwork and camaraderie.

[I]t's like what saved me, I think, from kind of falling under. It's just knowing that . . . everyone is on kind of the same page, the same mission, same vision, and I think that's just incredibly, incredibly empowering to know that . . . . And I think that's like really inspiring for me and really kept me along.

One corps member offered this particularly poignant explanation of the value of pods with respect to retention during a Fall focus group, echoed again in the Spring:

[Fall 2011] Most of October—the “Dark Month”—was truly horrendous for me. It was just an awful month and I had days where I would get home and think “I cannot do this,” and then [the presence of other corps members at the same school] was the thing that would stop that thought, like “I can't leave [other corps members]” . . . . I was like “I can't actually make that decision 'cause there are other TFA people here . . . . I can't leave.”

[Spring 2012] The “Dark Days.” We're in the second battle with them now. . . . [W]hen things are going really horrifically for whatever reason . . . . [O]r . . . like everything else is driving you a little crazy and you feel like you want to hit your head against the wall—I think that having a second TFA person definitely like kind of reins me in on multiple levels.

In 2011-12, TFA-ENC pods often ended up being comprised of corps members from multiple years, which provides another potential benefit: within-pod mentoring that positively impacted retention. As one first-year corps member told his fellow first-year peers, “I live with two second-year corps members and I don't know if I'd still be here if I was with first-years. I love you guys but they keep me grounded . . . .” Said another, “I don't know how much TFA does to integrate the two years. . . . But I just feel . . . that, being able to talk to somebody who is in the same situation as us and it's somebody who's been through it at least one year ahead of me is really, really helpful.”

*Potential negative outcomes associated with pod placement.* Clearly, pod placement appears to have been beneficial for corps members in a number of ways, and over the next few years, this or subsequent evaluations may even begin to be able to determine its impact on student achievement. Pod placement is not, however, always a positive endeavor.

The most important lesson from TFA-ENC pod placement in 2011-12 appears to be that there is a pod size beyond which the potential positives of the pod are outweighed by the negatives. For example, corps members placed in schools in which pods were very large (in some cases, so large that they represented nearly the entire teaching staff) often suffered from the absence of a veteran non-corps member presence that could help them navigate their first year of teaching. As one corps member observed, “Sometimes it is nice to actually talk to somebody that actually might have some resources or have stuff. Right now, we're still second-years who are still learning their craft and still trying things out . . . .” Another group of corps members discussed the issue in terms of the pressures placed on them as they entered their second year in a school without other veteran teachers:

R1: [W]e don't have veteran teachers at this school and I know just from last year, among people I talked to, [the most important] was the veteran teacher, and I talked to her for support and that's who I went to. And this year, it's . . . .

R2: You're the veteran teacher.

R1: I'm a veteran teacher and I'm a second-year teacher and it's like, wow, that's a lot of responsibility on top of . . . .

R2: Still learning your craft, yeah.

R1: I'm still learning what to do.

corps members in a different school recognized how important the presence of veteran non-corps members was to their overall experience and impact:

I think a drawback to having so many TFAs here . . . is that we are expected to be in charge of a lot of things . . . . I don't . . . feel like I'm ready to be in charge of certain committees I'm on, and I don't feel like I contribute much to meetings . . . . And so I feel like that's a drawback to having so many of us . . . .

I know there are some schools that are all TFA and I wouldn't want that . . . . I like having a mix because I need the support that I get from some of the veteran teachers, even just about the culture of this area and the kids' families and all that kind of stuff, and I think that's extremely, extremely important to what we're doing.

A related area of concern is the impact the turnover of large pods can have on the school's ability to maintain a consistent culture year-to-year:

[I]f you're recycling teachers, you're starting a first-year teacher every third year . . . . Yes, we might do good . . . if, say, all of us stayed here, we all were first-years. Yes, our second year would be awesome, [but] then we all [leave]. Then you're down back to first-years again.

Perhaps most important is the tendency for larger pods to provide corps members with an excuse for not integrating into the school culture, in essence distancing and separating themselves from the rest of the school community. As one corps member in a large-pod school noted, "[O]ur TFA group is choosing to be very separate." Added another, "[H]aving so many TFAs in your region, I mean that's exclusively who I socialize with on weekends or after school." This separation was apparent not only in social situations but also in academic ones, with one corps member observing that "[O]ur department is extraordinarily divided and it's kind of like [another corps member] and me against the other two."

Similarly, some non-corps members also picked up on the problem, with one contrasting the impact of pod-based corps member integration into their school community to the impact of integration in previous years, when there was just one corps member:

[T]his year as opposed to last year, they're very like, "We're in it together." If one of 'em doesn't come [to a school event or meeting], another doesn't come. . . . Now, instead of this one person's poison, it's six of them, because they're together.

Finally, there is as of yet little indication that pod placement will lead to changes in the likelihood that corps members will remain *beyond* their two-year commitments, and it is on measures like this that the ongoing willingness of LEAs and schools to support the idea of pod placement likely will hinge:

[T]he majority [of corps members] . . . [a]re here for two years and then they leave. Might stay for three, but I would say, overall, it's usually two, and I think that is the drawback . . . . [TFA] get[s] this huge pool of teachers that are, like, ready to work, but . . . many of them are going to leave after two years.

### ***Professional Development***

A long-standing concern about TFA and similar programs is based on the impression that they place their corps members in classrooms without proper preparation and, once they are placed, provide little follow-up support.<sup>29</sup> Corps members who participated in the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 focus groups shared a number of comments and opinions about the support they received after entering the classroom in the Fall.

#### *Professional Development Approaches that appear to be Effective*

Three of the four focus groups frequently pointed to the Manager of Teacher and Leadership Development (MTLD) as the most effective professional development support provided by TFA-ENC. Corps members were very positive in their descriptions of these mentors, using words such as “awesome,” “great,” “responsive,” and “helpful.” Several noted that they felt comfortable calling or emailing their MTLD advisor at any time of the day to exchange ideas, and to assist with classroom, TFA, and even personal issues. As one corps member noted:

[S]he's so responsive so fast, so having that resource available for anything, whether it was something like . . . I don't feel like there's something going on wrong in your teaching life versus your actual classroom, she can help you figure out or will try to take the steps to figure out what to do in all sorts of teaching life situations, which I have found to be very helpful.

Another corps member noted that she would call upon her advisor to observe her classroom for feedback, and to help with lesson planning. As new teachers, corps members seemed to appreciate knowing that they had someone whose primary purpose was to help them be successful: “[H]aving someone that I know that I can call and I know it's her job to help, has eased a lot for me.”

