

Five facts about NC schools, teachers

DALE CARPENTER

GUEST COLUMNIST

Education and schools in North Carolina have received a great deal of media attention in the last couple of years, including throughout the recent political campaigns. With the campaigns over, the work of newly elected officials begins in Raleigh and in towns and counties throughout the state; however, the effort to educate our youth never stopped. Here are five things you might not know about schools and teachers in North Carolina.

1. North Carolina schools are improving. The U.S. Department of Education reports that high school graduation rates are at an all-time high in the state (at more than 80 percent) and across the country, which is occurring as violent incidents in schools have dropped. In addition, teen pregnancy rates are on the decline, according to statistics from the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina.

2. North Carolina hires more new teachers every year than the state produces in teacher preparation programs at our public and private colleges and universities. While about 45 percent of the teaching workforce is prepared by North Carolina-based teacher preparation programs such as ours at Western Carolina University, North Carolina imports almost one fourth of new teachers from states that prepare more than the available teaching jobs in those states, the Education Policy Initiative at Carolina (or EPIC) tells us.

3. In addition, EPIC also reports that North Carolina-prepared teachers stay significantly longer in the teaching profession than teachers hired from out-of-state and other sources, including those who trained in other areas or change careers.

4. North Carolina teachers with five or more years of experience consistently outperform most novice teachers. Test scores of children with experienced teachers are higher than children with most novice teachers. Experience counts; only 30 percent of North Carolina teachers are in their most productive years, with 10 to 20 years of experience, according to EPIC.

5. North Carolina has a novice public school teaching force. More than 25 percent of the state's teachers are in their first five years of teaching (again, statistics from EPIC).

North Carolina needs new and experienced teachers to sustain the hard-earned positive results seen in schools across the state. The significant increase in teacher salaries passed by the N.C. General Assembly and supported by the governor this summer will help attract and keep needed teachers. The challenge going forward is to support and retain teachers. Our children's future — and our state's — depends on it.

Dale Carpenter is dean of the College of Education and Allied Professions at Western Carolina University.

This guest column was published in the Asheville Citizen-Times on December 19, 2014