

**Carolina Collaborative
for Alternative Preparation**
Spurring Innovation Through Collaboration

2024-25 ANNUAL REPORT



College of Education
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Overview of CarolinaCAP: Spurring Innovation Through Collaboration	4
Targeting teacher preparation to meet SC's needs	4
Powering preparation through partnership	6
Tailoring the pathway to support districts and candidates	6
Expanding Pathways into the Teaching Profession	8
Growing an effective teacher pipeline	8
Addressing vacancies in the state's hardest-to-staff classrooms	9
Enabling a Grow-Your-Own approach for districts	10
Providing a cost-effective recruitment solution	11
Deepening Readiness through Residency	12
A "pre-apprenticeship" residency model	12
Sharpening results from the CarolinaCAP residency	13
Preparing Candidates through Practice	14
Accelerating Praxis pass rates	15
Theoretical and applied learning experiences for candidates	16
Preparing educators to serve the whole student	17
Coaching that connects principles to practice	18
Evaluating effectiveness for candidates	19
Supporting Districts as Places of Preparation	20
Expanding the Vision for CarolinaCAP	22
Key growth markers in 2024-25	22
A vision for what's ahead	22
Appendices	
Appendix A: Original CarolinaCAP Funding Proviso	24
Appendix B: Program Evaluation Overview	25
Appendix C: Certification Areas for CarolinaCAP Candidates	26
References	27

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CarolinaCAP is a non-degree teacher preparation pathway leading to full licensure for teacher candidates in public school districts across SC. As a state Registered Apprenticeship Program, the pathway provides a high-quality experience in teaching that marries the expertise of local teachers, schools, and districts with the resources of an institution of higher education and a national nonprofit.

The pathway's model emphasizes rigorous preparation of new teachers without unnecessary barriers to entering the profession. Innovative and cost-effective teacher recruitment strategies, customized and competency-based training for new teachers, and dedicated coaching support make this aim possible. As part of USC's commitment to preparing and supporting educators for systems most in need, CarolinaCAP provides targeted support to school districts and candidates, with an emphasis on serving rural and hard-to-staff schools.

In its fifth year in operation in 2024-25, CarolinaCAP accelerated its impact on educator pipelines, district staffing challenges, and students' access to effective teachers. This annual report details how the pathway accomplished key markers of success to serve SC public school districts and the new educators that are making a daily difference within those classrooms.

- **CarolinaCAP supported educators serving 20% more SC public school students than projected this year.** About 7,850 young people (up from 5,000 in 2023-24) have had first-hand experience of the impact of this profession-building work.
- **Three-quarters of the students served by CarolinaCAP are eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals,** ensuring that students at high academic risk can receive instruction that is effective and uninterrupted by turnover.
- **The candidate pipeline for CarolinaCAP expanded by another 31% since last year** and is now nearly six times the size of the candidate pool in its first year of operation.
- **About half of SC districts now partner with CarolinaCAP** to help them "grow their own" educators, providing a long-term solution to chronic staffing challenges.
- **Districts partnering with CarolinaCAP have saved an estimated \$2.1M** in recruitment and induction costs through engagement with the pathway.
- **CarolinaCAP has more than doubled the number of Multicategorical Special Education teachers it prepares,** supporting a critical area of need for SC schools.
- **Three in four CarolinaCAP candidates are already working in non-certified roles in schools,** demonstrating the pathway's continued success in preparing new teachers who are already dedicated to serving schools and are likely to be retained over time.
- **The pathway continues to place teachers in two times the targeted number of rural and I-95 corridor districts** as required by proviso, meeting the needs of schools and classrooms most impacted by teacher turnover.
- **CarolinaCAP's Praxis pass rate has doubled since 2023,** creating paths to the profession for career changers committed to students.

OVERVIEW OF CAROLINACAP: SPURRING INNOVATION THROUGH COLLABORATION

The Carolina Collaborative for Alternative Preparation (CarolinaCAP) is a non-degree teacher preparation pathway leading to full licensure for teacher candidates in public school districts across SC. As a state Registered Apprenticeship Program, the pathway provides a high-quality experience in teaching that marries the expertise of local teachers, schools, and districts with the resources of an institution of higher education and a national nonprofit.

CarolinaCAP is administered by the University of South Carolina (USC) in partnership with Mira Education and 40 school districts in South Carolina. As part of USC’s commitment to preparing and supporting educators for systems most impacted by chronic educator staffing shortages, CarolinaCAP emphasizes support of districts and candidates in rural and historically disadvantaged communities across the state, following a model tailored to the challenges faced by districts and would-be educators in SC.

This report explores evaluation results for the year, outlines how CarolinaCAP is responding to those data and to partner input, and shares a vision for future growth.

Targeting teacher preparation to meet SC’s needs

The impact of teacher shortages on K-12 school districts is a well-documented and growing problem, particularly for the smaller rural communities common in the state. While addressing retention is an essential consideration, targeted approaches to educator preparation such as CarolinaCAP remain a critical part of the solution for the state, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Meeting District Needs through a Well-Targeted Educator Preparation Pathway

SC DISTRICT NEEDS	CAROLINACAP’S PATHWAY DESIGN RESPONSE
Well-prepared candidates	Rigorous coursework, competency-based preparation, and coached classroom experience over three years, while serving students immediately
Candidates for special education, STEM, and other hard-to-fill positions	Recruitment targets these content areas along with early childhood education, where good teachers can have the most lasting impact
Candidates able and willing to teach in communities that are rural or otherwise at risk of high teacher vacancies	“Grow your own” approach targets college graduates who live in the districts in which they become teacher candidates
Candidates who understand and respond to community context	Recruitment from within local communities, with a focus on educators who share experiences and identities with their students
Cost-effectiveness of new teacher support	Coaching and other learning experiences provide strong induction supports without increasing demands on districts with limited budget and capacity
For aspiring educators: Low-cost supports	Low-cost preparation and opportunity to earn teaching salary (main CarolinaCAP pathway) or living wage stipend (CarolinaCAP residency) from day one; districts may opt to cover all costs for candidates

The design of CarolinaCAP responds comprehensively to needs of SC districts impacted by teacher supply challenges, particularly ensuring that the state has an appropriate response to needs of districts that are rural and/or located along the I-95 corridor.

Responding to disproportionate needs in rural and I-95 corridor communities. Rural and disadvantaged communities experience greater difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified teachers (Edwards, D. S., et. al., 2023). The median three-year retention rate for I-95 corridor districts is two percentage points lower than the state average (authors' calculations based on SC TEACHER data). Further, the most recent SC Teacher Exit Survey results indicate that 41% of departing teachers moved to other districts, generally to access higher pay, better benefits, and enhanced supports, as well as for family or other personal reasons (Starrett et. al, 2023). CarolinaCAP's grow-your-own model helps districts identify local candidates who are college graduates and already committed to living in and serving their communities. This focus accords with the legislative proviso that funds the program.

Targeting disproportionate shortages in critical content areas. Early grades, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), and special education classrooms that are essential to student and district success are most challenging for districts to fill. CarolinaCAP targets recruitment and placement in these content areas.

Increasing instructional quality. Across the state, as many as 40.9% of teaching positions this fall were categorized as either unfilled or hard-to-fill and thus at ongoing risk of being vacant (Learning Policy Institute, 2023). Based on these figures, we estimate that 28,800 SC students were without permanent, highly-qualified teachers for one or more classes last fall, adversely affecting continuity and quality of instruction and other student supports. CarolinaCAP provides well-supported career candidates to classrooms and districts that would otherwise resort to use of substitutes or temporary teacher placements through other, often more expensive, programs. Preparation pathways tend to emphasize either extensive preparation or quick entry to professional practice; CarolinaCAP effectively balances these equally important demands in resolving the teacher shortage in the state.

Lowering personnel expenses due to teacher attrition. Replacing a single teacher costs districts an average of \$9,000 for rural communities and as much as \$20,000 in urban communities (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017). Because turnover is disproportionately high in rural and disadvantaged communities, even the lower replacement costs add up quickly. CarolinaCAP assists districts with recruiting and placing candidates in their schools and offsets capacity and cost requirements for induction through its three-year candidate support progression. All this is done at a cost to the district of only \$4,500/candidate in qualifying rural districts. This figure compares favorably with other programs such as the international teacher program, which can cost districts \$10,000 per year per position.

