

**Training and Support Received by Teach for America  
Corps Members in Eastern North Carolina**

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Undergraduate Honors Thesis  
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December 5, 2012, Durham, NC  
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## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to my advisors, Dr. Helen Ladd and Dr. Ken Rogerson, for reading and editing countless drafts of this thesis, to the Teach for America Eastern North Carolina team for allowing me to conduct this study, to my interviewees for being helpful and candid, to my family and friends for listening to me talk about this project for a year, and to the Breakthrough Collaborative for inspiring me to tackle this subject.

*“Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength of the nation.”*

– John F. Kennedy

## **Abstract**

Many teachers in the past decade have chosen to obtain teaching certification through alternative routes, and Teach for America (TFA) is one of the most popular programs offering alternative certification today. Much of the research shows that despite having no traditional training, TFA teachers are just as effective, and sometimes more effective, than traditionally certified teachers in high-needs schools. Through interviews with directors and corps members, this study examines the types of and quality of training and support programs offered by TFA to its corps members in Eastern North Carolina. The interview questions are based on the elements of training and support cited by the literature as most critical to the success of alternative certification programs.

Overall, TFA teachers and program staff believed that TFA provides quality training and support systems for the program's purposes. Although corps members did not feel that training adequately prepared them for the classroom, they believed that it fulfills TFA's goals of providing basic teaching skills and developing leadership skills. Some of the corps members also said that despite traditionally prepared teachers' stronger body of knowledge, TFA teachers had higher levels of determination and grit. The softer skills that TFA instills in its corps members combined with the strong academic background they come with could outweigh the technical teaching education they lack and allow them to be effective teachers in underserved, under-performing classrooms.

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## **Introduction**

In the past two decades, more states and programs have begun to offer alternative certification options for teachers due to teacher shortages in high-needs, low-income communities.<sup>1</sup> These alternative routes allow recent graduates or professionals in other industries with at least a bachelor's degree to obtain certification without having to complete a traditional college-based teacher education program. Teach for America (TFA) is one of the most popular and well-known alternative certification programs. TFA is a national corps program that trains and places recent college graduates and professionals in underserved rural and urban public schools to teach for two years. Although TFA teachers, also known as corps members, do not receive traditional training, the literature shows that they have been just as successful, and in some cases more successful, than non-TFA teachers, including traditionally certified and alternatively certified teachers.<sup>2</sup>

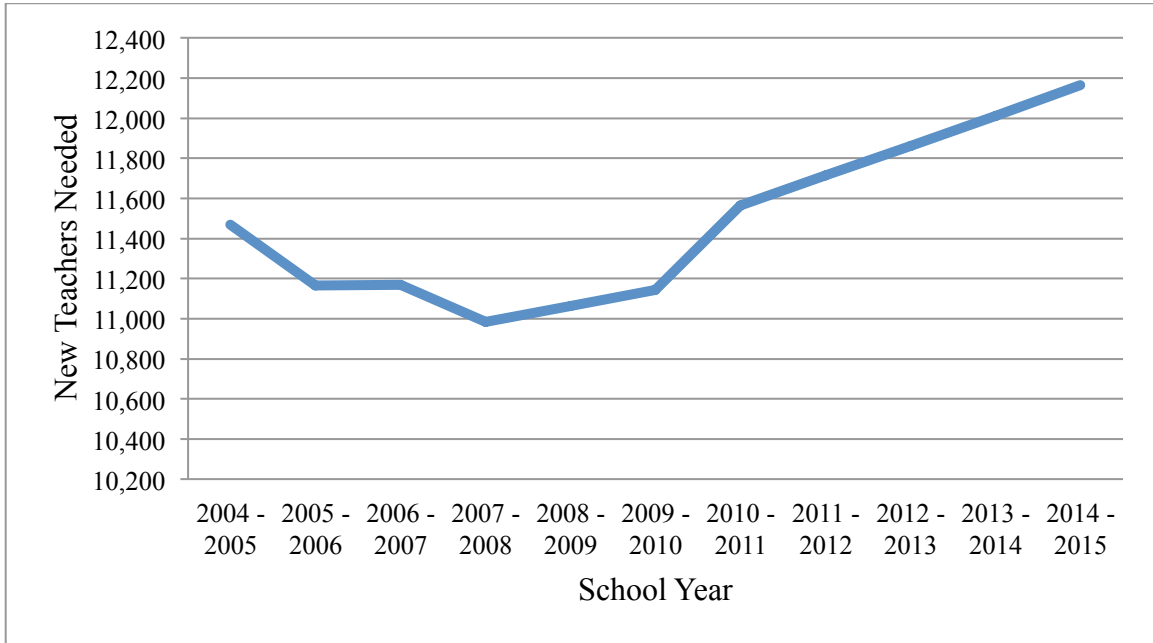
Research has also shown that the quality of training and support programs is a determining factor of whether an alternative certification program is effective.<sup>3</sup> Because research has shown TFA teachers to so effective, it is important to study their training and support programs. In this study, phone interviews with teachers and program staff from the Eastern North Carolina branch of TFA provided insights into the types and quality of training and support programs that corps members receive. The data helped answer the research question: how do corps members and program staff members perceive the quality of TFA's training and support programs?

## **Teacher Distribution Challenges and Alternative Certification**

Due to high retirement and low retention rates among K-12 teachers, many researchers argue that there is a nationwide teacher shortage, according to a 2004 report by the U.S. Department of Education.<sup>4</sup> Others argue, however, that the problem is not teacher supply, but rather teacher distribution. The total teacher supply growth rate actually adequately meets expected student growth rate. In fact, between 1988 and 2001, the total teacher supply in public elementary and secondary schools increased 29%, about one and a half times the student enrollment growth rate of 19%.<sup>5</sup> Despite the adequate supply of teachers nationally, there are shortages in certain subject areas, including special education, math, science, and bilingual subjects, and in certain regions of the country, such as western, southwestern, and southeastern states. There is also a shortage in urban, low-income minority schools and in rural schools.<sup>6</sup>

According to a study done by the University of North Carolina using statistics from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), North Carolina is one of the states experiencing a teacher shortage. Using a calculated student to teacher ratio to estimate the number of additional teachers needed for growth that year and replacements needed in response to teacher turnover, the study shows that in school year 2013 – 2014, 12,012 new teachers are needed. The study also shows that the number of new teachers needed every year has risen steadily since school year 2007 – 2008 (Figure 1).<sup>7</sup> One of the main factors is a high turnover rate for teachers; the five-year average turnover rate for North Carolina is 12.97%, according to the 2003 – 2004 Teacher Turnover Report. DPI has further identified math, science, middle grades, and exceptional children as high-need areas.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 1: Additional New Teachers Needed Every School Year in North Carolina<sup>9</sup>



In response, states have promoted alternative certification programs as a way to encourage professionals in other industries to begin a teaching career, the rationale being that many potential teachers are discouraged by the high costs associated with traditional certification.<sup>10</sup> Alternative certification programs are defined as “teacher preparation programs that enroll non-certified individuals with at least a bachelor’s degree, offering shortcuts, special assistance, or unique curricula leading to eligibility for standard teaching credentials.”<sup>11</sup> The U.S. Department of Education has endorsed these programs as a way to both improve teacher quality and increase supply; in fact, the No Child Left Behind Act considers candidates in alternative certification programs to be “highly qualified” teachers.<sup>12</sup> In 2007, 47 states reported offering alternative entry, compared to only 8 states in 1983.<sup>13</sup> According to the Race to the Top state report, in the 2010 – 2011 school year, 2,031 teachers in North Carolina completed alternative certification, compared to 1,676 in 2009 – 2010.<sup>14</sup>

