



2024 Education Policy Primer

Organization

The Primer contains 17 sections, which can be organized into three main categories:

→ **North Carolina's Public Schools and Students**

- ◆ Student Demographics, Student Performance

→ **Governance of NC Public Schools**

- ◆ State and Local Role, Federal Role, School Finance, Leandro v. State of North Carolina

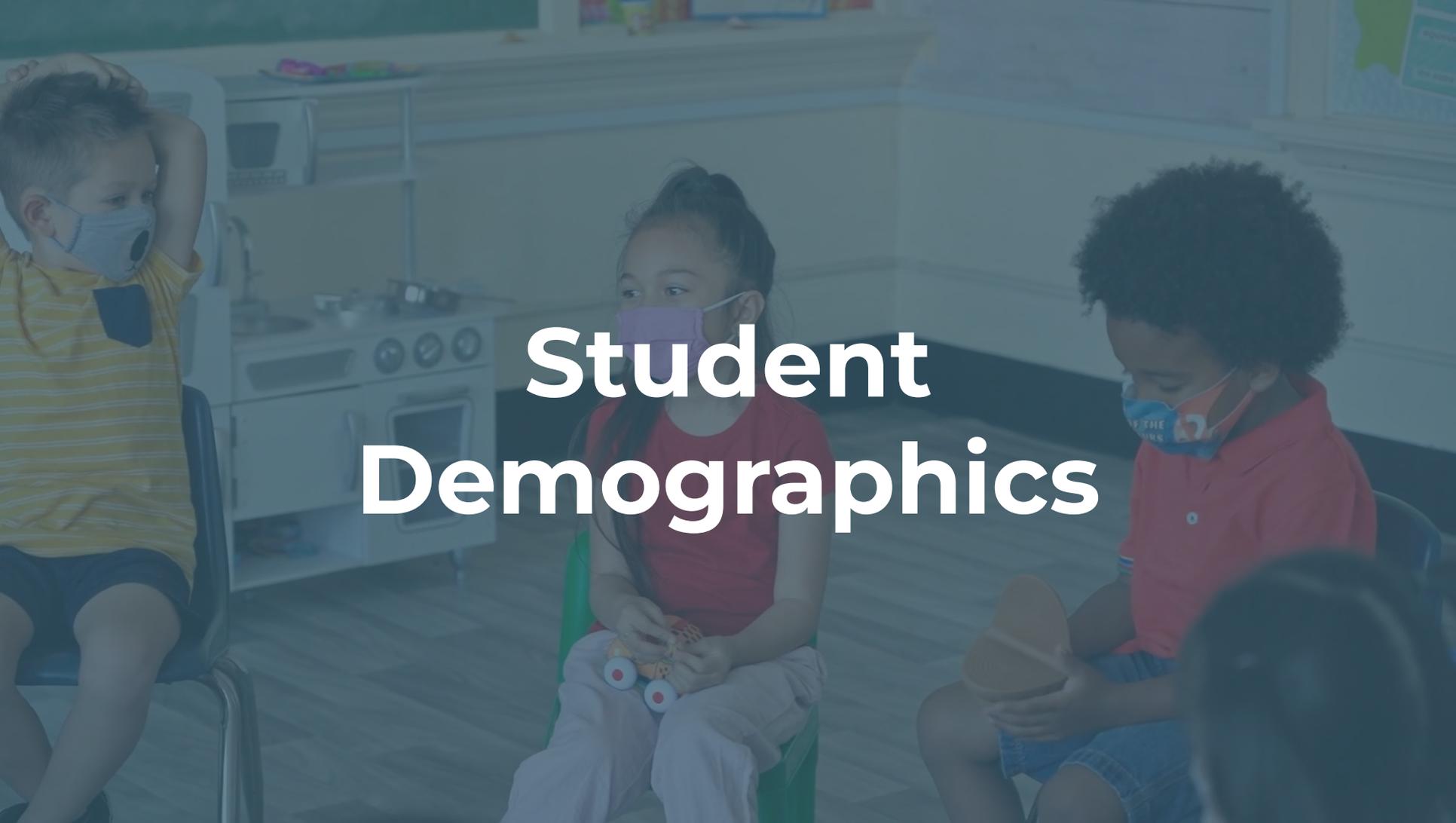
→ **Current Education Policy Issues in North Carolina**

- ◆ Teachers, School Facilities, School Calendar, Accountability, Standards & Curriculum, School Choice, Technology & Digital Learning, School Safety, Early Childhood, Student Mental Health, Out-of-School Time