Growing teachers within a community context. Positive student outcomes—both academic and behavioral—are closely correlated with the placement of educators who share backgrounds and community contexts with their students (Gershenson, et. al., 2017; Grissom, Kern, & Rodriguez, 2017). Moreover, some recent research into rural teaching contexts suggests that especially in STEM subjects, opportunities to highlight real-world application of academic content is enhanced when teachers are highly familiar with local communities and their assets (Paradise, et. al., 2022). CarolinaCAP's grow-your-own approach ensures that candidates are more likely to share and understand the contexts of the South Carolina students they serve.

Powering preparation through partnership

CarolinaCAP is designed to draw upon the expertise of the trilateral partnership among USC, Mira Education, and partnering school districts to create and refine efficient and effective recruitment, preparation, and retention practices for prospective and practicing educators across South Carolina. (See the [CarolinaCAP website](#) for a list of current district partners.) Each partner brings experience and skill sets to ensure CarolinaCAP meets the needs of the alternative certification candidate and addresses district recruitment and retention needs:

- USC provides research-based practices to build and deliver high quality learning experiences for candidates, support and training for CarolinaCAP coaches, technical assistance for district leaders to engage in pipeline planning, and continuation of strong partnerships with districts across South Carolina.
- Mira Education brings expertise in program design and strategy and impact assessment, supporting CarolinaCAP with ongoing improvements based on data and research, communicating results, and positioning the pathway as a sustainable model.
- Partner districts bring with them knowledge of the unique needs of their communities, understanding of staffing needs, and the ability to identify potential within and outside of their districts.

The combined expertise of the trilateral partnership provides the talent and support needed to cultivate and sustain an innovative alternative certification pathway that supports districts in growing their own. (See CarolinaCAP's website for a [full list of personnel](#) in 2023-24.)

The partnership is made sustainable through several funding sources. The \$750,000 awarded by a legislative funding proviso for 2024-25 continued the SC Legislature's multiyear support for innovation, programmatic improvement, and support for a viable pathway for teacher certification for our rural districts. (See Appendix A for the text of the initial proviso.) Additional appropriations supported the operations of an optional residency year for prospective educators seeking in-depth, "pre-apprenticeship" support and exploration to enhance their success in the preparation pathway. The balance of funding for the program comes from partner districts themselves, who pay \$4,500-7,500 per candidate depending on whether they qualify for reduced fees via Rural Recruitment support.

Progressions to support districts and candidates

The CarolinaCAP pathway is organized into a series of pathways or progressions, designed to support individuals and school districts throughout their experiences.

- **Application:** Individuals who wish to pursue teaching preparation through CarolinaCAP receive a range of screening and support to ensure their qualification for the pathway and provisional licensure, including verification of initial Praxis scores, a prior bachelor's degree (or higher), and hiring by a district.

- **Pre-apprenticeship Residency:** An optional CarolinaCAP residency offers a full year of stipended co-teaching experience to applicants who may benefit from additional clinical or Praxis exam preparation prior to becoming teachers of record. Residents also have the opportunity, following a pre-apprenticeship approach, to extend exploration of numerous education career paths. Following successful completion of the year, residents matriculate to leading their own classrooms within the CarolinaCAP candidate progression.
- **Candidacy/Apprenticeship:** After applicants are hired by a district and accepted by CarolinaCAP, they become provisionally certified CarolinaCAP candidates who receive three years of apprenticeship support to master content, pedagogy, and other professional skills. This progression is complete when candidates achieve full licensure.
- **District Pipeline Strategy Supports:** CarolinaCAP offers support not only to applicants, candidates, and residents but to the partner districts in which they teach. Preparation and support of district-embedded coaches and coaching teachers contributes to the impact and sustainability of each element of the pathway, and is thus embedded in discussion throughout the report.

EXPANDING PATHWAYS INTO THE TEACHING PROFESSION

“ We have been extremely fortunate to have our potential teachers go through CarolinaCAP. The success of the teachers we get...has led directly to improvement in student achievement as well as in school morale.”

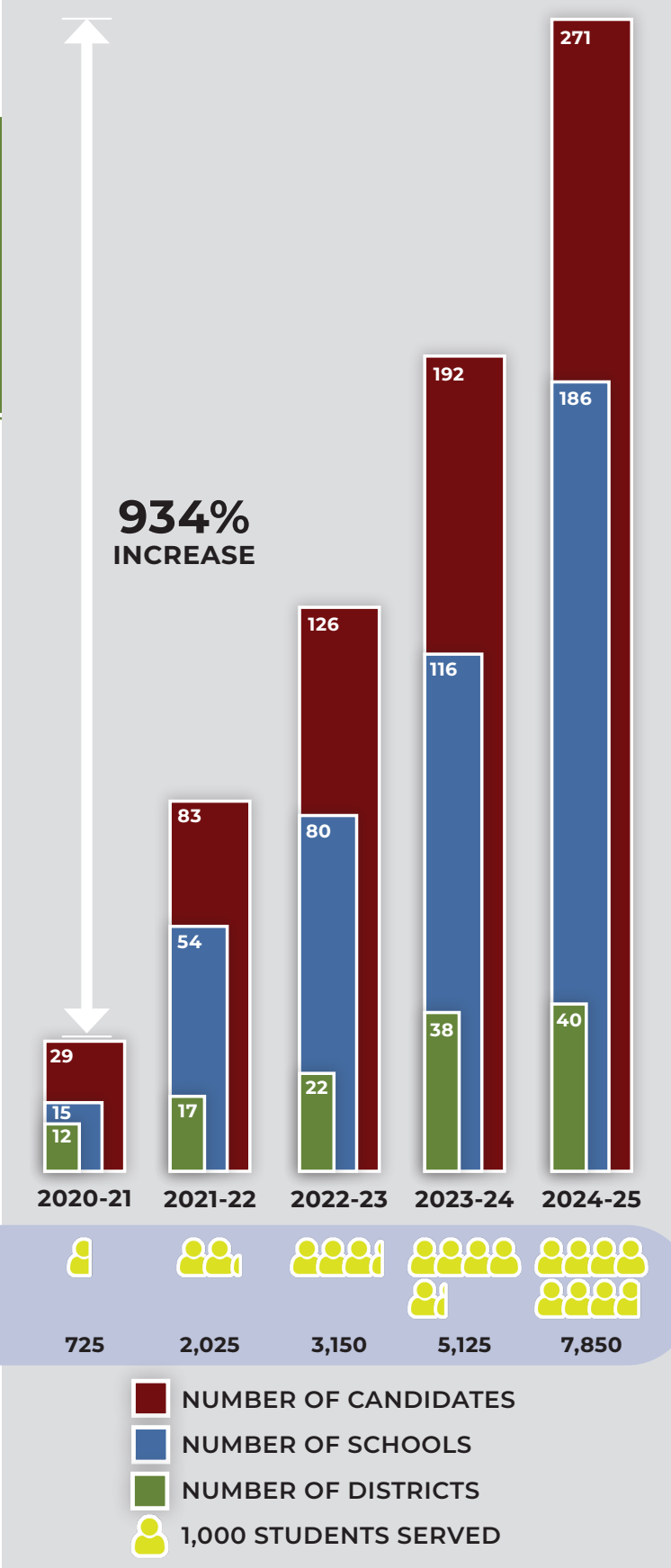
—Dr. Kelvin Wymbs, Superintendent
Williamsburg Co. School District

Over its five years of active operations, CarolinaCAP has increased the size of its pipeline by more than five times, while sustaining a high degree of confidence among administrators and districts in the quality of candidates. The pathway also prepares candidates with life experiences and backgrounds similar to those of the students they teach, which research links to improved student outcomes over time. In 2025-26, CarolinaCAP will focus on growing the visibility of the pathway to increase the number of district placements and scale impact in future years.

Growing an effective teacher pipeline

CarolinaCAP scaled its impact by 20% in the 2024-25 school year, placing 271 teachers, candidates, and residents in 186 schools across South Carolina. (See appendices for more details about partners and candidates.) As shown in Figure 1, CarolinaCAP has steadily increased the number of districts, schools, and classrooms served by its candidates in each year of operation.

Figure 1: Expansion of CarolinaCAP Candidates, Schools, Districts, and Students Served (2020-2025)



These figures translate to an additional 7,850 high-needs SC students who were able to experience the benefits of stable, continuous learning environments, rather than having their classes covered by substitutes or other temporarily assigned personnel. CarolinaCAP’s completers to date are on track to make a difference in the learning of nearly 700,000 SC students over the next two decades of their careers.