## **Teach for America**

Started in 1990 with 500 corps members to combat education inequality, TFA is now one of the most popular and effective alternative certification programs. TFA recruits recent graduates around the country to teach in low-income public schools around the county in an effort to close the racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps in U.S. public education. TFA's mission is not necessarily to train teachers, but to build a movement of educational leaders who will lead a revolution in low-income communities to help those children overcome a culture of low expectations to become academically successful. Even after corps members complete their two years of teaching, the program encourages them to continue to drive change at every level of the education system, whether through policy, research, or teaching.<sup>15</sup>

In the 2012 – 2013 school year, more than 10,000 corps members will teach 750,000 students.<sup>16</sup> The application rate to TFA is high at elite and selective colleges. For example, 18% of Harvard University's seniors applied to TFA in 2009 – 2010.<sup>17</sup> These TFA recruits typically have strong academic backgrounds and leadership skills and go through a competitive application process. However, they do not typically have education-related majors, and therefore, do not have the amount of education training that traditional teachers have. TFA corps members are only required to have a bachelor's degree and pass the Praxis II, which measures knowledge of specific subjects that K-12 teachers will teach and general teaching skills and knowledge. TFA corps members can then either opt for the 3-year license or be enrolled in an education program working towards full licensure.<sup>18</sup>



TFA's supporters have argued that the program brings academically strong and motivated graduates who would otherwise not consider teaching to low-income schools that typically are in need of quality teachers. Its critics, however, argue that because the program only requires corps members to commit to two years, many of its corps members do not stay in the classroom after the commitment. According to a Phi Delta Kappa International study, 56.59% of the over 2,000 TFA teachers sampled indicated that when they applied to the program, they had planned to teach for two years or less. Additionally, the study shows that 60.5% of TFA teachers continue teaching in public schools after their two years, but 56.4% leave their initial placements in low-income schools after two years. After five years, only 27.8% of TFA teachers were still teaching.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, analysis by Heilig and Jez (2010) concluded that more than 50% of TFA teachers leave after 2 years and more than 80% leave after 3 years.<sup>20</sup>

Comparably, in general, about 40 to 50 percent of all beginning teachers leave after 5 years.<sup>21</sup> This rate is higher in low-income communities; according to a 2008 study, 21% of teachers in high-poverty schools leave every year, compared to 14% in low-poverty schools.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, not all of the TFA teachers who left teaching within six years left the education field altogether. Of the TFA teachers who participated in the Phi Delta Kappa International survey, 21% held positions in K-12 schools and 10.7% returned to the classroom later on as teachers.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, the survey found that teachers who initially had plans to teach, particularly those who were education majors in college, had higher retention rates.<sup>24</sup> Increased quality of teacher training and preparation could also improve retention, as research shows that teachers who had more challenging

assignments, such as split grades, multiple subjects, or out-of-field courses, for which they were not prepared, were more likely to resign.<sup>25</sup>

### **Effectiveness of TFA Teachers**

Although TFA has often been criticized for its low retention rates and lack of traditional teacher preparation, researchers have repeatedly found that TFA teachers are just as effective, if not more effective, than non-TFA teachers based on student test scores. Decker, Mayer, and Glazer (2004) studied nearly 2,000 first to fifth grade students' standardized math and reading test scores in 17 schools and 100 classrooms in 6 of the 15 regions where TFA placed teachers at the time of the study. The researchers found that TFA teachers had a positive impact on math achievement and no impact on reading achievement when they were compared to non-TFA teachers, including traditionally certified, alternatively certified, and uncertified teachers. The effect of the positive impact on math was estimated to be equal to one additional month of math instruction. The researchers also found that the impacts of TFA were the same or larger when the comparison was limited to TFA teachers and non-TFA teachers who were in their first three years of teaching. Additionally, there were positive or no impacts on test scores across grades, regions, and student subgroups.<sup>26</sup>

Many other studies have also found that TFA teachers had a positive effect on math performance. Henry and Thompson (2010) compared 12 entryways into teaching in NC public schools and analyzed over two million test scores, almost 800,000 students, and about 18,000 teachers with less than 5 years of experience from all grade levels and school districts in North Carolina. They found that while alternatively certified teachers performed worse than University of North Carolina (UNC) undergraduate prepared

teachers in 2 of 11 comparisons, TFA teachers outperformed the traditionally prepared teachers in 5 out of 9 comparisons and were no different in four. The researchers found that TFA teachers' positive effects were mostly in high school and middle school subjects, particularly in middle school math; the advantage TFA teachers provided in middle school math could be equated to half a year of learning.<sup>27</sup>

In 2011, Xu, Hannaway, and Taylor studied high school TFA teachers in North Carolina, especially in math and science. The researchers used individual-level student data, which includes end-of-course testing for students across multiple subjects, linked to teacher data to estimate the effects of a TFA teacher versus a traditional teacher on student performance. They found that TFA teachers were as effective as experienced traditional high school teachers in math and more effective than experienced traditional teachers in science.<sup>28</sup> The researchers found that TFA teachers' superior academic preparation and unmeasured factors such as motivation offset their lack of teaching experience.<sup>29</sup> TFA's own independent external surveys of school leaders found that in 2011, nearly 90% of 1,824 principals in all partnership regions had high levels of satisfaction with TFA.<sup>30</sup>

Kane, Rockoff, and Staiger (2006) conducted a study in grades four through eight using six years of data from New York City and found that, when controlled for teaching experience, TFA teachers had a small positive effect on student math achievement compared to other certified teachers. The effect was larger for middle school teachers than for elementary school teachers. Additionally, compared to traditionally certified teachers, TFA teachers had greater returns to experience, but this effect was not statistically significant.<sup>31</sup> Boyd et al. (2006) also used data from New York City and had

similar results; they found that TFA teachers had a positive effect on middle school students' math performance and no effect on elementary school math performance.<sup>32</sup> In two studies conducted using data from Houston, researchers found similar results that TFA teachers had positive effects on the state test. The second study, however, also found that TFA teachers had negative effects on other subjects and tests. The first study used all non-TFA teachers in the district as a comparison, and the second study only used traditionally certified teachers.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Importance of Training and Support**

Since alternatively certified teachers do not receive traditional teacher preparation, researchers have found that the training and support that novice teachers receive is crucial to a successful alternative certification program.<sup>34</sup> A summary of 92 studies on teacher preparation by Allen (2003) and a survey of over 1,400 teachers from seven alternative certification programs by Humphrey, Wechsler, and Hough (2008) both cite training, in the form of pre-training programs and coursework, and support, in the form of supervision and mentoring, as elements that are central to successful programs.<sup>35</sup> A 2004 U.S. Department of Education report identified on-the-job supervision and support that candidates receive as the “heart and soul” of high-quality alternative programs. Specifically, the report identified support as program-provided supervisors, site-based mentors, and peer cohort support.<sup>36</sup>

