



## May 1<sup>st</sup> Is about Our Collective Commitment to Quality of Life in Our State



**The North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) has outlined a SET OF POLICY PRIORITIES for the General Assembly that are critical to the well-being of students now and in the future. They demonstrate the critical role that public schools play in educating our children, promoting health and well-being, being good employers, and anchoring communities of opportunity.**

**NCAE RECOMMENDS: Provide enough school librarians, psychologists, social workers, counselors, nurses, and other health professionals to meet national standards.**

**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?** For children to reach their full potential, they must be ready to learn. School psychologists, social workers, counselors, and nurses are necessary to provide an integrated system of support to help students manage mental and physical health issues that hinder development. They also allow teachers to focus on teaching. Providing these critical services on-site with trained personnel improves educational outcomes and supports the whole child so that they can reach their full potential.

**WHERE DO WE STAND NOW:** In the past decade, per-student state funding for support personnel has dropped 9%, while the share of students experiencing depression and chronic health conditions has risen. Staffing of support personnel remains far below national standards, forcing nurses and counselors to serve multiple schools. Reaching national standards will require doubling the state's current spending on school support staff.

**NCAE RECOMMENDS: Provide \$15 minimum wage for all school personnel, 5% raise for all public school personnel, and a 5% cost of living adjustment for retirees.**

**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?** Low wages make it difficult to make ends meet for bus drivers, custodians, child nutrition staff, and teacher assistants. For teachers and school administrators, wages remain far behind the pay of other professions in the state that require similar levels of education and experience. Since 2011, enrollment in UNC education programs has dropped 27% and the share of NC high schoolers interested in majoring in education has dropped in half. North Carolina must pay competitive to retain a high quality educator workforce.

**WHERE DO WE STAND NOW:** Extending the \$15 minimum wage for all school personnel would cost \$86 million and provide a living income for individuals without children. A 5% raise for other personnel would cost \$280 million. Such a raise would leave teacher salaries about \$6,000 below the national average, and leave teacher salaries more than 20% behind other similar North Carolina professions. Retirees have only received COLA adjustments totaling 3% in the past 10 years, while inflation has increased 21%. A 5% COLA for retirees would cost \$240 million.

**NCAE RECOMMENDS: Expand Medicaid to improve the health of our students and families.**

**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?** The health and well-being of children and families is critical to the ability of children to learn. Since 2015, the number of uninsured children in North Carolina increased by 20,000. In states that expanded Medicaid, there have been significant declines in the number of uninsured people,

particularly among children. Children who receive Medicaid have improved reading test scores and are more likely to complete high school and college. Moreover, for many school personnel, themselves, lack of affordable health insurance puts their own health at risk.

**WHERE DO WE STAND NOW:** There are 1 million North Carolinians without health insurance and at least 500,000 could benefit from Medicaid expansion. These North Carolinians currently in the coverage gap have very low incomes and struggle to meet basic needs.

**NCAE RECOMMENDS: Reinstate state retiree health benefits eliminated by the General Assembly in 2017.**

**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?** At a time when we are trying to close the coverage gap, removing health benefits from retirees could only make the issue of health insurance coverage more challenging in the future. By reducing the competitiveness of compensation packages offered to new workers it will be harder for schools to recruit and retain new employees.

**WHERE DO WE STAND NOW:** The state is set to eliminate this benefit for new hires after January 1, 2021. Because the benefit has not yet been eliminated, there is no cost to restore it.

**NCAE RECOMMENDS: Restore advanced degree compensation stripped by the General Assembly in 2013.**

**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?** North Carolina has long recognized the importance of credentials and degrees in supporting workers progress on a career pathway by providing a 10% salary increment to teachers with a master's degree. The compensation for advanced degrees provides a critical tool in supporting advancement and career mobility and ensuring that our educators continue to build their skills and training. This policy is also consistent with a growing body of evidence showing that teachers with in-area master's degrees outperform their peers.

**WHERE DO WE STAND NOW:** Compared to four years ago, North Carolina has 3,713 fewer teachers with a master's degree, a decrease of more than 12%. Restoring master's pay will cost just \$6.8 million, reversing this backwards trend.

**We can afford to fund our public schools  
and support every child, family and community in our state  
to achieve a higher quality of life.**

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