



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

2025-26 ANNUAL REPORT

page 10



College of Education
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA



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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 embedded nature of teacher preparation through CarolinaCAP provides districts all the benefits of a grow-your-own model without the pressure to run a GYO program all on their own.

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 rural and hard-to-staff schools.

The 2025-26 annual report breaks down specific evidence of how CarolinaCAP continues to raise the bar for preparation of SC's teacher workforce.

- **The candidate pipeline for CarolinaCAP expanded by another 31% since last year.**
- **More than 90% of candidates accomplish full professional licensure on time.**
- **CarolinaCAP has provided more than 38,000 SC public school students with effective teachers.** Over the course of their careers, those educators will serve an estimated 855,000 students across the state.
- **CarolinaCAP has more than doubled the number of Multicategorical Special Education teachers it prepares,** supporting a critical area of need for SC schools.
- **Over half of SC districts continue to partner with CarolinaCAP** to help them “grow their own” educators, providing a long-term solution to chronic staffing challenges. These partners include both traditional districts and the statewide charter district.
- **District human resources directors report that educators prepared through CarolinaCAP are highly likely to be retained** because they come from the local community and are invested in the success of their local schools.
- **CarolinaCAP has tripled the number of coaches it supports.** This added instructional leadership capacity grows the effectiveness of all teachers in partner districts – not just the candidates.
- **Partner districts receive the equivalent of up to \$15,500 per candidate, per year in no-cost services and savings** through CarolinaCAP, including technical assistance, enhanced coaching support, and reduced recruitment and turnover costs.
- **Fifty-nine percent of CarolinaCAP district partners are classified as rural, and a majority 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.

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 41 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. The pathway’s model is tailored to the challenges faced by districts and would-be educators in SC, creating a uniquely successful response to educator pipelines.

A pathway targeted to district 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 teacher 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
<i>For aspiring educators: Low-cost supports</i>	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 36% of departing teachers moved to other districts (Starrett et. al, 2025). In both state surveys and district exit interviews, these "lateral movers" cite strong school cultures and leadership, access to supports for growth, and proximity to family members or spouse employment as key reasons for relocation. CarolinaCAP's grow-your-own model helps districts identify local candidates who are already committed to living in and serving their communities, and who are likely to view the pathway's presence as a signal of the district's innovation and active support

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. Half of all candidates entering in the 2025-26 cohort, and 20% of candidates in the overall CarolinaCAP pipeline, are earning licensure in Multicategorical Special Education.

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, 2024a). This means that up to 28,800 SC students continue to start each fall without permanent, highly-qualified teachers for one or more classes, adversely affecting continuity and quality of instruction. 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 (Learning Policy Institute, 2024b). 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, 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. As one partner district's Director of Human Resources shared, CarolinaCAP residents and candidates "transition into the classroom...and there's no question about our culture and its expectations" because they have been prepared in the same schools they ultimately serve.

Teacher preparation powered by 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, improvement strategy, and impact assessment, supporting CarolinaCAP with ongoing innovation 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.

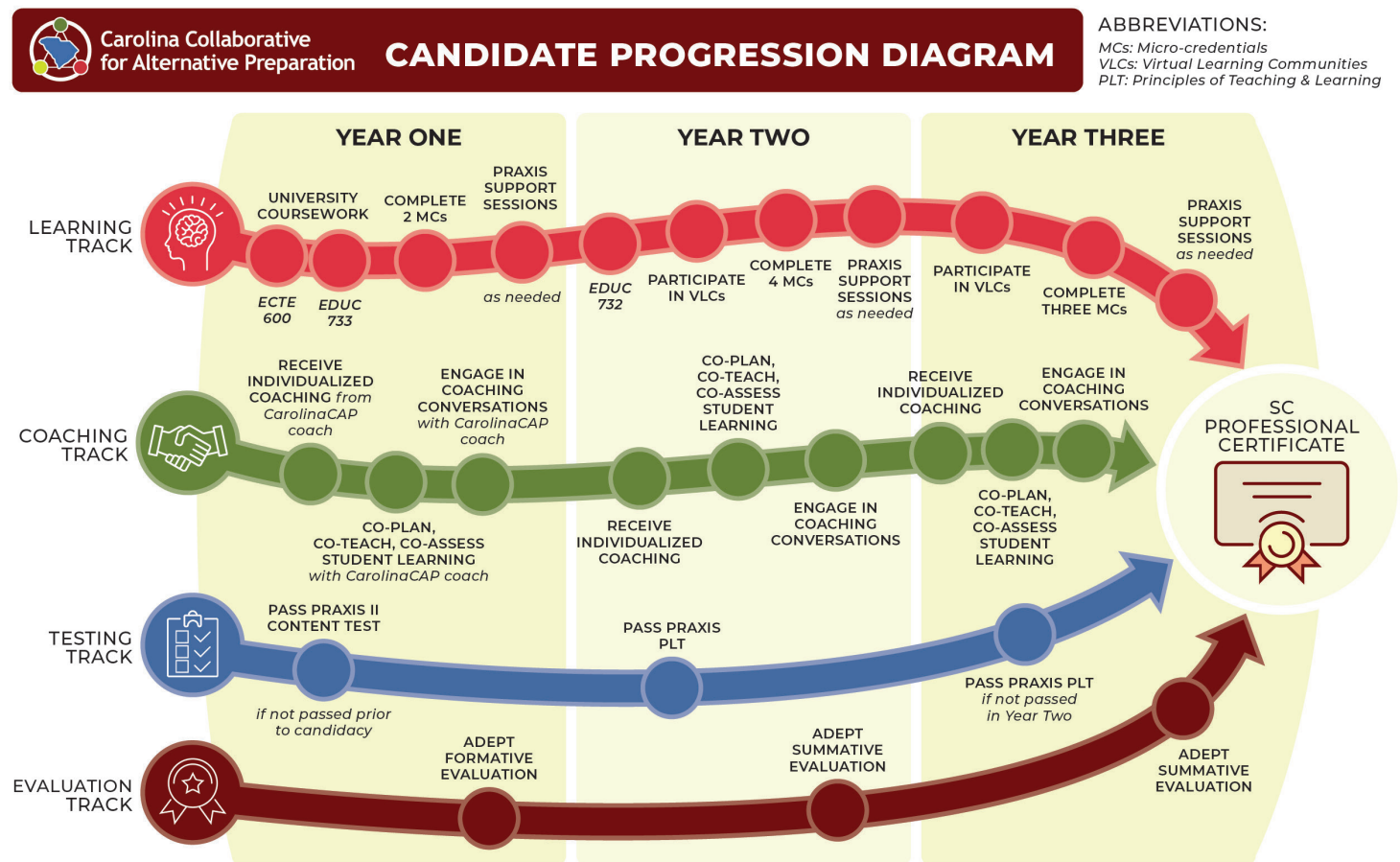
The combined expertise of these partners provides the talent and support needed to cultivate and sustain an innovative certification pathway that supports districts in growing their own teachers. (See CarolinaCAP's website for a [full list of personnel](#) in 2025-26.)