Humphrey, Wechsler, and Hough (2008) surveyed over 1,400 teachers from seven alternative certification programs, including TFA, once before the program started and once at the end of the teachers' first year of teaching. They concluded that participants found watching demonstration lessons, planning lessons together, discussing

needs of specific students, and obtaining curriculum materials to be the most valuable activities. Over 80% of participants found feedback from program staff to be somewhat or very valuable.<sup>37</sup> Most participants found practical courses to be most helpful, but the researchers argued that usefulness of coursework varies depending on a participant's previous experiences. For example, 45% of TFA participants, who are primarily recent college graduates, reported their coursework as a moderate to very important source of support, compared to 67% of NC TEACH participants, who are primarily older professionals. For both programs, the researchers surveyed around 300 teachers and had a response rate of 42% for NC TEACH and 33% for TFA.<sup>38</sup>

However, not all teachers in alternative certification programs receive the training and support that they find to be helpful and that the literature has identified as important to program success.<sup>39</sup> A report from the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda shows that alternative route teachers are less likely to feel supported by fellow teachers in areas such as creating lesson plans and teaching techniques, classroom management, working with special-needs students, and working and communicating with parents.<sup>40</sup> Rochkind et al. (2007) published a study on perception of training and support of new teachers in high-needs schools, comparing those coming from traditional teacher education with those from three well-known alternative certification programs: Teach for America, Troops to Teachers, and The New Teacher Project. Their general national survey of 641 first-year teachers and survey of 224 teachers specifically from the three programs shows that alternatively certified teachers are less likely than traditionally certified teachers, 50% versus 80%, to say they were prepared for their first year of teaching. Additionally, over half of new alternatively

certified teachers also said they did not have enough time working with a classroom teacher during training, compared to 24% of traditionally trained teachers, and 54% of new alternative entry teachers identify a lack of support from administrators as a major drawback to teaching, compared to 20% of new traditionally trained teachers.<sup>41</sup>

### **Teach for America Training and Institute**

For this study, training is defined as programs that take place before candidates begin teaching that prepares them for the classroom. Before corps members begin official training, TFA sends them teacher leadership development and diversity readings to complete and recommends they observe classrooms before training begins. If the incoming corps members live near a TFA region, TFA helps set them up with current corps members to observe. This observation, however, is not mandatory, and new corps members may find that they have limited access to schools.<sup>42</sup> Official TFA training occurs during the summer before the school year begins and consists of a three to five day regional induction, a five-week institute program, and a one to two week region orientation.<sup>43</sup> TFA's independent external surveys of school leaders show that in 2011, 87% of school leaders said TFA corps members' training was as effective as the training of other novice teachers, and 53% of them said corps members' training was more effective.<sup>44</sup>

The basis of TFA's training is the Teaching As Leadership program. Through studying the beliefs and actions corps members and teachers who have been particularly successful at putting underserved students on a better path, TFA has identified the principles of leadership that will make corps members more successful in the classroom. This purpose of this framework is to instill a leadership mindset in teachers so that they

are not only effective teachers, but also effective classroom leaders, helping students live up to their full potential. The first principle of the framework is to set big goals and have high expectations for student achievement, to give students the focus and motivation to overcome challenges. The second principle is to invest in students and families to break the cycle of low expectations and reach student goals. The third principle is to plan purposefully, starting with a specific goal and planning backwards to reach that goal. The fourth principle is to execute effectively to achieve goals, monitoring student progress and adjusting actions when necessary. The fifth principle is to continuously improve their teaching by using data to diagnose issues. The last principle is to continuously work to go beyond the typical “teacher” role, overcoming challenges of a low-income school and doing what it takes to help their students reach their goals.<sup>45</sup> The TFA Institute Design Team translates the principles into 28 teacher actions that are taught to corps members.

*Figure 2: TFA’s Six Principles and 28 Specific Actions<sup>46</sup>*

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Specific Action</b>
Set Big Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an ambitious vision of students’ progress and set measurable, standards-aligned goals</li> </ul>
Invest in Students and Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instill “I Can” in students</li> <li>• Instill “I Want” in students</li> <li>• Use role models</li> <li>• Reinforce academic efforts</li> <li>• Create a welcoming environment</li> <li>• Mobilize student families and influencers</li> </ul>
Plan Purposefully	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop assessments</li> <li>• Create long-term and unit plans (plan backwards)</li> <li>• Lesson plan</li> <li>• Differentiate</li> <li>• Develop behavioral management plans</li> <li>• Design classroom procedures and systems</li> </ul>
Execute Effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly present academic content</li> <li>• Manage student practice</li> <li>• Check for understanding</li> <li>• Reinforce rules and consequences</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement time-saving procedures</li> <li>• Track student performance</li> </ul>
Continuously Increase Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gauge progress and gaps</li> <li>• Identify contributing student actions</li> <li>• Identify contribution teacher actions</li> <li>• Identify underlying factors</li> <li>• Access relevant meaningful learning experiences</li> <li>• Adjust course</li> </ul>
Work Relentlessly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persist in the face of challenges</li> <li>• Expand time and resources</li> <li>• Sustain energy</li> </ul>

*\*Chart is adapted from TFA's Teaching As Leadership Framework and Pocket Rubric*

Besides introducing teachers to the Teaching As Leadership framework, the goal of institute is to teach corps members the basics of lesson planning, instructional delivery, classroom management, and student assessment.<sup>47</sup> The first week of institute consists only of teacher training, and corps members spend the next four weeks teaching summer school to students of various grades from the region where the institute program is located. There are nine institute locations, including Atlanta, Chicago, and the Delta, and TFA provides corps members with room and board in local university housing during institute. Corps members are required to attend institute at one of the locations before they begin teaching, but are not necessarily assigned to teach the same content area or the same grade level at institute as they will teach in the classroom. Corps members teach an average of two hours a day and are observed by instructional coaches who provide feedback and work with corps members to develop their teaching skills. In the hours when corps members are not teaching, they meet in small groups to discuss lessons, classroom management, feedback, and student progress and receive lesson planning clinics and curriculum sessions.<sup>48</sup> The institute training model is designed in-house by TFA, but the team draws extensively on research-based practices from the broader education field.<sup>49</sup>



## **Teach for America Support and Networks**

For this study, support is defined as on-the-job supervision, feedback, and/or guidance that corps members receive from TFA, the school, or other corps members during the school year. TFA emphasizes evidence and provides teachers with data-driven, student achievement focused tools and resources to support them through their two-year commitment.<sup>50</sup> TFA provides supervisors in the form of regional staff, but the program does not have a formal teacher evaluation process. The program also provides every corps member with a site-based mentor, called Managers of Teacher Leadership and Development (MTLDs), who provides guidance, observes corps members' classrooms at least four times a year, and provides constructive feedback. MTLDs are meant to act as coaches and do not have an evaluative role.<sup>51</sup> They are experienced teachers, and most of them have previously been TFA corps members.<sup>52</sup> Humphrey, Wechsler, and Hough (2008) found that 100% of TFA teachers reported observations and feedback from program staff and school supervisors, compared to the study average of 88% of all seven alternative certification programs studied.<sup>53</sup> However, compared to the study average of 93%, only 87% of TFA teachers reported receiving mentor support.<sup>54</sup>

