

To: PEPSC Members and the State Board of Education

From: Governor Cooper's Developing a Representative and Inclusive Vision for Education (DRIVE) Task Force

Re: North Carolina Pathways to Excellence for Teaching Professionals

## **Background**

The state of North Carolina is home to a population that is increasingly racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse, especially within its school-age population. Yet, North Carolina's educator workforce has been unable to match this rich diversity. On December 9, 2019, Governor Roy Cooper signed Executive Order no. 113 establishing the Developing a Representative and Inclusive Vision for Education (DRIVE) Task Force, recognizing the positive impact of diverse educators on all students, and especially students of color. This body was charged with assessing North Carolina's progress in creating and sustaining a diverse educator workforce and developing a plan to strengthen and coordinate state efforts in this space. On January 1, 2021, the DRIVE Task Force submitted its [Final Report and Recommendations](#), calling for a collective agenda to challenge the structural racism inherent in our educational system and proposing short-, mid-, and long-term strategies to disrupt our current system, which has historically failed to attract, prepare, and retain a sufficient supply of educators of color. In addition, in June of 2022, the DRIVE Task Force published [A Plan to Implement the DRIVE Task Force Recommendations to Increase the Racial, Ethnic, and Linguistic Diversity of North Carolina's Educator Workforce](#). This plan identified action items for state- and local-level actors that are necessary to implement the Task Force's original recommendations.

The Professional Educator Preparation and Standards Commission (PEPSC) is crafting recommendations to pilot the NC Pathways to Excellence for Teaching Professionals ("Pathways") proposal, which will restructure North Carolina's teacher licensure, support, and compensation systems. We believe components of this proposal have the potential to, if implemented well, expand the number of teachers of color in classrooms by addressing some of the barriers and challenges the DRIVE Task Force identified in its report. This work could not be more important, as research shows that all students, but particularly students of color, experience benefits when taught by teachers of color.<sup>1</sup> Students experience stronger academic outcomes and positive impacts relative to college aspirations and self-confidence; however, data illustrate that people of color become educators at lower rates than their white peers, and educators of color leave the teaching profession at higher rates.

The purpose of this letter is to highlight the positive impact that the Pathways proposal could have on teacher diversity and to identify opportunities to align the professional pathways structures more closely with DRIVE Task Force Recommendations. While emphasizing potential positives that this plan contains for teacher diversity, we continue to encourage PEPSC, the State Board of Education, and the General Assembly to keep teacher diversity, and ultimately educational outcomes for students of color,

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<sup>1</sup> Dee, T. (2004). Educators, Race, and Student Achievement in a Randomized Experiment. *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 86, no. 1: 195-210. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3211667>

top of mind when implementing this proposal and other policies, programs, and funding to strengthen the educator workforce.

**Teacher Compensation**

DRIVE Task Force Report Barriers & Considerations:

<b>Lack of Long-Term Earning Potential</b>	Educators of color often lack the generational wealth afforded to their white colleagues, which, when coupled with a low salary compared to similarly credentialed professionals, leave educators of color to face an uphill battle in paying down student loan debt. This generational wealth gap exacerbates the issue for those who shoulder the additional responsibility of supporting family members. The limited long-term earning potential and higher chance of student debt may keep educators of color from entering and remaining in the profession.
<b>Address Salary</b>	For teaching to be an attractive life-long career option that can bring passionate, high-quality candidates into the profession, teachers must be well compensated. With that in mind, North Carolina should work diligently to raise teacher salary above the national average and to be highest in the southeast. In doing so, policymakers should look to decrease the pay disparity between educators and similarly credentialed and experienced professionals in other fields.

The Blueprint for Action accepted by the State Board of Education at their December meeting, and the Pathways proposal on which the Blueprint is based, calls for a new model for educator compensation, including significant increases in teacher salaries. The Pathways proposal also provides educators the ability to increase their compensation at a much faster rate than the current salary schedule, potentially motivating more candidates, and more candidates of color, to enter and remain in the profession. Under the new plan, teachers could reach the highest license level, and its corresponding compensation level, in as little as three years. Once reaching License IV, teachers can continue advancing in their career by taking on an Advanced Teaching Role, which would provide a salary increase of \$5,000-\$10,000 funded by the state, with potentially more provided by individual school districts. Under each license level, salary increases based on years of experience.

