

TOP EDUCATION ISSUES 2024-25 MEASURING PROGRESS

Our Top Education Issues represent the Public School Forum's policy agenda for the 2024-25 biennium.

- 1 Ensure fair and competitive compensation for educators.
- 2 Address the root causes of mental health and school safety crises.
- 3 Grow, retain, and diversify the teacher pipeline.
- 4 Prepare students for the world they live in.
- 5 Implement, monitor, and evaluate the Comprehensive Remedial Plan.

Public School Forum Core Policy Priorities

These ongoing policy priorities encompass what we stand for and what we work to achieve. These priorities guide the development of our Top Education Issues each biennium.

Ongoing Policy Priorities



Recognize and value public education as a public good



Recruit and retain a highly effective, diverse educator workforce



Fully and equitably fund public schools



Provide safe, supportive, inclusive schools for each and every child



Eliminate the opportunity gap

Top Education Issues 2024-25

The Public School Forum's Top Education Issues outlines the Forum's priorities on what should be at the forefront of education policy decision-making each legislative biennium as we work toward eliminating the systemic inequities that exist throughout our educational system and ensuring that every child has access to a high-quality education. The Forum's [2023-24 Top Issues](#) identified a set of actions that we hoped to see our policymakers address during the 2023-2025 legislative biennium. Over the past twelve months, our team has worked toward and tracked progress on specific metrics for each of our policy priorities.

Districts continue to face high levels of [teacher vacancies and attrition](#), as well as chronically low educator and staff pay and underfunded schools. These elements, combined with the [impending ESSER funding cliff](#) and growing education culture wars during a particularly volatile election year have fostered an incredibly challenging environment for our students, schools, and educators. Overall, we found that while progress has been made on some metrics- including an expansion of the NC Teaching Fellows program and other initiatives to grow the educator pipeline- we are still far from meeting the educational needs of our students, to which they are constitutionally guaranteed.



Metric Progress Key

- = No progress or regression on the metric
- = Minimal progress on metric
- = Significant, but incomplete progress on metric
- = Met or exceeded metric

Ensure fair and competitive compensation for educators.

Recommended policy actions

Increase state-funded base pay for teachers by 24.5% to reach the national average and eliminate the teacher pay penalty.

Compensate teachers for additional duties and workload.

Reinstate masters pay for teachers.

Provide funding to pay student teachers.

Revise the principal pay plan to ensure that compensation is stable and predictable.

Progress: Year 1

The raises included in the [General Assembly's 2023 budget](#) are less than one-third of what the Forum called for (an average 7% increase over the biennium according to budget writers) and do not include reinstating master's pay. Increases are higher for beginning teachers, but North Carolina continues to fall behind neighboring states and the national average.

Expanded funds for Advanced Teaching Roles and tuition reimbursement for TAs seeking their teaching license were included in the budget. Beyond this, no funding was included to cover additional workload or support student teachers. The principal pay plan was not revised, though they did see a 7.5% increase in starting pay over the biennium.

Address the root causes of mental health and school safety crises.

Recommended policy actions

Increase students' access to school-based mental health services.

Raise salaries for counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses to levels comparable with other states and practitioners in other settings.

Provide funding for professional development in

trauma-informed practices for educators.

Examine codes of conduct, eliminate use of nebulous discipline categories, and end exclusionary and inequitable discipline practices. Direct attention toward creating positive school culture, building accountability through relationships, and practicing conflict resolution and repair.

Pass a state statute requiring safe storage of firearms.

Reinstate the federal ban on assault weapons and require universal background checks for gun purchases in all 50 states.

Close the nearly \$13 billion funding gap to address school facilities needs across the state.

Progress: Year 1


120 new school health personnel positions, now categorized more flexibly to include school psychologists, counselors, nurses, and social workers, were allotted in the 2023 budget, and salary supplements were included for some of these personnel. Additionally, the budget increased appropriations for school safety grants by \$70 million over the biennium. These all amount to some progress toward increasing student access to school-based mental health services.


However, other progress in this area was limited, and some actions may create more challenges when it comes to school safety and mental health.

[HB 188](#), a law which would make it easier to suspend students for subjective offenses, was introduced. [Session Law 2023-8](#), which repealed the requirement of a permit needed to purchase handguns and expanded authorization to concealed carry on school property, was passed. And [North Carolina Session Law 2023-106](#), most commonly known as Parents' Bill of Rights, has left districts with more uncertainty than guidance. Advocates have expressed concern, [filing a federal complaint](#) alleging the law has led to school-based policies and practices that discriminate against LGBTQ students.


