Making an Impact

Teach For America Alumni in Eastern North Carolina Rural Schools

About this study

Teach For America (TFA) believes that meaningful, sustainable change to education systems requires the focus of leaders who are rooted in their local culture, who are familiar with the challenges and opportunities in a particular community, and who believe in the potential of all children.[1] Accordingly, TFA's theory of change centers on leadership and partnerships with broad and diverse coalitions to change systems that perpetuate educational inequity.[2] To help inform strategic and programmatic direction, TFA is commissioning a number of studies to gather insights about alumni working in communities across the country. For this study, TFA commissioned the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to gather alumni perspectives about their work and impact in a small, purposeful sample of rural communities in Eastern North Carolina (ENC).

Selecting communities to study

TFA has a long history of placing corps members in rural schools and situating this study in ENC affords the opportunity to gather insights from rural communities. In our conversations with TFA staff, some of their primary questions were: Are there schools or systems with a high concentration of alumni that are also demonstrating high levels of student achievement? If so, is it possible that TFA alumni supported students' success? Our sample selection is designed to gather insights to inform those questions.

In fall 2019, we identified schools with large concentrations of TFA alumni and average or above-average student achievement growth in ENC and selected three sites for this study. Specifically, we used Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping to overlay data on school-level student growth and data on the school-level numbers of TFA alumni across North Carolina. In school year (SY) SY2018–19, 1,149 North Carolina schools met expected growth and 693 schools exceeded expected growth. This group of schools makes up approximately two-thirds of North Carolina's more than 2,600 public and charter

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[1] The recommended citation for this report is as follows: Barkowski, E., Giffin, J., Fulbeck, E., Love, E., & Meyer, C. (2020). *Making an Impact: Teach For America Teachers in Eastern North Carolina Rural Schools: Research Brief*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

[2] Teach For America. (2020). *What we do.* https://www.teachforamerica.org/what-we-do.

schools. In SY2019–20, there were 1,165 TFA alumni working in ENC, 389 of whom worked in K-12 education.

We examined GIS mapping results to pinpoint specific schools and school districts in rural areas within North Carolina with large numbers of TFA alumni and average or above-average student growth. Outside the Raleigh-Durham urban area, there are three sites that stand out as having above-average or average student growth and more than 20 TFA alumni in ENC: Edgecombe County School District, KIPP Gaston and KIPP Halifax, and Henderson Collegiate (Exhibit 1).[3] We reviewed the results with TFA ENC regional staff and received confirmation that these data are consistent with their understanding of sites that have demonstrated above-average or average student growth and have large concentrations of alumni.

Exhibit 1. SY2018–19 North Carolina Schools Meeting or Exceeding Expected Student Growth With Concentrations of TFA Alumni
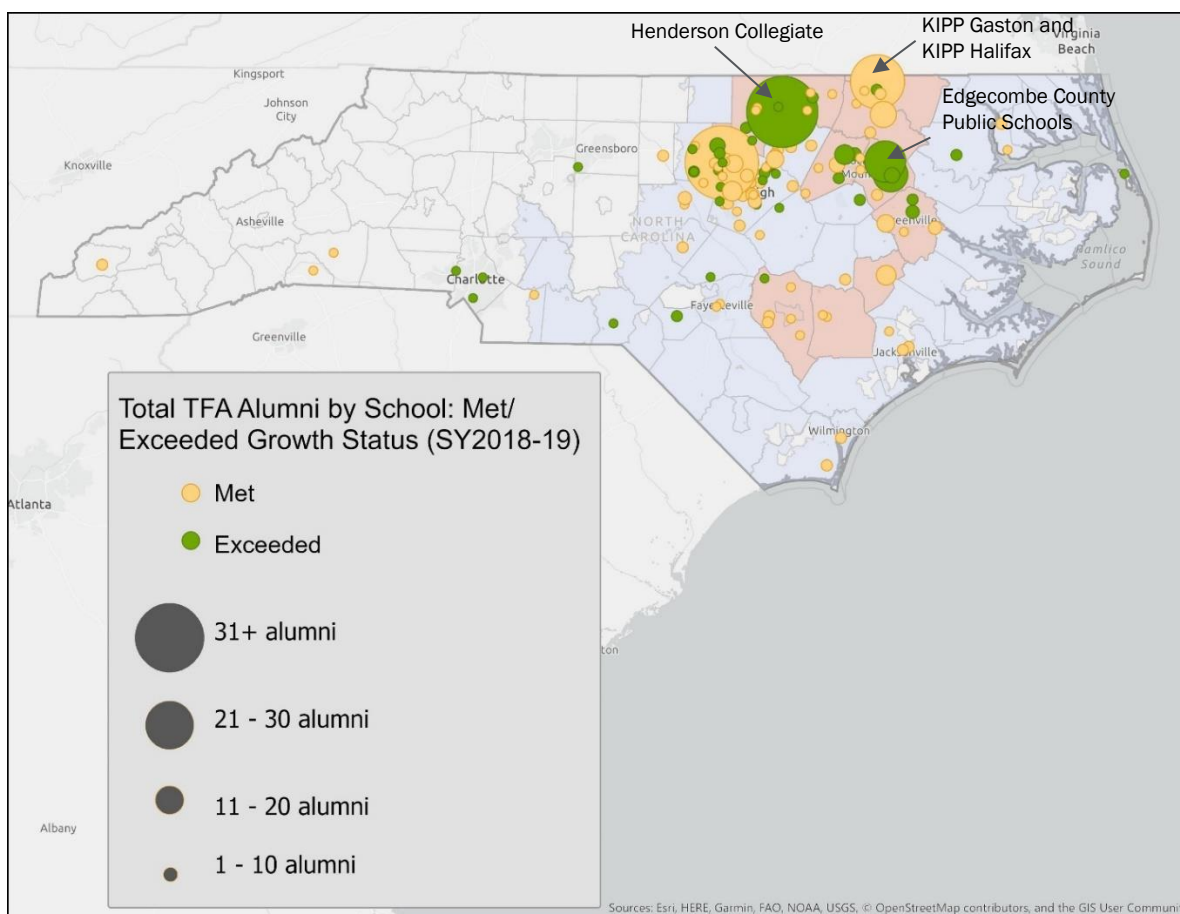
Note: Teach For America Eastern North Carolina region counties are shaded in pink.

