

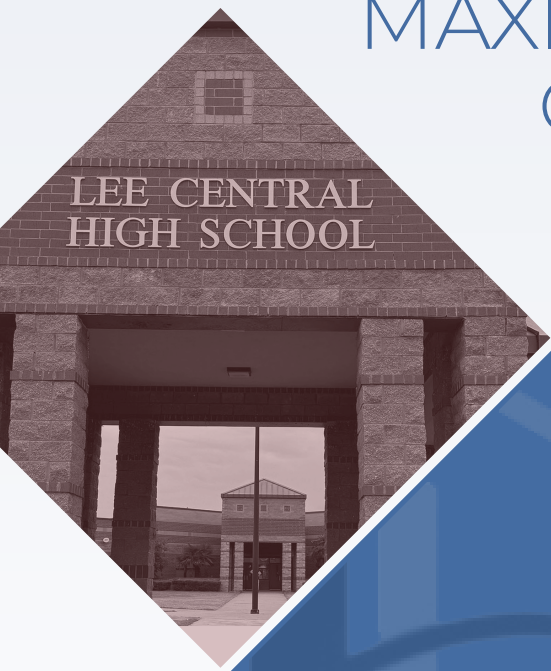


**Carolina Collaborative
for Alternative Preparation**
Spurring Innovation Through Collaboration

CASE STUDY

LEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

MAXIMIZING THE POTENTIAL OF A CAROLINACAP PARTNERSHIP



THE CHALLENGE

Like many communities near the I-95 corridor, Lee County has deep rural roots and a population on a steady decline over the past 20 years. As of 2025, lower enrollments have prompted the Lee County School District to consolidate their 1,400 students into just three buildings to reduce budget pressures while keeping academic and whole-child supports in place.

The rural nature of the community and high needs among students have also complicated the district's efforts to attract effective, certified educators. As Ms. Shawnta McKenzie, Director of Human Resources for Lee County School District, reflects, "These college students who graduate aren't looking to come here. We...don't have all the things they want in their first few years out of school. They want to be in a city." The district spent years "on the wheel" of job fairs that took up extensive time and money, and too often ended with teachers moving to other districts a few years later.

However, Lee Co.—as a school district and community—is determined to lean into the strength of its relationships to fuel innovation and resilience. Ms. McKenzie and other leaders in the district realized that if they wanted sufficient and effective teachers, they needed to grow their own from within Lee County itself. "But," she notes, "we didn't have the ability to do that on our own in a small district."

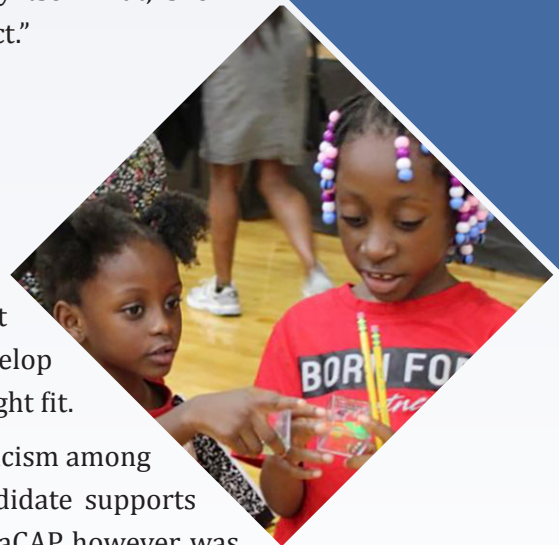
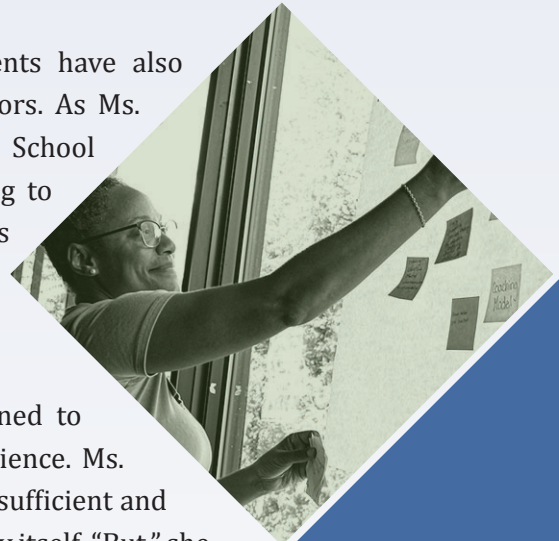
PARTNERSHIP WITH CAROLINACAP