[The budget provides \\$46 million more](#) this year in the Needs-Based Public School Capital Fund. However, schools continue to have billions of dollars in facilities needs that exceed the funding capacity of county governments.


Grow, retain, and diversify the teacher pipeline.


 Open the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program to prospective teachers in all subject areas and structure financial support as scholarships, rather than forgivable loans.


 Increase the diversity and number of National Board Certified Teachers by reimbursing

Recommended policy actions

 certification fees and providing support for teachers of color during the process.

 Collect more actionable data on teacher satisfaction, disaggregated by race, on the Teacher Working Conditions Survey to better inform recruitment and retention efforts.

 Provide flexibility in how districts can utilize position allotments to address instructional needs.

 Eliminate requirements for teacher licensure exams that are not predictive of educator effectiveness, i.e. PRAXIS Core.


Progress: Year 1


The NC Teaching Fellows expansion to include 10 institutions (rather than the current 8) and K-6 teachers (rather than the current restriction to STEM and Special Education), in addition to a slightly increased scholarship amount, was a positive development in this year’s budget. We continue, however, to advocate for a full restoration of the program to include all subject areas and levels, as well as a restructuring of the financial support.

In addition, increased funds for Advanced Teaching Roles, TA tuition reimbursement, and the creation of a \$1 million grant program for National Board Certification reimbursement were bright spots. The revised teacher working conditions survey offered a more accessible experience, though it remains to be seen how the resulting data will be disaggregated and acted upon.


No new funding flexibility was offered to districts; in fact, the expiration of ESSER funding will make this experience more challenging for district and school leaders. Additionally, there was no movement on eliminating unnecessary barriers to teacher licensure, though PEPSC has taken up discussions on the topic.


Prepare students for the world they live in.


 Ensure that standards and curriculum reflect the diversity of student identities and address historical truths and systemic inequities that persist today.

 Provide funding for preparation and ongoing

Recommended policy actions

 professional development in culturally responsive/ sustaining pedagogy and social emotional learning.

 Implement robust SEL and equity plans in every district, as required by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

 Replace A-F school grades with an accountability model with multiple measures that emphasizes growth, equity, and critical thinking and problem-solving skills.


Progress: Year 1


Rather than working toward a culturally inclusive curriculum and support for social and emotional learning (SEL) for our students, a number of steps backward were taken. [HB 187](#) was introduced, which if passed, would limit conversations about race and racism in the classroom. The Parent Bill of Rights, now law, also limits discussions around sexual identity, sexual orientation, and gender identity. No state funding was provided for professional development pertaining to culturally sustaining pedagogy or SEL, nor was any progress made on the state level regarding SEL plans (as required by the Every Student Succeeds Act).


There is continued conversation and work being done to revise the A-F school accountability system. A [new model was proposed to the NCGA](#) early this year, aiming for a pilot in the fall. The model would include multiple measures for school accountability, but would require legislative approval.

Implement, monitor, and evaluate the Comprehensive Remedial Plan.

Recommended policy actions

 Transfer funds for years 2 and 3 of the Comprehensive Remedial Plan (supplementing, not supplanting), and provide support for districts to efficiently and appropriately distribute and manage the influx of new funds.

 Build on progress by fully funding investments for years 4 and 5 of the Comprehensive Remedial Plan in the new state budget (supplementing, not supplanting).

 Track data on progress towards providing a sound

basic education for every child over time, with a focus on equitable opportunities for children from low-income families, students of color, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners.

Progress: Year 1

The budget falls far short of funding the court-ordered, evidence-based [Leandro Comprehensive Remedial Plan](#) that outlines a set of requirements for the state to meet its constitutional obligation to provide a sound basic education to all students. Just 7% of the plan will be funded in 2023-24 and 4% in 2024-25.

Instead, the budget significantly increases funding for vouchers to account for expansion of the [Opportunity Scholarship program](#) (private school vouchers). For the current biennium, funding for the program increases to over \$678 million, compared to the \$428 million in appropriations outlined in the 2021 budget. If this funding were instead allocated to public schools, the budget could more than double teacher raises for the biennium.



Our Vision

ALL NORTH CAROLINA CHILDREN shall have the opportunity to **REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL** through equitable and meaningful public education that nourishes our state's civic and economic vitality.

Our Mission

To inspire **MEANINGFUL ACTION** on **NORTH CAROLINA'S MOST IMPORTANT PUBLIC EDUCATION ISSUES.**



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