<i>Pathways Proposal</i>							<i>Current Schedule (2022-23)</i>	
Year	License 1	License 2	License 3	License 4 (1.0% annual increase)	License 4 + Masters (10%)	License 4 + NBCT (12%)	Year	"A" Schedule (Bachelors)
Starting Salary	\$38,000	\$40,000	\$45,000	\$56,000	\$61,600	\$62,720	0	\$37,000

L1-4 +1 year	\$38,380	\$40,400	\$45,450	\$56,560	\$62,216	\$63,347	1	\$38,000
L1-4 +2 years	\$38,764	\$40,804	\$45,905	\$57,126	\$62,838	\$63,981	2	\$39,000
L1-4 +3 years	-	-	\$46,364	\$57,697	\$63,467	\$64,620	3	\$40,000
L1-4 +4 years	-	-	\$46,828	\$58,274	\$64,101	\$65,267	4	\$41,000
L1-4 +5 years	-	-	\$47,296	\$58,857	\$64,742	\$65,919	5	\$42,000
L4+6	-	-	-	\$59,445	\$65,390	\$66,579	6	\$43,000
L4+7	-	-	-	\$60,040	\$66,044	\$67,244	7	\$44,000
L4+8	-	-	-	\$60,640	\$66,704	\$67,917	8	\$45,000
L4+9	-	-	-	\$61,246	\$67,371	\$68,596	9	\$46,000
L4+10	-	-	-	\$61,859	\$68,045	\$69,282	10	\$47,000
L4+11	-	-	-	\$62,477	\$68,725	\$69,975	11	\$48,000
L4+12	-	-	-	\$63,102	\$69,412	\$70,674	12	\$49,000
L4+13	-	-	-	\$63,733	\$70,107	\$71,381	13	\$50,000
L4+14	-	-	-	\$64,371	\$70,808	\$72,095	14	\$51,000
L4+15	-	-	-	\$65,014	\$71,516	\$72,816	15	\$52,000
L4+16	-	-	-	\$65,664	\$72,231	\$73,544	16	\$52,000
L4+17	-	-	-	\$66,321	\$72,953	\$74,280	17	\$52,000
L4+18	-	-	-	\$66,984	\$73,683	\$75,022	18	\$52,000
L4+19	-	-	-	\$67,654	\$74,420	\$75,773	19	\$52,000
L4+20	-	-	-	\$68,331	\$75,164	\$76,530	20	\$52,000
L4+21	-	-	-	\$69,014	\$75,915	\$77,296	21	\$52,000
L4+22	-	-	-	\$69,704	\$76,674	\$78,069	22	\$52,000
L4+23	-	-	-	\$70,401	\$77,441	\$78,849	23	\$52,000
L4+24	-	-	-	\$71,105	\$78,216	\$79,638	24	\$52,000
L4+25+	-	-	-	\$71,816	\$78,998	\$80,434	25+	\$54,000

The above salary structure will play a vital role in showing current and prospective teachers that their profession is valued. The potential for continued growth in compensation, along with the shortened

timeline for receiving significant raises, throughout a teacher's career will motivate candidates to enter the profession. The new compensation model is better aligned with the earnings that other college-educated professionals earn. In 2021, the median income for recent college graduates ages 22 to 27 was \$52,000. Under the new model, teachers would be able to achieve License IV, which has a minimum salary of \$56,000, in as little as three years.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to pay raises for licensed teachers, a key reform in the Pathways proposal is the creation of a teacher apprenticeship program and license. The apprenticeship positions provide a paid opportunity for prospective teachers to gain valuable school-based experience while completing their educator preparation coursework. These positions will be an opportunity for prospective teachers of color who have faced barriers to postsecondary education to receive financial assistance and professional support to help them move toward earning a teaching license.

