

2025 Community Partner Award

This award recognizes a community partner that has engaged in the development of a sustained, reciprocal partnership with an NC Campus Engagement member institution.

R.N. Harris Elementary School is an integrated arts, core knowledge magnet school in Durham, NC

For more than a decade, R.N. Harris Elementary School and North Carolina Central University (NCCU) have engaged in collaborative programming and a sustained transformative partnership that has been instrumental in helping the elementary students excel academically, behaviorally, and social-emotionally, while aligning with NCCU's commitment to "truth and service." The eagle is the mascot for both schools and this partnership is an exemplary example of how mutually beneficial partnerships can help everyone soar.

The America READS program has been a cornerstone of the collaboration since 2013. Coordinated by NCCU's Engagement and Service office, students provide crucial one-on-one tutoring to K-3 students reading below grade level. Results of the program evaluation, which include pre and post-assessments, reveal that 24% of participating students had improved word recognition, 22% increased reading fluency and 20% increased vocabulary. This program has been particularly effective in supporting R.N. Elementary School's goal of having every child read at grade level by the end of third grade.

NCCU has also supported literacy and fostered a love for reading among the elementary students through:

- A Book Drive that allowed NCCU faculty, staff, administrators and students to select and donate books.
- The Read Across America program.
- A Read-a-Thon that featured student readers from R. N. Harris, along with NCCU students, faculty, staff and administrators. This daylong continuous reading event was carried out in concert with National Literacy Week.
- The National African American Read-in has celebrated diversity in literature, aligning with NCCU's commitment to cultural awareness and inclusion.



Other innovative initiatives in this partnership include:

- The 1908 Project and a Career Fair exposed elementary students to future possibilities and the importance of higher education. Both programs were facilitated by the New Student and Family Programs Office.
- The Aramark Nutrition Project in which NCCU's Aramark dining services contributed to the well-being of the elementary students' through nutrition and food service support.
- NCCU's Department of Library Science provided valuable resources and expertise, enhancing the information literacy skills of the elementary students.
- NCCU hosted field trips to campus to give elementary students early exposure to higher education, planting seeds for future academic aspiration.

While the feedback from R.N. Harris students and staff has been overwhelmingly positive, NCCU students have also benefitted from the opportunity to engage in valuable experiential learning opportunities. This is especially true of Education majors who are able to fulfill their requirements in classroom settings for graduation and licensure.

The partnership is anchored by open communication and undergirded by an annual Memorandum of Understanding to clarify the relationship and responsibilities.

In the words of the R.N. Harris nomination, "Our partnership with NCCU exemplifies the power of university-assisted community schools. It has significantly enriched our educational environment and provided our students with resources and experiences that extend far beyond the traditional classroom."