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[3] Initially we sought sites with above-average student growth and large concentrations of TFA alumni; however, we relaxed this criterion to include sites with average student growth for two reasons. First, there were only two sites outside the Raleigh-Durham area that had above-average student growth and large concentrations of TFA alumni (Henderson Collegiate and Edgecombe County Public Schools). Second, TFA ENC regional staff recommended including KIPP Gaston and KIPP Halifax as a site given the large number of alumni. As such, we included sites with large concentrations of alumni and above-average or average student growth.

Exhibit 2 presents the number of alumni, students, and schools by site along with demographic student characteristics.[3] The majority of students are Black and nearly all students are from low-income families as measured by their eligibility for the federal free- or reduced-price lunch program (FRPL).

Exhibit 2. SY2019-20 Demographic Characteristics, by Site

Site	Number of Alumni Working in Distrct or Schools	Number of Students	Number of Schools	% Black	% Hispanic	% White	% FRPL
Edgecombe County Public Schools	59	5,998	14	52%	9%	36%	98%
Henderson Collegiate	46	1,277	3	63%	2%	5%	94%
KIPP Gaston	20	1,236	3	78%	5%	10%	98%
KIPP Halifax	5	420	2	85%	4%	5%	96%

In November 2019, we conducted 35 interviews with TFA alumni working as teachers, school leaders, and district leaders in the three participating sites.[4] We also conducted three interviews with alumni working outside of those school systems but still living and working within the ENC region. In total, 38 interviews contributed to the case study used to address the research question. Exhibit 3 presents the number of interviews we conducted, by participating sites.

Exhibit 3. Number of TFA Alumni Interviewed, by Site

Site	Number of TFA Alumni Interviewed
Edgecombe County Public Schools	14 (1 district leader, 3 school leaders, 10 teachers)
Henderson Collegiate	13 (3 district leaders, 4 school leaders, 6 teachers)
KIPP Gaston and KIPP Halifax	8 (3 district leaders, 2 school leaders, 3 teachers)
Non-School District Alumni	3
Total Number of District/CMO Leaders Interviewed	*7*
Total Number of School Leaders Interviewed	*9*
Total Number of Teachers Interviewed	*19*
Total Number of TFA Alumni Interviewed	***38***

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[3] Demographic information for these sites comes from National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). Common Core of Data public school data for the 2018-2019 school year. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/, as well as information on the number of schools from site websites http://hendersoncollegiate.org and https://kippenc.org/

[4] Appendix A presents the interview protocol that guided these data collection efforts.

To identify interviewees, TFA ENC staff reached out to site leaders to request that AIR conduct site visits and interviews. TFA ENC regional staff then provided a list of TFA alumni in each site to AIR so the study team could schedule interviews. At the time of our interviews, all respondents from KIPP Gaston, KIPP Halifax, and Henderson Collegiate were working in schools founded or started by TFA alumni. Respondents from three of four schools that we visited in Edgecombe County had TFA alumni in leadership positions.

Drawing on these interviews, we identified three major themes related to TFA alumni experiences in the selected schools:

- Challenges faced by students, which TFA alumni work to address;

- The importance of school culture, community connections, and leadership to recruit, support, and retain TFA alumni and other teachers; and

- Positive impacts that TFA alumni reported on student achievement and school culture.

In the following sections, we describe the key themes that emerged from the interviews and discuss implications for the field.

Findings from the study

TFA alumni are aware of challenges their students face and help address these challenges.

Interviewers asked TFA alumni to describe the challenges that students in their communities faced and that TFA alumni worked to address. TFA alumni overall cited deep-rooted inequality and a lack of school-based resources as the biggest challenges their communities face.

The main challenge shared by all TFA alumni respondents (*N* = 38) working in the Edgecombe, Henderson, and KIPP Gaston and KIPP Halifax communities included descriptions of deep-rooted inequality driven by racism and poverty and the ways in which those systems of inequality affected opportunities for students in the communities. According to TFA alumni, these systems of inequality often lead to poor health outcomes, food insecurity, lack of housing, and student trauma. Two interviewees described how life in these conditions often encourages a community mentality of low expectations for students, and explained that they and other TFA alumni are working to break this narrative and establish a culture of high expectations.

> *"One challenge is that, historically, there have not been educational options for students in our community … One reason KIPP was started was to address that [challenge], and KIPP was started by TFA alums."*

Other commonly cited community challenges included a lack of school-based resources to support students academically, socially, and mentally. For example, seven alumni cited challenges associated with teaching students who were dealing with trauma. Five alumni described challenges related to teacher recruitment and retention, especially in terms of recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers to work in poor, rural communities.

Some TFA alumni offered potential solutions to these challenges or ways that TFA has already worked to address them, including the recruitment of TFA corps members and alumni to work in these schools (11 alumni); TFA alumni founding new schools and/or serving as school leaders to instill high expectations among staff and students (six alumni); and building relationships with the community (four alumni).

Many TFA alumni are committed to the region.

A majority of interviewed alumni (20 of 38) stated that they completed their TFA corps membership in the ENC region and continued to teach in the same school or in the region after their 2-year TFA commitment. At least 12 of the 18 alumni who did not complete their corps membership in the ENC region came to the region because of personal connections, such as having family or friends in the area.

Alumni cited three main reasons they were placed in ENC for their corps membership: (a) ENC was their first choice of placement, often because they were from North Carolina and/or had family in the region; (b) they desired to teach in a smaller and/or rural community in which they felt they could make an impact; or (c) ENC was not their first choice, but they were placed there by TFA as one of many choices. A number of interview respondents (12 alumni) stated that they were drawn to TFA and the region because of the opportunity to make a lasting impact on students' lives. One alumnus was motivated to join TFA in ENC by a strong belief in "social justice work and education as the most effective way to dismantle systems of oppression and create new pathways for students."