Additionally, the lack of compensation for pre-service student teachers can often be a significant barrier, especially for low-income students who are interested in pursuing teacher licensure during their undergraduate education. Student teaching is a significant, and typically unpaid, time commitment that student teachers must balance with other coursework and financial demands (many low-income students work while completing their college coursework). The apprenticeship position would offer a financially viable route into teaching that has previously been closed off for individuals who face barriers to receiving a bachelor's degree. Creating an apprenticeship program where individuals, such as student teachers, can be compensated while also gaining valuable on-the-job training and experience would be a welcome change.

### **Advanced Teaching Roles**

The Advanced Teaching Roles initiative (ATR) was created in North Carolina in 2016. There are currently 19 districts implementing ATR with more than 236 schools participating.<sup>3</sup> The model is an innovative approach to modernizing outdated school organization models, offering a better way to improve student performance and increase teacher retention. ATR creates meaningful leadership roles and opportunities for higher pay for effective teachers while providing embedded professional support for novice teachers. These roles distribute leadership across the school, lessening the burden on school administrators while also positively impacting instructional quality and student performance.

This model is an opportunity to leverage North Carolina's best asset, our experienced, effective teachers. ATR assures that every child has exposure to an excellent teacher, while also providing key early career support to new educators. ATR lead-teachers work exclusively in their school and are familiar with the school community and knowledgeable about the school's unique opportunities and challenges. Participating districts are currently providing salary supplements ranging from \$5,000-20,000 for teachers in advanced roles, depending on the role and school characteristics. This means that teachers, some of whom could reach the highest licensure level in as little as three years under the Pathways Proposal, would have additional opportunities for promotion. This opportunity for continued

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<sup>2</sup> Federal Reserve Bank of New York (February 2021). The Labor Market for Recent College Graduates. Retrieved from [https://www.newyorkfed.org/research/college-labor-market/college-labor-market\\_wages.html](https://www.newyorkfed.org/research/college-labor-market/college-labor-market_wages.html)

<sup>3</sup> BEST NC (2022). Advanced Teaching Roles in North Carolina: Meaningful Career Pathways for Education Professionals.

growth in leadership and in compensation will both help North Carolina retain teachers and attract more people to the profession. The Pathways Proposal recommends expanding ATR into a statewide model, an idea that will attract and retain a more diverse educator workforce.

As PEPSC develops pilots, the DRIVE Task Force encourages the Commission to ensure that the pilots are distributed across diverse schools and districts by race/ethnicity, poverty, and geography. PEPSC should also ensure that ATR positions are open to teachers of color and that there are no unforeseen barriers for diverse teachers to access these positions. The selection of ATR teachers should be explicitly defined and designed to avoid implicit bias. Additionally, PEPSC should tailor ATR responsibilities to support new teachers of color.

**Methods for Proving Teaching Excellence**

DRIVE Task Force Report:

<b>Educator Certification Exams</b>	One of the most frequently cited barriers for aspiring educators of color are educator certification exams. Due to unequal access to foundational knowledge and lack of exposure to test-taking strategies, which starts in the K-12 setting, educators of color are at a disadvantage when taking educator licensing exams. Further, some have argued that cultural biases that are embedded in the assessments, as well as the cost of the test itself, create additional challenges for aspiring educators of color.
<b>Recruitment &amp; Preparation Short-Term Strategy #8</b>	Develop a robust, asset-based candidate selection process for educator preparation programs that values characteristics that are closely aligned with in-service teaching effectiveness while ensuring that no single measure on its own (such as a test score) can prevent a candidate who meets other established criteria from being admitted.

The DRIVE Task Force commends this proposal for offering alternative ways for teachers to demonstrate their abilities to impact student learning in the classroom. This work is aligned with the DRIVE Task Force report. Providing educators with multiple measures to demonstrate their abilities is vital to opening the door to educators with varying backgrounds and experiences. Anyone who has ever taught knows that standardized tests do not capture the myriad of positive things that a teacher is doing in the classroom.