CarolinaCAP’s growing candidate pipeline is fed by an applicant pool that has expanded by nearly three times over the past three years, allowing the pathway to scale while retaining high standards for placement. This growth has been fueled by the strength of the pathway’s emerging reputation for high-quality preparation and partnership with districts. A broadened emphasis on public outreach and communications—one of CarolinaCAP’s goals for 2024-26—has also supported wider recruitment among prospective educators.

Addressing vacancies in the state’s hardest-to-staff classrooms

CarolinaCAP partnered with 40 districts in 2024-25. (See Figure 3.) Twenty-four of these partner districts and 72 participating school sites are considered rural according to the South Carolina Rural Recruitment Initiative.

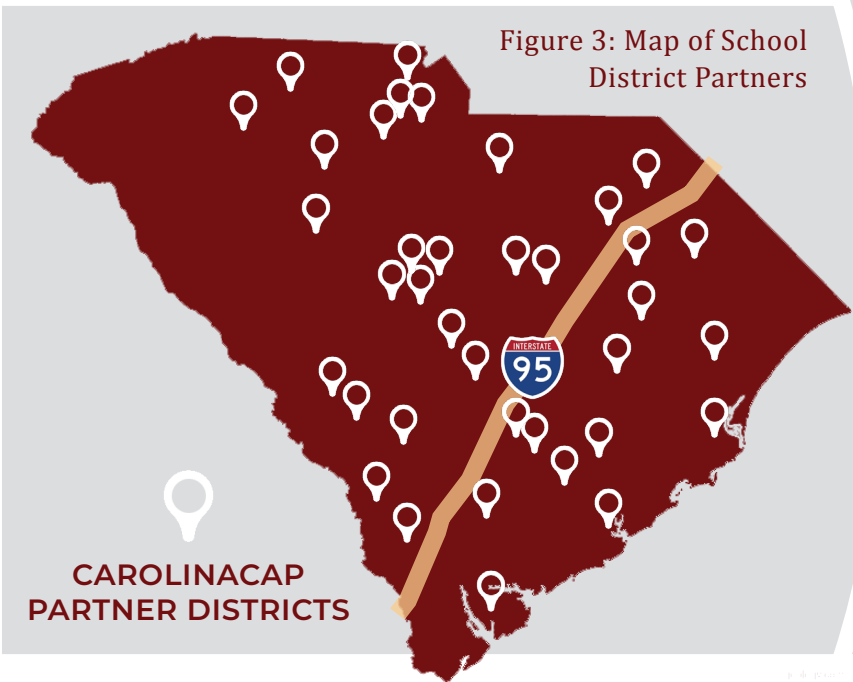
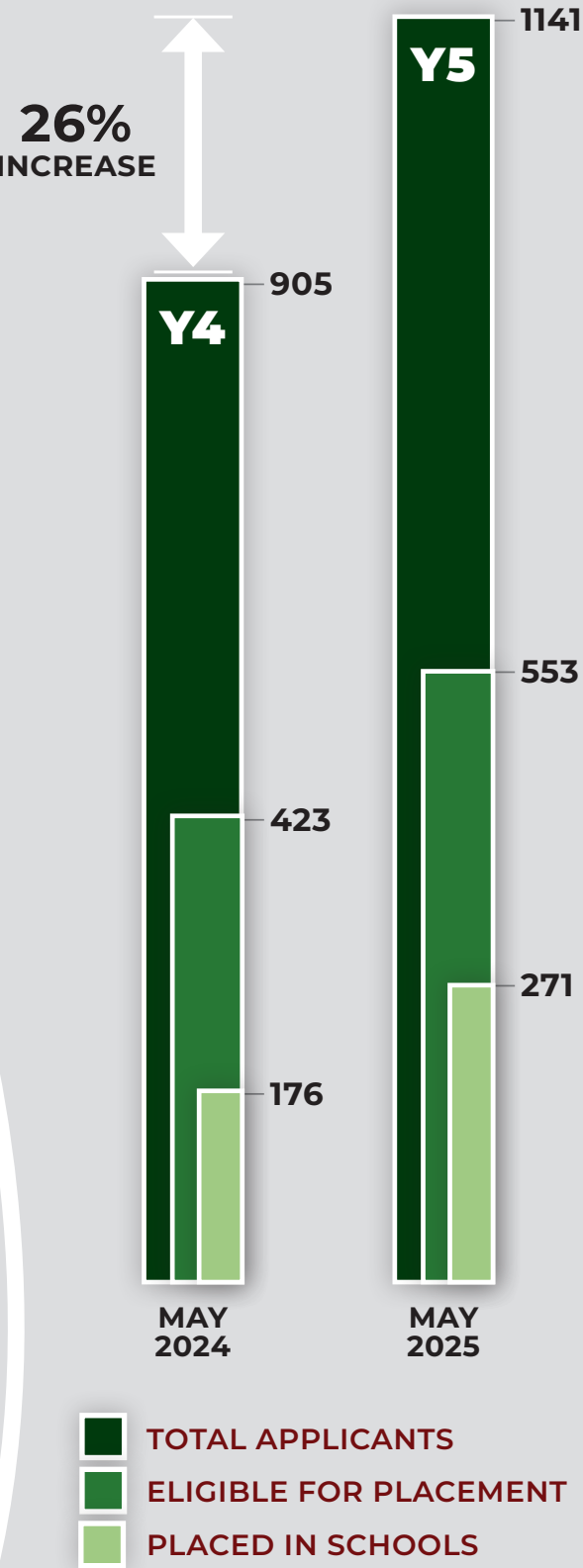
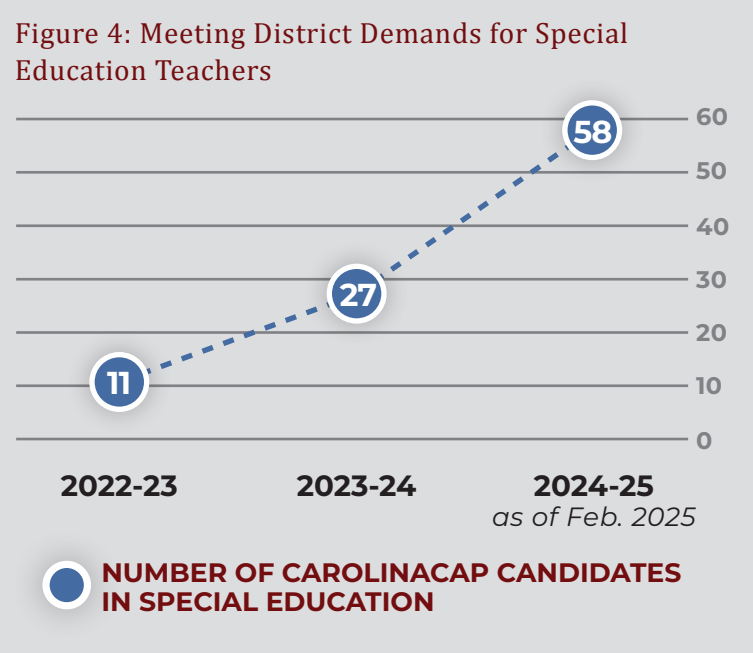


Figure 2: Applicant and Placement Growth in CarolinaCAP, 2023-24 to 2024-25



Fifteen of those districts are along the I-95 corridor. Partner districts include some of the least economically advantaged schools in the state, with about 75% of students in participating schools being eligible for Free and Reduced Priced School Meals. CarolinaCAP thus effectively meets its programmatic goals for focus on districts most in need of new, effective teachers.



CarolinaCAP also focuses on hard-to-staff positions within those schools and districts. The pathway only identifies and places applicants in certification areas where partner districts experience particular difficulty with finding qualified teachers. (See appendices.) Importantly, 58 candidates are preparing as Multicategorical Special Education teachers. This licensure area currently comprises about 20% of CarolinaCAP’s candidate pipeline and continues to grow each year. (See Figure 4.) More than half of schools (55%) report difficulty in filling special education positions, due to higher-than-average turnover and a declining number of new special education teachers completing traditional preparation programs each year (NCES, 2023; Nguyen et. al., 2024).

Enabling a grow-your-own approach for districts

“The pipeline and candidate support planning efforts facilitated by CarolinaCAP... play a crucial role in expanding access to quality educators, ultimately strengthening the education workforce and enhancing student outcomes.”