Ms. McKenzie recalls receiving a call from CarolinaCAP Director Dr. Tria Grant in 2020, asking if Lee County wanted to be among the first districts to partner with the pathway that fall. As an opportunity to develop their own educators but to do so with support, partnership felt like a right fit.

Prior experiences with alternate certification programs had built skepticism among both district and school personnel, who worried that promised candidate supports might not materialize. They soon realized that partnership with CarolinaCAP, however, was more than a promise; it was a way of working with every person who engaged with candidates. Special Services Coordinator Mr. Warren Joye describes it as "a total support approach...to the candidate teachers, the mentor teachers, but also to the principal. It provides the total support that wraps around everybody."

SPECIALIZED SUPPORT

One example of this comprehensive support arose in how Lee County supported CarolinaCAP residents serving in Multicategorical Special Education classrooms. While co-teaching with special education teachers provided essential experience, district administrators wanted residents to receive strong learning opportunities in content-focused classrooms as well, enhancing their knowledge of base state standards for instruction. The district elected to pair residents with not one but two teachers who could provide a range of opportunities—a departure from how most districts implement the CarolinaCAP model, but one the pathway supported to meet a partner district's needs.



HOW THE PATHWAY WORKS IN LEE COUNTY

More than 70% of CarolinaCAP candidates statewide are former classified staff who already know the schools and students well. In a small community like Lee County, each of these emerging educators is known by name and hometown, and often by the year of their graduation from a high school in the district where they now teach.

CarolinaCAP has standard progressions to support both residents (in a “pre-apprenticeship” year) and candidates who teach on provisional licenses while completing their certification requirements and formal learning. Needs and capacity within each district, however, shape ways support is shared.

- **Wraparound coaching:** Most CarolinaCAP educators in Lee County start as residents, paired with experienced coaching teachers in a paced co-teaching model to support their exploration of a teaching career. Once this “pre-apprenticeship” is complete, they become candidate teachers in their own classrooms, with ongoing support from district-based coaches. CarolinaCAP provides professional learning and coaching to all these expert and emerging educators.

“I have someone side-by-side to answer [my questions],” said one resident. “I don’t have to have a gap where I have to email someone about a question and I’m waiting while the students are waiting.”

- **Dedicated Praxis support:** Residents have carve-outs of time during each school week when they can study together for the Praxis. This approach has grown collegial bonds among residents, created opportunities for coaches and principals to extend mentoring, and resulted in a 100% Praxis passage rate. “I actually passed my initial Praxis exam early,” said one resident. “But even if I’m on another level, I can still benefit. I can explain what I know to other residents. ...And I think that helps me learn what I need [for the next exam].”

- **Cross-district collaboration:** The successful Praxis support structure actually originated in Charleston County. Principals and district staff noted that recurring meetings with other partner districts has been “critical” as a way to problem-solve and share best practices with peers as well as CarolinaCAP staff.

- **Accessibility:** District office leaders and principals universally praise the accessibility of key CarolinaCAP staff, noting that from Dr. Grant’s first call, they had always enjoyed consistent, personal outreach. Being on a first-name and cell-phone basis reassured them that they weren’t alone in facing challenges of any size; they had a partner.