Fifteen of the 20 alumni who completed their corps membership in ENC indicated that they remained at the schools in which they had served as TFA corps members. Thirteen alumni (some of whom did not complete their corps membership in ENC) explained that they were recruited to their current schools by other TFA alumni. These alumni described the ways in which their informal connections with other alumni helped them learn about specific job opportunities in their current schools or districts, such as meeting someone through another TFA corps member or meeting other alumni through opportunities like the Northeast Leadership Academy program at North Carolina State University. These alumni also described how innovative instructional approaches within their schools or districts led to their interest in working there. One alumnus explained, "One of the hardest decisions to make as a corps member is whether or not to leave kids and a community you've become close to." For this and other reasons, many alumni remained in the ENC region.
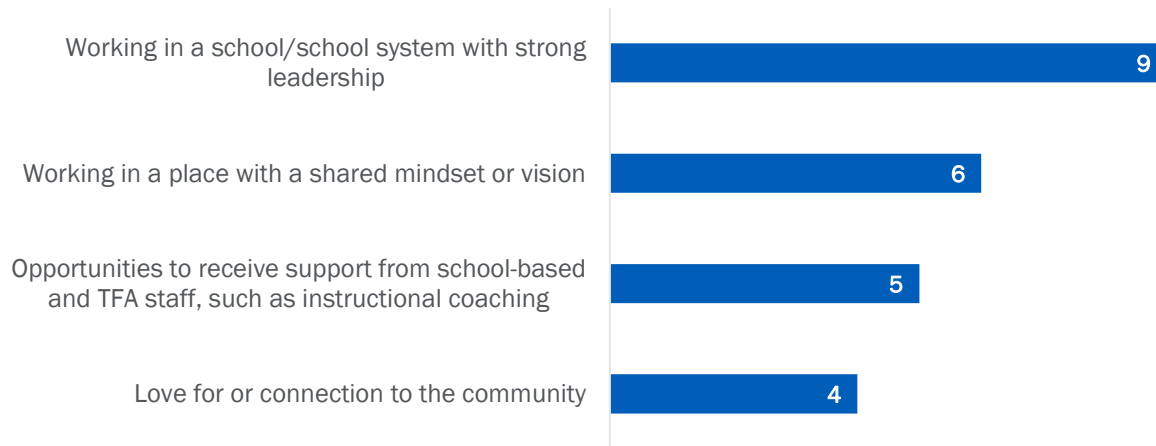
TFA alumni described school culture, connections to colleagues and community, and strong district and school leadership as the primary reasons they joined and stayed in ENC schools.

School culture and connections to colleagues and the community.

When asked about factors that motivated them to join and stay in their current schools or sites, respondents frequently cited the "TFA culture" or mindset cultivated by TFA alumni in teaching and leadership roles as an important factor in establishing a culture and environment that encouraged staff to stay. According to respondents, the following were the most frequently cited reasons that teachers remained in their communities (Exhibit 4). These represent responses from 24 of the 38 individuals

interviewed. The number of respondents who cited each reason appear in the graph bars; some respondents provided multiple reasons for remaining in their communities.

Exhibit 4. Reasons TFA Alumni Remained in Their Communities—Responses From TFA Alumni

Reason	Number
Working in a school/school system with strong leadership	9
Working in a place with a shared mindset or vision	6
Opportunities to receive support from school-based and TFA staff, such as instructional coaching	5
Love for or connection to the community	4

TFA alumni explained that having large concentrations of TFA alumni in schools or school systems informed both recruitment and retention decisions. One alumnus commented: "Sharing a common set of values with district leaders, school leaders, and fellow teachers was a primary motivating factor for bringing teachers to ENC schools and keeping them there."

> *"I feel like everything about the community of the alumni there [in Edgecombe County] was just so intentional. Like, people were just so passionate, and there was … people were wanting something bigger … there's something very special about the work being done there, and the commitments that people are making to have their lives there."*

Words and phrases that alumni commonly used to describe their school and district cultures in ways that motivated alumni to continue teaching in the schools included "innovation," "high expectations," "social justice," and "community." TFA alumni explained that to be successful in a rural community, TFA alumni and corps members need to be ambitious, smart, humble, willing to learn, and open-minded, and they must care for the students. Exhibit 5 presents a word map of characteristics used by respondents to describe TFA alumni working in ENC schools.

Exhibit 5. Words Used by Respondents to Characterize TFA Alumni Working in ENC Schools

The response of one alumnus captures the general sentiment of most respondents when asked about the motivating factors that drew them to and kept them at a particular school (see quote at right):

> *"I love the concentration of TFA alum[ni] here. I've stayed because of the relationships with a lot of them … but, really, what's kept me in the area is the people that I get to work with every day, and the community that we get to serve, and I'm just grateful that I ended up here."*

When interviewers asked respondents about their specific future plans, a majority of TFA alumni (24 of 38) expressed plans to remain at their schools or in the ENC region for the foreseeable future, citing strong ties to the schools and communities.

Strong and supportive school and district leadership.

Some TFA alumni cited strong and supportive school and district leadership as one reason they joined or stayed at their schools, and a primary school-based factor that helped alumni be successful (nine alumni). This strong leadership created a supportive school culture that helped to recruit and retain teachers in these schools. In Edgecombe County, for example, TFA alumni who served in district and school leadership roles actively recruited other TFA alumni to schools and to school leadership roles. KIPP and Henderson Collegiate were founded by TFA alumni, and they have instilled TFA core values and practices in their schools. One alumnus described the culture and leadership in Henderson Collegiate (see quote below):

> *"They [the leadership] have been instrumental in creating a culture that has high accountability, a ton of inspiration, opportunities to grow. They're really good at pushing you to become a better version of yourself. I think being in a work environment where I feel I'm getting to live out my values and what I believe in, on a daily basis, but also where I'm pushed to be the best version of myself every day, influences me to stay."*

Some ENC schools grew their own leadership pipeline through TFA networks. One key resource to develop this pipeline of leaders was the Northeast Leadership Academy at North Carolina State University. A number of TFA alumni in leadership roles went through this program when they first learned of the opportunity from other TFA alumni through TFA networks. The Northeast Leadership Academy program provided opportunities for alumni to grow into leadership positions within their current schools and districts as well as to connect with other alumni in the region who participated in the program.