The partnership is made sustainable through several funding sources, primarily by state funds. (See Appendix A for the text of the initial 2019 funding proviso.) Additional appropriations have 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, which pay \$4,500-7,500 per candidate based on whether they qualify for reduced fees via Rural Recruitment Initiative support.

Defined progressions for comprehensive candidate support

Candidates in most preparation pathways focus on completing coursework or other theoretical learning to support the growth of their instructional practice. As a state Registered Apprenticeship Program, CarolinaCAP provides its candidates and residents 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.

Figure 6: Three-Year Candidate Progression for CarolinaCAP



CarolinaCAP's active preparation progression for candidate-practitioners follows four "tracks" of support: learning experiences, coaching, testing, and evaluation. (See Figure 6.) The CarolinaCAP pathway is organized into a series of 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.
- **Capacity-Building for Coaches:** Preparation and support of district-embedded coaches and coaching teachers strengthens the instructional support available to all teachers in partner districts – not just CarolinaCAP candidates and residents.
- **District Pipeline Strategy Supports:** Ongoing technical assistance to superintendents and other key leaders helps each partner district develop their own teacher pipeline strategy to which CarolinaCAP candidates contribute. This support contributes to the impact and sustainability of each element of the pathway, and is growing in importance as increasing numbers of CarolinaCAP educators are fully licensed and retained over time.

Together, these converging supports provide rich grounding in theory, content, and pedagogy that both candidates and their administrators commend, without delaying an effective entry to the classroom.

DELIVERING ON THE PROMISE TO SC CLASSROOMS

“ *We did a lot of recruiting on the outside, but the majority of the candidates that we had were in our district. They were simply looking for a [certification] path that would work for them. CarolinaCAP is that path.”*

—**Dr. Remona Jenkins**, Human Resources Administrator,
CarolinaCAP Partner District

CarolinaCAP has increased the size of its pipeline by more than five times since fall 2020, while sustaining a high degree of confidence among administrators and districts in the quality of the candidates it prepares. Partnerships are key to enabling acceleration of candidate recruitment and placement. In spring 2026, CarolinaCAP initiated a partnership with Morris College to provide a pathway for graduating seniors who discover an interest in teaching during the latter part of their undergraduate experience. Partnerships of this type allow for these individuals to move directly into classrooms in small communities near their alma mater, rather than having to take additional time out of the workforce to pursue a second degree. CarolinaCAP’s high-dose support and coaching structure ensures—as with all candidates—that students are well served by these recruits as their pedagogical skill catches up with their content knowledge.

Scaling the pipeline

In the 2025-26 school year, CarolinaCAP placed 265 teachers, candidates, and residents in 177 schools across South Carolina. (See appendices for more details about district partners and candidates.) For the current year, these figures translate to an additional 8,525 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.

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. (Appendix C contains further details about movement of candidates through the pathway.) CarolinaCAP’s completers to date are on track to make a difference in the learning of between 700,000 and 855,000 SC students over the next two decades of their careers.

The rate of growth in the CarolinaCAP candidate pipeline has slowed in the past few years (Figure 2). In part, this may be a marker of the pathway’s success. District human resources directors indicate that because CarolinaCAP candidates have higher-than-average retention rates, extended participation in the pathway gradually reduces their needs for new staff. Additionally, increasing numbers of districts have begun to operate their own grow-your-own (GYO) programs. Starting in fall 2025, one additional district has licensed the CarolinaCAP to strengthen the quality of candidates it prepares. This approach is still in pilot but offers a promising avenue for CarolinaCAP to scale its impact to every part of the state.

Figure 1: Expansion of CarolinaCAP Candidates, Schools, Districts, and Students Served (2020-2026)