Additionally, for peer cohort support, TFA staff group corps members into regional learning teams called Content Learning Communities. These teams act as a network where corps members can discuss challenges that are specific to their grades or content levels and enable teachers to share resources that they have developed or have been given. TFA members can also access teaching resources and professional support through the broader corps member network, TFANet, the online community for current corps members and alumni. TFANet offers a collection of lesson plans, classroom

management strategies, a forum where teachers can post questions and share ideas, and video resources and models.<sup>55</sup> Further, TFA has also been known to provide strong professional support for its members and has a very active alumni network.<sup>56</sup>

### **Other Alternative Certification Options in North Carolina**

Despite TFA's popularity, the program is still one of the smallest sources of teachers for North Carolina, making up only 0.3% of the teacher workforce in NC schools.<sup>57</sup> In North Carolina, there are two routes to licensure: direct licensure and lateral entry. There are multiple programs for lateral entry, including programs at institutions of higher learning, four Regional Alternative Licensing Centers (RALCs) built by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), Teach for America, and other various lateral entry programs.<sup>58</sup> Lateral entry candidates must meet the requirements for licensure set by the state, and the State Board of Education must approve all lateral entry programs. However, these programs operate independently and are typically funded through public-private partnerships.<sup>59</sup>

The most notable other alternative teacher preparation program in North Carolina is North Carolina Teachers of Excellence for All Children (NC TEACH), a program established in 2000 and administered by the UNC Office of the President in collaboration with DPI. NC TEACH serves more than 85 counties and school districts in all regions of the state, and more than 1,300 teachers have become licensed through the program.<sup>60</sup> Annually, there are 350 participants in NC TEACH, and unlike TFA, which is aimed towards recent graduates, NC TEACH is designed to train and retain mid-career professionals.<sup>61</sup> In fact, two-thirds of NC TEACH teachers intend to stay in teaching for more than 10 years.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, Donaldson and Johnson (2011) found that 56.59% of

the over 2,000 TFA teachers sampled indicated that when they applied to the program, they had planned to teach for two years or less.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, many NC TEACH participants come with teaching experience as substitute teachers or teaching assistants; 40% of 2003 NC TEACH participants had been classroom teachers and 18% had been teaching assistants.<sup>64</sup>

The program also trains teachers at a five-week full time summer institute. However, rather than teaching for four weeks, the prospective teachers are in classes for the entirety of institute, learning critical teaching skills. The courses are offered at 13 UNC host campuses and pay regular tuition rates to their host universities' graduate schools.<sup>65</sup> Six key areas are addressed at institute: lesson planning and classroom management, the professional role of a teacher within the system, understanding children as learners, the specific content area, instructional technology, and teaching diverse learners. After institute, the teachers begin teaching at NC public schools, not just high-needs schools, and continue to take NC TEACH classes and seminars. The teachers are assigned a mentor by the local education agency (LEA) or employing school system, and NC TEACH instructors can also act as mentors.<sup>66</sup>

Humphrey, Wechsler, and Hough (2008) found that a quarter of surveyed participants in NC TEACH reported that they were never observed by program staff or school supervisors, whereas all of the TFA teachers reported being observed at least once. Additionally, 17% of NC TEACH participants, compared to 13% of TFA participants, reported never receiving mentor support. NC TEACH's sample size and response rate were both slightly higher, but very similar, to TFA's.<sup>67</sup> Recently, the U.S. Department of Education awarded NC TEACH a Transition to Teaching grant in order to

expand the program to create NC TEACH II, which focuses on recruiting and preparing teachers specifically for high-needs school districts. Participants in NC TEACH II are committed to three years and receive a \$1,000 stipend and a laptop or a \$2,000 technology allowance.<sup>68</sup>

The other popular lateral entry program in North Carolina is TEACH Charlotte, a local public-private partnership between Charlotte-Mecklenberg Schools and the large New York based non-profit organization, The New Teacher Project (TNTP). Like TFA, TEACH Charlotte candidates are placed into high-needs Charlotte-Mecklenberg schools and trained through a six-week summer training program where participants observe and teach in a Charlotte summer school classroom. However, unlike TFA, which recruits mainly undergraduate college students, TEACH Charlotte and TNTP focus mainly on hiring mid-career professionals interested in making a permanent transition to a career in teaching.<sup>69</sup>

Additionally, in the fall, TEACH Charlotte teachers pay \$5,000 to enroll in the TNTP Academy, a national network of teacher preparation programs developed by TNTP, and complete the Teaching for Results seminar in their first year while teaching. As far as support goes, throughout the years, TEACH Charlotte teachers receive professional development and mentoring programs sponsored by the school and the district. The program staff provides specific support to new teachers, and the program states that staff will observe all participants at least two times during their first year of teaching.<sup>70</sup> Although there have not been any studies done specifically on TEACH Charlotte, a 2011 Louisiana study has rated TNTP-trained teachers as exceptionally effective for the fourth year in a row. Researchers at Louisiana State University and

A&M College found that new teachers trained by TNTTP had a greater positive impact on student achievement in math, English language arts, and science than new and experienced teachers in the 18 other programs studied, which included both alternative entry and traditional undergraduate programs.<sup>71</sup>

### **Methodology**

The focus of this thesis is the Eastern North Carolina branch of TFA, and I conducted 30-minute phone interviews with six first and second year corps members and four directors, all of whom were previous corps members. The interview questions are based on the characteristics defined by the literature as most essential to the success of alternatively certified teachers, such as pre-training, coursework, mentorship, observation, and feedback.<sup>72</sup>

### ***Eastern North Carolina***

There are 230 corps members at every grade level in Eastern North Carolina today. North Carolina is an interesting state to study because it has a high population growth rate, which can exacerbate the effects of teacher shortages and pressure policymakers to come up with effective solutions.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, North Carolina, along with Louisiana and Tennessee, is a state where studies have concluded that TFA corps members have a greater impact on student achievement than new teachers from other routes.<sup>74</sup>

Eastern North Carolina is fairly typical of the type of underserved, low-income area that TFA and alternative route programs work with.<sup>75</sup> In the 10 counties that make up the region, the decline of textiles and other manufacturing has led to unemployment and impoverishment.<sup>76</sup> Children who grow up in low-income communities facing

impoverishment increasingly face homelessness, residential instability, violence, and other stressors that may affect their academic achievement. Additionally, children of color are especially likely to be poor.<sup>77</sup> In Eastern North Carolina, 47% of African American students, 52% of Hispanic students, and 48% of economically disadvantaged students in grades 3-8 perform below grade levels.<sup>78</sup>

### ***Interviews***

In November and December 2012, I interviewed six TFA teachers and four program directors over the phone about the training teachers receive before they begin teaching and the support they receive throughout the school year. I offered the teachers confidentiality, and the conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed, but subsequently destroyed. IRB and TFA both approved this project, and I conducted practice phone interviews with three previous TFA teachers, which provided an opportunity to vet the interview questions. Alissa Schwartz and Zach Perin from TFA helped find participants for the study.

The interview questions focused specifically on those characteristics of training and support identified by the literature as important to successful alternative certification programs. Within training, those include the quality of pre-training programs, the opportunity to observe exemplary classes, and the opportunity to practice teaching. Within support, those include mentorship, supervision, and feedback from the school administrators and program staff members. The purpose of these interviews is to determine the quantity, quality, structure, and effectiveness of the training and support that the teachers receive. The effectiveness and quality will be measured by how prepared

the teachers thought they were—where they thought the training and support helped them and failed them.