Although several of the corps members interviewed were not very positive about their pre-service training or their in-service All Corps Conferences (ACC) on the whole (for example, participants in one focus group felt that the ACCs and Summer Institute was largely ineffective in preparing corps members for their first year and instead focused more on “grandiose ideas” than on content specific to their teaching placement), several noted some positive aspects of

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<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, the discussion below in the section entitled *Non-TFA Perceptions of TFA Teachers' Preparedness*

these professional development events that were beneficial to their teaching. One member specifically mentioned how critical the hands-on teaching experience was during the Summer Institute and the intensive amount of support around the experience:

[I]t was good that we actually got to work with kids over the summer with an intensive amount of support around us because . . . I feel like the only way to become a better teacher is to teach.

One corps member also noted that the opportunity to network with other teachers in similar roles was a beneficial aspect of the ACCs: “We have like a 90-minute session with our content learning communities, and so it’s just a way for all the English teachers all over Eastern North Carolina to get together and be like, ‘What are you teaching?’” A corps member at another school, who was especially critical of the Summer Institute and ACC sessions, felt that allowing more unstructured time during ACCs for collaboration with peers to work on lessons and to exchange ideas would have been a better use of his time than being forced to follow the scripted agendas.

In addition to the formal systems provided through TFA to support teachers’ professional practice, corps members cited the importance of informal support networks such as local Professional Learning Communities or relationships with other teachers as an important factor in their success:

Like our English department here; we’re just a very tight knit group. So then like I think that feeds off nicely, that type of experience and I get a lot of resources from our Teach For America community but then we’re able to bring it to these five people here and they’re able to do different stuff with it . . . it really does come down to like the people that are also teaching your subject and area.”

Several corps members were appreciative of any feedback provided on their instruction. Teachers viewed feedback from peers, principals, and TFA-ENC leaders as valuable and expressed a desire for more.

#### *Professional Development Approaches that do not appear to be Effective*

In connection with the intense support mentioned above, corps members in two separate focus groups mentioned that the steep drop-off in support as members transitioned into their teaching placements following the Summer Institute was a difficult adjustment; in addition, in some cases the initial support they received from the Summer Institute, particularly during the teaching practicum, was not sustained by their local schools:

I feel that in the summer we had a lot of support and a lot of just people showing us what to do, guiding us through it, doing it with us, and then I kind of feel like, being honest, from moving in that environment to coming to an actual district, a county, that all of that support didn’t really transfer over and I don’t think it’s necessarily TFA’s fault. I’m just saying that that network of support doesn’t exist in a school district level.

Corps members also reported a drop-off in support from MTLDs at one school because of the strong support that TFA-ENC perceived teachers already were getting from their host school:

A lot of the MTLDs will be like, “Well, you’re getting instructional support from your school, so I don’t need to focus on you.” I think I’ve had someone from TFA observe my room once, in like October, this year. They were in my room slightly more last year, but because we do get support here, from our school, in a way that corps members at other schools don’t necessarily get, we are low on the priority list for support from them.

Conversely, one corps member cited being denied the additional support of a new teacher induction program in that corps member’s district because of the high number of new teachers in the county and because of the support it was assumed the corps member already received through TFA-ENC. This participant noted that the additional training on classroom management would have been especially beneficial to corps members.

In the case of the KIPP placements, however, one TFA-ENC member noted that KIPP did provide “good, solid professional development” which may have helped ease this transition and provide the necessary ongoing support that he did not feel he was getting from the ACCs. He felt that the ACCs and Summer Institute was largely ineffective in preparing them for their first year—a sentiment echoed by others in this focus group—and instead focused more on “grandiose ideas” than content specific to their teaching placement.

Several corps members in the non-core content areas (e.g., the arts, psychology, public speaking) and special education commented on a lack of relevant support from TFA-ENC during the ACC and summer institute sessions. They noted that they had to sit in on sessions unrelated to their teaching areas, and that what *was* offered in terms of relevant training was limited. One special education teacher seemed especially distressed by her lack of training:

If you’re going to place in Special Education, the training needs to start before they get to their school, especially because it’s so very legal and people . . . individual people can be sued for not doing things right, and so to place somebody in that and not have a staff member who 100% knows the state, like knows everything, I just think is really unfair.

In addition to lack of professional development opportunities specifically related to the subject area they would be teaching, one corps member noted that the stark difference between her teacher practicum experience over the summer and her actual classroom placement was challenging:

I taught 4<sup>th</sup> grade over the summer and now I teach 8<sup>th</sup>, and the big jump from kids who are very elementary to kids want to be high school definitely presented a challenge in terms of what I expected kids to be like . . . I think I had 10 children in my classroom over the summer at a time, and they knew that if they were not there and they did not focus, they would not be going on to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and so I felt that managing those children was a lot easier, whereas the kids here may or may not want to be here and there are more group dynamics, large classrooms. I just felt like the experience itself was different.

Aside from professional development being too “big-picture” or not being directly connected to their eventual grade level or subject area placements, corps members also commented on aspects of school leadership for which they were not prepared. In one instance, it was noted that the

expectation that corps members immediately take on leadership roles within their schools may have been inappropriate:

[S]o we have no choice but to . . . which I know looks good on a resume but at this point I want what's good for the school and I know that if I have no idea what's going on in this meeting and I'm supposed to be representing a school, that's not good either.

One corps member also noted that she was not adequately trained during the Summer Institute for what to expect of her principal. In particular, she stated that she didn't feel prepared to "deal with administration" or know "what your principal should be doing or shouldn't be doing and what your responsibilities should be."

As noted above in the discussion of the Summer Institutes, one professional development resource available to corps members was TFA Net ([www.tfanet.org](http://www.tfanet.org)), an online repository of teaching resources and access to the TFA community. Two corps members noted that the site was not very effective for finding resources and, like the face-to-face professional sessions that "throw a thousand resources at you," there was too much information to sift through. In response to this overload, several corps members noted that it would have been more effective to have a ready-made curriculum instead of just volumes of unrelated resources, especially since they were likely only to be there two years, and that having to build lessons from scratch continuously was not the most effective use of their time. The same group in a later interview echoed this sentiment:

I thought there would be more there . . . lack of resources because you are creating your own curriculum. You're not working off a book, and it's almost frowned upon to work off of a book or out of a worksheet book. Everybody creates their own material, so it's almost like everybody's re-creating the wheel every single year, even if they're using somebody's good stuff, you try . . . you have to make it your own. So that, I think, adds to the volume of work . . . .