North Carolina's Public Schools and Students

Student Demographics

Student Performance

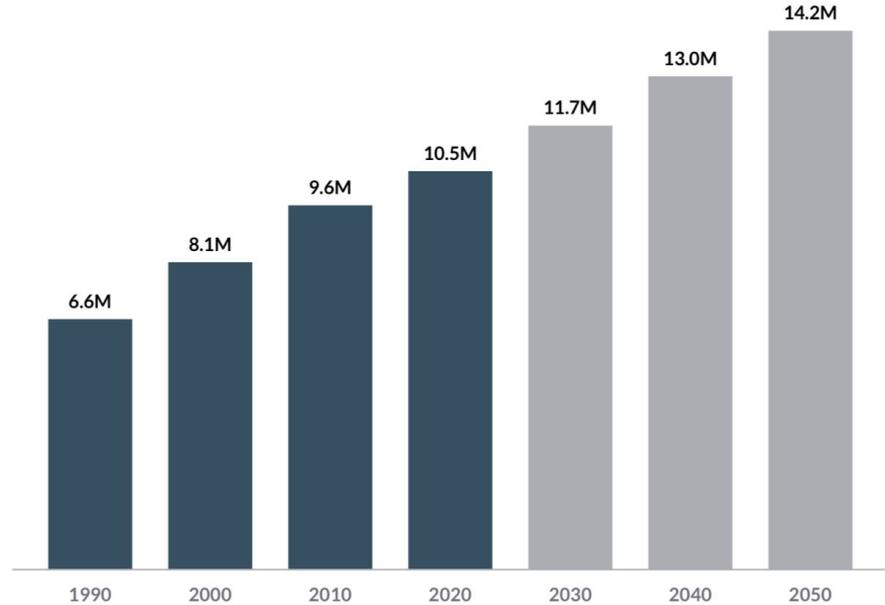
A photograph of three children in a classroom setting, all wearing face masks. The child on the left is a young boy with short hair, wearing a yellow and white striped shirt and a grey mask, sitting on a blue chair with his hands behind his head. The child in the middle is a girl with long dark hair, wearing a red shirt and a purple mask, sitting on a green chair and holding a small toy. The child on the right is a girl with curly hair, wearing a pink shirt and a blue mask, sitting on a blue chair and holding a wooden toy. The background shows a classroom with a whiteboard, a sink, and various educational materials. The text "Student Demographics" is overlaid in the center in a large, white, sans-serif font.

Student Demographics

North Carolina Population Growth

With **10.8 million residents**, North Carolina is the 9th largest state in the nation. Between 2022 and 2023, North Carolina added more people than any state other than Texas and Florida, adding an additional 140,000 people to the state population.

By **2050**, North Carolina is expected to reach 14.2 million residents, including **3.2 million people younger than age 20 (22%)**.



