

TOP EDUCATION ISSUES

Measuring Progress | 2025-26

The Public School Forum’s Top Education Issues outlines the Forum’s priorities for 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, ensuring that every child has access to a high-quality education. The Forum’s 2025-26 Top Issues identified a set of actions that we hoped to see our policymakers take during the 2025-2026 legislative biennium. Over the past year, our team has worked toward and tracked progress on specific metrics for each of our policy priorities.



Ensure our School Funding System is Equitable, Adequate, and Flexible to Meet Students’ Unique Needs.



Make Educator Pay Competitive in North Carolina.



Address Critical Needs to Support Child Well-Being and Success In and Outside of School.



Adopt Assessment and Accountability Policies that are Fair and Effective.

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.



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

North Carolina was the only state in the nation that did not pass a budget for Fiscal Year 2025, with teacher salary increases and tax cuts that will lead to revenue shortfalls at the core of disagreement between House and Senate leadership. Meanwhile, a delayed budget and frozen or rescinded funding at the federal level added to disruption for districts, limiting their ability to fully serve the needs of their students.

While we did see some promising policy proposals concerning teacher pay and student well-being from the General Assembly, they were overshadowed by political stalemate and inaction. New laws targeting vulnerable student populations were passed, and classrooms are feeling the weight of legislation targeting inclusive practices. Our public schools remain underfunded, yet our state is considering opting into yet another private school voucher program—this time at the federal level. North Carolina is still far from meeting the educational needs of our students, which the state is constitutionally obligated to provide.

Metric Progress Key



Ensure our School Funding System is Equitable, Adequate, and Flexible to Meet Students' Unique Needs.

Recommended Policy Actions

Ensure that stakeholder input informs any potential changes to North Carolina's school funding model. Under any new model, prioritize adequacy, equity, transparency, flexibility, and ensure that no districts lose money.

Progress

North Carolina falls behind the rest of the nation in funding for public education, to the detriment of our students, educators, and our communities. We rank 50 of 51 in per pupil spending on public schools and dead last in funding effort. Meanwhile, the state Supreme Court ended the decades-old Leandro lawsuit, invalidating the order to disperse nearly \$2 billion to our public schools.

No new bills were filed this year related to changes to the state's school funding model.

Recommended Policy Actions

Prioritize public dollars for local public schools that serve all children. Require all schools receiving taxpayer funds to practice non-discriminatory admissions policies.

Progress

North Carolina continues to send taxpayer dollars to private schools through the Opportunity Scholarship Program, the state's universal voucher program.

Unlike public schools, private schools receiving public dollars are not accessible to all children. Many of these schools practice exclusionary admissions policies, often related to religious affiliation, family values, or academic achievement.



Make Educator Pay Competitive in North Carolina

Recommended Policy Actions

Develop a plan, with educator input, to increase state-funded base pay for teachers to reach the national average by 2030.

Progress

Teachers in NC have not received a raise since 2023. Between the rising costs of living and increases in state healthcare premiums, educators are essentially experiencing a pay cut. Three budget proposals were brought forward in 2025, but none advanced.

FY25-26 Budget Proposals

	Governor	Senate	House
Minimum Starting Salary	\$51,200	\$41,510	\$50,000
10-Year Teacher	\$55,200	\$49,970	\$52,650
25-Year Teacher	\$55,200	\$56,650	\$57,820
Average Increase	10.6%	2.3%	8.7%
Reinstates Masters Pay	Yes	No	Yes

Recommended Policy Actions

Simplify the principal compensation plan by aligning the principal salary schedule with the teacher salary schedule, implementing a school complexity range, and reducing the potential for unpredictable shifts in pay.

Attract and retain great educators by reinstating masters pay for teachers and compensating educators for additional duties and workload. Incentivize longevity in the profession with additional compensation.

Progress

No legislation passed this session to simplify or align the principal compensation plan with teacher salaries. By contrast, NC DPI's Strategic Plan – “Pillar 2, Revere Public School Educators” – calls for a revised principal compensation model that increases base pay, accounts for school complexity, and incentivizes retention.

Both the Governor's and House budget proposals would restore master's pay for teachers and invest in related educational supports, and the Senate plan would boost grant funding for Advanced Teaching Roles. There were no legislative changes passed that would create statewide longevity incentives, leaving the burden of this challenge to local school districts.



Address Critical Needs to Support Child Well-Being and Success In and Outside of School.

Recommended Policy Actions

Enact local policies that prioritize the mental health of students and educators and expand social and emotional learning programs that support student well-being.

Progress

North Carolina state statute requires all PSUs to adopt and implement a school-based mental health program. However, this mandate remains unfunded, and implementation varies across districts based on availability and use of local funds.

Recommended Policy Actions

Create safe, affirming school environments for all students with adequate staffing of the school-based mental health workforce.

Community Schools



Local efforts have shown strong commitment to students in this area. Currently, there are 28 districts that have adopted the North Carolina Community School Framework. These schools serve as hubs of community resources, aiming to improve academic, mental, and physical needs of over 23,000 students.

Close the afterschool, summer learning and enrichment funding gap with funding designated for school- and community-based programs.

Progress

During the long session, we saw legislation proposed to increase student access to mental and physical health supports. However, school mental health positions remain significantly understaffed.

Furthermore, multiple bills targeting diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts were filed. A new law went into effect that puts school and classroom libraries under scrutiny, resulting in reduced access to books and other instructional materials for many students.

Several pieces of legislation passed that put the safety of students, educators, and families at risk. Immigrant students were targeted with bills facilitating the increased presence of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in their communities, and another law was passed authorizing concealed handguns on private school campuses.

There has been no progress on dedicated state funding for out-of-school time programs. With increased unpredictability with regard to federal funding, state resources for afterschool are even more critical. Four out of five- more than 664,000- families in North Carolina want to enroll their child in afterschool care but cannot due to cost or lack of availability.





Adopt Assessment and Accountability Policies that are Fair and Effective.

Recommended Policy Actions

Adopt a new statewide school accountability model with multiple measures of school success accompanied by a plan or targeted resources and supports needed for school improvement.

Remove the Praxis Core requirement for entry into educator preparation programs, while maintaining evidence-based certification and licensure requirements to ensure high standards for the profession.

Require all schools receiving taxpayer funding to measure and publicly report common and comparable student achievement outcomes.

Progress

North Carolina has taken meaningful steps toward adopting a new statewide school accountability model that incorporates multiple measures of school success. As part of its strategic plan, NCDPI convened a task force to redesign how school performance is measured, with a clear timeline for deliverables.

The Praxis Core remains a requirement for entry into Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs). Meanwhile, undergraduate enrollment in traditional EPP programs has declined. Between 2010 and 2020, enrollment in UNC System EPPs declined by 44%. Classroom vacancies remain an issue, with schools beginning the school year 1,500 teachers short of the number needed.

Private schools that receive taxpayer funding are not required to publicly report academic outcomes for the 100,000+ NC students receiving vouchers. Schools receiving voucher funding must report limited test results to the NCSEAA under specific conditions, but this data is not publicly available to taxpayers.

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