TFA alumni were often recruited to ENC schools not only to lead schools but also to lead new initiatives in their districts or school systems. For example, Edgecombe is piloting a micro-school model—the North/Phillips School of Innovation—developed and led by TFA alumni. The micro-school includes 30 eighth- and ninth-graders who engage in self-directed learning using human-centered design strategies. The teachers recruited for the micro-school also were TFA alumni.

One TFA alumni and school principal described TFA's impact on the leadership pipeline as follows:

> *"The impact of TFA … a lot of the leaders of the school, coaches, head-level chairs, our three principals are all TFA alum. That seems to be our leadership pipeline … And if TFA wasn't placing in this rural county, and wasn't placing in Eastern North Carolina, I don't know where our leadership pipeline would have come from."*

TFA alumni supported student success in rural ENC schools.

We asked TFA alumni to share ways in which they and their TFA colleagues had addressed the challenges faced by students in their communities in ENC schools and districts. Specifically, we asked TFA alumni about the effect that alumni have on (a) the culture and climate of their schools or districts, (b) teacher effectiveness, and (c) student outcomes.

A common mission that drives cultural change in schools with large numbers of TFA alumni.

When asked about the impact of TFA on school culture and climate, 17 of 38 respondents provided examples of the ways in which a large TFA presence helped drive the mission and vision for education in their schools. Respondents most often cited examples of a common mission or vision characterized by high expectations for all students (e.g., 100% of students will be ready for college when they graduate), the fostering of positive relationships with students, promotion of a sense of community among staff, and the use of restorative justice and culturally competent practices.

TFA's effect on teacher practice and student outcomes.

When asked about the effect of TFA alumni on teacher effectiveness, nine respondents described how their school develops teachers through coaching and other supports, such as professional development and professional learning communities, that may or may not be attributable to TFA. Six respondents explained that TFA alumni often had similar mindsets, a shared view of rigorous instruction, and high expectations for themselves and their students that translated into effective teaching. Four respondents said that promoting teacher retention helped to increase teacher effectiveness, while three other respondents stated that TFA's 2-year commitment had a negative effect on teacher effectiveness. Three respondents noted that school and district leadership—not TFA itself—influenced teacher effectiveness.[5]

We also asked respondents about how TFA alumni affect student outcomes. The most common reply among respondents was the increase in student proficiency or achievement (16 responses) that they observed in their schools. Twelve respondents also discussed college and career outcomes for students as a positive effect of TFA alumni at their sites. Together, these responses represented the great majority of interviewee responses (a total of 28 of 38 alumni responses).

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[5] Although these responses came from TFA alumni who themselves were in leadership positions in their schools or districts, these alumni felt that the nature of having a leadership role in the school or district—rather than TFA's presence in and of itself—helped them to personally make an impact.

A Henderson Collegiate teacher shared the following as an example of TFA's impact on student learning:

> *"Last year we had our first founding class, the class of 2018, they're the students who started with us the very first year of the school in fourth grade. They all graduated and 100% of them got accepted into the college of their choice. So that's a huge success for this school...that was the dream and the vision ... I think TFA has impacted us directly and indirectly. Number one, the two cofounders are TFA alumni."*

Insights and implications for the field

Information gathered from the interviewed convenience sample of TFA alumni who have joined and remained in ENC schools has implications for the recruitment, selection, development, and retention of educators in rural school districts.

Having a common vision is important.

TFA alumni described being drawn to the region due—at least in part—to the "TFA culture" or mindset. Establishing a strong, common mission to ensure that all students in high-need schools meet key educational milestones that put them on the path to college and life success helps attract teachers to TFA and the ENC region. This is consistent with findings from the field. For example, fostering a mission, vision, and core values is the first standard of the *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* (2015). Crafting and communicating a compelling vision can increase teacher recruitment and retention, thus leading to greater impact on students and communities. In rural communities that historically struggle to recruit and retain effective teachers, organizations with strong missions such as TFA can improve the quality of the teacher workforce by attracting and retaining more effective teachers.

Relationships matter.

TFA alumni noted that their relationships with people (including colleagues, other TFA alumni, and their students) and their relationship to the community were two important reasons they stayed in ENC, enabling alumni to make a long-term, collective impact in the region. This aligns with a recommendation from TFA alumni to build better connections between new and veteran teachers to create an environment of collegiality and support as a recommendation for teacher retention. Other rural communities interested in supporting teacher retention could encourage collegial relationships between staff and leadership and establish systems and structures to foster positive relationships among staff, community members, and students to reap positive educational outcomes.

Strong leadership and opportunities for professional learning are essential.

TFA alumni reported that strong school leadership and supports, such as coaching and professional development (for example, the coaching and professional development opportunities offered by the rural leadership academy), were reasons they had a positive impact in ENC schools and encouraged teachers to stay. This finding aligns with research on teaching conditions—specifically, three teaching conditions that affect teacher retention identified by the New Teacher Center (n.d.): teacher leadership, school leadership, and professional development. Research on teaching conditions finds that "when teachers perceive more positive teaching conditions, they are more satisfied with their jobs, they are more motivated to do their work, and they feel more efficacious at their jobs. In other words, teachers are

happier and feel that they are more effective and capable educators. Thus, it makes sense that educators in more positive working environments have students who also perceive their environments to be more positive" (Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, 2020, p. 8). These teaching conditions also were evident in the recommendations for teacher retention that TFA alumni provided.