—Benita Hughes, Coordinator for Alternative Certification Pathways, Berkeley Co. School District

Teacher labor markets are hyperlocal. Up to 60% of all teachers teach within 15 miles of where they attended high school themselves (Reininger, 2012). Grow-your-own programs like CarolinaCAP respond by focusing not on bringing in applicants from other locations who may be likely to leave after a few years, but by developing talent from within the local community and often from within the district itself.

Table 2: Growing Districts’ Own via CarolinaCAP

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Percentage of candidates previously employed in non-certified roles	76%	75%	77%	69%	73%

As in prior years, about three quarters of new candidates in 2024-25 previously served in classified roles within the school district in which they received teaching placements. District leaders and principals report that these candidates’ prior experience in local schools makes them more attractive candidates and effective educators because they thoroughly understand the community context within which students live. Moreover, hiring prior employees in more advanced roles creates administrative simplicity for district offices that may have limited staff capacity. (See discussion of district supports on pipeline development on page XX.) Offering paths to skill up for better-compensated positions also can support community economic development efforts in rural areas.

Providing a cost-effective recruitment solution

The total cost for CarolinaCAP is \$7,500 per teacher for three years of support, making it very competitive in the marketplace for alternative preparation models. For qualifying rural districts, \$3,000 in legislative funding is used to offset partnering district fees for each candidate. Qualifying rural districts are responsible for the remaining \$4,500 fee for each candidate. Districts are also responsible for covering the cost of the CarolinaCAP Coach.

These costs compare very favorably with other pathways for preparing and/or placing teachers. For instance, international teacher programs cost about \$10,000 per teacher per year. Over the three years needed to prepare a likely-to-stay CarolinaCAP teacher, districts could spend up to five and half times that amount to secure an international teacher, with no assurance that the investment would keep the teacher in place over the long term. Table 4 summarizes comparisons with several programs that also commonly serve rural and/or underserved districts in SC.

Table 3: Cost Comparisons with CarolinaCAP

PROGRAM	ONE YEAR COSTS PER TEACHER	ESTIMATED THREE YEAR TOTAL PER TEACHER	ESTIMATED DIFFERENCE FROM CAROLINACAP IN QUALIFYING RURAL DISTRICTS	REQUIRED COMMITMENT BEYOND TWO YEARS OF TEACHING?
International Visiting Teachers Program	\$10,000	\$30,000	+\$25,500	No
Teach for America		\$3,500*	-\$1,000	No

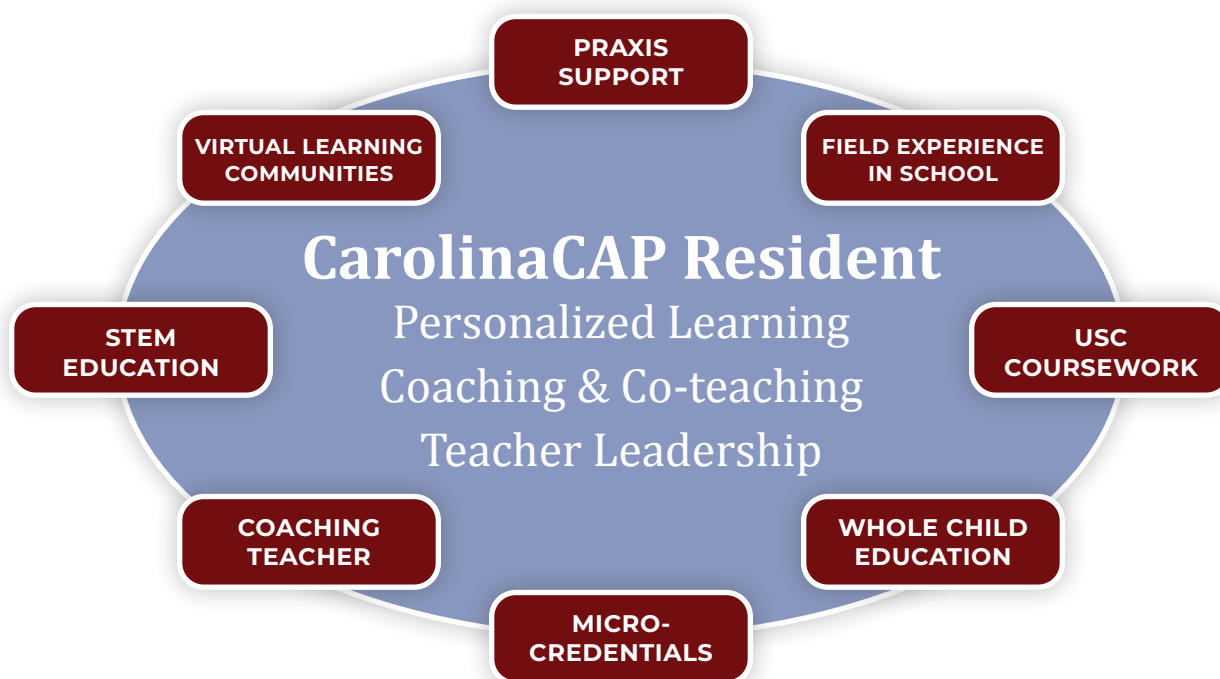
*Costs assume that candidates accomplish full professional licensure, which is not required by TFASC.

Finally, beginning teachers who are well-prepared for the content area and student context in which they teach are up to two and half times less likely to leave the classroom after their first year (Podlosky et al, 2016). Thus, access to strong, contextualized preparation not only increases the supply of incoming teachers but becomes a first step in educator retention. As noted in an earlier section of this report, likely retention also contributes to savings through CarolinaCAP of \$9,000 to \$20,000 per vacated position.

DEEPENING READINESS THROUGH RESIDENCY

The CarolinaCAP Residency was launched in 2023-24 as an optional, intensive, and innovative “pre-apprenticeship” to the main CarolinaCAP pathway. Its design combines national best practices with responses to district needs for candidate support, accelerating readiness of both the future candidates and the administrators who will support their success as they transition to becoming teachers of record. (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5: Elements in CarolinaCAP’s state-of-the-art residency model



A “pre-apprenticeship” residency model

CarolinaCAP residents experience a range of learning supports that permit additional time and opportunity to complete requirements for entry as full candidates in the main CarolinaCAP pathway. Following a “pre-apprenticeship” model, the residency also structures specific opportunities to explore education careers to ensure—prior to matriculation as a CarolinaCAP candidate – that teaching is a good professional fit for those who may not have worked in schools in other roles.

Residents receive:

- A full year of co-teaching with a “coaching teacher” who supervises and supports the clinical experience;
- A liveable wage stipend that allows the residents to forego other paid work and focus fully on co-teaching and preparation;
- Opportunities to shadow other professionals in their schools;
- Targeted learning experiences on STEM content and whole child pedagogical approaches, provided by higher education partners;

- Targeted learning experiences on STEM content and whole child pedagogical approaches, provided by higher education partners;
- Extended Praxis preparation to boost pass rates for each portion of the exam;
- Coursework with university faculty; and
- Micro-credentials to verify developing competencies for teaching, aligned with the SCTS 4.0 rubric.

Sharpening results from the CarolinaCAP residency

CarolinaCAP supported a second cohort of 16 residents in a pre-apprenticeship year in 2024-25. For a second year, all residents but one successfully completed residency year requirements to accomplish provisional licensure and “bridge” to the main CarolinaCAP pathway.

Co-teaching is extremely valuable as a job-embedded learning strategy for preparing teachers. The approach is also effective for supporting statistically significant learning growth for all students, especially in math and for students with disabilities (Jones & Winters, 2023). That said, successful co-teaching requires not only close collaboration between the two practitioners, but also between the preparation program and district staff to ensure the co-teaching model is implemented as intended.

CarolinaCAP staff provided additional structure and formalized communication with district leaders and principals in this regard prior to the start of the 2024-25 school year. During site visits this spring, administrators and teaching coaches expressed their appreciation for the improved communication around expectations for the residency. Based on the refinements to the model and the observed quality of the residents, they expressed eagerness for more residents to enhance their staffing pipelines in coming years.