#### *Non-TFA Perceptions of TFA-ENC Teachers' Preparedness*

When asked if they felt corps members were prepared for their first year of teaching, non-corps member participants in focus groups were split in their opinions. Teachers in one of the focus groups felt that the corps members were as prepared as, or better prepared than, other beginning teachers at the school. Teachers in another focus group, however, felt that their limited training was not an adequate replacement for the training that a teacher in a traditional program would receive, and that the vast majority of corps members were not prepared for their first year. Non-corps members noted that in some instances this was due to being placed in teaching positions that did not match their college major. For instance, one teacher commented on a corps member who majored in a performing art but was now teaching a core content subject:

[W]hen I have a TFA person who comes in who has no knowledge of [core subject] at all, because like, yeah, I can help you with instruction but I can't help you with instruction AND teach you [core subject]. I just can't. I'm not a college professor and I'm trying to teach my own kids that.

Two specific areas in which non-corps members felt TFA could have better prepared corps members for their first year—despite a focus on both during different portions of Summer Institute—included classroom management and cultural sensitivity. As one teacher noted: “Classroom management, I’ve never seen one come in—here at the middle school—and do classroom management well. It takes them a while.” In connection to classroom management, another teacher commented on the importance that cultural sensitivity plays in successfully managing a classroom:

The biggest issue I’ll say with classroom management is it’s just hard for them to . . . I think cultural is the main thing, especially what [other focus group participant] said. A lot of them have never been around a lot of African-Americans . . . Rural North Carolina . . . it’s a totally different world to come here, first year teaching, didn’t go to school for teaching, be around a lot of people you’ve never been around in your life.

### ***Teacher Quality***

Several themes related to the perceived quality of corps members emerged during the focus group discussions, including: tenacity; classroom management; pedagogy and delivery of instructional content; and rigor. The analyses below of each of these themes may provide insight into several likely instruction-related facets of the upcoming NCTC experience that can help inform not only planning for appropriate professional development but also strategies for integrating new NCTC corps members into their school cultures.

A word of caution, however, about the analysis in this section: Unlike many of the other themes described in this report, the majority of responses related to teacher quality represent the perceptions of non-corps members at only one of the four schools where Fall and Spring focus groups were conducted.<sup>30</sup> Very few TFA-ENC participants at any of the four schools discussed issues related to their perceptions of teacher quality. As a result, conclusions drawn from the analysis below should be treated with caution, as they do not present opinions from a wide or representative range of participants.

### ***Tenacity***

For this evaluation, the term *tenacity* is being used to refer to a teacher’s ability to persist in the face of adversity or challenges. Examples of teacher tenacity shared by focus group participants in the Fall suggested that corps members typically fall into one of two classes: either they exhibit a strong commitment and dedication to the job, or they drop out fairly early in the year, possibly from feeling “burnt out,” or as a result of an inability to manage their classrooms. For example, one non-corps member indicated that two corps members left his school “within the first four to five weeks” because they were “getting eaten alive” in the classroom. However, another non-corps member spoke admiringly of a corps member who exhibited personal drive and a strong commitment to her job:

She’s a brand-new teacher and I can’t even imagine what she’s doing, to be honest. To be a new teacher jumping into Special Education in a program that’s fairly new to the

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<sup>30</sup> A small group of non-Corps Members at a second school contributed a limited number of comments during a Spring focus group.

school . . . But she's very hungry, I can say . . . she asks a lot of questions, she looks for different resources . . . She seeks help when she's not quite where she feels comfortable . . . So I think that's a plus. A lot of teachers will sit there and take it and cry and not do anything about it, but I see she's trying to do something about it.

This teacher added, "I've seen the other side as well, when [corps members] get burnt out or they feel like . . . they're getting ready to leave." However, the corps member mentioned above "had her moments but by the end of the day [she was] ready to fight again."

The indication that tenacity is a product of personal drive or commitment was echoed among some of the Spring focus group participants. One non-corps member provided an interesting visual, comparing the corps members to pit bulls: "They latch onto something and they hang on until they get it the way they want it." There was also emphasis placed on the "personality of the person;" as one participant put it, some corps members "come in and they just rock it out." On the other hand, other corps members appear withdrawn, and perhaps experience feelings of isolation. Said one non-corps member, "Certain teachers . . . that's why they leave, they feel like they didn't fit in, you know, [so] they just leave."

### *Classroom Management*

As noted in the previous section, classroom management is one of the main areas of concern about corps members among educators who are not involved in TFA. Recall the statement above by a non-corps member who shared that "both management and instruction is not strong" among the corps members at his school, adding: "I have never seen [a corps member] come in—here at the middle school—and [manage] the classroom well." This teacher believed that a general lack of experience in the classroom made it difficult for corps members to manage the classroom well and that cultural awareness and sensitivity, specifically towards the African-American student population, are a necessity to effectively manage a classroom:

It's about being culturally sensitive and culturally aware of how to react to certain personalities. . . . But if you are not confident, [the students] see weakness, they attack. . . . You have to be aware and be able to adjust and fit.

Another non-TFA respondent shared a more holistic perspective about corps member preparation for handling classroom management, stating, "As far as the school goes, I don't know if I could really generalize too much about [corps members] because some of the folks that we've worked with, it's like the model classroom . . . whereas there are also some folks on the other end."

Feedback about classroom management during Fall focus groups was sparse, but opinions that were shared typically were critical. In contrast, the Spring focus group comments were more positive and understanding of a teacher's struggle with managing the classroom, possibly indicating either growing empathy among non-corps members or growing classroom management skills among corps members. One non-corps member acknowledged that teachers are always trying to find better ways to manage the classroom, they "all struggle with it," and they all "feel like [they] should be better at it than they are." This individual also recognized that classroom experiences (i.e., good or bad management days) can vary and "you have to look at the culture of the classes, too" when making assumptions about how well the classroom is being

managed. Another non-corps member admitted that opportunities to observe corps members in action also limit the ability to provide an accurate assessment: “I do not have the opportunity or the time to see what is going on with the others. So I can only speak from my experience with the one [corps member] that I observed.”<sup>31</sup>

Despite this infrequency of classroom observations, however, it was evident that by Spring some non-corps members had become impressed with how their TFA-ENC colleagues managed their classrooms by building rapport with students, keeping the class focused, and pacing the class effectively. For example, one teacher noted:

From what I observe, just by looking at the way the students react to them [corps members] . . . the reaction is awesome! [They] are very matter of fact. Boom, boom, boom, boom. The kids respond to matter of fact. Boom, boom, boom. You have X amount of time to get this done [and] the kids do it! They might be struggling a little bit, but they get it done. And I really like that and I said, ‘I’m gonna have to follow that myself.’