THE IMPACT

The most obvious change created by engagement with CarolinaCAP has been reliably staffed classrooms. However, CarolinaCAP participation has created three other important shifts for Lee County that position it well for the future:

- **Connected culture:** “Growing your own” in Lee County is literal: one resident now co-teaches with her former middle school teacher. Yet even when residents come from outside the area, says Ms. McKenzie, “they 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 go on to serve as fully-certified professionals.
- **Fully staffed special education roles:** Lee County district staff call CarolinaCAP “a proven, sustainable pipeline for teacher retention” even in hard-to-staff positions. Currently, the district projects no open special education positions for 2026-27 and “can see where we may even have a surplus of SpEd teachers a few years from now.”
- **Instructional excellence:** Candidates and residents improve their practice through CarolinaCAP—but so do the expert educators who support them. “You know, you’re talking about your staff leveling up and thinking differently about how to be really consistent with their modeling, how to be really explicit with what they know,” said Lee Central Elementary Principal LaToya Boyd. Coaches echoed this and added that the staged process of co-teaching learned through CarolinaCAP strengthened how they do all mentoring with new teachers in the district.

VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOMS

The voices from within classrooms perhaps say it best, as they reflect on what the CarolinaCAP experience has meant for them personally and professionally:

- **Ms. Deneisha McKella**, a coach at Lee Central Middle, noted the importance of collaboration that CarolinaCAP has accelerated: *“In some of our virtual meetings with other coaches, we went in breakout rooms and we could... talk about our residents and candidates, and ...you kind of learned from the other people. And then with Lashawn [the site coach], we started thinking about how we in our classrooms here can still learn from each other. We’re doing our own little cohort now.”*
- **Ms. Yolanda Holmes**, a resident at Lee Central Elementary, noted how CarolinaCAP made it possible for her to go from occasional substitute to full-time educator: *“I served as a sub here in Lee County. I wanted to teach, but I was in another career before and it didn’t make sense to go back school to do those all those years of just studying. And then I could have in-class learning side-by-side with a mentor and also being able to be right in with students and also seeing the whole realm of education. It was a better fit, a better way for me to move quickly.”*
- **Kevin Wilson**, principal at Lee Central High and a native of a neighboring rural community, talked about ways that the opportunity CarolinaCAP presents is core to making the most of the benefits of being a small district: *“We’re constantly skilling up ourselves at the same time we’re supporting our teachers and their growth and their learning process, because we know things are changing constantly before us. ...Great things come out of small places, you know, when we get focused and get intentional.”*



RIPPLE EFFECTS

Technically, CarolinaCAP is a teacher preparation and certification pathway. As Lee County moves out of emergency staffing mode thanks to retained candidates, CarolinaCAP is also becoming a pathway for strategic pipeline planning. Hiring season can feel overwhelming as HR directors rush among job fairs, sometimes with little return, but things have begun to change for Lee County. Their HR staff is now being pursued by potential candidates who want to come into the district via CarolinaCAP and is re-evaluating the necessity of some formerly routine recruitment efforts.

“I’ve been asked if we’re having a recruitment fair. I say maybe, because we already have CarolinaCAP residents who already passed their tests or who are close to passing their tests and they can teach next year.... Yes, we can look at other people [from outside the district] sometimes but our focus is on who we’ve already invested in and who’s chosen us.”

—Shawnta McKenzie, Director of Human Resources
Lee Co. School District

While many districts around the state have launched or explored having their own apprenticeship programs, Lee County will not follow suit—especially as a smaller district that is focused on making the quality of each educator’s preparation count. “Districts can build their whole teacher pipeline through CarolinaCAP,” says Ms. McKenzie. “You can work with CarolinaCAP and get the same result but it’s easier on you and it offers more support.”



LOOKING FORWARD

“You want to invest in your people in your district. You do that by investing in CarolinaCAP.”

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

Even though Lee County schools anticipate fewer chronic vacancies in the future, the district plans to continue its partnership with CarolinaCAP for the foreseeable future. Educators receive access to high-quality but fast-tracked preparation, principals and coaches find opportunities for growth and meaningful leadership without needing to leave their schools, and the district can ensure every classroom is staffed well. Most of all, staff throughout the district describe how personally meaningful it is to support one another as part of a partnership: “It’s intentional, the way we work together—here, and with CarolinaCAP.”

Want to cultivate the next generation of teachers in your district? Discover how CarolinaCAP can help you establish a sustainable pipeline of certified, community-rooted educators who are well-prepared to thrive in your schools. Connect with us today to start the planting seeds of lasting impact.

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