PREPARING CANDIDATES THROUGH PRACTICE

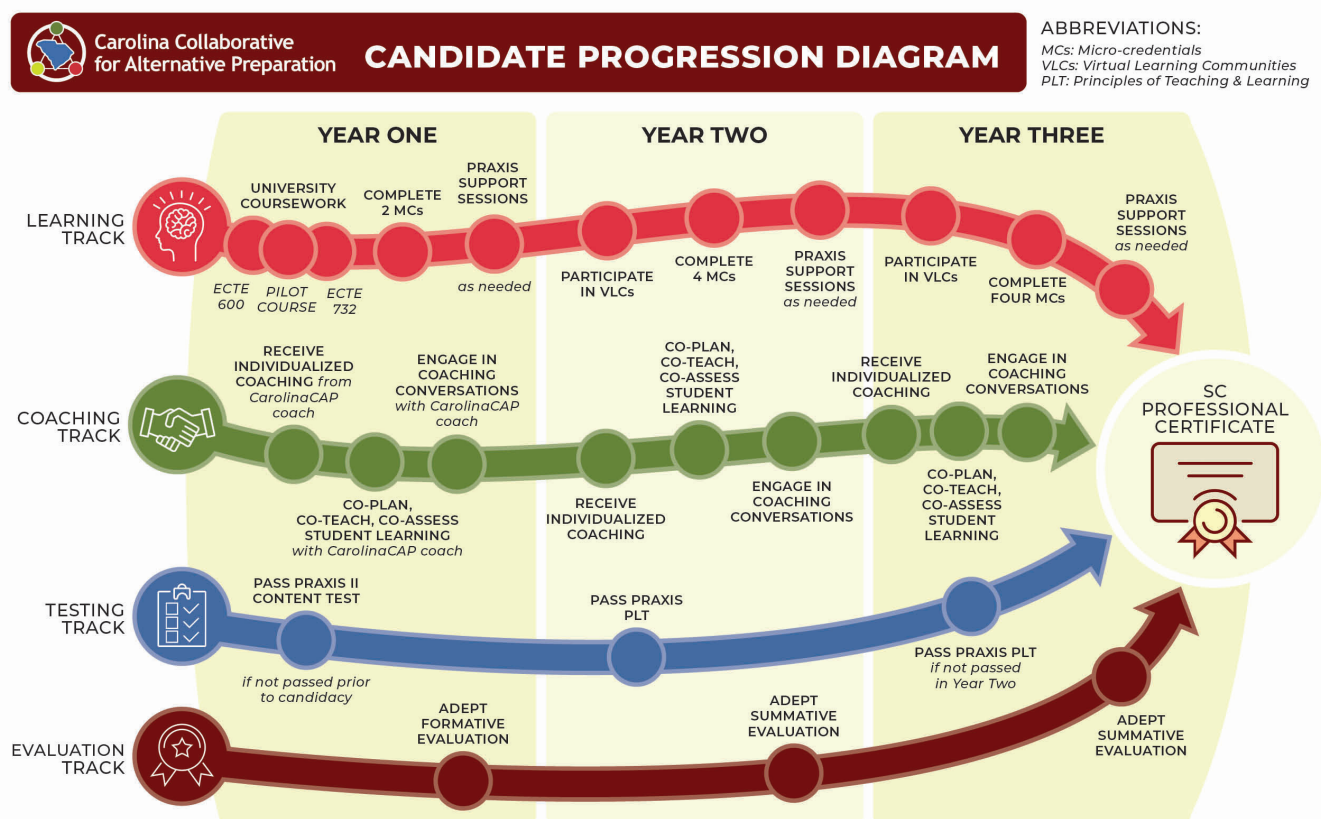
“With retention challenges increasing from year to year, this...pipeline of candidates [via CarolinaCAP] allows us to grow our own candidate pool while providing guidance and essential learning in the field to aid candidates in successfully transitioning to their classroom.”

—LaToya Boyd, Principal,
Lee Co. School District

While candidates in most preparation pathways are still only completing coursework or other theoretical learning to support the growth of their instructional practice, CarolinaCAP provides them an opportunity to move immediately into the classroom once they qualify to receive a provisional license from the state. This closely supervised, job-embedded approach ensures that students can benefit from these new educators quickly, and ground candidates’ learning in the context of real classrooms.

CarolinaCAP’s active preparation progression for candidate-practitioners follows four “tracks” of support: learning experiences, coaching, testing, and evaluation. (See Figure 6.) This progression has continued to evolve, including new elements and sequences for candidates launching beyond Spring 2025. The 2025-26 report will detail early results of the new progressions. Together, these converging supports provide rich grounding in theory, content, and pedagogy that both candidates and their administrators commend—while allowing them to immediately serve students and earn full-time salaries, rather than delaying an effective entry to the classroom.

Figure 6: Three-Year Candidate Progression for CarolinaCAP

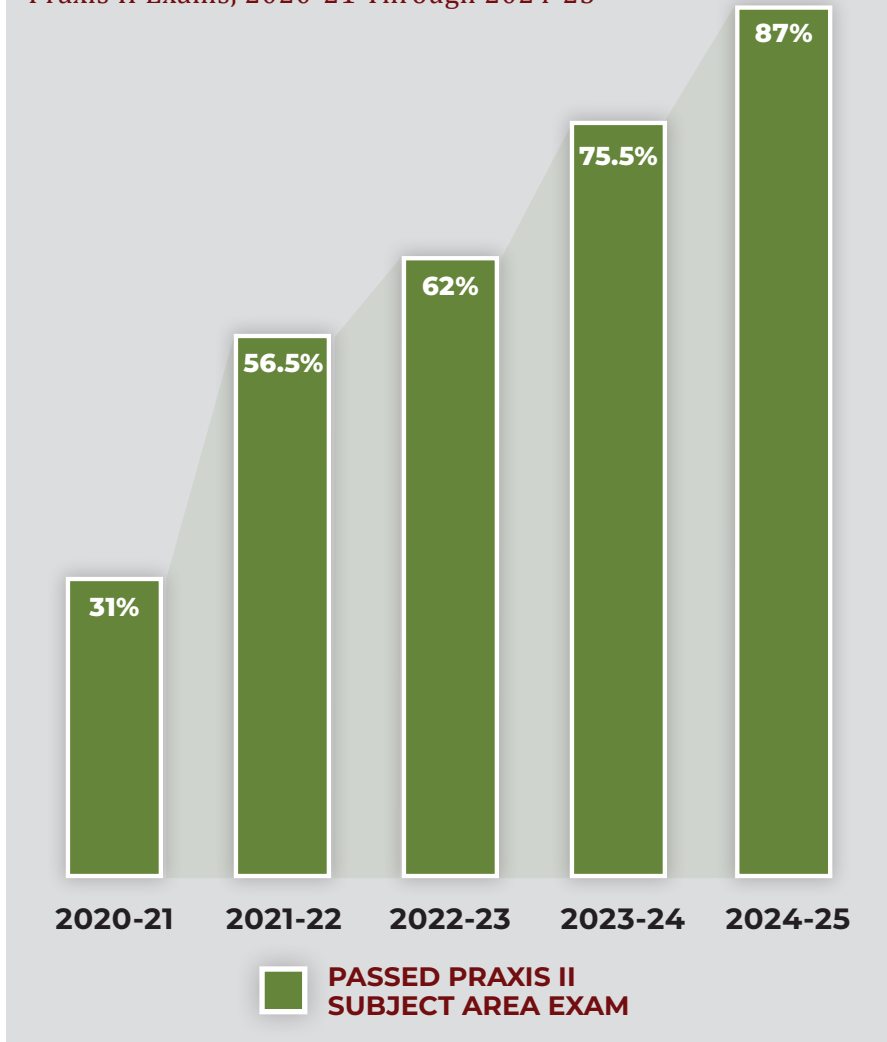


Accelerating Praxis pass rates

Fewer than half of all teacher candidates nationally are able to pass Praxis exams on a first attempt (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2019), making these content and pedagogy tests an even larger hurdle to professional teaching certification than the bar exams are for aspiring lawyers. The pass rates are even lower for alternative route candidates, who typically have been away from standardized testing and their own academic coursework for some time.

CarolinaCAP, however, has made programmatic adjustments that has almost tripled its candidates' Praxis pass rates over five years and exceeds the state's average first-time passage rate by nearly 30 percentage points. (See Figure 7.) As a result, a greater number of candidates can successfully complete requirements for program completion and full licensure.