One of the focus groups also noted a student-teacher relationship based on discipline and respect. Said one participant, “You can feel that the kids really like them. There is sternness there and they respect it. It’s stern but yet it’s still soft enough.” In addition, one non-corps member commented on corps members’ abilities to redirect students when they get off track, “They’re reined back in quickly,” adding, “That’s something I have to learn how to do.”

#### *General Pedagogy and Content-Specific Knowledge*

Non-corps members were divided in their perceptions of the strength and quality of their TFA-ENC colleagues’ pedagogy in general and of their content-specific knowledge. The general perception shared by non-corps members during Fall focus groups was that corps members knew their content well but in some cases “almost too well, because they then don’t know how to relate it down to the middle school level,” suggesting a disconnect between their content knowledge and their ability to share that knowledge with their students in a pedagogically-sound way. By the Spring, however, focus group comments suggested the corps members’ instructional delivery was “awesome” and related directly to how “wonderful” they were at “building relationships with the kids.” However, the same focus group participants still felt they had an edge over corps members in terms of content delivery because they had had “more classes on it, more background” on content delivery during their preparation.

Continuing a theme noted elsewhere, several non-corps members expressed concerns about corps members who were asked to teach out of their areas of expertise. In one case, a non-corps member believed that a corps member had not been sufficiently prepared for her assigned

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<sup>31</sup> Results from the TFA Fall survey provide related insight into Corps Members’ opportunities to observe and provide feedback regarding each other’s classroom management. When asked if they receive valuable feedback about their teaching from other Corps Members at their school, about 62% of respondents somewhat agreed, strongly agreed, or very strongly agreed with the statement, but over a third indicated that they received little to no valuable feedback about their teaching. Spring survey results show a slight decrease in Corps Members (57%) who reported they received some degree of valuable feedback about their teaching; however, just over a third indicated that they received little to no valuable feedback—on par with responses from the Fall.

position; there was a gap in her capacity to deliver the content effectively because she lacked the experience or background in the subject area. “Everything she does, she . . . question(s) it, making sure she’s, ‘Am I doing it right?’ You know?” The non-corps member empathized over this situation stating, “I have a master’s in [the content area under discussion] and I still am not [completely] ready for it. I can’t even imagine . . . being shoved into something like that . . . and not being equipped.”

### *Instructional Rigor*

Instructional rigor is an important TFA goal for its corps members, as noted in the description of the TFA Summer Institute above, but very little information was shared during focus groups regarding perceptions of corps members’ instructional rigor, most likely due to limited opportunities to observe classes. What comments were shared tended to point up the relevance of TFA’s concern (also noted in the Summer Institute section) about differences in student expectations among corps and non-corps members. For example, during a Fall focus group, a non-corps member expressed concern that a corps member’s rigor was perhaps too intense. The non-corps member explained, “Several teachers have spoken with [one] TFA[-ENC teacher] about the way they’re teaching. I went to them because they have some of my Special Education kids and they’re teaching to high.” Another non-corps member from this same group shared his impressions of corps members’ perceptions of their rigor—“They feel like what they’re doing is A1” and “they do feel like their expectations are high for the kids”—again suggesting the validity of TFA’s concern about differences in expectations that often exist when corps members first enter a school.

Interestingly, however, during a Spring focus group session, one TFA-ENC group’s discussion indicated that some host schools hold higher expectations for students than those established by TFA during Summer Institute. One corps member noted that “the expectations are high” at her school, that rigor is embedded in the school’s “culture—work hard, be good,” and that teachers at the school strive to meet those expectations. Another corps member at the same school felt that the TFA program, in comparison, “never set that [type of] culture into place.” In her opinion, TFA “seemed much more worried about educating [them] about diversity.” TFA, she believed, would communicate to corps members to “set high expectations and the kids will live up to it,” but there was never a clear understanding of what that actually looked like in practice.

### *Integration*

Another critical component of programs like TFA is the ability of corps members to integrate successfully into their placement schools. Three aspects of that integration process emerged during the Fall and Spring focus group sessions: (1) integration into the general culture of the teaching life; (2) assimilation into the specific culture of their individual placement schools, and (3) integration into their host communities (typically, integration into a rural setting)

#### *Integration into the Teaching Life*

Corps members felt that the most important factor in facilitating their integration into the life of a teacher was the presence of similarly-aged, similarly-experienced, and like-minded colleagues, not necessarily just the presence of other people associated with TFA affiliation:

I think one of the differences between some of the other public schools here and [this school] is that there are a group of teachers at this school who are under 25 who . . . [are] very similar to the other people in TFA who are under 25 who are in their first two years of teaching, who come from other parts of the country.

[T]here are four people in the Social Studies Department, three of us are new. One of the other one's classroom is right under mine and . . . it's hard to remember that he's not TFA, he's our age and he came in when we came in, and so . . . the relationship I have with him is very similar [to the one I have with corps members].

I'm pretty friendly with all the veteran teachers and I do do something outside of school with them, but they're all so much older than me. Like one teacher, her son I think is a year older than me. But I do things with her occasionally and I love her to death but I'm not gonna go, you know, hang out at her house every Saturday night. I think it's more of an age thing, at least for me, than anything.

So I think it's not necessarily like the TFA relationship but the . . . like relationship with a similarly-minded person who is teaching the same stuff or at least same overall department. That's important.

In a related vein, some corps members noted that, in hindsight, their Summer Institute experiences might have been more useful and practical had they included training and support focused on school integration:

I mean [Summer] Institute, I felt like prepared me for lesson-planning and classroom management, but there wasn't much about dealing with administration, which is another aspect of being a teacher, you know, like integrating yourself into a school.

### *Integration into Host Schools*

Integration into the life of a teacher presents similar challenges for nearly every beginning teacher; integration into the ebb and flow of a specific school—particularly one in which one's presence may not be immediately appreciated—often is a much more individualized experience. Corps members and non-corps members alike shared several observations about some of the vagaries of corps member integration into their specific host sites.

*Perspectives on host school integration from Corps Members.* Corps members discussed several supports for integration at their host schools—such as strong matches between corps member values and the values of other teachers at their host schools—but they also discussed impediments—such as the commonly-held perception of corps member as teachers who were “just passing through,” and the lack of training and preparation to deal with school integration issues for TFA-ENC corps members.

Alignment between corps members' values and a host school's culture assisted corps member integration, even without the integration training some corps members noted was lacking during their Summer Institute experiences:

At [school name], it's the culture of . . . work hard, be good, and think that the students learn even before they really start 5<sup>th</sup> grade . . . . The expectations are high, so it makes us at [school name] want to live up to them, because we're always saying, "Be a model for our students." Teach for America never set that culture into place. For me, they [TFA] seem much more worried about educating us about diversity, as if we were gonna go say something racist in our classroom. They're much more worried about that than they are . . . developing us as humans to like work hard and be the best that we can be.