## **Discussion of Findings**

### ***The Interviewees***

The majority of the corps members interviewed were second year teachers, which means they have had time to reflect on their experience at institute and have had time to take advantage of the support networks and resources available to them. The TFA directors interviewed were corps members in the late 1990s and 2000s. They are also formally involved in TFA’s training and support programs in various ways.

*Table 1: Summary of the Interviewees*

	<b>Current / Previous Corps Member</b>	<b>First / Second Year Corps Member</b>
<b>Director A</b>	Previously	N/A
<b>Director B</b>	Previously	N/A
<b>Director C</b>	Previously	N/A
<b>Director D</b>	Previously	N/A
<b>Teacher A</b>	Current	Second
<b>Teacher B</b>	Current	First
<b>Teacher C</b>	Current	First
<b>Teacher D</b>	Current	Second
<b>Teacher E</b>	Current	Second
<b>Teacher F</b>	Current	Second

### ***Alternatively Certified vs. Traditionally Certified Teachers***

As the literature often compared TFA teachers to non-TFA teachers in terms of preparedness, one of the main interview topics was on the differences between alternatively certified, specifically TFA, and traditionally certified teachers. Most interviewees acknowledged that traditionally prepared teachers have a stronger body of knowledge when it comes to teaching concepts and activity ideas but did not think that

there were large preparedness differences between traditionally prepared and TFA-trained teachers once they started teaching in the classroom. The directors and corps members were generally in agreement on this point. One of the directors noted that the challenge to TFA teachers is that they have to learn faster because they simply have much less time to learn the basic concepts than traditionally prepared teachers. Director D noted that although traditionally trained teachers have a better understanding of the skill level their students should be at and have more instructional ideas on how to get their students to achieve at that level, TFA teaches corps members how to build a culture in the classroom that allows under-achieving students to reach their academic goals.

However, many interviewees found that the biggest difference between alternatively prepared and traditionally prepared teachers is their mindset. Four corps members and one director believed that traditionally certified, non-TFA teachers did not share the same mission, determination, or mindset that TFA teachers do. One of them said traditional preparation is more “cut and dry” in that it teaches systems, instead of the big goal setting and student motivation that TFA teaches. Teacher D said that while many TFA teachers are volunteering to tutor at their schools in an effort to further help underperforming students, the traditionally trained, non-TFA teachers that she has encountered at her school are typically not as proactive. She said:

*“TFA teachers come with just a tremendous amount of determination. That’s the difference that I see: the grit...I’m the only person that has gone to my principal and said it’s time for me to start tutoring after school...we’re at a traditionally underperforming school, why isn’t anybody else asking about that?”*

Another explained that TFA more clearly and deliberately engrains in corps members the idea that the teacher is responsible or whether or not their students achieve



and that teacher mindset directly leads to teacher actions, which is directly linked to student actions and outcomes. Without this mindset, when faced with challenging situations, it is easy to rationalize them away and blame circumstance; with this mindset, TFA teachers can more easily “catch themselves” when they start to think that way.

Director D said:

*“I find that in the communities that they [corps members] work within, there is more of an attitude from some teachers that there’s only so much you can do for these kids, there’s so much going on in the home that you can’t control, so sometimes you just get what you get and if they’re failing or not doing well, don’t blame yourself..most corps members believe that in some way they can work with families and help impact what’s going on at home or find ways in their classrooms or opportunities outside of the classroom to make the difference between a student’s background and a student’s potential.”*

Teacher A described a similar experience:

*“They [the young, non-TFA, traditionally certified teachers in her school] have students who have struggles, major struggles. We are in one of the worst performing school districts in North Carolina, and they say things like, ‘sometimes you just gotta give up on one or two of them so you can focus on the rest of them’ and ‘some kids are just stupid’ ...TFA does not let you think that way, and if you start feeling like that, you should give yourself a slap on the wrist, splash some cold water on your face, move on in another direction, and try to game plan for that child.”*

Director D also found that more than any other organization, TFA tries to develop a growth mindset in its corps members, the belief that they and their students have the ability to change and grow and that mistakes are a way to learn. She noted that more effective corps members either come in with this mindset or are able to develop it fairly quickly, and the ones who struggle in the classroom are the ones who struggle with this mindset.

Even between TFA teachers who have an education background and TFA teachers who do not, Teacher C described a different way of looking at these challenging,

under-performing schools. Because traditionally prepared teachers are given an idealized sense of what a classroom needs to look like, Teacher C described a level of disengagement. Whereas teachers who have not gone through teacher preparation programs are just asking, “What can we do to fix this,” teachers who have are asking, “Why is it like this? This is not what a normal school should look like.” However, he does not believe that either is more effective, and he finds these different perspectives to be a benefit to TFA.

*Table 2: Difference Between Alternatively Certified and Traditionally Certified Teachers*

	<b>Alternatively Certified vs. Traditionally Certified Teachers</b>
<b>Director A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No dramatic differences between TFA teachers who have had traditional training and those who have not</li> <li>- Traditionally trained teachers may have less to learn, but are not necessarily better prepared</li> <li>- First year of teaching is extremely difficult for both</li> </ul>
<b>Director B</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Traditionally prepared teachers have a “stronger body of knowledge” and longer-term exposure to concepts</li> <li>- When they get into the classroom, TFA and traditional teachers face similar challenges</li> </ul>
<b>Director C</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hasn’t really worked with traditional teachers</li> <li>- Noted that traditional teachers have more time to learn the technical skills; TFA teachers simply have less time, so they have to learn faster</li> </ul>
<b>Director D</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Traditionally trained teachers come into the classroom with more instructional knowledge; they know what their students should be doing or reading</li> <li>- TFA does a better job at teaching how to build a culture in the classroom that allows under-achieving students to reach their academic goals</li> <li>- Biggest difference is that corps members have the mindset that any student can succeed regardless of their background or how they’re currently doing</li> <li>- The more effective TFA teachers also have a growth mindset, a belief that they have the ability to change and grow and that mistakes aren’t a way to measure themselves and their success, but a way to learn</li> <li>- Those corps members who struggle most in the classroom are the ones who struggle with this mindset</li> <li>- TFA purposely tries to get corps members to think about and work on developing this mindset</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mindset of young traditionally-prepared teachers is completely different from that of TFA teachers; traditional preparation is more cut and dry and traditional teachers do not share the same mission as TFA teachers</li> <li>- Traditional preparation is better at giving teachers systems and philosophies to put in place for the classroom, while TFA concentrates more on big goals, ideals, and student motivation</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher B</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- TFA teachers who had traditional training had an advantage at institute on lesson planning and activity ideas, but once they enter the classroom, all TFA teachers are on</li> </ul>

