

# The Search for Highly Qualified Teachers

By Crystal Packard  
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Most parents assume that they send their children to school to be educated by highly qualified teachers. If their children are going to public schools in North Carolina, that might not be the case.

Out of the 109 school systems in the state, nearly one-third have staffs entirely composed of “highly qualified” teachers. This specification was set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act, and ensures that teachers have the proper education to be teaching the grade and subject that they instruct. Most of these counties are in the central and western part of the state, including Alexander, Anson, Davie and Orange counties.

Unfortunately, less than 90 percent of the teachers are highly qualified in 12 counties. Alleghany, Dare, Halifax, Hertford, Hoke, Jones, Madison, Northampton, Robeson, Scotland, Stokes, and Warren counties are all in need of highly qualified teachers. Most of these counties are in the eastern part of the state and are full of small towns with few resources. More than one in five teachers are not rated as highly qualified in Warren and Northampton counties.

Dr. Vivian Covington, director of teacher education at East Carolina University, sheds some light on the problem. She explains that it’s more difficult to get recent graduates to go to these rural counties. “Our graduates want to live somewhere with a Starbucks and a mall,” she says.

Nicole Vellucci, a high school Spanish teacher in Wake County, agrees. “I love my job, but I wouldn’t want to teach in a tiny town with nothing around. I like being in Raleigh. My friends and family are close, and there’s always something to do. The schools are great here, too.”

Covington notes that ECU works with many of these surrounding counties for its student teaching program. All education majors are required to participate in student teaching, and these counties are in desperate need of help. Some students decide to stay with these schools after graduation, which is a great help to the schools. Still, ECU is doing more to help these schools find the educators they need.

ECU is working hard to ensure that these counties will soon have more highly qualified teachers. Covington explains that ECU’s Teacher Education department is working closely with community colleges in these areas to help find and educate potential teachers. With this program, students can receive an education similar to what they would receive at ECU.

While Covington notes that this is not the “complete university experience,” it is the most feasible option for many teaching candidates. Teacher’s assistants are one of the main

targets for this program. Many of them already want to be teachers but lack the resources to quit their jobs, move, and attend a university for four years. In this program, potential teachers can take classes while keeping their jobs. Covington said she is certain that these programs produce the same quality teachers that ECU does.

Aside from this program, is there anything colleges can do to help the problem of distributing highly qualified teachers? Sara Packard, an elementary education major at Methodist University, says, "I plan on staying here in Fayetteville for at least a few years after I graduate. Honestly, though, I'll probably end up teaching in private school. As far as those little towns go, I don't think I'll ever be teaching there. I just don't see myself living in a small town."

This is not a problem with an easy answer. It will take time and work to ensure that all of the schools in North Carolina have highly qualified teachers. In the meantime, however, ECU is doing what it can to help find ways to improve the educators of the state.

#### Lowest 10 Counties in North Carolina for Share of Highly Qualified Teachers:

Warren – 74 percent  
Northampton – 78 percent  
Robeson – 82 percent  
Stokes – 83 percent  
Scotland – 85 percent  
Jones – 86 percent  
Hertford – 87 percent  
Hoke – 88 percent  
Halifax – 89 percent  
Dare – 89 percent