Figure 7: CarolinaCAP Candidate Passing Rates on Praxis II Exams, 2020-21 Through 2024-25



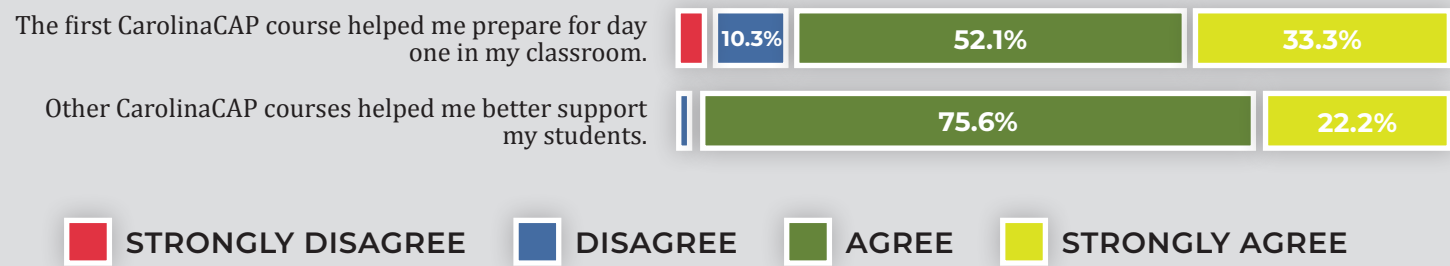
The pathway's comprehensive approach to Praxis support includes three elements:

- 1. HR supports.** Starting in the application process, CarolinaCAP extends additional services from a human resources professional to guide future candidates (including residents) through the process of being provisionally hired by local school districts, including completing Praxis successfully.
- 2. Praxis preparation.** Candidates receive additional no- and low-cost supports to prepare for the Praxis exam, including access to study guides and tutoring programs. For a second year, 240 Tutoring has proven the most popular, with over 90% of candidates who used that program reporting it was effective or extremely effective. Survey data indicate that candidates who use at least 50% of the 240 Tutoring programs are passing their subject-area Praxis exams. Because CarolinaCAP has qualified as a Registered Apprenticeship Program, some qualified candidates may receive additional resources to pay for individual learning supports that can further enhance their success.
- 3. Residency.** Finally, the residency has an explicit focus on Praxis II preparation. While intended primarily to help residents qualify for provisional licensure and entry into the main CarolinaCAP pathway, these supports may also benefit Praxis II pass rates in future years. (See the residency section of this report for further details.)

Theoretical and applied learning experiences for candidates

CarolinaCAP coursework includes three required graduate-level courses taught by faculty at the USC College of Education. For some candidates entering the pathway through partnerships with the Center for Educator Preparation and Innovation (EPI Center) or Transition to Teaching, additional supports may be supplied from other faculty as a precursor to entry into the main CarolinaCAP pathway.

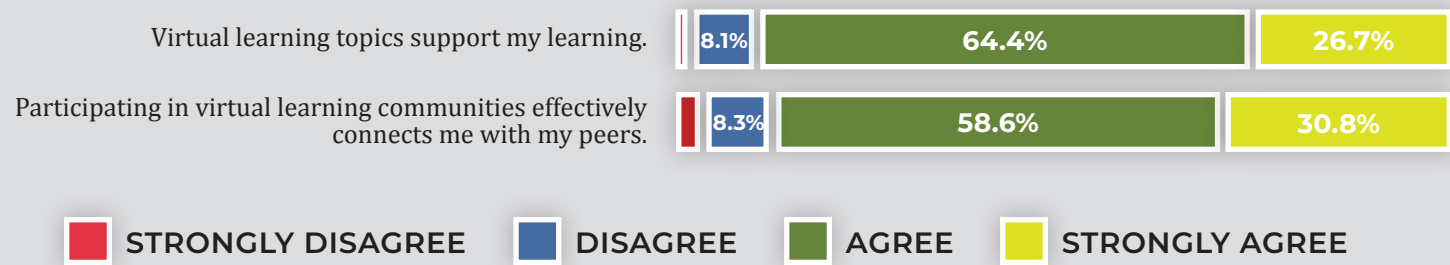
Figure 8: Candidate Perspectives on Relevance of CarolinaCAP Coursework



Nearly 98% of candidates continue to report that CarolinaCAP courses help prepare them to effectively support students. This year, CarolinaCAP added a Foundations of Learning class to the candidate coursework sequence based on feedback from candidates to expand their understanding of learning theory, student assessment, and other sources of information that fuel instructional decision-making. Such foundational topics lead directly to candidates’ effectiveness as well as preparation for Praxis exams and other district assessments of teaching effectiveness.

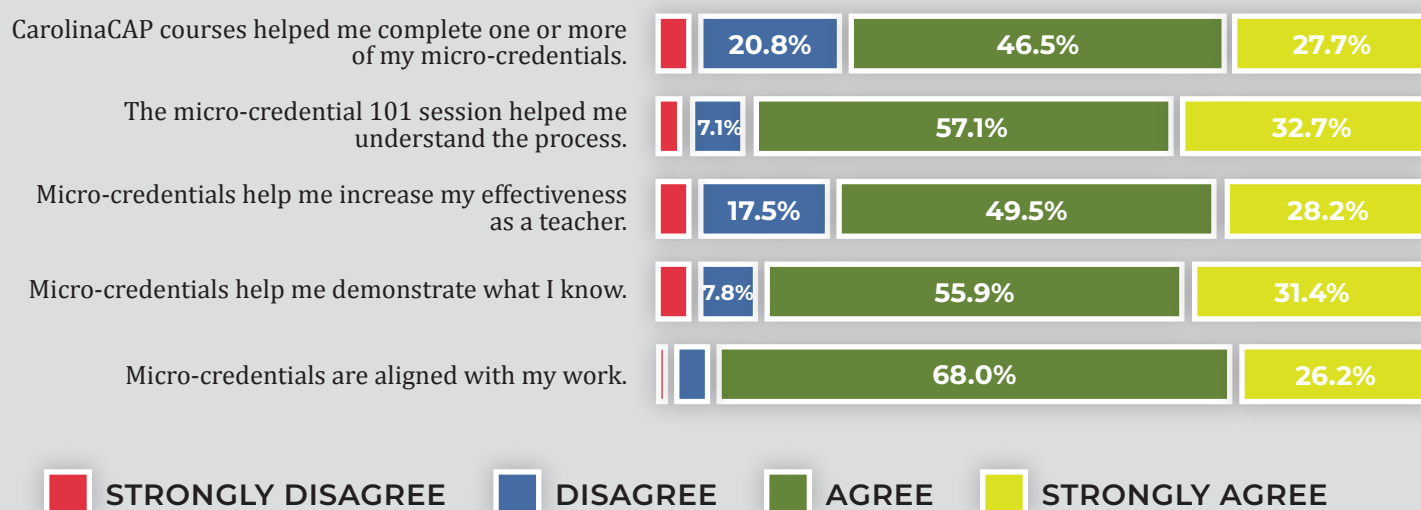
Candidates also participate in virtual learning communities, which enhance and extend coaching supports with “anytime, anywhere” opportunities to connect with peers and coaches. Over 90% of respondents felt that virtual learning communities supported their learning successfully and laid critical groundwork for the collaborative practices that research links with long-term teaching effectiveness and retention (Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009; Loeb et al., 2012; Papay et al., 2020). (See Figure 9.)

Figure 9: Candidate Perspectives on Virtual Learning Community Support



In addition to other academic assessments, candidates use micro-credentials offered through the USC College of Education’s mCrED platform to demonstrate developing competencies throughout the three years of their candidate progression. This strategy—along with observation results using the SC Teaching Standards (SCTS) 4.0 rubric—ensures that candidates’ new skills directly translate into effective instruction experienced by their students. However, competency-based learning is inherently intensive, similar to completion of a National Board Certification entry. Thus, candidates now complete eight micro-credentials instead of ten as part of CarolinaCAP completion requirements. Nearly 78% of candidates responding to the end-of-year survey said that micro-credentials helped increase their effectiveness as teachers. (See Figure 7 for further detail on candidates’ perspective on relevance and support of micro-credentials.)

Figure 10: Benefits of Micro-credentials and Related Candidate Supports



Preparing educators to serve the whole student

Research demonstrates that where teachers share backgrounds and life experiences with their students, those students accomplish better learning outcomes (Redding, 2019) and are more likely to be represented in academically gifted or accelerated programs (Grissom, Rodriguez, & Kern, 2017). With its grow-your-own approach, CarolinaCAP is responding to the opportunity to recruit, prepare, and place teachers who are longtime members of the communities they serve in classrooms.