Standardized tests do not always encompass the cultural diversity of test-takers and therefore do not measure every test-taker’s proficiency fairly. The Pathways proposal allows teachers to choose from multiple, different, and more meaningful ways to demonstrate their effectiveness, thereby reducing the

emphasis on (licensure) exams that research has shown to be an enormous barrier for educators of color.<sup>4,5</sup>

The cost of tests can also present a barrier for aspiring educators, especially if an educator has to take more than one test or take a test more than once. By providing other options to prove effectiveness, the Pathways proposal also reduces this barrier.

### **Expanded Pipeline**

DRIVE Task Force Report:

Expand and develop entry points into the educator pipeline that are based on models with proven success in recruiting racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse educators. (p 13)

Research has shown that all students, and especially students of color, benefit from a diverse educator workforce. Lateral entry, now known as the residency pathway, is North Carolina's most diverse educator pathway. This pathway allows people who have not gone through a traditional educator preparation program to transition into the profession after obtaining a Bachelor's degree. The Pathways Proposal aligns with DRIVE recommendations to expand this pipeline by providing teachers multiple measures to demonstrate their effectiveness in the classroom, by providing rapid and meaningful salary increases, and by providing residency teachers with ongoing, embedded early-career supports.

Providing alternatives to standardized tests and increasing teacher salaries are likely to attract more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse educators to the field. Additionally, the Pathways Proposal increases access coupled with a support infrastructure to ensure success for teachers who enter the profession at multiple entry points. Residency licensed teachers have a higher attrition rate than teachers who enter the profession through a traditional pathway.<sup>6</sup> Early career supports, such as embedded professional support from ATR teachers, microcredentials to build skills, and professional development, are likely to help these teachers persist in the profession as they increase their effectiveness.

### **Professional Advancement Accounts**

DRIVE Task Force Report:

Offer affordable postsecondary access through scholarships, loan forgiveness, and tuition reimbursement programs to address the disproportionate financial burden incurred by aspiring

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<sup>4</sup> Wexler, N. (2019, May). Why so many aspiring educators can't pass a licensing test—and why it matters. Forbes. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nataliewexler/2019/03/13/why-so-many-aspiring-teachers-cant-pass-a-licensing-test--and-why-it-matters/?sh=17a930a1321a>

<sup>5</sup> Bennett, C., Lynn M. McWhorter, & John A. Kuykendall. (2006). Will I Ever Teach? Latino and African American Students' Perspectives on PRAXIS I. American Educational Research Journal, 43(3), 531-575. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4121768>

<sup>6</sup> Department of Public Instruction (2022, February). 2020-2021 State of the Teaching Profession in North Carolina, p. 8. Retrieved from <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/media/14558/download#:~:text=Lateral%20entry%20teachers%20have%2C%20on,their%20non%2Dlateral%20entry%20counterparts>

educators of color. Emphasis should be placed on those models that have been shown to effectively recruit, prepare, and sustain educators of color. (p 13)

The Pathways Proposal offers professional advancement accounts of \$2500 for teachers in license levels I through III. These accounts could help educators in residency license programs cover tuition costs or allow other beginning educators to purchase meaningful coursework or other professional development experiences that increase their skills and effectiveness in the classroom.

### **Opportunities for Further Alignment with DRIVE**

The DRIVE Task Force commends PEPSC for this significant and innovative proposal which, if approved and implemented well, could help North Carolina recruit a more diverse educator workforce. In this section, we highlight additional opportunities PEPSC and the State Board of Education should consider to ensure that this proposal increases educator diversity in North Carolina.

First, the DRIVE Task Force encourages PEPSC, in its work on the Pathways Proposal and its work overall, to be more explicit about the need to recruit, retain and support educators of color. Direct language about the importance of educators of color has an important effect on education stakeholders, from legislators to educator preparation programs to school districts and the public. All North Carolina children will see more positive learning outcomes with a more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse teaching and educator workforce. These benefits also connect to business and economic success. Research shows that 75% of diverse and inclusive businesses exceed their financial targets and are able to better foster innovation, support different markets, increase talent retention, expand access to talent and skill, and improve problem solving<sup>7</sup>. To have those diverse businesses we need a more diverse workforce, which is fostered and accomplished with a more diverse education profession. A better education can lead to a more diverse workforce and greater diversity in the workplace, which ultimately will bring increased economic prosperity to the state as a whole. Only by specifically naming the barriers faced by educators of color can we really begin building the profession our children need. The framework PEPSC has created is strong, and much of the impact towards educator diversity depends on the plan's implementation. The DRIVE Task Force encourages PEPSC to highlight the following when the proposal moves forward to implementation, and urges the bodies tasked with implementing this plan to consider these opportunities.