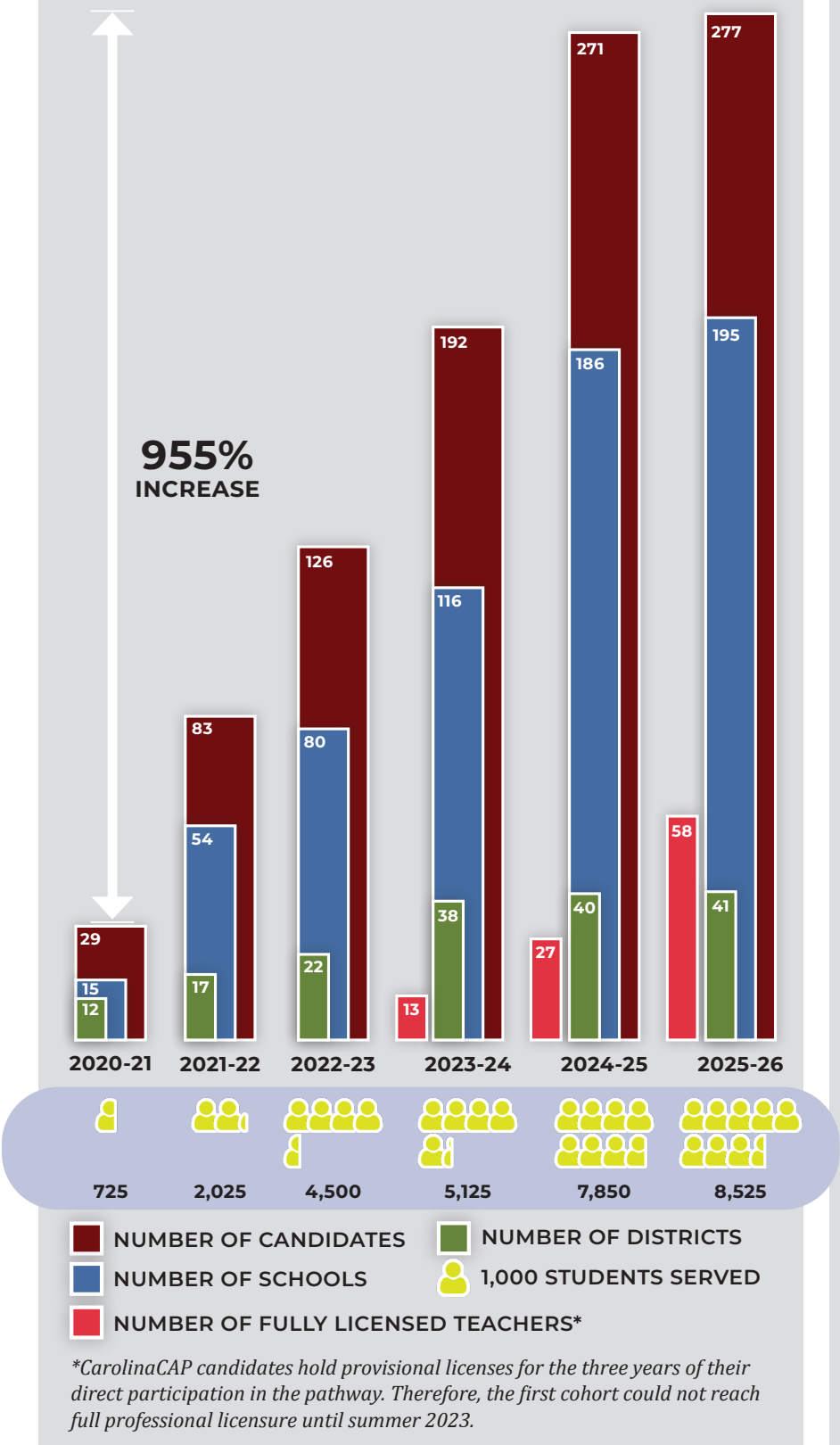
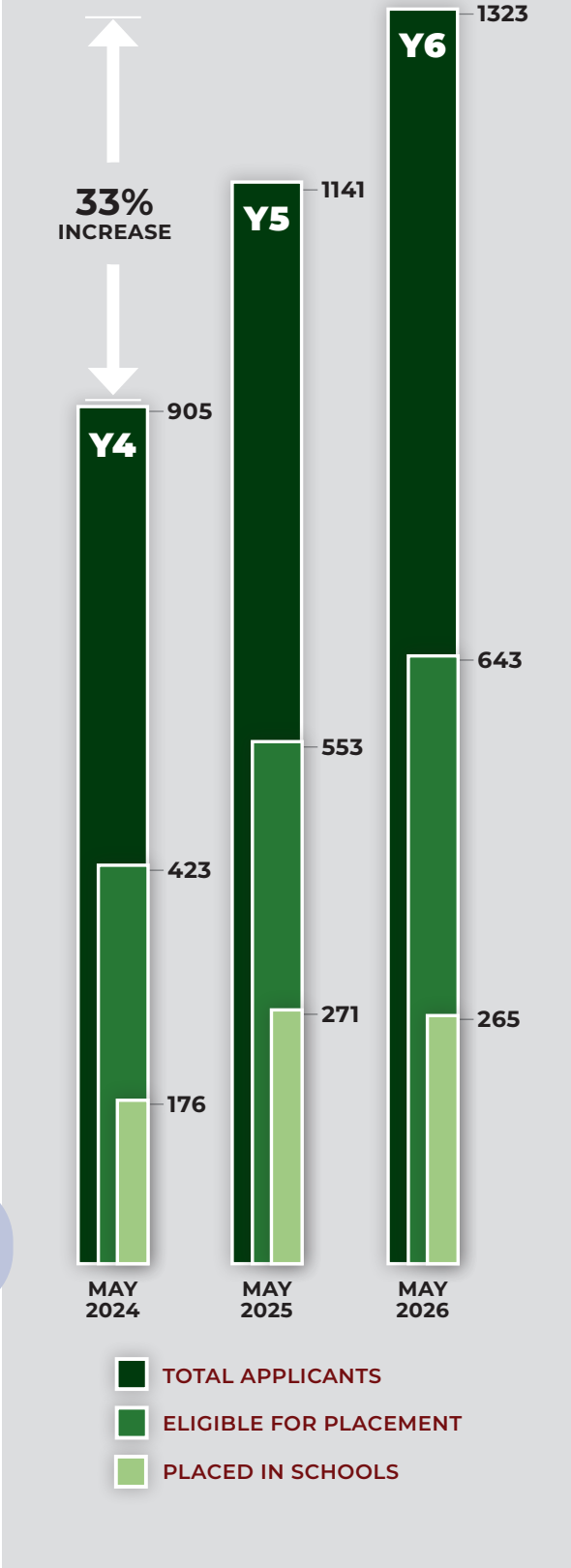