CarolinaCAP enhances that knowledge base with an eye toward growing educators who can engage and support students well. New coursework completed by each candidate focuses on meeting students’ nonacademic needs to build their readiness to learn, and accompanying micro-credentials are available to demonstrate how these competencies are applied. As discussed elsewhere in this report, individuals participating in the CarolinaCAP residency have opportunities to shadow counselors, social workers, and other staff responsible for such supports, giving them more robust knowledge of what is available to students and how they can collaborate with these staff members to meet the needs of the whole student.

Coaching that connects principles to practice

“ Having a coach at my side was important. ...She helped me step back and see what needed to change, and having that support from a veteran mattered. I had my team members in my school, but the opportunity for another perspective was invaluable. [My coach] gave me extra layers of support I would not have had if I hadn’t been part of CarolinaCAP.”

—CarolinaCAP Candidate

Since CarolinaCAP partner districts include a number of rural, small, or otherwise heavily-impacted school systems, their ability to offer consistent coaching support has been an ongoing challenge. CarolinaCAP hired three full-time coach leads starting in fall 2023 to accelerate the depth and frequency of coaching received by CarolinaCAP candidates. A two-day summer immersion experience now also offers extended opportunity for candidates to build relationships and lay groundwork for effective support in the subsequent school year; parallel opportunities for coaches are held each fall.

Site visits conducted in spring 2025 found that coaching support is significantly stronger for candidates as a result of programmatic improvements in the pathway. Each candidate and coach was observed to have solid rapport, and each candidate reported feeling well-supported by coaches with most of the support going to lesson planning and classroom management (see Figure 11).

Almost 87% of candidates feel that they are spending “adequate” or “more than adequate time” with their coaches, with nearly 75% spending an hour or more a week with their coaches (see Figure 12).

Figure 11: In what area(s) does your CarolinaCAP coach assist the most? (n=111)

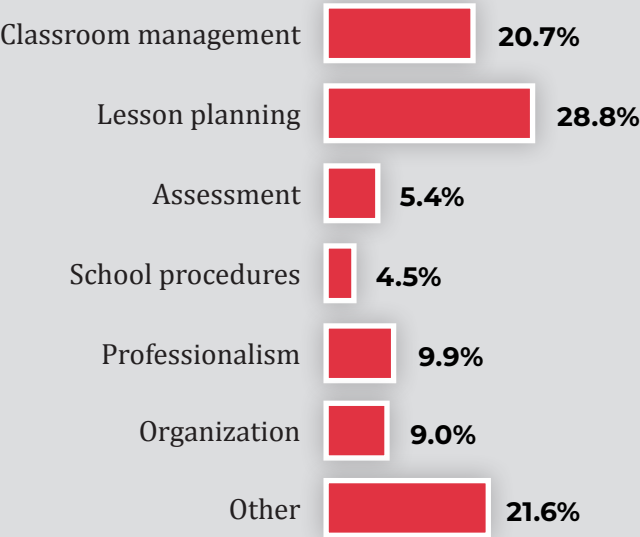
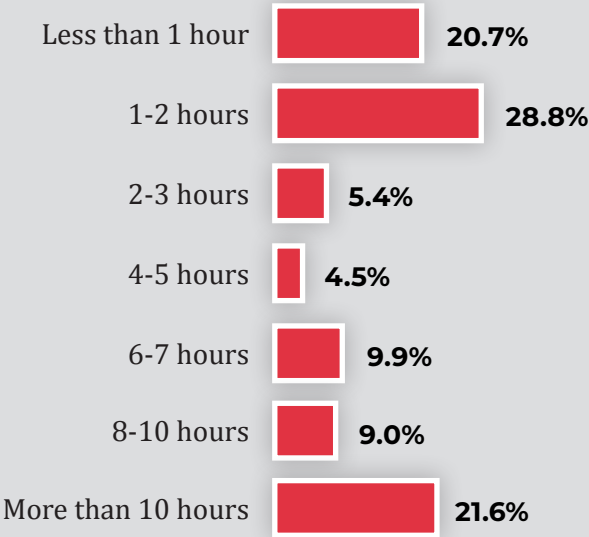


Figure 12: On average, how many hours/week do you spend with your coach? (n=113)



In fact, in one district, four candidates reported that they actually had *too much* support from coaches. While enhanced coordination between school, district, and CarolinaCAP coaches is needed next year, this problem is a good one to have. Other districts continue to stretch instructional coaches' workloads, but coaches on site visits were never supporting more than four candidates. This represents significant improvement over previous years.

Evaluating effectiveness for candidates

Candidate effectiveness can be assessed in three ways: (1) success in meeting requirements to matriculate from a provisional to full professional teaching license, (2) teaching evaluations conducted by the districts that employ them, and (3) less quantitatively but equally importantly, by the perceptions of district and school administrators who have direct experience of their work. CarolinaCAP candidates perform well on each of these measures.

Accomplishing full professional licensure. Because CarolinaCAP is a three-year pathway to full licensure, only three cohorts of candidates have been able to move through the preparation sequence to date. The coronavirus pandemic influenced some of these candidates' ability to meet requirements for observations, testing, etc. on time. However, about two-thirds of candidates are still accomplishing full licensure within the three years, with the balance receiving one-year extensions on their provisional license. By June 2026, CarolinaCAP will have more than 150 fully-licensed program completers in place in SC schools.

Receiving positive evaluations against the SCTS 4.0 rubric. Candidates also participate in regular teaching evaluations through their districts. The results of these evaluations are considered part of candidates' confidential personnel records and details thus cannot be made available to CarolinaCAP. However, candidates' ability to continue receiving provisional licenses or transition to full professional teaching licenses is contingent on satisfactory teaching evaluations. The successful annual progression of CarolinaCAP candidates is therefore a strong indicator that their practice meets or exceeds professional standards.

Growing a reputation for excellence. Routinely positive responses from district superintendents, principals, human resources, and other leaders suggest that the quality of CarolinaCAP candidates' emerging teaching practice is high. As one principal put it during a site visit in spring 2025, "I prefer CarolinaCAP candidates ...[because] the coaching support coupled with the quality of the candidate provides for a better experience [for our school]."

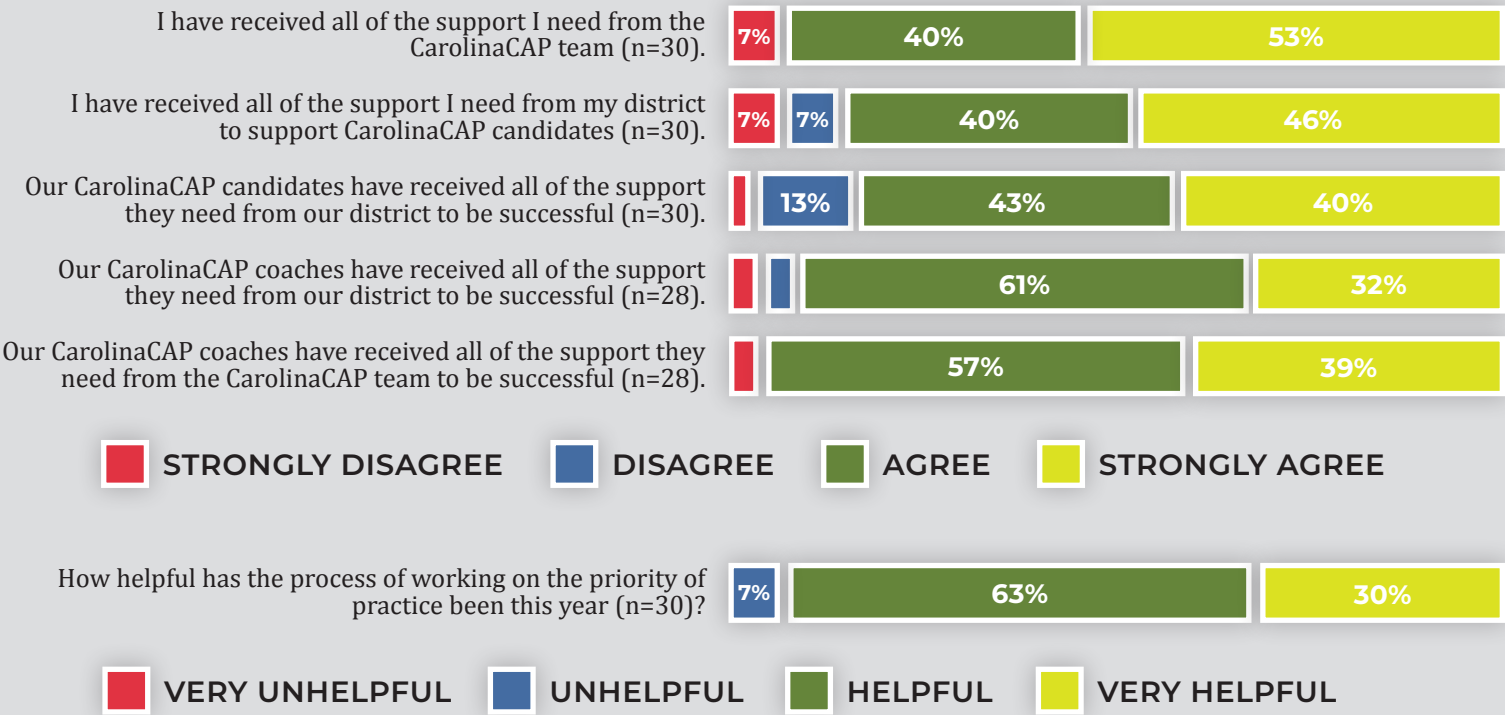
SUPPORTING DISTRICTS AS PLACES OF PREPARATION