NC Schools: Fast Facts 2022-23

1,502,213

Total ADM

115

Public School Districts

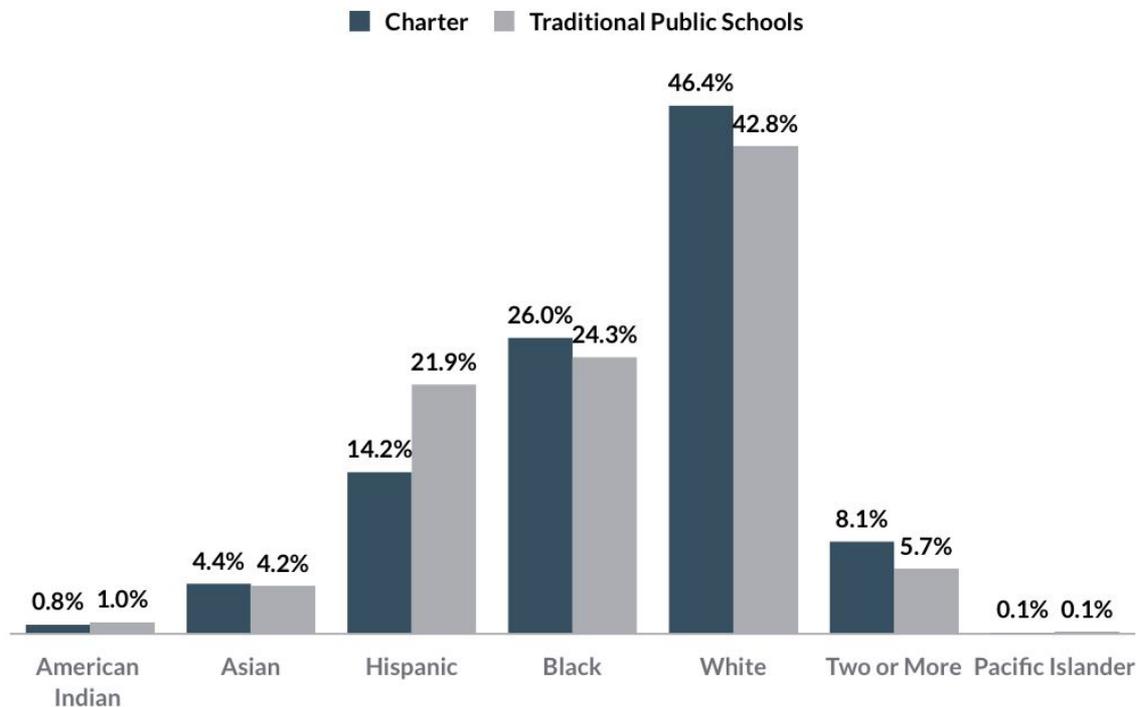
2500+

District Public Schools

206

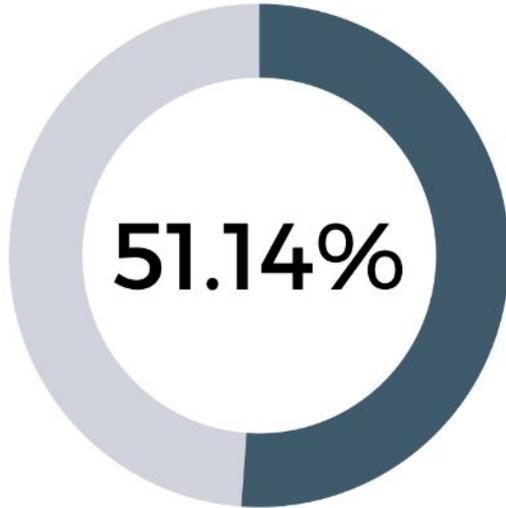
Charter Schools

Racial Demographic Makeup of North Carolina's Students (2023-24)

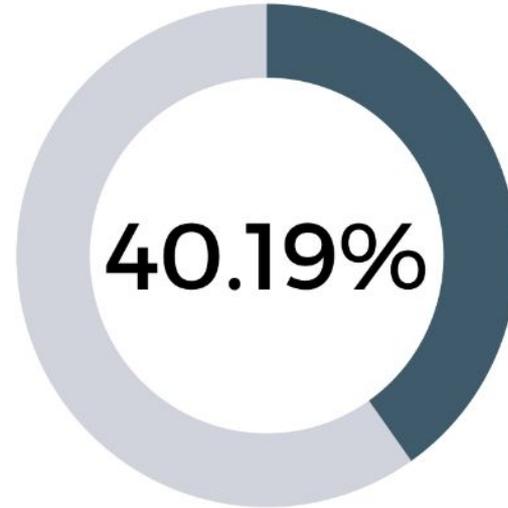


Economically Disadvantaged Students

Economically Disadvantaged Traditional
Public School Students (2023-24)

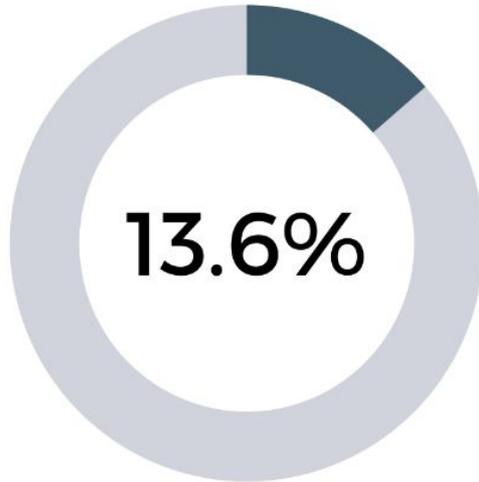


Economically Disadvantaged Charter
School Students (2023-24)

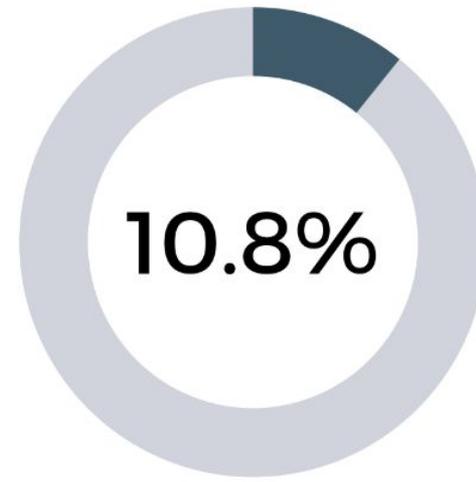


Students Served by Exceptional Children Programs

Traditional Public School Students Served
by Exceptional Children Programs (2022-23)