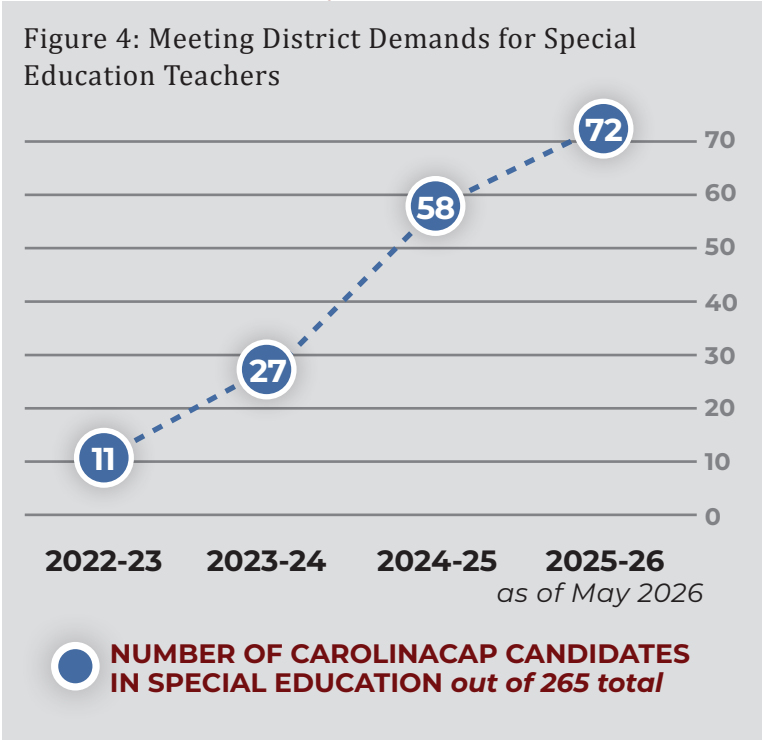
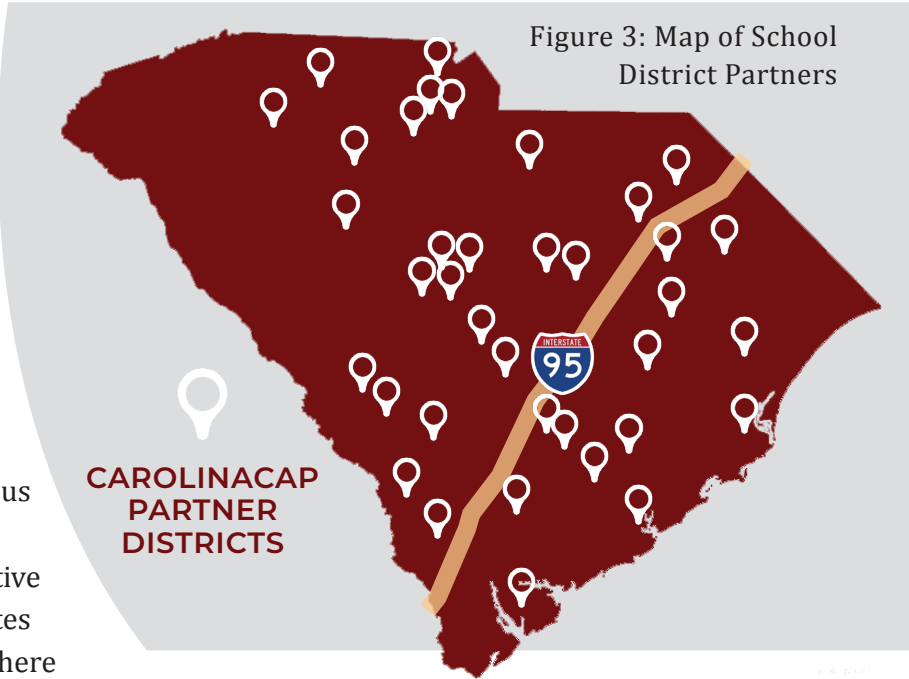
Figure 2: Applicant and Placement Growth in CarolinaCAP, 2023-24 to 2025-26



Reducing vacancies in the hardest-to-staff classrooms

CarolinaCAP partnered with 41 districts in 2025-26. (See Figure 3.) For a second year, 24 of these partner districts and 72 participating school sites are considered rural according to the South Carolina Rural Recruitment Initiative. 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 Price School Meals. CarolinaCAP thus effectively meets its programmatic goals for focus on districts most in need of new, effective teachers. Importantly, CarolinaCAP candidates appear to perform equally well in schools where as few as 36% of students are eligible for Free and Reduced Price Schools Meals. This finding suggests that the preparation model and quality offered by CarolinaCAP is equally effective regardless of school or community context.

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, 72 candidates (up from 58 in 2024-25) are preparing as Multicategorical Special Education teachers. This licensure area currently comprises about 20% of CarolinaCAP’s overall candidate pipeline and continues to grow. (See Figure 4.) In-depth exploration of CarolinaCAP’s support for special education candidates is in a later section of this report.



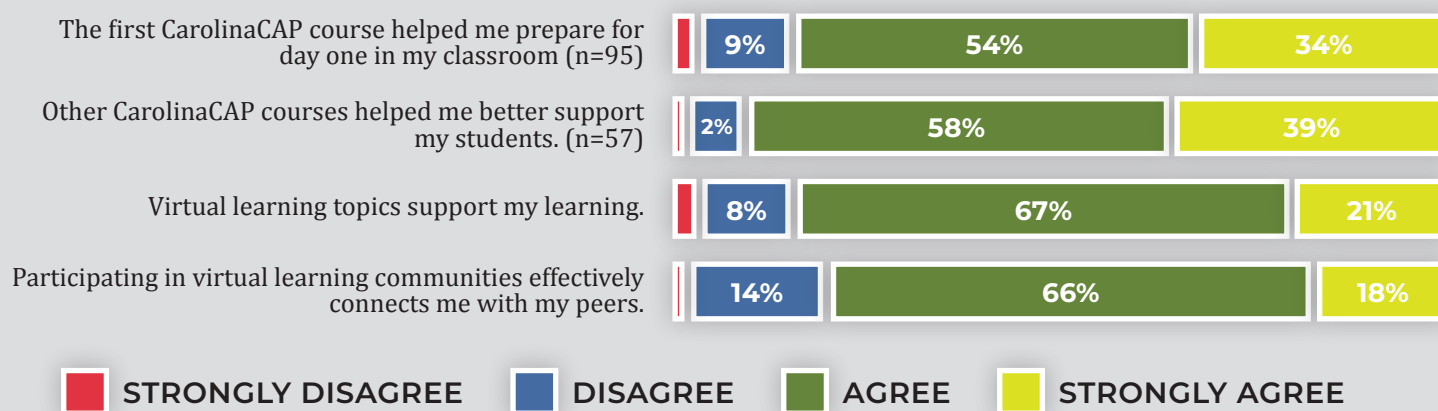
Building effective professional practice

While emphasizing applied learning, CarolinaCAP also requires rigorous coursework. Graduate-level courses taught by faculty at the USC College of Education are required for each candidate, ensuring sufficient theoretical knowledge to make sense of classroom experiences in real time. For some candidates entering the pathway through partnerships with the Center for Educator Preparation and Innovation (EPI Center), additional supports may be supplied from other faculty as a precursor to entry into the main CarolinaCAP pathway.

Coursework receives consistently high marks from CarolinaCAP candidates. Eighty-eight percent of first-year candidates report that their first course prepared them well for their first day in the classroom, and 97% agreed that their capacity to support students well was enhanced by the close of their second course. While coursework in some preparation pathways can feel like a theoretical world set apart from clinical teaching experiences, CarolinaCAP candidates report that the faculty close this gap effectively. Said one candidate, “The professors in the USC courses...care about us and give us practical strategies we can use right away.”