“CarolinaCAP is a collaborative effort that empowers teachers as well as school systems! We have been extremely fortunate to have our potential teachers go through CarolinaCAP. The success of the teachers that we get from this collaborative has led directly to improvement in student achievement as well as school morale.”

—LaTonya Parker, Recruitment and Staffing Specialist,
Williamsburg County School District

CarolinaCAP offered a second year of support in 2024-25 to district leadership teams in partner districts, with an emphasis on those placing both residents and candidates. Independent evaluators surveyed district administrators this year, finding high degrees of support for the pathway. Among responding district leaders, 93% “agree” or “strongly agree” that they have received the support they need from the CarolinaCAP staff. Most importantly, 83% of district respondents “agree” or “strongly agree” that candidates and residents receive all of the support they need from the district to be successful.

Figure 13: District Administrators’ Perceptions of CarolinaCAP Supports



The top four reasons provided for choosing CarolinaCAP as a partner were coaching support, opportunities to collaborate with CarolinaCAP team, development of district coaches, and the chance to develop paraprofessionals. (See Figure 14.)

Figure 14: District Perceptions of Key Benefits to Partnership with CarolinaCAP (n=25)



EXPANDING THE VISION FOR CAROLINACAP

CarolinaCAP continues to refine its model to best meet the needs of districts seeking well-prepared and well-suited teaching candidates. CarolinaCAP personnel and partners use ongoing external evaluations, conducted annually, to ensure effectiveness of the pathway and guide programmatic improvements and growth. The external evaluation team has collected data annually via a baseline survey of candidates, annual follow-ups, and (following the pandemic) quarterly site visits. (See Appendix B for the evaluation plan.) These data are the basis of the information reported here and in quarterly reports available on the CarolinaCAP website.

Key growth markers in 2024-25

Last year's report highlighted three areas of focus for CarolinaCAP. As described earlier in this report, the pathway successfully addressed each of these areas as part of its commitment to continuous improvement:

1. **Supporting initial transitions into the classroom.** See pp. 12-13 for discussions of resident and candidate support.
2. **Accelerating district supports.** See pp. 18 for information on support of district-provided coaches and pp. 20-21 for more on district staff and school-based administrator perspectives.
3. **Enhancing communication about benefits and impact of CarolinaCAP.** See p. 4 for discussion of how communications are enhancing the recruitment and profile of the pathway.

A vision for what's ahead

Based on external evaluator reports and feedback from district partners, three priorities for 2025-26 will enable consistently high quality of preparation as CarolinaCAP continues to scale.

1. **Maximize support to those who directly support candidates and residents.** The coaching model presently works well, though coaches can be offered additional, specific guidance on frequency and cadence of coaching tailored to candidates' evolving needs as they grow. Because co-teaching requires much more give and take than traditional mentoring work with student teachers, the coaching teachers with whom residents are paired may require significant shifts in practice. Assistant principals in some buildings have instructional leadership roles and will therefore benefit from receiving communications and learning opportunities alongside principals in CarolinaCAP schools.
2. **Deepen advisory to districts on how to sustain CarolinaCAP requirements in uncertain fiscal times.** Low costs of partnering with CarolinaCAP have not formed a barrier to participation for districts to date. The conclusion of ESSER funds and uncertainty about federal funding cuts to public schools, however, may impact continuation of some positions, including coaching roles. CarolinaCAP will continue to monitor and provide additional advice to districts about strategies to sustain their commitment to the structures that support their work as places of preparation for candidates and residents.

- 3. Enhance special education content across the pathway.** Special education strategies in inclusion classrooms are now included in some early coursework for all CarolinaCAP candidates, and the number of special education teachers providing coaching supports has increased. The number of students with identified special education needs is expected to rise over coming years. Thus, relevant pedagogical and support strategies will need to be even more fully integrated into preparation for all candidates, regardless of their content area.

APPENDIX A: ORIGINAL CAROLINACAP FUNDING PROVISIO

On or before September 30th of Fiscal Year 2021-22, following the development of accountability metrics, \$750,000 of the funds appropriated in this Act to the Department of Education for “Rural Teacher Recruitment” shall be allocated to the University of South Carolina’s College of Education (COE) for the development and implementation of a new teacher recruitment pilot program to be administered by the COE in partnership with the Center for Teaching Quality [CTQ, now Mira Education].

The purpose of the pilot program shall be the employment of innovative and cost-effective teacher recruitment strategies, customized training for new teachers, and dedicated, ongoing mentoring support. The pilot program shall compliment and/or enhance the state’s ongoing rural teacher recruitment initiatives such as those supported pursuant to Part 1A.54 of this Act.

At minimum, the pilot program must assist no fewer than ten school districts to include at least four districts along the I-95 corridor and serve no fewer than 250 teacher candidates. The pilot program shall stipulate reasonable fees for participating candidates and districts and districts shall agree to release time for required on site mentors who shall be experienced, practicing teachers within the district for the purposes of co-teaching with and supporting candidates’ development.

Within participating districts, the pilot program shall emphasize high-need schools and within selected schools, the emphasis shall be on developing teacher candidates teaching in high-need subject areas to include, but not be limited to, STEM and special education with all candidates receiving training in literacy skills.

The pilot program design shall be based on emerging empirical evidence of effective teacher education as well as best practices from recent innovations in university-based and alternative certification and residency programs for the dual purpose of recruiting needed candidates with equal focus on retaining accomplished, experienced teachers utilizing, in part, a model which contains intensive mentoring and support for candidate teachers.

Before any funds are disbursed to the COE, the COE and CTQ [now Mira Education] shall develop accountability metrics for the pilot program that must include, at minimum, employment outcome indicators such as job placement and retention statistics as well as survey instrumentation in order to measure candidate, mentor, and principal satisfaction with the pilot program.

No later than June 30th, program data and evidence collected as a result of this accountability requirement must be shared in report form with the Department of Education, the Education Oversight Committee, the South Carolina Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement, the Commission on Higher Education, the Chairman of the Senate Education Committee, the Chairman of the House Education and Public Works Committee, the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee and the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee.

APPENDIX B:
PROGRAM EVALUATION OVERVIEW

EVIDENCE	TIMELINE
Development, administration, analysis, and reporting of survey of district CAP partners to determine readiness and effectiveness	Baseline survey: June 2020 Impact assessment: June 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024
Annual interviews with administrators, mentors, CarolinaCAP teachers	2020-2025
Focus groups of mentor teachers, CarolinaCAP teachers	Two focus groups per district, per year, 2020-2025
Site visits for up to 10 districts for documentation and triangulation of survey and interview findings	5 days per year, 2020–2025
Student surveys of CAP teachers	June 2021, 2022, 2023 May 2024 and 2025
Demographic data collected from CAP applications to link information to three years of data to determine effectiveness	Collected annually
Student assessment data provided by the school and teachers	2020-2025
Summer experience evaluation with participant feedback via survey	2020-2025
Annual feedback survey from CarolinaCAP candidates	2020-2025

APPENDIX C:
CERTIFICATION AREAS FOR CAROLINACAP
CANDIDATES

CERTIFICATION AREA	NUMBER OF PLACED CANDIDATES
Early Childhood Education	149
Elementary Education	58
Multicategorical Special Education	58
Secondary Biology	1
Secondary Math	2
Middle Level Science	3

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