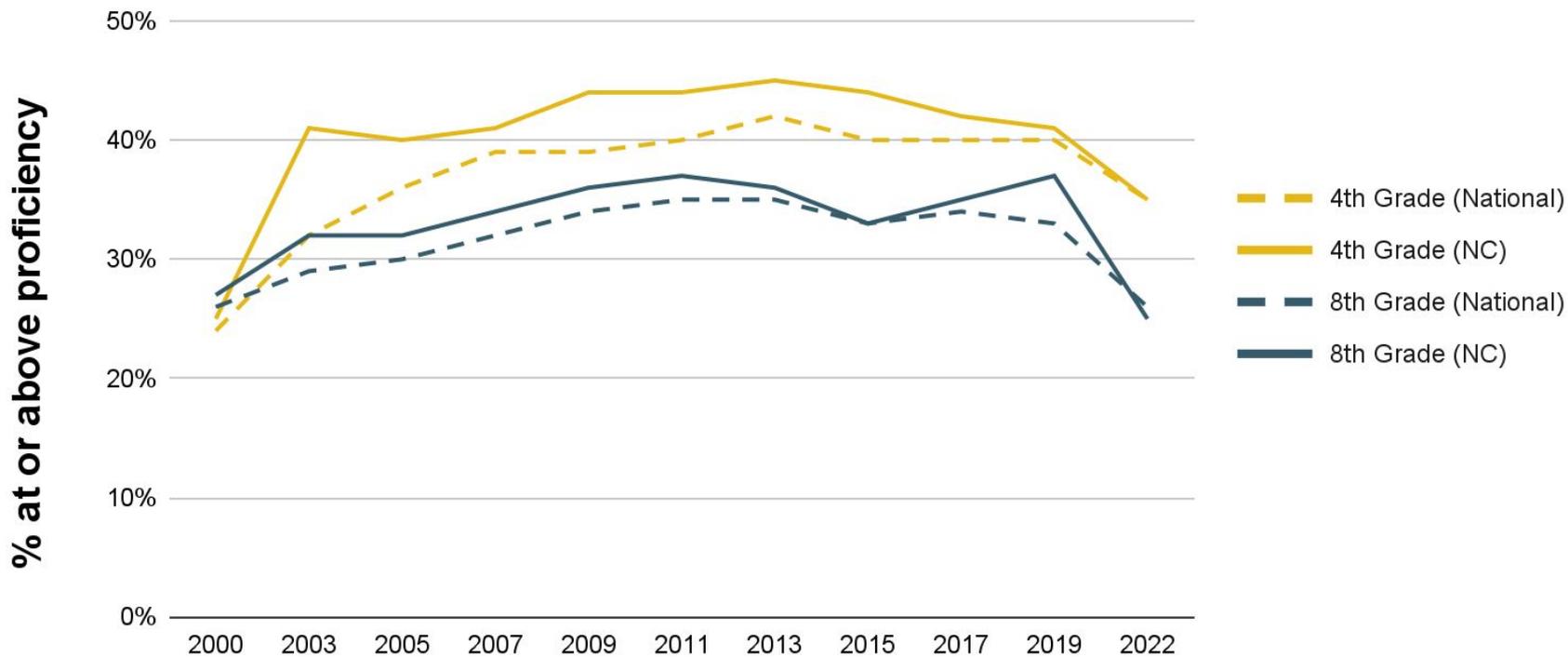
Charter School Students Served by
Exceptional Children Programs (2022-23)