	<p>the same level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Institute allows corps members without an education background to catch up quickly</li> <li>- Believes that not pursuing a teacher education degree gave her the time to travel and allowed her to build knowledge. She feels that being able to share those experiences with her students makes her a more effective teacher</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher C</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No large difference between TFA teachers who have had traditional training and those who have not because every classroom is unique</li> <li>- People who come from traditional programs have a larger toolkit and more ideas and resources</li> <li>- Biggest difference is the mindset: TFA teachers have the mindset taught by TFA training that a teacher's outcomes creates teacher actions, which in turn creates student actions and student outcomes</li> <li>- Traditionally prepared teachers often already have an idea of what a classroom is "supposed to look like," so there is a level of disengagement</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher D</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No large differences between a new TFA teacher and a new traditionally-trained teacher</li> <li>- Veteran teachers know more, but do not necessarily have better results</li> <li>- Biggest difference between TFA teachers and traditionally-trained teachers is the grit and determination that TFA teachers exhibit</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher E</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hard to compare because the traditionally trained teachers at her school are mostly veteran teachers; there aren't many young traditionally certified teachers</li> <li>- Main difference is that TFA more clearly and deliberately engrains a mindset in its teachers that the teacher is responsible for whether or not students achieve and that teacher mindset leads to teacher actions, which leads to student outcomes</li> <li>- Without this mindset, when facing challenges with students, it is easy to rationalize them and blame circumstances</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher F</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Traditionally-trained teachers have had more opportunity and time to practice teaching before they enter the classroom, which contributes to their effectiveness</li> <li>- Does not believe TFA's summer institute is comparable to traditional teaching programs</li> </ul>

### ***Classroom Observation***

The research identified classroom observation as a common element of many alternative certification programs.<sup>79</sup> Three of the directors saw observation as an important component of becoming an effective teacher. One of the directors said observation of excellent classrooms helps give teachers an idea of what that should look like so that when they face challenges they can keep their expectations up and have a clear picture in their heads of where they should be headed. Director A said:

*"It's hard to keep your expectations up when things start to get hard, and I think remembering and having a clear picture in your head of what's possible and what excellence looks like is really helpful."*

However, TFA currently only recommends, but does not mandate, that teachers observe classrooms before institute, so some teachers did not observe a classroom before

they began teaching. Those who had observed classrooms found the experience to be extremely valuable, and the one teacher who did not observe said she wishes she had. Director B also noted that observation is important throughout because after corps members begin teaching, they begin to observe classrooms from a teacher’s perspective, rather than a student’s, which may be even more beneficial. Teacher E touched on this point as well, saying that even though she observed a classroom before institute, she did not know what she was supposed to look for.

One of the directors stated that she did not believe that observation is one of the most important components of training and that observations are most helpful when the teacher being observed can talk corps members through the decisions they made for that class and why. She found that without this explanation, the teaching can sometimes look like “magic” and that it is more valuable when the corps member can see the purposeful planning that is behind the actions. Additionally, she finds often, the value in observation comes more from corps members seeing what students are capable of. She said:

*“It’s the observation of the outcomes and not the teacher that is more valuable because it re-grounds our teachers in what children are truly capable of.”*

*Table 3: Importance of Classroom Observation*

	<b>Classroom Observation</b>
<b>Director A</b>	- Believes observing excellent classrooms before teaching and throughout the school year is one of the most important things teachers can do to prepare themselves for the classroom
<b>Director B</b>	- Believes observation is important throughout because with experience in the classroom, teachers observe differently, more from a teacher’s rather than a student’s view
<b>Director C</b>	- Believes observation is important because it gives teachers a realistic picture of what the job will look like
<b>Director D</b>	- Does not believe observation is one of the most important components of training - Believes that observation is more helpful when the teacher also explains their planning process - Believes that observation of student outcomes is sometimes more valuable than

	observation of quality teaching
<b>Teacher A</b>	- N/A
<b>Teacher B</b>	- Had the chance to observe other corps members and veteran teachers teaching at the summer school at institute - Has previous experience as a substitute teacher for a few years and got to see how another school ran
<b>Teacher C</b>	- Observed two classrooms during institute - Found observation to be very helpful and is working on finding opportunities to observe classrooms now
<b>Teacher D</b>	- Did not observe - Wish she had observed a classroom for 2 or 3 days, especially a TFA teacher's - More observation would have helped her learn the rudimentary things involved with teaching in a school - A whole day of observation would be most helpful
<b>Teacher E</b>	- Observed a classroom before institute but did not realize how excellent of a classroom it was until she began teaching - Wants to go back and observe the classroom again - Feels that observation is very important but that teachers need to know what they're looking for
<b>Teacher F</b>	- Completed 8 or 9 full days of observation because she did not think the 2 day recommendation was adequate - Found this to be helpful

### ***Training at Institute***

TFA training occurs during a five-week institute program based off of the Teaching as Leadership framework of six principles and 28 actions. According to the directors, the purpose of institute is to provide corps members with basic teaching skills, such as daily lesson planning and classroom management, and to help teachers develop leadership skills. Director D also believed that institute is successful at teaching corps members how to use student data to find ways to increase their effectiveness. Director A also explained that the Teaching as Leadership framework has given a lot of direction to the training. Director C said:

*“In five weeks, we’re trying to give people the tools to reach a baseline of performance with the expectation in fully that they grow every day and honestly every single minute from that point forward.”*

Most teachers agreed that institute provided them with basic teaching skills, and two teachers also acknowledged that institute was particularly successful at teaching the

TFA ideals, explaining the enormity of their mission, and getting corps members excited to fight educational injustice. Teacher B said:

*“I think that is probably the most important thing...teaching you why you should want to be a teacher, how important it is...my eyes were open to so many social injustices that I never even thought about before institute, so it really got me powered up to do what I was going to do.”*

However, one of the directors also identified the need for more diversity awareness at regional training to help teachers understand the communities they are working for. He hopes that this will encourage corps members to stay in their regions after their two-year TFA commitment and continue to make an impact.

Although institute was successful at helping corps members understand education inequality and TFA’s mission, the majority of teachers did not feel that institute adequately prepared them for the classroom. Because there are only a limited number of children who need to attend summer school, the class sizes at institute were small, and each corps member only taught one period a day. Many of the teachers felt that this did not adequately prepare them for the classroom management challenges that come with their large classrooms and the timing and endurance challenges that come with teaching multiple blocks. One of the teachers suggested allowing corps member to teach all of the classes in their subject area for one day or creating a time at the end of institute for teachers to meet with experienced teachers and the people they have worked with during the summer to discuss major differences between a real classroom and institute and to come up with ways to prepare for the transition. He added that more interaction and better relationships between corps members and the instructional coaches at institute would help corps members realize the realities of an under-performing classroom.

According to two of the directors, because institute is only five weeks, the organization has had to make strategic decisions on what concepts to cover. The teachers believed institute did not provide enough concrete training on classroom systems and philosophies that can actually be put in place in their classrooms. One of the teachers described the lesson planning training as “too formulaic,” and another said some of the teaching techniques were “out of date.” One of the directors described the training as too “directive,” explaining that the teaching techniques and methods are so structured that corps members often don’t realize that they need to modify the structure to fit the needs of their unique students. She suggested institute teach more flexibility in these tools to encourage corps members to take “instructional risk.” Another critique was that many teachers taught content at institute that was unrelated to the content they would be teaching in the classroom. Teacher A said:

*“I had a couple times when I went to sessions that were targeted towards my placement area, but two or three sessions of an hour is not enough to prepare you to teach a content area that you are not necessarily ready to teach...they [TFA staff] always want to say that they’re there for you and be there for you in spirit, but then the actionable stuff, like the stuff you can actually take into the classroom, could be beefed up at little bit.”*

One of the teachers believed that institute needed to be restructured and reformed into something that provides more extensive training for corps members, mentioning other alternative certification programs that requires a full year of observation before the prospective teacher begins to teach. She believes that with a stronger start at institute, corps members could be more effective in the classroom. However, she also notes that institute is successful in its goal of giving corps members basic skills and developing their leadership capacities. Teacher F said:

*“They [TFA] are a self-described leadership development organization. They are not a teacher development organization, and I think that shows...because they are a leadership organization, there is very little teacher development.”*

Another teacher found the lack of intensive teacher training to be an advantage for corps members. He said that because Eastern North Carolina TFA teachers have more flexibility in their classrooms than TFA teachers in some other regions in terms of what they can teach and how they can teach it, having only the basic skills gives corps members the opportunity to come up with their own teaching strategies and techniques.