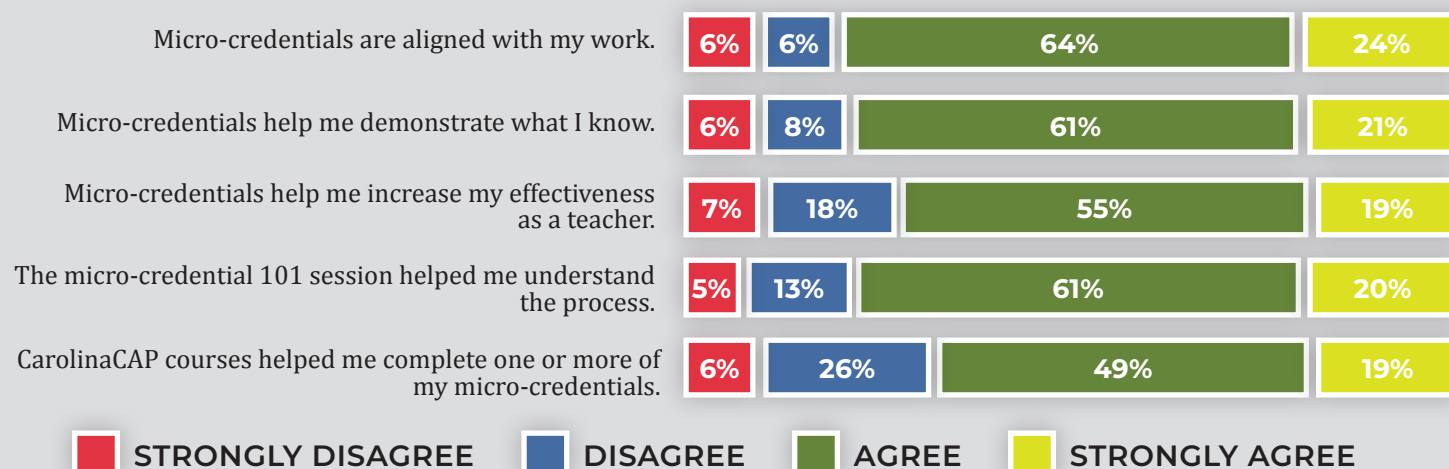
Candidates also participate in virtual learning communities, which enhance and extend coaching supports with “anytime, anywhere” opportunities to connect with peers and coaches. Over 88% of respondents felt that virtual learning communities supported their learning successfully and laid critical groundwork 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 5.)

Figure 5: 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. Candidates report that those theoretical benefits translate into practice, helping them demonstrate what they know (82%) and increase their effectiveness as teachers (74%). (See Figure 6 for further detail on candidates’ perspective on relevance and support of micro-credentials.)

Figure 6: Benefits of Micro-credentials and Related Candidate Supports



Ensuring effective 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 four cohorts of candidates have been able to move through the preparation sequence to date. However, the number of fully-licensed teachers completing CarolinaCAP is therefore expected to grow in coming years, as successively larger cohorts of candidates move through its preparation pipeline. More than 90% of CarolinaCAP residents and candidates each year progress smoothly through the pathway’s benchmarked requirements, which culminate in full professional licensure.

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 unique reputation for excellence. Interviews conducted with school and district-level administrators as part of annual evaluation and site visit activities continue to suggest their belief in the quality of CarolinaCAP supports. Specifically, they mentioned that combining supports both within and outside of classrooms “reduced the strain” on schools to ensure that candidates were effective and well supported. “I wish more [preparation] programs follow[ed] the teacher the way CarolinaCAP does,” one principal shared. District instructional coaches agree, calling the intensive one-on-one support model a “game-changer” for emerging teachers.

Supporting districts to grow their own

“ Districts can build their whole teacher pipeline through CarolinaCAP. You can work with CarolinaCAP and get the same result as if you did it all yourself, but it’s easier on you and it offers more support.”

—Shawnta McKenzie, Director of Human Resources,
Lee 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	2025-26
Percentage of candidates previously employed in non-certified roles	76%	75%	77%	69%	73%	77%

As in prior years, about three quarters of new candidates in 2025-26 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 9.)

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.

However, each district partnering with CarolinaCAP is eligible to receive a range of additional supports for their educator pipeline planning at no additional cost. The dollar value of each can vary—especially since many partner districts might not otherwise access these services if it were not for this partnership. Based on current utilization, we estimate that districts receive up to \$15,500 per candidate per year in free technical assistance, professional learning, and training.