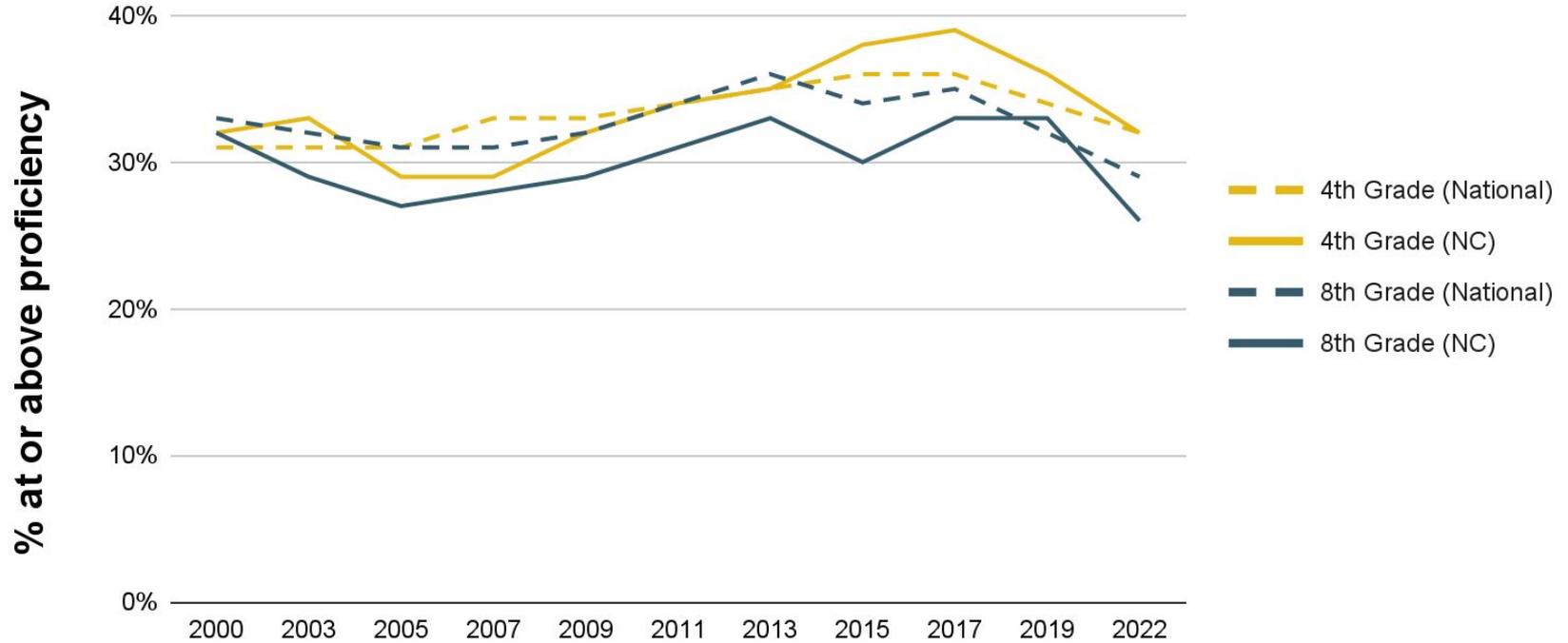


Student Performance

NAEP Math Proficiency



NAEP Reading Proficiency



The Impact of COVID-19 on Learning

The pandemic had a significant impact on students' opportunity to learn, leading to what researchers call unfinished learning. Unfinished learning refers to the fact that as a result of the pandemic, students were not given the opportunity to complete the amount of learning that one would expect in a typical year.

In North Carolina, by the end of the 2020-21 school year, fewer than half of all public school students were meeting typical grade-level expectations. As a whole, no district in the state performed better in 2020-21 than in 2018-19 and test scores dropped, on average, 13 percentage points across the state.

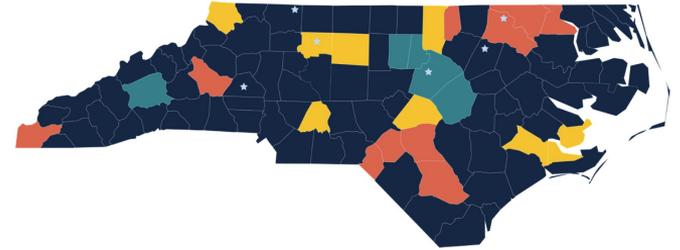
NC Education Corps

North Carolina Education Corps (NCEC) launched as a response to the pandemic's disruptive effects on schools and families. Their mission is to eliminate barriers to opportunity by providing high-quality whole child and academic support to public school students in North Carolina.

NCEC partners with local public school units (PSUs) to recruit, train, and support literacy tutors for K-5 students and accelerate learning.

In the 2021-22 school year, **230 corps members served over 3,000 K-3 students in 148 schools** throughout **23 PSUs** in the state. NC Education Corps anticipated partnering with as many as 35-40 PSUs in the 2023-24 school year.