[W]e have, like, a school with one culture. That is very intentional, and . . . as a staff member, you have to be on board with [it]. Like, we don't just have student expectations, we have staff expectations, and there's been a lot of thought that went into the culture. At a school that has few corps members, you . . . can be very intentional about what your classroom looks like, but in the end it's not necessarily the same culture that's being upheld . . . throughout the school.

Perhaps the most telling indication of corps member integration into the culture of their host schools was when the corps members identified more closely with their host schools than with TFA. Corps members' relationship to the larger TFA organization varied considerably across the four focus groups, but in at least one instance, several corps members were very aware of a disconnect between their relationships with their host school and their relationships with TFA overall or TFA-ENC in particular:

[I] am significantly more affiliated with [host school] than I am with Teach for America.

I guess for me I think of my TFA experience and my daily teaching experience as two separate things. So I feel a part of TFA but I think of those two things almost . . . as if they were separate entities, until there's somebody from TFA in my classroom . . . . I just don't make the connection between my daily teaching experience and my TFA experience unless there is a TFAer in my classroom.

I feel much more part of this [school name] family, and that they care and that they want me here and I feel valued, so that's why I'm staying. I would not really consider a position with Teach for America at all because I don't feel valued by the organization.

*Perspectives on host school integration from non-corps members.* In general, non-corps members understood that there is always a "learning period, a transitional type of time" during which corps members learn to adjust to their host schools. As one non-corps member acknowledged, "I think sometimes, at the beginning, when you're a first-year teacher, you've got to go meet with this, meet with that, and they [corps members] sometimes feel like that cuts in [to their available time]."

That grace period eventually ends, however, and corps member integration becomes more important. One key to corps member integration, according to one non-corps member focus group, was the ability and willingness of corps members to identify the support they needed for their teaching during their first year, "a couple of other people to fall back on." Their impression was that, once corps members identified a non-corps member as a "successful [teacher], they will like you . . . . [T]hey will latch to you."

For other non-corps members, successful corps member integration largely centered on the attitudes they brought to the integration process, as indicated by this non-corps member's impressions of some of her TFA-ENC colleagues: "I'll be very honest. We don't have a very good relationship because . . . sometimes I don't see this with all, but . . . there is definitely a 'high and mighty' [attitude] . . . ." <sup>32</sup>

Some non-corps members suggested that more important than either of these was the strength of the match between corps member and host school values and culture, which mirrored the observations of some of the corps members noted above. When the match was weak, integration was less likely:

They're [TFA-ENC teachers] not buying into our culture so they're getting eaten alive . . . .

They do not buy into the culture of the school . . . . [W]hen I see in team meetings or just observations I do, I worry because they've not bought into the culture so the culture of the room is not where it should be. And to be honest, that's my bigger worry . . . because when culture's bad in rooms, bad things happen.

It's like they're not happy here. They're open and honest about it. So . . . and what basically we're trying to tell them is it's not gonna change; you need to adapt to where you are. I think they're just not trying to go there so they're taking their own little world and making their room their world . . . .

Finally, reflecting some of the findings detailed in the discussion above about placement, non-corps members expressed concerns about corps members who did not appear willing to work with the host school's faculty ("they're really clumped together and none of their attitudes are really positive") and who did not participate in social events outside of the school day ("our TFA group is choosing to be very separate").

[I] think they're just so focused on getting their work done . . . . Teaching is a lot more than just getting a lesson plan done, grading a paper, and all that stuff. It's going back to good relationships, talking to your coworkers, even going out every once in a while. If you consume your whole life with just grading papers and thinking about new material, if you don't ever converse with anyone outside of your little bubble, life is just gonna be tough.

### *Integration into the Community*

Corps members also believed that acceptance and support outside of the school walls and in the community at large made a difference in the degree to which they felt integrated. Some noted that in some places there appeared to be community pressure to resist corps members as legitimate teaching staff ("[I was] confronted with a feeling of, like, well, 'We don't want you

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<sup>32</sup> Several Corps Members were acutely aware of this particular perception, with one noting: "There's a stigma that . . . TFA people feel privileged and, like, [our attitude is] . . . 'I'm coming into this already good school, but I'm going to make it better,' [but] people here already know that the school is working and what they're about is working, so why am I also then trying to bring this other set of ideals here ?

here, get out”), while others were aware of the role that differences in ethnicity played (“I’ve been called a racist by one of my kids”). While some TFA-ENC teachers mentioned being involved in their host communities (e.g., participating in the local church choir), these situations appeared to be relatively uncommon.

I think that . . . you know, we have to be honest with ourselves and say that while we work in [town], none of us are actually part of the [town] community. . . . I certainly feel very detached from my kid’s larger lives and also from their families. And I think that breeds its own set of issues with parents who are very hesitant about “Oh, you are a very young person. Are you really qualified?” and “Who are you?”

I don’t always fit in culturally here, in that I am a different race than most of the people living here and working and going to school here. I [practice] a different religion; I have [a] different political background.

I was thinking that as much support [as] we get from each other, there are just moments that are like hours where you just feel like you don’t know anybody here and nobody knows you here and nobody understands you or something like that. But . . . it’s just like sometimes you feel like you’re battling things by yourself and know that that’s not truly the case. Sometimes you feel cornered, you feel trapped, and it’s just like you’ve got to deal with it and just go on and figure it out on your own.

Finally, a major complicating factor at all levels of integration but one that is most apparent in corps members’ discussions of their ability to integrate into their new communities is the awareness on everyone’s part—corps members, non-corps members, students, and community members alike—that most corps members will stay for only two years:

I feel like . . . very transient and sort of like . . . it’s sort of like I’m not part of the [town] community and at the same time I also don’t expect myself to be, because I know that this is a very transient part of my life.

I want to be invested here but only for two years, and that . . . since I feel like I’m doing a disservice in some ways but also it’s like “What if I just want to be in the city?” and I don’t know how to . . . I haven’t quite figured out how to think about that yet.

R: One of the faculty here made a comment “I know you’re just passing through, but . . .” so this perception that TFA is only here for two years. You’re in and out, and the kids even . . . .

R: They ask me all the time.

R: [T]hey know that. I’m sorry to be more blunt here. But the white teachers who come in typically stay for two years, if that, and leave. So that’s the perception. I think we can improve it because I see how hard we work when we’re here. But that is, I think, definitely a disadvantage . . . .