Districts and schools seeking to recruit, select, develop, and retain educators in rural communities can use the information collected and analyzed through this descriptive study to create the conditions and community that can foster educator growth.

References

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Appendix A. TFA ENC Alumni Concentrations and School-Level Student Growth

In October 2019, we used GIS (geographic information system) mapping to address questions 1–3 to guide the study of Teach For America (TFA) alumni in Eastern North Carolina (ENC) schools:

1. In what districts and schools are TFA alumni working in North Carolina? Where are TFA alumni concentrated?

2. What districts and schools in North Carolina have above-average student achievement outcomes?

3. In what districts and schools do we observe concentrations of both TFA alumni and above-average student achievement?

Specifically, we overlaid data on school-level student growth and data on the school-level number of TFA alumni across North Carolina.

To address question 1—*In what districts and schools are TFA alumni working in North Carolina? Where are TFA alumni concentrated?*—we summed the number of TFA alumni working in North Carolina schools in three school years (SYs): 2017–18, 2018–19, and 2019–20. There were 1,079 TFA alumni working in North Carolina schools across SY2017–18, SY2018–19, and SY2019–20. To visually represent the schools in which TFA alumni were working, we mapped the results using different-sized bubbles to denote schools with different numbers of TFA alumni (a larger bubble indicates a greater number of alumni).

Exhibit A-1 shows the number of TFA alumni by school across North Carolina, with ENC counties shaded in pink. Exhibit A-2 shows the number of TFA alumni by school district (or charter school) across North Carolina, with ENC counties shaded in pink. We observed large clusters of alumni in the Raleigh-Durham area as well as in Edgecombe County, Northampton County, and Vance County.

We also examined the number of TFA alumni working in professions outside of K–12 school districts and charter schools in SYs 2016–17, 2017–18, 2018–19, and 2019–20. Exhibit A-3 includes numbers of TFA alumni working in North Carolina, numbers of TFA alumni working in North Carolina in non-K–12 education careers, and numbers of TFA alumni working in the most commonly reported professions and occupational fields.[6]

In SY2019–20, we observed 1,165 TFA alumni working in North Carolina. A majority of TFA alumni (776) with employment data worked in non-K–12 education careers. A large number (243) worked in education-related careers but outside of K–12. For example, these TFA alumni worked for colleges or universities, nonprofit education organizations like TFA, and education research or service provider organizations. A large number (74 in 2019–20) of TFA alumni were enrolled as full-time graduate students. Other alumni worked in fields such as healthcare, legal services, and nonprofits, and some reported being a stay-at-home parent. Other professions in which few (less than 10 in each school year)

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[6] TFA alumni professionals and occupational fields were defined by and reported in an alumni dataset provided by TFA.