NCEC Served 30 PSUs in
2022-23



Map Key

- Tier 1
- Tier 2
- Tier 3
- ★ City School District or Charter School

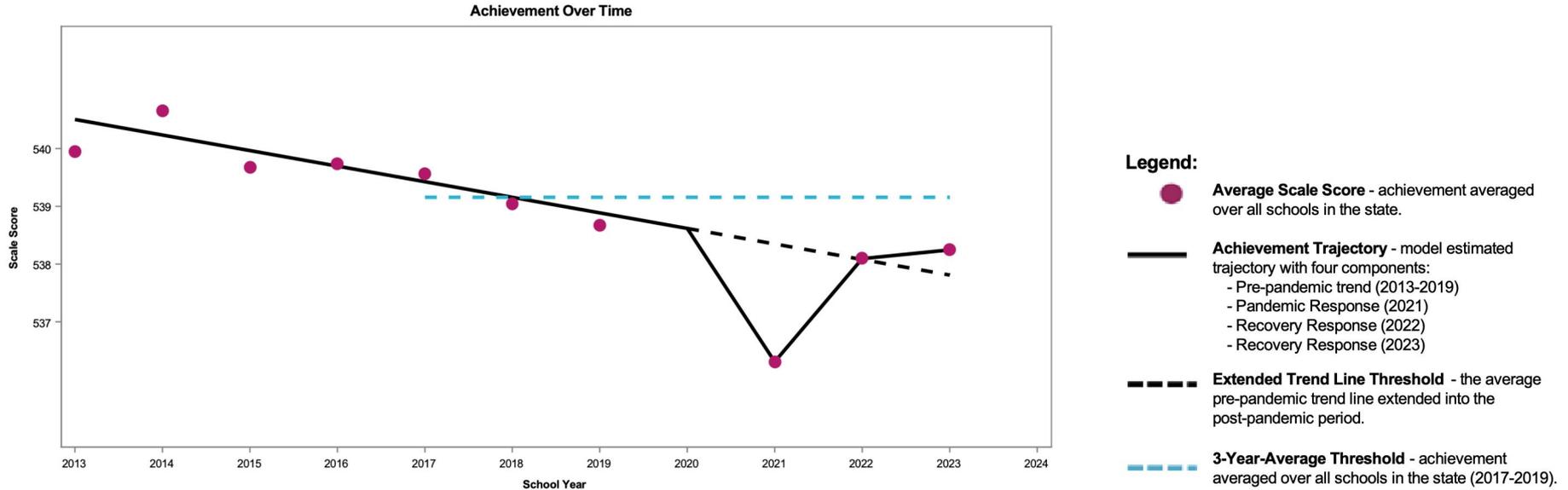
NC Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration

In April 2021, State Superintendent Catherine Truitt announced a new Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration (OLR). The mission of OLR is to serve public schools by “providing the research and support needed to make evidence-based decisions to combat learning loss and accelerate learning for all students.”

The OLR produces an annual report that measures the pandemic’s impact on learning across all grades and subjects for North Carolina’s students. The 2023 Year-Over-Year State Analysis Report indicates further progress toward the recovery thresholds, meaning that North Carolina schools are steadily continuing to recover from the pandemic with gains virtually across all grades and subjects. Two of 16 standardized assessments (EOG Reading Grade 3 and EOC English II) already show gains above the recovery thresholds.

Reading 3 Learning Recovery

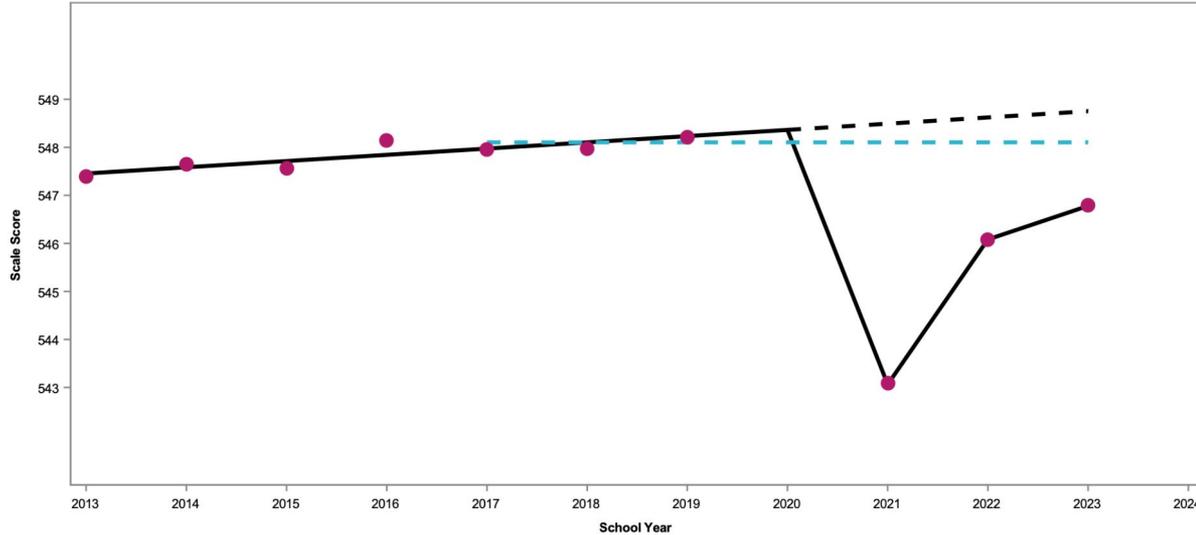
Year-Over-Year Trends and Impacts from the Pandemic EOG Reading 3