Table 3: Benefits of CarolinaCAP

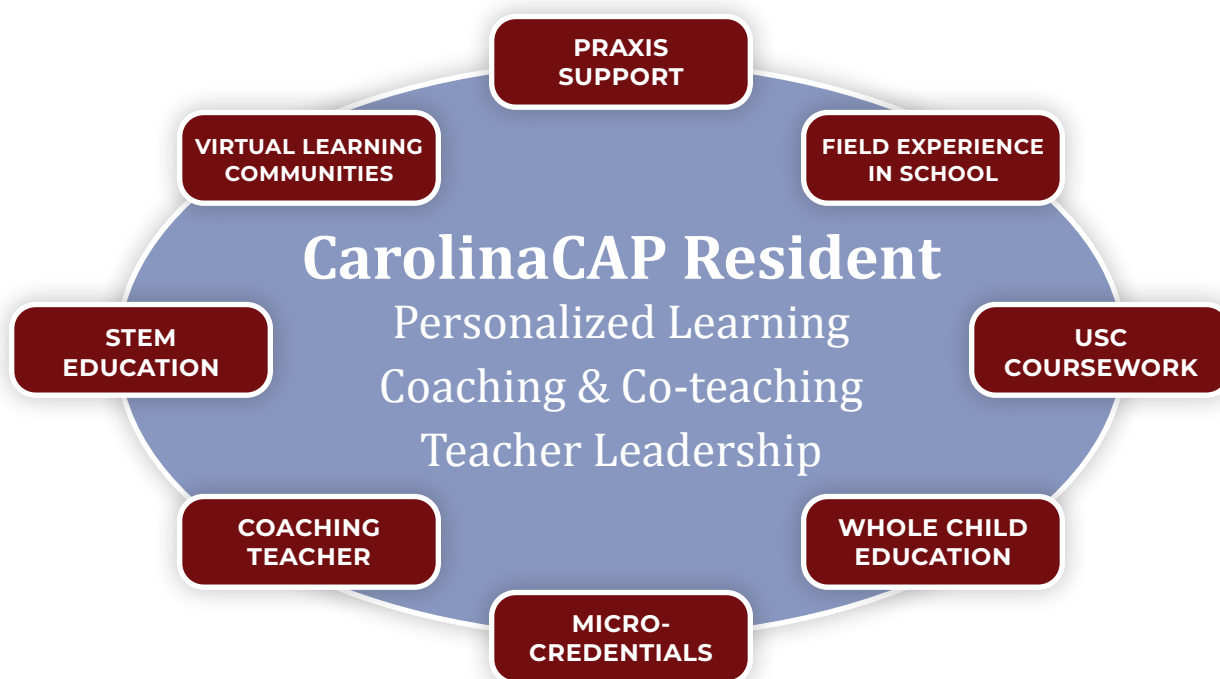
Technical assistance on pipeline development strategy to superintendents and HR administrators, offered through ongoing individualized consulting and group sessions with peers	\$1,000-3,000 per candidate per year
Career advising for incoming candidates	
Networked support from peer districts as part of district meetings	
Savings on recruitment and onboarding for immediate classroom vacancies filled by CarolinaCAP candidates	\$9,000 per candidate
Projected savings on future turnover given candidates' usual pre-existing tenure in local schools	\$1,000-3,000 per candidate per year
Training, mentoring, and support for coaches who support other district teachers alongside CarolinaCAP candidates	\$650 per coach per year
Additional coaching capacity to back up district coaches as needed	\$100-500 per coach per year
Professional development on serving special education students to prepare every candidate with what she needs to know about IEP/504 plan compliance and instructional supports in mainstream classrooms	\$500 per candidate
Evidence of impact on staffing and effectiveness to educate district leadership and school board members on success of pipeline strategies, provided through annual pathway evaluations	\$100-500 per coach per year

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—another source of savings and cost-effectiveness for CarolinaCAP partner districts.

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 7.)

Figure 7: Elements in CarolinaCAP’s state-of-the-art residency model



Residency as “pre-apprenticeship”

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;

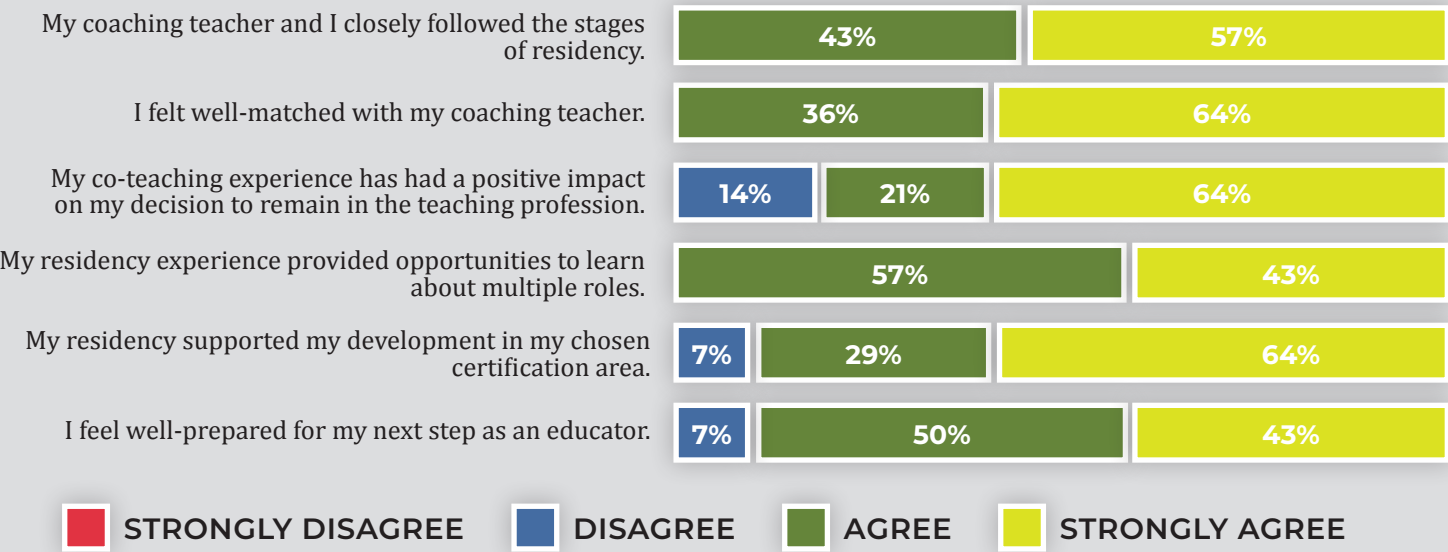
- Extended Praxis preparation to boost pass rates for each portion of the exam;
- Coursework with university faculty; and
- Micro-credentials to verify developing competencies for teaching, aligned with the SCTS 4.0 rubric.

Sharpening results from a sharpened model

CarolinaCAP supported a third cohort of 18 residents in a pre-apprenticeship year in 2025-26. For a second year, all residents but one successfully completed residency year requirements to accomplish provisional licensure and “bridge” to the main CarolinaCAP pathway. Principals and coaching teachers are nearly unanimous that a crisply structured co-teaching approach is critical to the success and retention of residents. More tightly defined target “stages” for residency describe exactly what residents and coaching teachers each do—and do not do—in each quarter of the school year, allowing residents to progress from more observational and assisting roles into more independent but supervised practice teaching.

Among residents responding to the end of year survey (Figure 8), 100% agreed or strongly agreed that they and their coaching teachers closely followed the stages of residency, that they were well-matched, and that they had the opportunity to learn about multiple roles. The residency helped 93% of respondents feel better prepared for their next step in education. Additionally, 86% reported that the residency had a positive impact on their decision to remain in teaching, and 93% felt supported in their development in their chosen certification area.

Figure 8: Candidate Experiences with CarolinaCAP Coaches



GROWING WITH THE NEEDS OF SC SCHOOLS

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 evaluation activities to ensure effectiveness of the pathway and guide programmatic improvements and growth. An 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.