TFA alumni worked included state and local government, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields, general business, and social services.[7]
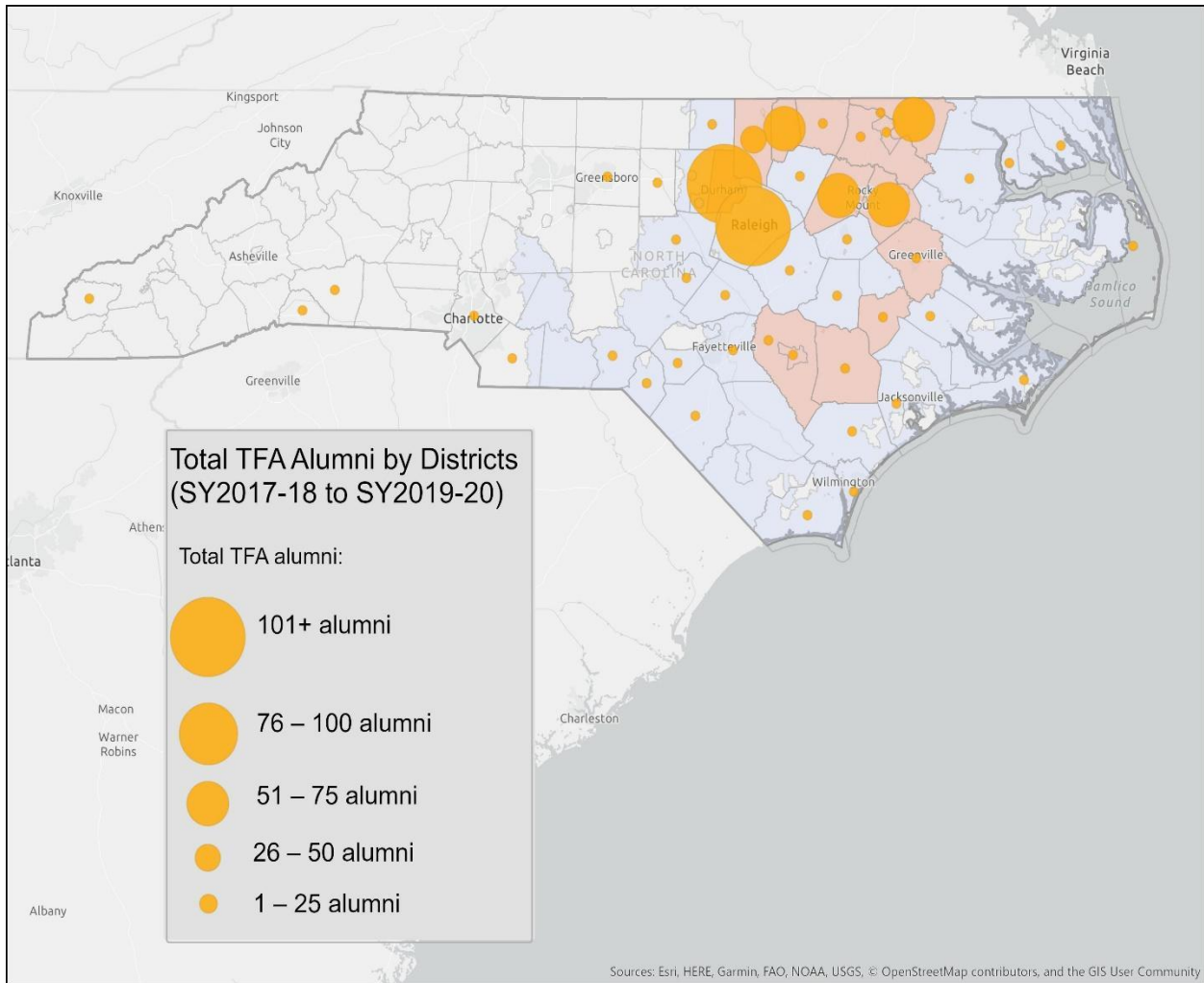
Exhibit A–1. TFA Alumni Working in North Carolina Schools in SYs 2017—18, 2018—19, and 2019—20
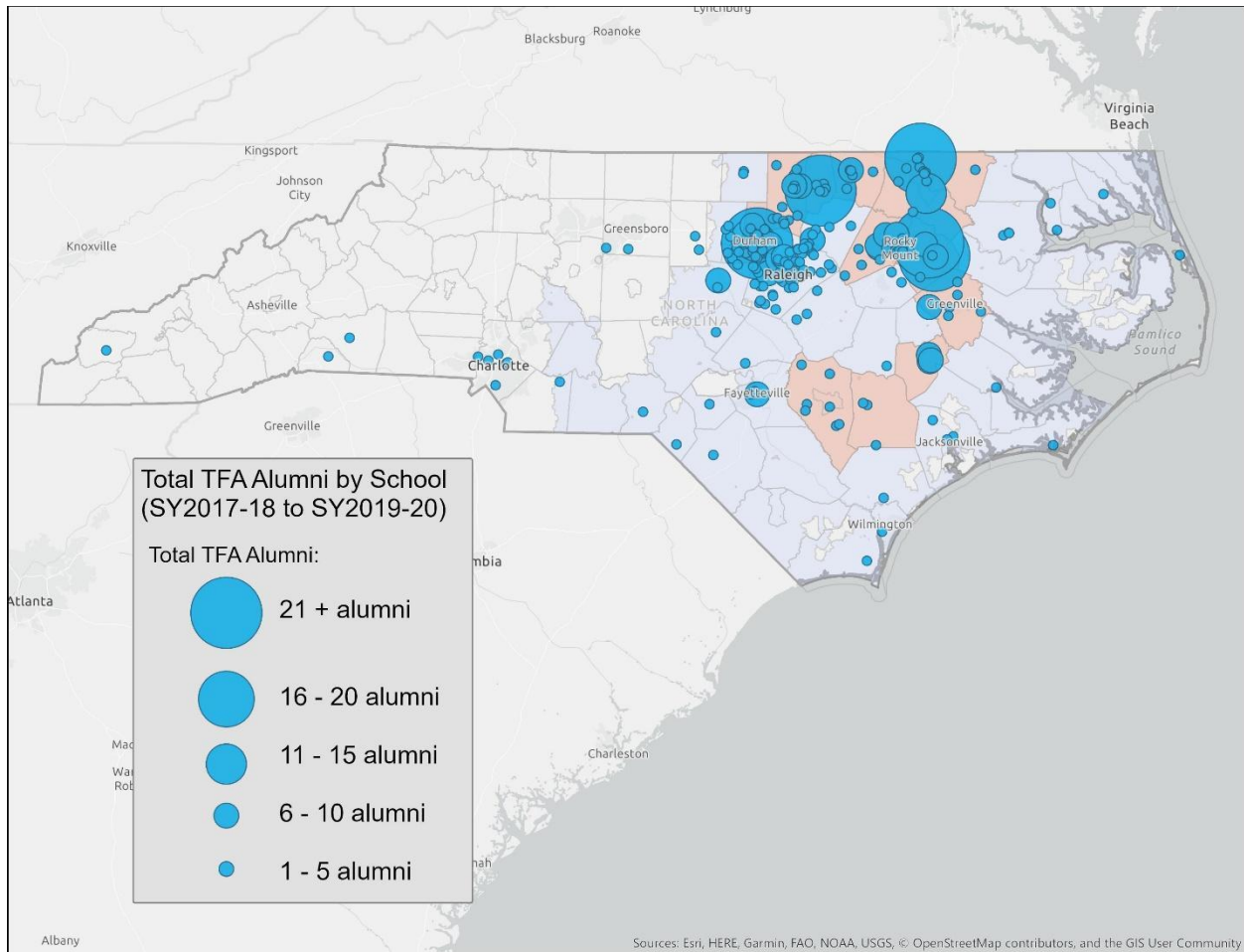
Note: Teach For America Eastern North Carolina region counties are shaded in pink.

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[7] Since TFA alumni data were captured every school year between 2017 and 2020, TFA alumni were counted in each year if they were present in the dataset each year. For example, if an alumnus worked in healthcare in 2017 and 2018, they were included in both 2017 and 2018 counts of TFA alumni working in healthcare. If an alumnus was a full-time graduate student in 2017 and they worked in healthcare in 2018, they were counted as such in each school year, respectively.

Exhibit A–2. TFA Alumni Working in North Carolina School Districts in SYs 2017—18, 2018—19, and 2019—20

Note: Teach For America Eastern North Carolina region counties are shaded in pink.