Teacher C said:

*“By having this very basic toolbox, it’s a nice way of being able to think about your classroom, to give your own spin to it, to really make it something that you want it to look like...the first two weeks are very rough...but looking back on it now, institute gave me all the resources that I could have possibly wanted before I stepped into a real classroom.”*

Two of the directors also noted that institute currently does not provide teachers with training on long-term lesson planning. Director B noted that this is an issue that the design team has been struggling with, but that it is unclear if institute is an appropriate place to address this issue because of the time constraints. One of the teachers agreed that he would have benefitted from more training on how to lesson plan and pace the curriculum for the entire school year.

*Table 4: Quality of the Training at Institute*

	<b>Training at Institute</b>
<b>Director A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focus is on teaching corps members classroom management and daily lesson planning</li> <li>- Institute does not currently provide training on how to plan for the long-term</li> <li>- Teachers are expected to come out of Institute having learned the teaching and leadership framework and backwards design and having developed some diversity competencies</li> <li>- Acknowledges that it is a limitation that some of the characteristics of teaching summer school at institute, such as the small class sizes, are not representative of a real classroom</li> <li>- Would like to alter regional training to increase diversity awareness to help teachers</li> </ul>



	understand communities better and encourage them to stay and make an impact in their regions after the 2 years
<b>Director B</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Believes Teaching as Leadership framework and TFA research on how to prepare teachers has given a lot of direction to the training</li> <li>- Believes institute covers the basics of teaching, but that the time constraint makes it so the organization has had to make strategic decisions on which topics to cover</li> <li>- Institute design team has struggled with better preparation of corps members to plan for the long term</li> <li>- Is not sure if institute is the appropriate place to address the long-term planning issue</li> </ul>
<b>Director C</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feels that institute adequately prepares teachers for the classroom and has been improving every year</li> <li>- Focus is on giving teachers basic teaching skills and also the skills to learn and grow quickly so that they are growing after institute</li> </ul>
<b>Director D</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Believes institute is incredibly effective in preparing teachers to enter the classroom on the first day and have control of the classroom</li> <li>- Believes institute does a good job of giving teachers basic teaching skills, preparing a teacher for classroom management, and using student data to figure out how to increase teacher effectiveness</li> <li>- Believes institute is too directive and would like the training to introduce more flexibility in teaching tools to teach corps members how to take “instructional risk”</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did not feel institute prepared her for the classroom because she had very small classrooms and only taught one period a day at Institute</li> <li>- Did not prepare her for behavioral management issues</li> <li>- Teachers are often placed in subjects at institute that they are not going to teach</li> <li>- Did a good job making corps members aware of the big goals and instilling the feeling that the “world is on your shoulders”</li> <li>- Provided inadequate crash courses on the systems and philosophies that can actually be put in place in the classroom</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher B</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did a good job getting corps members excited to fight educational injustice and explaining the mission of TFA and what the core problem is</li> <li>- Believes that institute was critical for preparing those without an education background to teach</li> <li>- Finds the way TFA teaches lesson planning to be too formulaic</li> <li>- Believes that teaching one period a day at institute was not representative of the real classroom</li> <li>- Finds teaching at institute to be more difficult than the real classroom because there were many more behavioral issues</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher C</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did a good job giving corps members a basic toolkit for teaching but did not prepare teachers for challenges in the actual classroom, such as the pacing of teaching multiple blocks all day</li> <li>- Believes that it is a positive that institute gives teachers only basic skills because teachers can use those to come up with their own strategies and techniques</li> <li>- Suggests more interaction and better relationships between corps members and instructional coaches</li> <li>- Suggests a time at the end of the summer for teachers to meet with the people they’ve been working with all summer to discuss the realities of the real classroom, such as time management</li> <li>- Suggests an opportunity for teachers to learn to teach multiple classes a day during institute</li> <li>- Believes institute needs to have more training on long term pacing of the curriculum for the school year</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher D</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does not think institute was adequate preparation but does not think TFA could have done much more, considering the time constraint</li> </ul>

<b>Teacher E</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does not think institute was adequate preparation because she taught a different subject at institute than she does in the classroom</li> <li>- Technical training was very basic</li> <li>- Felt unorganized, unprepared, and anxious entering the classroom</li> <li>- Notes that TFA was willing to make changes in response to corps members' critiques</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher F</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did not think institute adequately prepared her for the classroom because of the small class size, because all the students knew they needed to pass, and because she only taught one period a day</li> <li>- Was not prepared for the more challenging behavioral issues in the real classroom</li> <li>- Believes institute needs to be restructured and reformed into something that provides more extensive training</li> <li>- Finds some of the teaching techniques that are taught at institute to be out-of-date</li> </ul>

***TFA's Networks, Support, and Mentorship***

The overwhelming majority of corps members believed the TFA provided adequate support during the school year, and corps members found that they had many different options for support. The main resource that TFA provides to support its corps members is MTLDs, and the directors said that MTLDs are an important component of teacher development and support. They noted that MTLDs have no evaluative role in the program in an effort to help them build strong relationships with the corps members.

Director C said:

*“We bucket our coaching into two fairly broad categories: one is to spark and inspire and sustain the motivations and energy of the corps member to be a fighter, fighting on behalf of their students, on behalf of their communities, with their communities...the other part is the coaching and empowering them with the resources and the immediate feedback and the support of a more technical nature to help them actually make something of those motivations.”*

Even though two of the teachers noted that the MTLDs are more focused on the first years and one said that MTLDs are overworked and have too many corps members assigned to them, all of the corps members interviewed described their current MTLDs as extremely helpful and supportive. Teacher C said:

*“She [his MTLD] is someone who, anytime you talk with her, you can just see so many of the ideals, so much of what TFA stands for, so much of*

*what's possible in our classrooms, and that to me is the biggest benefit that she has."*

Teacher A said:

*"It's really insightful some of the things that she [my MTL] and other MTLs have to say because they are an outsider coming in to talk to your students and can hear your students' perspectives and thoughts from a different place, and that's really helpful for me."*

Outside of support from their MTLs, many corps members and one director identified the non-TFA teachers at their schools to be extremely helpful. These corps members found that having an in-school informal mentor helps them deal with the everyday, transitional challenges for a new teacher, such as finding the copier, figuring out how to fill out referral forms, and understanding basic school protocols. Although one corps member suggested assigning every corps member an in-school mentor, one of the corps members who has a formal school mentor assigned to her found that it has been difficult to build a relationship with her mentor.