#### **Methods for Proving Teaching Excellence**

As discussed earlier, providing teachers with additional methods, beyond standardized tests, to prove that they are having a positive impact on students' academic growth, is a golden opportunity to capture the myriad positive things that are happening in North Carolina classrooms. As these additional measures are developed and tested, there must be an effort to ensure that they treat educators of color fairly and equitably and do not recreate the racial disparities and barriers to entry we see in our teacher licensure system.

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<sup>7</sup> UNC Pembroke (2021, October). Why Diversity and Inclusion Are Good for Business. Retrieved from <https://online.uncp.edu/articles/mba/diversity-and-inclusion-good-for-business.aspx>

### Professional Learning Tools and Structures

The Pathways proposal envisions state-approved professional learning tools as a method for teachers to demonstrate effectiveness and renew their license for Levels II through IV. For instance, microcredentials may offer a great opportunity to make the workplace a more inclusive place as well as help teachers who are struggling with common barriers. PEPSC has already identified “teaching diverse learners” as a potential area for microcredentials. We encourage PEPSC to recommend a system of professional learning tools and structures that foster an inclusive workplace and help retain and support educators of color.

### New Teacher Supports

The Pathways draft offers an Initial Teacher Success Program (ITSP) designed to help teachers advance to License IV. This program is a key opportunity to retain educators, especially educators of color. We encourage PEPSC to consider the barriers specific to educators of color defined in the DRIVE Task Force Report<sup>8</sup> and design ITSP to combat those barriers. Barriers include postsecondary access and preparedness, student loan debt, barriers at institutions of higher education, educator certification exams, the “invisible tax” educators face at work, isolation, lack of long-term earning potential, ineffective school leadership, and bias and discrimination. For example, the lack of diversity in the educator workforce leads many educators of color who serve in predominantly white schools to feel isolated, excluded, and unwelcome. The ITSP could combat this by pairing new teachers with mentors based on racial and ethnic affinities. These mentors would then help new teachers feel less isolated and empower them to fight through racism and systemic biases they may experience in their profession. Importantly, however, the responsibility of mentoring new teachers of color and making the educational system more welcoming to diverse teachers should not fall solely on current educators of color. The responsibility of making education policy and practice into systems that are inclusive and support racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse educators belongs to all educators, including, principals, superintendents, and policymakers.

### Implementation Funding

The Pathways Proposal represents significant changes to North Carolina’s teacher licensure system. Implementing these changes could prove challenging, especially for small or low-income districts. Those districts may need additional financial support for implementation. In addition, significant human resources will be needed to support the thoughtful implementation of this plan including staff at the Department of Public Instruction, at educator preparation programs, and in school districts. A one-time investment in a new licensure software system may also be needed. We encourage PEPSC to state these needs clearly and to provide recommendations to adequately fund implementation, so that the new system provides districts, state agencies, and universities with the resources they need.

### Conclusion

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<sup>8</sup> [DRIVE Task Force Report, pp. 10-11](#)



The NC Pathways to Excellence for Teaching Professionals does not fully address the challenges the state faces in recruiting, preparing, retaining, and supporting educators of color. As our report and recommendations show, that work must be multifaceted and systemic. However, many aspects of the Pathways proposal, including significant and strategic salary increases, opportunities for advancement through Advanced Teaching Roles, allowing for multiple measures of teacher impact, and the expansion of alternative certification pathways and early career supports, will help North Carolina to improve educator workforce diversity. Still, the proposal can do even more to attract, support, and retain teachers of color in North Carolina. The DRIVE Task Force encourages PEPSC to be explicit in structuring this proposal to help prepare, recruit, support, and retain teachers of color and to work with various stakeholders to continue that work.