[T]hey’re just like, “Okay, these people are going to be here for two years, and then leave,” so that’s their take on it . . . . Some TFA members felt that integration, especially into the community, was a seemingly impossible task.

### ***Isolation***

The inverse of teacher integration is often teacher isolation, or a teacher's feelings of being disconnected or separated, which can manifest themselves in any of a number of ways. While only about 29% of Fall survey respondents very strongly agreed, strongly agreed, or somewhat agreed that they felt isolated within the context of their schools, with little change in the Spring (about 31%), several focus group dialogs revealed other forms of isolation, and that when corps members did feel isolated, those feelings often were quite strong. Analysis of focus group transcripts revealed four forms of isolation experienced by TFA-ENC corps members during the 2011-12 school year: cultural isolation; isolation from family; geographic isolation; and professional isolation.

#### *Cultural Isolation*

The theme of culture as an isolating factor surfaced among corps members in two of the four schools where focus groups were conducted. Differences in religious, racial, and political backgrounds were challenges for corps members and the school communities in which they served from the start, and, perhaps most importantly, they remained challenges over the course of the school year. For example, one corps member shared that the year had been a gradual period of learning about the cultural differences that separated her from her students:

I don't mean this to be, like . . . touchy, but, like, racially, I've never felt pushed outside, but things like . . . not knowing about the kids' hair, not knowing about black hair. It's taken me a year to get to know that, and like some of the language they use and . . . you know, it's never that I felt that anyone is pushing . . . pushing me out, but it's just taken some time to become accustomed to their culture and their customs here.

Corps members often felt ill-prepared to deal with the culturally-based perceptions of community members, other teachers, and students in their classrooms. Corps members of a race different from that of the majority of community members seemed keenly aware of the fact that their own race was an issue, and they sometimes felt like their motives for serving at a particular school were being called into question. One teacher shared:

Obviously anywhere you go there's racism, there's culture clash, but I'm noticing how different it is . . . coming from a city where people are just so much more accepting of a lot of things and here where, you know, I've been called a racist by one of my kids. Whereas racism at home, at least in my experience, has been talked about so much more openly, and we learned about it at a young age

Another first-year corps member stated, "[T]here are issues with coming in, being young, having no experience, and race can be an issue in this community, and even with the staff there's a divide between the people who were here and new [staff]." One corps member suggested that issues related to the race of corps members might be minimized if pods are established with a multi-racial criterion in mind; otherwise, the message sent to students and members of the community might be taken as implying that one race was better positioned than others to make positive changes in a school. She shared her desire to serve as a role model for students, but at the same time, she also wanted them to have role models from all races.

That's also really hard because, like I want to be a strong role model, but I also want them to have strong role models in their race . . . And different races, too, like I want them to not have that look, that . . . like I don't know how to phrase it, but just sort of like, you know, that white people are in charge . . . .

Another TFA-ENC corps member shared that, while she believes that she is open to different cultures, she does not sense that the community in which she is currently teaching reciprocates the same feelings of acceptance or openness with regards to race, culture, or religion:

I don't always fit in culturally here, in that I am a different race than most of the people living here and working and going to school here. I am a different religion, I have different political background. I have all sorts of things that are just different about me and just about every time that I mention something about who I am, I'm just perceived as really weird in a lot of cases, which is very different for me because I'm used to being from a little hippie mecca and it's very unusual for me to feel out of place somewhere.

In the Spring, the same feelings of isolation due to various cultural reasons persisted. Practices such as prayer in school and intolerance towards sexual orientation became issues with which teachers had to contend:

I mean, there are some things that . . . I would just consider wrong. Like, they pray all the time in this school, and that makes me so uncomfortable . . . . [A]ny other establishment, I would like stand up and walk out, and . . . I would never accept that to go on, because I think it's completely indecent to do that in a public area that is state-run and . . . it just makes me uncomfortable and then that's not even the religion I'm a part of, and so I feel like they're all assuming that I am, and there are other parts of my identity that I have to keep really quiet, and . . . like the homophobia here is so terrible, and it makes me angry every single day, and I just get so mad at my kids, and I'm like, "You will not be homophobic in my room. You will not."

One corps member had hoped for feeling of separation based on race to dissipate as the year progressed. She was disappointed to find that the feelings remained or even intensified as the year progressed. She shared her disappointment during the spring cycle of interviews:

It feels worse now when they throw the race card at me now, because I'm just like, "Really, now, you're throwing that at me now, in May? You've known me for so long, it's not even like this August and you don't know me," but . . . I was like, "Alright, we can play the race card."

### *Isolation from Family*

Many corps members expressed a sense of isolation due to being away from their family and friends, like one who said, "It's been a very difficult experience and I miss being closer to home and closer to family," and another who added, "I probably shouldn't even talk about this because I'll probably start crying. I miss my family. It's tough." Several others echoed these sentiments:

I would like to be closer to home, just if I wanted to go home for the weekend or something, to have that option.

[I]t's hard to be away from your family, from your friends. Like there's nothing for me in North Carolina but now there is—the school—[but] I think it'd just be easier if you had that family support.

By the Spring, many corps members indicated that feelings of homesickness had subsided to some extent. As one corps member noted, “In the beginning, it was actually really bad. I was like, ‘I want to go home,’ like every weekend, but now it's fine . . . .”

A few corps members broached the subject of their placement and its effects on relationships outside of immediate family. One corps member's partner traveled to her placement site, which eased her feelings of isolation at first, but only temporarily. Another teacher reflected, “I am in a relationship, and that has been one of the hardest things to have while doing this experience . . . . [I]t's not like hurting our relationship but it's just difficult.” Still another corps member shared that being away from her parents has been much less of an issue than being in a long distance relationship: “I've always, even in college, just kind of called my parents when I felt like [it], so that's not really different. . . . [B]ut coming here has made me be in a long-distance relationship, which is no fun . . . .”

Major holidays often can add to emotional distress for corps members. One teacher coined the term “Blacktober” to describe the depths of her despair about her experiences and thoughts of not being able to travel home, and, as noted earlier, others referred to the “Dark Month” and the “Dark Days.” Some corps members who had the opportunity to travel home for the holidays dealt with an adjustment period upon their return: “I went home for Thanksgiving and it really did hit me in coming back.”