Math 3 Learning Recovery

Year-Over-Year Trends and Impacts from the Pandemic EOG Math 3

Achievement Over Time

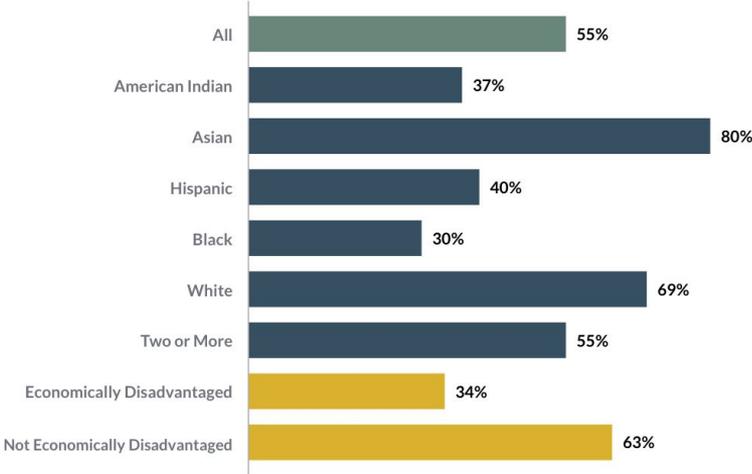


Legend:

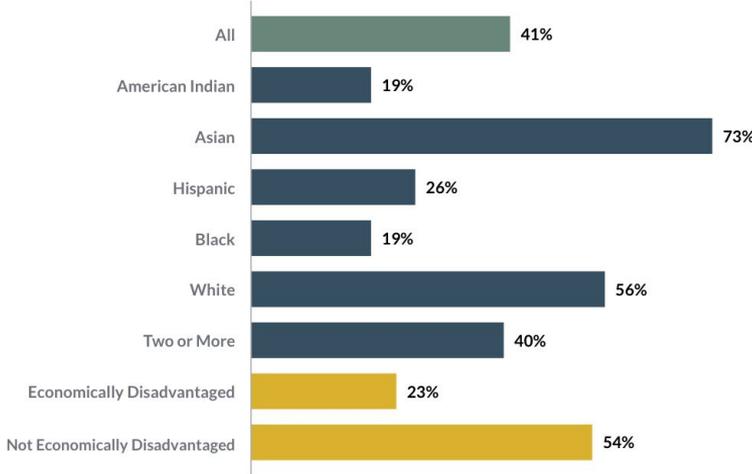
-  **Average Scale Score** - achievement averaged over all schools in the state.
-  **Achievement Trajectory** - model estimated trajectory with four components:
 - Pre-pandemic trend (2013-2019)
 - Pandemic Response (2021)
 - Recovery Response (2022)
 - Recovery Response (2023)
-  **Extended Trend Line Threshold** - the average pre-pandemic trend line extended into the post-pandemic period.
-  **3-Year-Average Threshold** - achievement averaged over all schools in the state (2017-2019).

Student Performance Disparities

Percent of Students Scoring at Least 17 on the ACT Composite Test (2021)



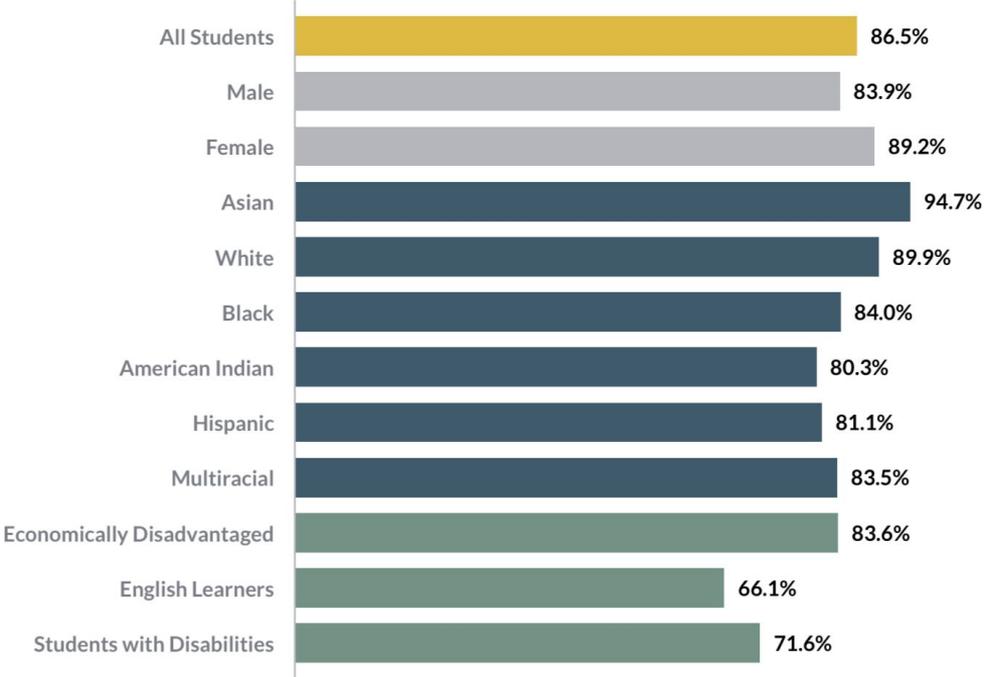
Percent of Students Scoring at Least 19 on the ACT Composite Test (2023)