Exhibit A–3. TFA Alumni Working in Professions Outside of K–12 Education in North Carolina in SYs 2016–17 Through 2019–20

	Common Professions/Fields and Number of TFA Alumni Working in Those Professions/Fields								
School year	Total number of alumni working in NC	Number of alumni working in non-K–12 Education fields	Education (non-K–12)	Full-time graduate student	Health/Healthcare	Law/Legal services	Nonprofit	Stay-at-home parent	Number of alumni with no employ-ment data
2016–2017	884	603	130	135	32	29	21	20	155
2017–2018	953	651	137	123	32	29	18	25	195
2018–2019	1,105	733	202	83	66	42	23	38	128
2019–2020	1,165	776	243	74	64	49	27	40	108

To address question 2—*What districts and schools in North Carolina have above-average student achievement outcomes?*—we used SY2017–18 and SY2018–19 North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI] school performance grades (NCDPI, 2019a) data to identify schools that "met" or "exceeded" student growth expectations on the state's value-added student achievement measure in

each year (see the box to the right for more information on North Carolina's student growth measure). We examined 2 years of data to determine whether student growth was consistent across more than 1 year. In SY2017–18, we found that 1,070 schools met expected growth and 631 schools exceeded growth. In SY2018–19, the number of schools meeting or exceeding expected growth increased such that we observed 1,149 schools that met expected growth

> *The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI) calculates and reports student academic growth as part of its state accountability system. Student academic growth, reported at the school level, is defined by NC DPI as "the progress that students in the school made over the previous year." The standard is roughly equivalent to a year's worth of growth for a year of instruction. Growth is reported for each school as Exceeded Growth Expectations, Met Growth Expectations, or Did Not Meet Growth Expectations as measured by EVAAS, a statistical tool that North Carolina uses to measure student growth when common assessments are administered" (NCDPI, 2019b)*

and 693 schools that exceeded expected growth. The group of schools in each year that met or exceeded student growth expectations makes up approximately two-thirds of North Carolina's more than 2,600 public and charter schools.

Exhibit A-4 shows schools that met or exceeded student growth expectations in SY2018–19. Schools that met expected growth are represented on the maps with a yellow bubble, and schools that exceeded expected growth are represented with a green bubble.

To address question 3—*In what districts and schools do we observe concentrations of both TFA alumni and above-average student achievement*—we combined TFA alumni data and student growth data to identify schools with large (10 or more) concentrations of TFA alumni that met or exceeded growth expectations during SY2018–19. Exhibit 1 in the report presents the GIS mapping results to display the combined data. Large concentrations of TFA alumni are indicated by the size of the bubble (a larger

bubble indicates a greater number of alumni). Schools that met or exceeded student growth expectations in SY2018–19 are indicated in green. Thus, large green bubbles represent the schools with large (10 or more) concentrations of TFA alumni that met or exceeded growth expectations during SY2018–19.

To identify with large concentrations of TFA alumni in schools that have met or exceeded student growth, AIR further examined GIS mapping results with TFA staff. The goal of this activity was to pinpoint specific schools and school districts in areas with large numbers of TFA alumni and average or above-average student growth. With input from TFA ENC regional staff, we selected one public school district and two ENC schools from charter management organizations to include in the case study. These districts and schools included Edgecombe County School District, KIPP Gaston and KIPP Halifax, and Henderson Collegiate. The total number of alumni working in these three sites in SY2019–20 included 59 alumni in Edgecombe County Public Schools, 46 alumni in Henderson Collegiate schools, and 56 alumni in the KIPP Gaston and KIPP Halifax schools.

The three identified sites—Edgecombe County School District, KIPP Gaston and KIPP Halifax, and Henderson Collegiate—were studied to address the research question.

Exhibit A–4. North Carolina Schools Meeting or Exceeding Expected Student Growth in SY2018–19
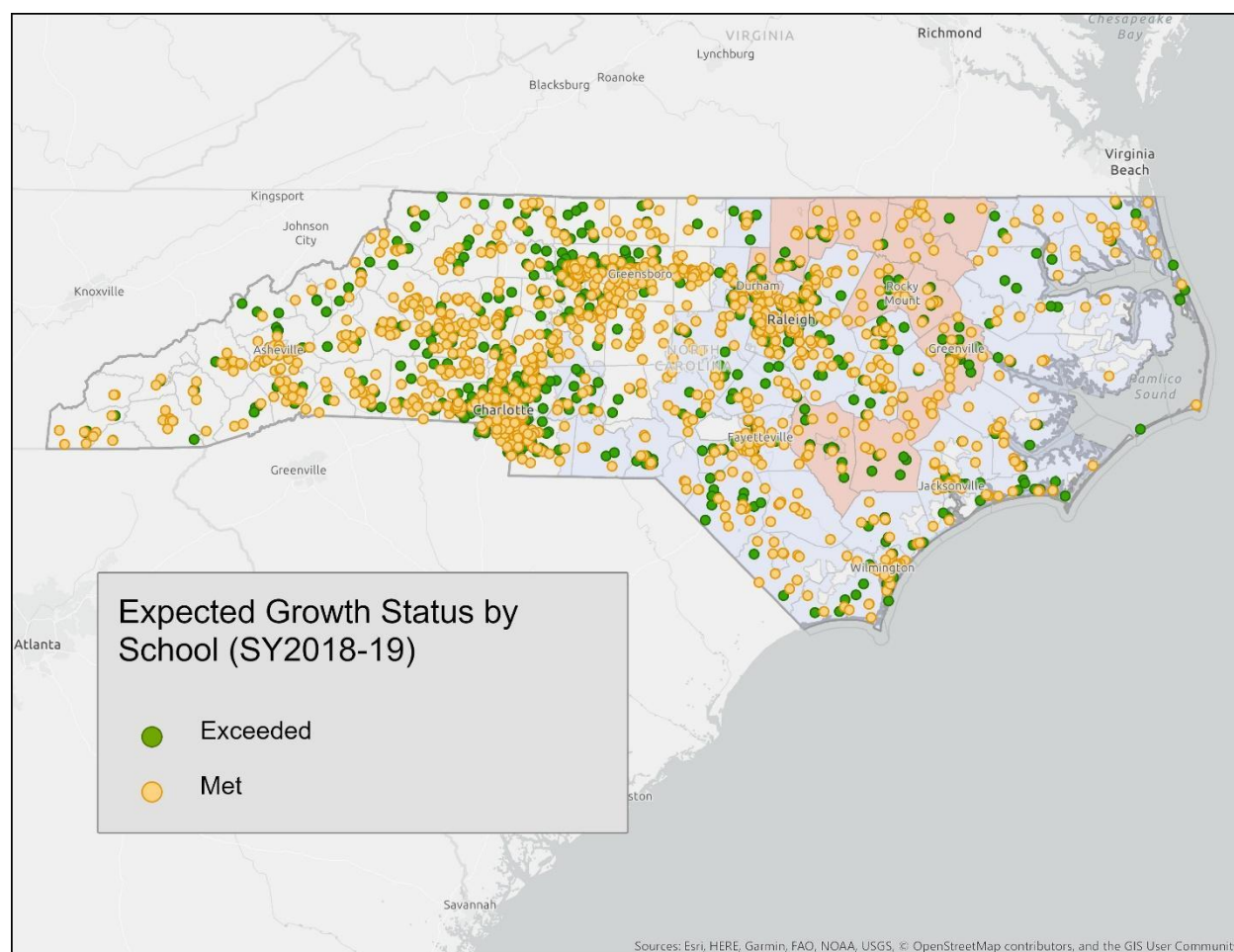
Note: Teach For America Eastern North Carolina region counties are shaded in pink.