Not every corps member, however, felt the strong pull of home. A few corps members shared that they desired to have a placement far from their families to gain a sense of independence and freedom. Said one, “I felt like I would have gotten too babied if I had stayed in [home town]. I mean . . . yeah, no. I needed to get out.” Another stated that being close to family was not automatically a recipe for success and support. As the roommate of a corps member who was from a relatively close city and spent a substantial amount of time visiting observed:

My . . . original roommate here was from, like an hour away, and she went home every weekend and ended up actually leaving, 'cause she was really homesick and 'cause she, you know, got to see it every weekend, so . . . I don't know how I personally would react, 'cause I've never had that option, 'cause I went to college pretty far away as well, but I know that . . . watching that experience, I don't know that I'd want to be able to see my parents at the drop of a hat, going home for dinner, and taking an hour car trip. It might . . . make me not want to come back even more.

For other corps members, isolation from friends and family was less of an issue due to their development of family-like networks among corps members and other teachers in their own schools, as well as with those in surrounding areas:

For me, the major sense of isolation is being away from home and being away from all my friends from college and everything, which has lessened a lot, especially over the past month or so, as I've gotten a lot closer to . . . the other teachers here . . . .

I think, for me, it's finding other support systems outside of Mom and Dad, and I think that's been one good thing about, sort of, the Teach for America Corps model is . . . I live in a town that places corps members in a lot of the surrounding districts, so I live with other Teach for America corps members, and we have a ton in the town that I live in, so, you know, if I'm, you know, feeling sort of isolated or alone, I've got people around me who are going through the same exact experience . . . [T]hat's been a good way of . . . bridging that need for community outside of going home to Mom and Dad.

Still others reported living arrangements that promoted family ties. Many shared homes with other corps members of their own school or other nearby schools. Corps members also regularly socialized with one another. On the Fall survey, more than 65% reported participating in non-school-related activities with other corps members at least bi-weekly, and those proportions remained relatively unchanged in the Spring survey (about 63%). One corps member stated:

I was thinking that as much support that we get from each other, there are just moments that are like hours where you just feel like you don't know anybody here and nobody knows you here and nobody understands you or something like that. But . . . it's just like sometimes you feel like you're battling things by yourself and know that that's not truly the case. Sometimes you feel cornered, you feel trapped, and it's just like you've got to deal with it and just go on and figure it out on your own. I know that that's not the case. I know that we're here with each other and we're in this together.

In a few cases, corps members were able to deal with their isolation from family by engaging in the larger community outside of their schools, like one corps member who secured a grant to start a community garden that generated additional support from other community members.

Interestingly, non-corps members typically perceived corps members as tending to stick exclusively to themselves and not developing personal or professional relationships with other members of the school. Several non-corps members felt that corps members preferred to be with one another and that any isolation they experienced was because they primarily engaged only with other TFA-ENC corps members:

Okay, so they do not feel isolated . . . Now, maybe in their individual communities, they may feel a little bit of isolation, in their individual communities that they live in . . . but, I don't think that they feel isolated, because they do have that connectivity there with one another.

### *Geographic Isolation*

Some corps members came to their placement communities with visions of small-town life that did not match what they found once there. "I imagined this small town with local businesses, with kind of just everybody walking the street . . . waving hello . . ." Instead, several corps members soon realized that the smallness sometimes created another pathway to isolation: "I'm standing out here [and someone said to me] 'You're not from around this area, are you?' . . . [E]veryone knows one another, and . . . you're an outsider. They know it immediately."

What I felt is I'm an outsider. In other words, I'm not from a small town. I do not understand the inner workings of a small town. So that is what I felt. The fact that I am

not a small-town person. I do not think like a small town person. I do not look like a small town person. So my perspective isn't small town . . . . So that was what I felt, that I'm an outsider, an out-of-towner as opposed to part of the small-town group. Matter of fact, there was a former teacher who taught here before and he said . . . and he said, "You know what I noticed? You're outside of the group. You're an outsider."

Additionally, the rural nature of the placement schools limits housing options, which in turn can lead corps members to live elsewhere out of necessity; unfortunately, as one corps member put it, their commute "only adds on to the sense of young white kids coming in."

Town size alone was not the only issue; isolation often stemmed simply from just being from somewhere else:

I'm living in [this] town, that's actually bigger than my hometown by three times, [but] I feel very isolated. And yet when I go home to my podunk town that's like an hour and a half from anywhere, I feel like very connected and I don't care that I'm not in the city.

Okay, a few of us went recently to a local history museum, and a man who has lived here his entire life, he's like 60-some years old, says that people still consider him to be a newcomer, because his family hasn't been here for generations and generations, and . . . when I heard that, I was just incredibly discouraged, because I was like, okay, no matter how hard I try, it's never going to work. I'm never going to be accepted. I'm never going to be a part of this town. And I was just so incredibly discouraged, and that's part of why I said earlier that I would rather have stuck with [home state ] in some ways, because I like . . . as much as I can appreciate the culture, I can't participate in it, and I can't be part of it . . . .

### *Professional Isolation*

Finally, simply being a new teacher sometimes contributed to feelings of isolation, as these two corps members discussed:

R 1: I guess for me, I mean I've certainly felt isolated but in the sense that I feel like every first year teacher, like most new teachers feel. Just isolated. But not like in this particular school but just in the profession. Or when I do feel isolated, I feel isolated in my classroom. Like that moment in the middle of your class that you're like "I am the only . . . ."

R 2: Only single person.

R 1: Feeling for a second you're like "This is not happening in anybody else's class" and you're like for a second, "Yes it is."

As noted earlier, a recurring theme across both the Fall and Spring focus groups related to professional isolation was the lack of more experienced teachers within a school or even a specific subject area or grade level:

We're talking about it being such a small school and we make up such a big part of the core staff at this school, and like, while it's nice to be able to support each other, it's kind

of that . . . that challenge of not having as many veteran teachers, or even just like a second-year TFA or something like that to really . . . share some of the . . . you know, sometimes when we're looking for things . . . I mean, the three of us pretty much make up the [subject] Department at this school and we're all first-year teachers . . . .

In one school, non-corps members perceived corps members' isolation of themselves to be due to the quantity of corps members employed in their school. Corps members, they believed, did not reach out to the other teachers in the school because they appeared to have a network of support among one another both professionally and socially. Further, the non-corps members expressed concern that corps members tended to isolate themselves and not respond to social invitations. One teacher said of those corps members, "If they feel isolated, it's by choice." Another teacher elaborated by stating:

I mean that's basically . . . if they feel isolated, it's because they're choosing to not open up. They're choosing to not talk to other people. It's not that we're like "Oh no. You're a first-year TFA" or I see you coming and run the other way. So it is like . . . we do send out emails that say, "We're going to [restaurant] at 6:00, you're more than welcome to come." Do they come? No.