Deepening preparation for special education students

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). A majority of CarolinaCAP districts face chronic needs for Multicategorical Special Education teachers as well. However, as of spring 2026, some districts that have enjoyed multiyear engagement with CarolinaCAP report that targeted placements and high retention of CarolinaCAP candidates lead them to “see where we may even have a surplus of special education teachers a few years from now.” Further discussion of how this impacts pipeline strategy for districts is addressed in a later section.

“CarolinaCAP is a proven, sustainable pipeline for teacher retention. It’s working well...and this is the first year we’re going into recruitment season not having any needs for special ed teachers.”

—Warren Joye, Special Services Coordinator,
Lee Co. School District

As the number of Multicategorical Special Education teachers prepared via CarolinaCAP scales, the pathway also seeks to increase rigor and breadth of experience for these candidates. This certification area is unusually complex given the wide range of student needs served, intensive documentation and compliance work, and management of multiple stakeholders involved in support for each student.

District leaders continue to report that CarolinaCAP candidates are “at least as good” as other new special education teachers. However, CarolinaCAP staff, school-level staff, and candidates agree that additional preparation with writing 504 and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), IEP software, and a wider range of pedagogical strategies would greatly improve effectiveness and confidence. In 2026-27, CarolinaCAP will implement plans to offer a completely separate, dedicated sequence of coursework for Multicategorical Special Education candidates to address these needs.

The increasing availability of special education teachers in CarolinaCAP partner districts is leading some to experiment with opportunities to bring multiple teachers’ expertise to students in mainstream and self-contained classrooms alike. Lee County already assigns residents to co-teach with special education and general

education teachers, ensuring they build targeted skills for special education classrooms alongside strong overall understanding of standards-aligned pedagogy more generally. District staff predict that high retention rates of CarolinaCAP candidates will result in a surplus of special education teachers in the next few years. If so, strategic staffing and co-teaching approaches open opportunities to increase early identification of students with special needs—or broader personalization of learning strategies for every student in the district. [Learn more about Lee County’s success and innovation through CarolinaCAP.](#)

Refining coaching models for success at scale

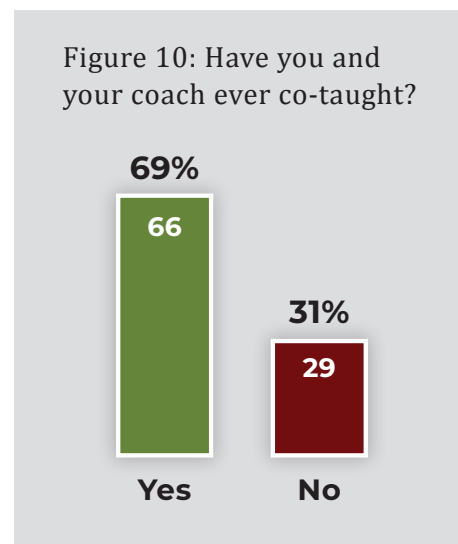
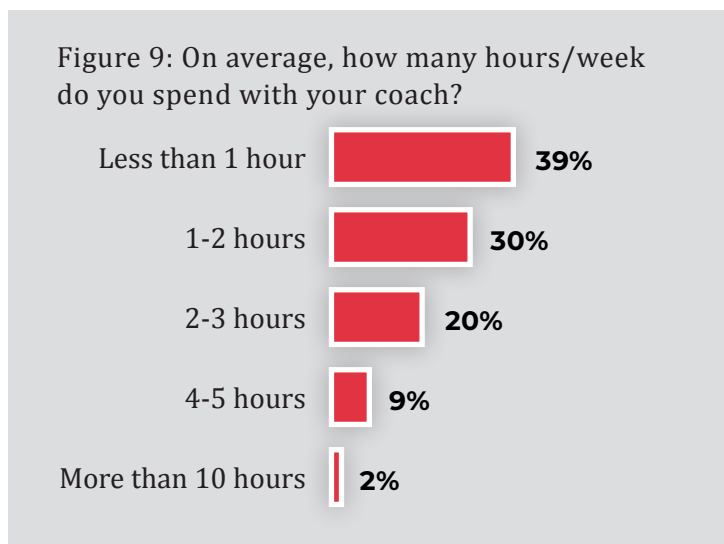
“CarolinaCAP doesn’t just require that you have coaching [for candidates]. They provide coaching for the coaches.”

—**Tonya Addison**, Director of Teacher Quality
Sumter School District

Williamsburg Co. School District has reduced the number of uncertified teachers in its classrooms by 85% through its multiyear partnership with CarolinaCAP. The strong coaching model has been a key to success. Residents, candidates, and administrators cite it as a factor in retention of these new educators “from day one” based on how it grows their skill and confidence. Because CarolinaCAP’s coaching model is built on enhancing skills of existing instructional coaches, participation in the pathway can strengthen the district’s coaching model as a whole—growing effectiveness even in classrooms without CarolinaCAP residents and candidates. [Learn more about how the pathway works in Williamsburg Co.](#)

Coaches and coaching teachers feel well-prepared to support CarolinaCAP candidates and residents with activities that embed skills for effective instruction directly into their classroom practice. Both groups also noted the responsiveness of the Coach Leads, faculty, and other CarolinaCAP staff in assisting them with emerging challenges and needs. However, limited time remains a hurdle for both groups. Balancing coaching for candidates with other professional duties can make scheduling complex and limit access to the ongoing professional learning they require to keep their own skills sharp.

Sixty-one percent of candidates reported spending an hour or more a week with their coaches (see Figure 9). A large majority (85% of candidates) still report feeling that coaching time is “adequate” or “more than adequate” time. CarolinaCAP will continue to monitor actual coaching contact time as well as its perceived sufficiency and effectiveness to be sure that coaching continues to deliver results and support to candidates. Additionally, the pathway will collect data from coaches and partner districts starting in fall 2026 to monitor overall coaching load, including both the CarolinaCAP candidates and other educators supported by each coach.



A reported seven-point increase in the practice of co-teaching this year (and 29-point increase over the past two years) is one possible reason that the slight decrease in candidates' time with coaches has not affected perceived support. Co-teaching is a required component of the CarolinaCAP residency, and is an evidence-based best practice for teacher preparation across all contexts—particularly in special education and other hard-to-staff fields where just-in-time support can be critical for candidates (Damiani & Drelick, 2024; Jones & Winters, 2023).

