



Adequate and Equitable Funding to Educate Every Child from Early Years to Careers

North Carolina can strengthen its economy and improve opportunities for families by making public education a priority and investing in children.

Pre-Kindergarten: NC Pre-K currently only serves about half of the estimated 67,000 at-risk 4-year-olds across the state. Research consistently confirms that quality early childhood education programs dramatically improve the performance of all students, eliminate achievement gaps, and ensure that students who have disabilities or live in poverty begin school ready for kindergarten. North Carolina has been a leader in the development of early childhood education programs and has a national reputation for the quality of its programs. Pre-k must be adequately funded in order to serve all eligible children.

School Funding: North Carolina legislators' continued pursuit of costly tax cuts in recent years has greatly reduced revenue for public investments, resulting in public schools lacking adequate resources to ensure that all students receive a quality education regardless of where they live in the state. Amid an improving economy and more students attending public schools, state support for public education remains below pre-recession peak spending.

- North Carolina continues to rank in the bottom 10 states in per-pupil funding and average teacher pay.
- For current 2017 school year, state funding for public education remains below peak 2008 pre-recession spending.
- Funding for textbooks and supplies is about half of what it was at peak levels.
- Despite nearly 76,000 more students in public schools since in 2008, the number of state-funded teachers and teacher assistants are lower for the current school year compared to 2008.
- The constant underfunding of public schools makes it impossible for North Carolina to live up to constitutional responsibility to provide each student with a sound basic education.
- North Carolina faces a shortfall of \$79 million in order to reach the recommended ratios for school nurses; many schools lack a school nurse altogether and school personnel administer the majority of medications to students. There are also far fewer counselors, therapists, school psychologists, and other wrap-around supports than nationally-recommended ratios.

Teachers: Research consistently shows that the success of students is linked to the having quality teachers. State funding for teacher mentoring programs has been eliminated and the newly-restored Teaching Fellows program is far smaller and less ambitious than its predecessor. These programs helped young teachers to become successful. In addition, budget cuts have reduced much of the support teachers receive in and out of the classroom. State funding for pay increases

in recent years has largely targeted early-career teachers, leaving more experienced educators wondering if they will ever get a meaningful pay increase. Salary enhancements for teachers with master's degrees have been eliminated. State funding for professional development is no longer provided. Beginning in 2021, new teachers will no longer qualify for state health insurance when they retire. Year after year, teachers are being asked to do more with less. Enrollments in teacher preparations programs have declined, teacher turnover has increased, and districts across the state are struggling with shortages of qualified teachers.

Vouchers: Instead of funding our resource starved public schools, the North Carolina legislature provided annual increases in state funding allocated to unaccountable private schools culminating in a \$145 million expenditure in 2024. Although originally described as a pilot program costing just \$11 million, these vouchers, while only given to low-income students now, will be open to middle-income families if the blueprint of current legislation is followed. There is no evidence that student achievement increases by attending a private voucher school. In fact, traditional public school students perform better on proficiency measures in jurisdictions that have had vouchers for the longest period of time. North Carolina's program lacks any meaningful accountability measures, so it is impossible to compare the performance of voucher students with students in local public schools.

Questions for Candidates

Will you work to ensure that North Carolina rises out of the bottom in the rankings of per pupil spending and reach the national average in teacher pay? Will you support professional development opportunities for teachers and recognize advanced training that teachers undertake?

Will you advocate for full funding for our traditional public schools, where over 80 percent of our students are enrolled, rather than divert more taxpayer dollars to be used for unaccountable voucher programs?

Will you advocate for the capital funding necessary for districts to prepare for compliance with the four-year phase-in of the K-3 class size reductions? How do you plan to meet the building needs of North Carolina's growing school districts?

How will you ensure schools are connected to their communities and serving the whole child? Will you ensure that each school has access to a school nurse, counselor, psychologist, and other supports for children's socio-emotional well-being?

What ways would you align our funding formula for school districts to achieve greater equity in funding for schools and children with diverse needs?

Will you ensure that all at-risk children can participate in quality early childhood programs?