### ***Retention***

Ultimately, the impact of NCTC will be measured at least in part by the proportion of corps members who continue to teach after the conclusion of their initial two-year commitments. Initial results from the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 surveys administered to TFA-ENC corps members suggest that the challenge to keep NCTC corps members in schools could be great. The proportion of TFA-ENC corps members who very strongly agreed, strongly agree, or somewhat agreed with the statement "I plan to stay beyond my two-year commitment to teaching" decreased from about 41% in the Fall to only about 19% in the Spring. In addition, survey results suggest that the presence of teaching pods has less impact as the year wears on; in response to the statement, "Having other TFA members in my school has been critical to my decisions to continue teaching each year," showed a decrease from about 69% in the Fall to about 53% in Spring. These changes in survey responses suggest that, even with support, the TFA-ENC experience tends to negatively impact corps members' initial intentions regarding remaining in teaching. The focus group responses discussed below provide further insight into additional mechanisms behind corps members' decisions related to staying in teaching after their two-year commitments were over.

One key ingredient to the decision to stay—and something that has been explored in discussions of several of the other themes above—is the degree to which corps members feel accepted and welcomed in their schools. Several non-corps members tended to believe that TFA's short two-year timeframe influenced the lack of commitment they perceived in their working relationships with corps members. This tension often expressed by non-corps members—that corps members are not fully committed to teaching as a career—is noteworthy, as it highlights one of the major challenges to increasing the likelihood that corps members will choose to stay at their placement sites after two years.

As an example, one group of non-corps members agreed that their impression was “kind of like they [corps members] came in and left . . . [T]hey were here one minute and the next minute they were gone.” Another non-corps member went on to mention that she felt that corps members treated their instructional practice with a certain level of “distaste and a distrust as if [they knew] they’re just going to be here for two years, and gone.” Still another added, “They’re not aiming for the long haul. ‘I have two years to get this. I can survive two years and then I’m done,’ and I just . . . for someone who’s in teaching as a career, it’s just a little bit different.

Indeed, several corps members indicated that their plans for teaching beyond the two-year time commitment fluctuated, sometimes from day to day. For example, one corps member said, “I mean I think [I’ll stay], but like, you know, some days it’s like ‘I could never do this again’. Some days it’s like ‘I love this’.” Another corps member expressed a similar sentiment “I would consider a third year if next year went better than this. I’d consider another year, but not beyond that.”

Another part of the doubt that corps members felt about the likelihood of staying dealt with the pace at which they were expected to work. One said plainly “I don’t know how I could sustain this level of work. I don’t know how I could do this and have a family.” Another echoed those same views but also alluded to feeling somewhat undervalued by the TFA organization. “It’s like the message is you have to work so hard for student achievement, and I almost feel like . . . they have such a high turnover [rate because] I feel like [the attitude is] ‘Let’s get as much use out of ’em as we can until they’re done and discard ’em.’”

Finally, as one non-corps member noted, there are pressures on every new teacher—regardless of which programs sponsored those teachers—that make it difficult to choose to continue teaching year after year:

“It’s not just TFAs. It happens with a lot of new teachers . . . [M]ost new teachers are put into classrooms where the energy is high, the motivation is low, and it’s draining, and so you have people who will try and hang in there for three years or so, but because it is draining they have a tendency to leave it.”

### *Retention in Teaching*

Even with all of these pressures, and even given the number of corps members who indicated in survey responses that a return was not likely, there was a surprising number of corps members who implied that a third year of teaching at their current schools was not entirely out of the question. Some corps members were certain that they would stay because of the bonds they built with their fellow corps members. As one corps member explained “I just feel like that, being able to talk to somebody who is in the same situation as us and it’s somebody who’s been through it at least one year ahead of me is really, really helpful.” As noted earlier, the supportive relationships that corps members built through their teaching experiences created a sense of loyalty toward each other, but for some that loyalty was extended to students and staff at their schools:

I know that some TFAers will move on . . . so . . . I don't think they're going to play an influence on whether I would stay or not. I think it would be the kids and the staff and the experience itself.

I taught sophomores last year so if I stay next year, they're seniors. That would be huge to me. That's what would keep me here next year: The kids.

I think that you feel needed here. For me personally, I feel like I can be useful. So, I mean, and that's something I don't think I get at every school

### *Retention in Education*

The nature of programs like TFA is that some corps members (perhaps most) will not stay in the classroom beyond their commitment, no matter what the circumstances. One member said, "To me, at this point, it is a two-year thing and I'm ready to be back in a city after that time." Another added "For me [its] because my home is still in [city]. I have a life there and so I made a two-year commitment and I don't know if I would have made a three-year; I don't know if I would have accepted if it was any longer than two years."

However, when asked if they would remain in the broader field of *education* beyond their TFA commitment, the majority of corps members who participated in the focus groups stated they would do so after their teaching commitment ended. Some appeared to have learned through their experience in TFA-ENC that their impact on education could expand beyond the classroom level, even when their classroom experiences were less than ideal. One member confessed, "I think for me, it's just like really looking critically at do I have the personality to be a teacher, and I see some of the other second-years at the school who I just know every single day they are like fantastic for their children, and I think increasingly as I get more and more bogged down in this job, I am not meant to be around small children." Another member found that that he is "very much still [interested in] something involved with education in [the] future but [is] not sure exactly what form that's going to take." Still others indicated that through their experiences they "got sucked into the education movement":

I want to stay in teaching but I do want to do public policy and probably go on a state level with working with the district rather than so much teaching. But I think I would eventually . . . come back to teaching as well.

I think for me, it's like I would like to stay in education maybe and do something, but having been a teacher, I see how many problems there are that are out there and it's like "Okay. Why do we do that? That's totally asinine." Maybe I can go back to school and get in a position where maybe someday soon I could make changes that could impact twenty teachers that could impact two thousand students instead of being one teacher that impacts a hundred students.

### *Retention related to being "In State"*

As noted earlier, the possibility for home-state placement appealed to several corps members, who indicated that such an option could make a program like NCTC intriguing. In addition to its recruitment value, in-state placement might also contribute to in-state *retention*, which is one of

the ultimate goals of the NCTC program. Several TFA-ENC corps members agreed that there might be value in having an in-state Corps program similar to Teach for America:

I would say that I could see maybe the retention of TFA be higher if it was your home state and you felt like you could start making a life even if it wasn't your job or something.

If you were in your home state . . . you might stay past your two years just because you're already around family and things, whereas coming all the way out here, at the moment, and my experience so far it feels like I'm going to finish my two years and then I'm . . . not going to stay here. I mean, I may feel differently in June but . . . perhaps [there might be] a higher retention rate after those two years if you are placed in your home state.

The Evaluation Team will continue to track developments in this area in particular after NCTC places their first cohort of students in schools in Fall 2012.

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