A few of the corps members also cited Content Learning Communities and TFA Net as resources that they utilize frequently. They have found that TFA teachers are very generous in their willingness to share resources, activity ideas, and teaching strategies. In general, TFA teachers found that TFA has been successful at providing them with the support systems that they need during the school year. Both of the directors cited support and networks as one of the reasons many prospective teachers choose TFA, and in fact, four of the teachers specifically identified support, networks, alumni connections, and the idea of TFA as a movement as one of the primary reasons they joined. Teacher F said:

*"The most important part to me of being in Teach for America is that I have this constant stream of corps members and resources around me who are there to help me."*

Table 5: Managers of Teacher Leadership and Development and Other Networks

	<b>Managers of Teacher Leadership and Development</b>	<b>Other Informal or Formal Networks</b>
<b>Director A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sees MTLDs as a critical component of corps members' development</li> <li>- MTLD involvement is balanced with the amount of support the teacher is receiving from the school itself and the amount of support the teacher needs</li> <li>- Tries to keep MTLDs away from being an evaluative role because that would create friction where it does not need to be</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Believes that giving teachers a network and helping them collaborate and make connections is very important because teaching can be a lonely profession, especially for first and second year teachers</li> <li>- Believes teachers have always been attracted to TFA because it provides an extra layer of support, and it gives prospective teachers a chance to do something meaningful without having to go back to school and obtain a degree</li> <li>- Sees more and more people who are attracted to TFA also because of its brand and because of the idea of belonging to a corps and being a part of a movement</li> </ul>
<b>Director B</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feels it is important that MTLDs have no evaluative responsibilities and is in that position to be a supporter and partner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some corps members have mentors from the school system as well</li> <li>- Believes many prospective teachers choose TFA because it provides a ready-made community of people who are passionate about working with kids in underserved communities and a network of people who are available to support corps members emotionally and professionally</li> </ul>
<b>Director C</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feels that the MTLD experience can be very different depending on the needs of the corps member</li> <li>- The goal of MTLDs is to inspire and motivate corps members and to give them resources, feedback, and technical teaching support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Believes non-TFA teachers, principals, and the people in the communities that they work are particularly helpful</li> <li>- Part of the approach is to complement and add to the value that is already in states</li> </ul>
<b>Director D</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feels the MTLD experience is very different depending on needs of the corps member</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Believes TFA teachers also reach out to local teachers at their school and coaches provided by the school district for instructional and emotional support</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Found MTLD to be very helpful, attentive, and accessible</li> <li>- Mostly strategized about how to connect with students</li> <li>- Did not get as much support the second year; MTLDs are focused on first years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Found TFA's occasional "Saturday Summit" professional development sessions where the whole Eastern North Carolina region gets together to be very helpful</li> <li>- Additional helpful resources include: TFA Net and Content Learning Communities</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher B</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Found MTLD to be very helpful, supportive, honest, and open</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Has found helpful informal mentors in non-TFA teachers in her grade; she would approach them first with a problem because her MTLD isn't always there and they know</li> </ul>

		<p>the school better</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Originally chose TFA because of its support systems and alumni connections</li> <li>- Feels that TFA is doing a great job with providing strong support systems</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher C</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Found MTLT to be very helpful, caring, and a great example of TFA ideals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Found the network of TFA corps members and Content Learning Communities to be the second biggest source of support outside of a MTLT</li> <li>- Found TFANet to be helpful for the first few weeks, but not that helpful after that because teachers need to find techniques that work specifically for their own classrooms</li> <li>- Chose TFA because the program provides more guidance than other alternate routes</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher D</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Found MTLT to be very available, honest, and helpful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Received little support from the school district itself</li> <li>- Found the network of TFA corps members to be helpful; people are willing to share resources</li> <li>- Found an in-school, informal mentor immediately, which she found to be extremely helpful</li> <li>- Recommends that all corps members be provided with or find an in-school mentor to ask the “stupid questions,” logistical questions such as “where is the copy paper,” to make the transition into the classroom smoother because those rudimentary things are what makes the transition to the classroom most challenging</li> <li>- Originally chose TFA because of its model, the framework, network, and support</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher E</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Very different experience with the two MTLTs she has had: one was not helpful at all, while the other was extremely helpful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joined TFA originally to be part of a movement</li> <li>- Finds TFANet to be extremely helpful</li> <li>- Finds the non-TFA teachers in the school to be extremely helpful</li> <li>- Finds the formal mentor provided by the school district not to be helpful</li> <li>- Recommends more special education support from TFA staff, rather than just from fellow corps members through Content Learning Communities</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher F</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Found MTLT to be really helpful</li> <li>- Believes the MTLTs are overworked and have too many corps members assigned to them</li> <li>- Finds that MTLTs are more focused on first years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Finds the network of teachers that TFA provides to be very helpful; corps members link Drop Boxes to share resources</li> <li>- Finds TFANet to be extremely helpful</li> <li>- Would like more help addressing the school protocol issues and logistical problems, such as how to fill out referral forms</li> </ul>

## **Conclusion**

Overall, TFA teachers and program staff found that TFA provides quality training and support systems for the program's purposes. As one of the corps members pointed out, however, TFA's primary intention is not to train teachers, but to train leaders. This is reflected clearly in the strengths and weaknesses of the program's training and support. Although many of the interviewees acknowledged that traditionally prepared teachers have a stronger body of knowledge in terms of teaching concepts, interviewees believed that TFA teachers have a higher level of determination and grit. Rather than focusing on more advanced lesson planning and systems that teachers can implement in their classrooms, TFA focuses on teaching big goal setting, leadership skills, and how to motivate students.

A teacher also identified that TFA more deliberately and successfully instills a mindset in its teachers of responsibility for their students' achievements and persistence in the face of challenges. Rather than stressing the perfect lesson plan, TFA focuses on larger, more abstract concepts, such as maintaining high expectations for students. In this sense, it is possible that the softer skills that TFA instills in its corps members and the strong academic background they come with outweigh the technical teaching education they lack to allow them to be very effective teachers in underserved, under-performing classrooms. The training, as well as their own values, may be what inspire these teachers to go above and beyond in the classroom.

The interviewees also seemed to think that TFA's support programs were generally more successful than its training programs. The corps members had the most critiques on institute, which the majority of them did not believe adequately prepared

them for the classroom. They pointed to the small class sizes, teaching different content than what they would be teaching during the school year, and the short teaching time to be major reasons they did not feel prepared when they began teaching in their assigned schools. The directors also recognized these limitations of the institute. Generally, however, many corps members found that the institute was successful in what it intends to do: provide basic teaching skills and techniques and help teachers develop leadership skills and understand TFA's mission.

On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of corps members believed that TFA provides adequate support during the school year, and some of the corps members also specifically cited support and networks as one of the reasons they chose TFA over other alternative certification programs. All of the corps members had some type of support program that they utilized often, including their MTLDs, TFANet, and the Content Learning Communities, and found that they had those resources readily available when they needed help with the concepts they were teaching. In a way, these resources successfully fill in the gaps that the training leaves so that even if the institute does not provide full preparation, the corps members can continue to learn teaching techniques, obtain activity ideas, and observe virtual classrooms through these programs.

The small number of interviewees as well as the selection bias may have an effect on the results of the study. The corps members were recommended by Zach Perin, the Senior Managing Director of the Teacher Leadership Continuum for Teach for America. Thus, it is possible that the sample is more vocal, invested, or opinionated about TFA in general and the training and support programs than a random sample. However, the practice interviews with former corps members generated similar results. Additionally,

the sample size is small and may not be representative of other TFA corps members or directors or of any region outside of Eastern North Carolina. Further research with a larger sample size would determine whether or not these are trends that exist among the larger TFA community.

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