Appendix B. TFA ENC Alumni Interview Protocol

Hello, my name is _____. I'm a researcher with the American Institutes for Research, or AIR.

We are working with Teacher For America, or TFA, to develop case studies to highlight information on how TFA alumni in Eastern North Carolina have affected schools, districts, and communities in the region. As part of our case studies, we are conducting interviews with TFA alumni and other district and community members. We want to hear your story to learn about experiences of TFA alumni and their impact on students, schools, and the community.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any time. We will treat the data collected during this interview as confidential; however, we will include district and school names in our reports. This study is not an evaluation of any staff member, school, or individual district but, rather, a way to highlight your role specifically, and TFA's role generally, in this community and region.

Do you have any questions about the study or the consent form?

Do you agree to participate? [Confirm that all participants say "yes."]

We typically audio-record interviews to ensure that we accurately capture your responses, rather than relying solely on typed notes. Recordings will be kept in a secure location by AIR and will be destroyed at the end of the study. You may request to turn off the recorder at any time. Do you agree to be audio-recorded? *[If the participant agrees, begin the recording.]*

Exhibit B–1. TFA Alumni Interview Protocol

Question	Protocol Questions
	When recording starts, state the following:
	▪ Today is [DATE].
	▪ I'm interviewing a [role] named [NAME] in [DISTRICT NAME].
Section 1: Background Information	
1	To start, please tell us about your current role here in [DISTRICT NAME]. How long have you been at the district?
Section 2: The Community and TFA's Role	
2	What are some successes in your districts/community? What role, if any, has the TFA presence and/or the efforts of TFA alumni had in those successes?
3	What challenges has the district/community faced? What role, if any, have TFA alumni played in helping to meet those challenges? Have there been challenges that TFA could not address or that were exacerbated by TFA's presence?
	Probe for:
	▪ Challenges such as teacher recruitment and retention, teacher effectiveness, educator pipeline
	▪ Issues such as student academic needs, lack of rigor, lack of support for students and families outside of the classroom
Section 3: TFA Alumni Experiences and Pathways	
4	Can you briefly tell me about your experiences as a TFA corps member?
	▪ Where and when did you serve as a corps member?
	▪ What motivated you to join TFA originally?

5	Tell me about your pathway to [COMMUNITY NAME]. That is, when and how did you start living and working in [DISTRICT/COMMUNITY NAME]?
	Probes:
	▪ Did you start here as a corps member, or did you come to this district after your corps membership?
	▪ What enticed you to come to the community?
	▪ Were you asked by other alumni or other staff to join the district?
	▪ Why was TFA, and specifically TFA ENC, a good fit for you?

Section 4: TFA Impact

6	How does TFA's mission align with the district's mission?
	▪ What words would you use to characterize TFA alumni?
	▪ How would you characterize TFA's role in your district and community?
7	From your perspective, how have TFA alumni in leadership roles helped shape the mission of the district, and/or district policies and programs?
8	I'm going to ask you a series of questions about the influence of TFA alumni on several different factors.
	As a result of TFA's presence in the district/community, how has teacher classroom instruction and teacher effectiveness changed, if at all?
	As a result of TFA's presence in the district/community, how have student academic outcomes changed, if at all?
	As a result of TFA's presence in the district/community, how have school and district culture or climate changed, if at all?
	Probe for:
	▪ Student engagement
	▪ Teacher engagement and collaboration
	▪ Student well-being and social-emotional factors
	▪ School leadership quality and support, including principals and teacher leaders
	▪ Innovation and choice
9	What are some ways in which TFA can help foster alumni connections to lead to meaningful opportunities for alumni and communities in which TFA operates?

Section 5: Wrap-Up

10	Tell me about your future plans in [DISTRICT NAME].
	Probes:
	▪ Do you plan to stay in the community? Why/why not?
	▪ What factors have motivated you to stay so far?
	▪ What factors do you attribute to your plans to leave?
	▪ What, if anything, would encourage you to stay [if the interviewee plans to leave at some point]?
11	Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with, or the influence of, TFA and TFA alumni in your district and community?
	Thank you for taking the time to participate and for sharing your thoughts about TFA and your experiences as a TFA alumnus.
	Our next step is to write case studies to highlight information gathered during these interviews. AIR and TFA will send you a link to the case studies once they are published.

To learn more about AIR's research on teacher preparation, recruitment, development, and retention, contact Elizabeth Barkowski at ebarkowski@air.org

About the American Institutes for Research

Established in 1946, with headquarters in Washington, D.C., the American Institutes for Research (AIR) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research and delivers technical assistance, both domestically and internationally, in the areas of education, health, and the workforce. For more information, visit www.air.org.

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