One candidate noted that co-teaching “showed me how [my coach’s] teaching brain works,” reinforcing other research findings about the value of this strategy to build candidates’ understanding of decision-making processes and contextualized rationales for specific instructional moves—not just rote implementation of classroom practices. This topic requires further exploration over coming years, but the ongoing growth of co-teaching within CarolinaCAP may be one factor in building the unusually mature professional judgment that administrators report among CarolinaCAP candidates from their early years in the classroom.

Increasingly, district and school administrators report that instructional coaches who work with CarolinaCAP are increasing their skills as coaches and instructional leaders. Several partner districts have also inquired about the possibility to send coaches who are not coaching candidates to CarolinaCAP coach training sessions. These inquiries and comments have become consistent enough to warrant more formal exploration in next year’s evaluation activities. They also prompt CarolinaCAP to consider how expanding these supports might increase the value of the pathway as a source of not just staffing, but accelerated instructional effectiveness and improvement across the state.

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.

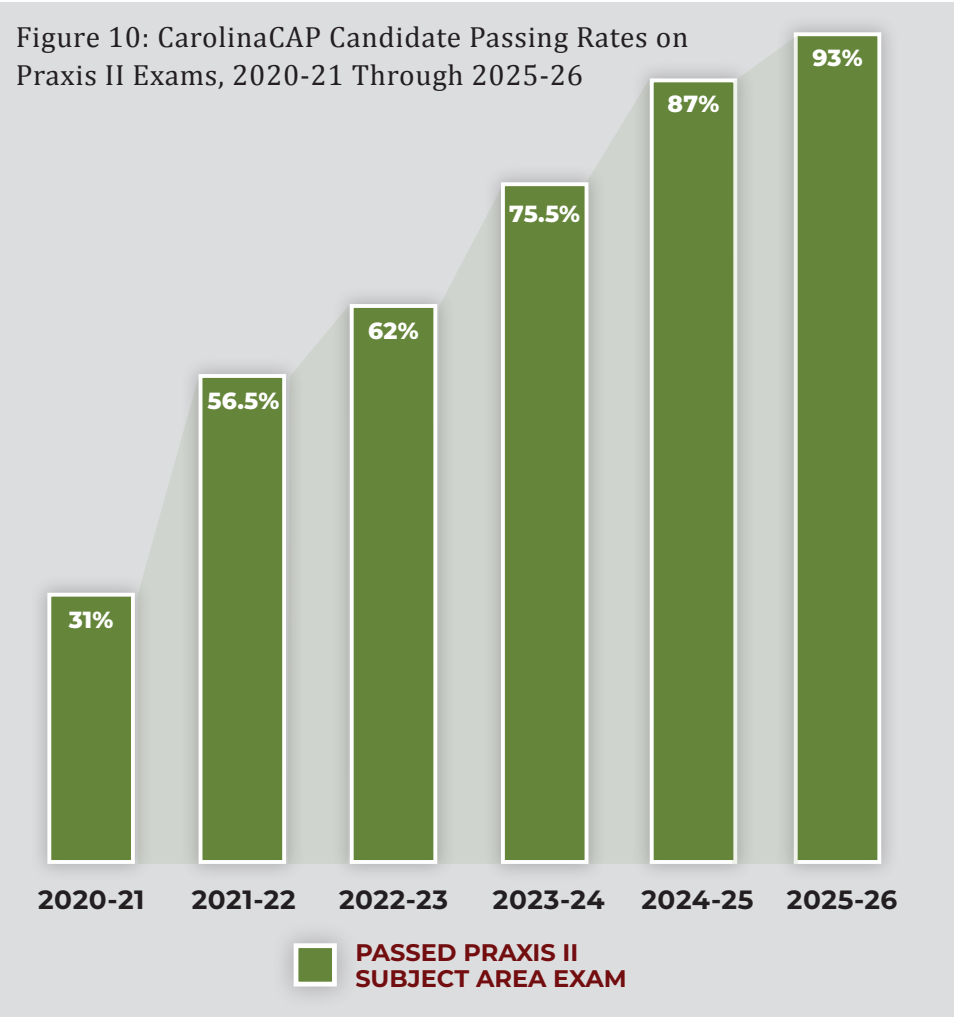
CarolinaCAP enhances that knowledge base with an eye toward growing educators who can engage and support students well. Coursework completed by each candidate focuses on meeting students’ nonacademic needs to build their readiness to learn, and accompanying micro-credentials are available to demonstrate how these competencies are applied. Candidates report that they get “specific, actionable strategies” from coaches that include advice on improving student engagement and other elements of ensuring that readiness for learning is in place. CarolinaCAP residents 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.

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 10.) As a result, a greater number of candidates can successfully complete requirements for program completion and full licensure.



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. 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. Many partner districts have also implemented study groups that accelerate test preparation and pass rates.
- 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.)

CarolinaCAP's success in preparing teachers through one of the most common hurdles to full professional licensure is notable – and unusual in the field. While the pathway does not anticipate offering Praxis preparation as a separate service, its model can be a helpful and influential one for other alternative and traditional preparation programs across the state.

APPENDIX A: ORIGINAL CAROLINACAP FUNDING PROVISO

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 of each year (2021-2026)
Annual interviews with administrators, mentors, CarolinaCAP teachers	2020-2026
Focus groups of mentor teachers, CarolinaCAP teachers	Two focus groups per district, per year, 2020-2026
Site visits for up to 10 districts for documentation and triangulation of survey and interview findings	5 days per year, 2020–2026
Student surveys of CAP teachers	June 2021, 2022, and 2023 May 2024, 2025, and 2026
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	2020-2026
Summer experience evaluation with participant feedback via survey	2020-2025 <i>2026 data collected but not reported due to timing of report</i>
Annual feedback survey from CarolinaCAP candidates	2020-2026

APPENDIX C:
CERTIFICATION AREAS FOR CAROLINACAP
CANDIDATES

CERTIFICATION AREA	NUMBER OF PLACED CANDIDATES	
	2024-25	2025-26
Early Childhood Education	149	136
Elementary Education	58	50
Multicategorical Special Education	58	72
Secondary Science	3	2
Secondary Math	3	2
Total Candidates	271	262

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