Source: [NCDPI ACT Results](#), [myFutureNC ACT Performance](#)

Student Performance Disparities

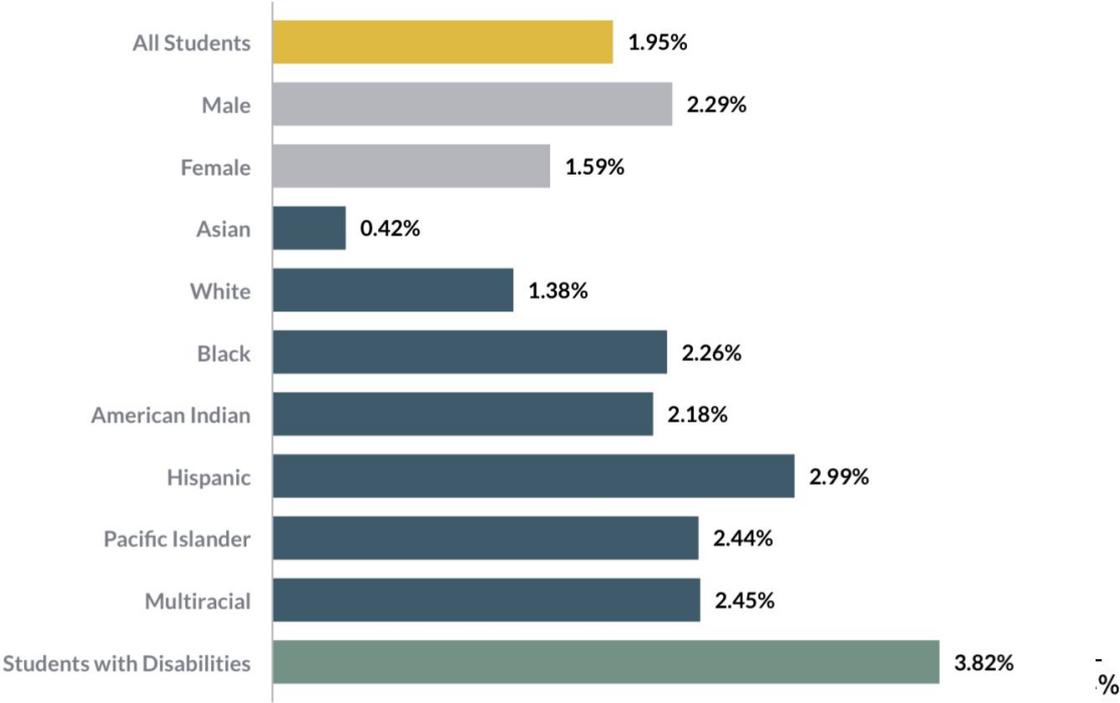
Graduation Rates (2022-23)



Source: [NCDPI Consolidated Data Report, 2022-23](#)

Student Performance Disparities

High School Drop Out Rates (2022-23)



Source: [NCDPI Consolidated Data Report, 2022-23](#)

Student Performance Disparities

Dropout Reason	Count	Percent
Attendance	4,447	46.3%
Unknown	1,242	12.9%
Lack of engagement with school and/or peers	1,081	11.2%
Choice of work over school	649	6.8%
Moved, school status unknown	588	6.1%
Enrollment in a community college	465	4.8%
Academic problems	220	2.3%
Unstable home environment	150	1.6%
Discipline problem	122	1.3%
Psychological or emotional difficulties	117	1.2%
Employment necessary	104	1.1%
Health problems	82	0.9%
Failure to return after a long-term suspension	67	0.7%
Pregnancy	65	0.7%
Runaway	59	0.6%
Incarcerated in adult facility	42	0.4%
Need to care for children	37	0.4%
Expectations of culture, family, or peers	31	0.3%
Difficulties with English language	29	0.3%
Suspected substance abuse	13	0.1%
Marriage	2	0.0%
Total	9,612	100.0%

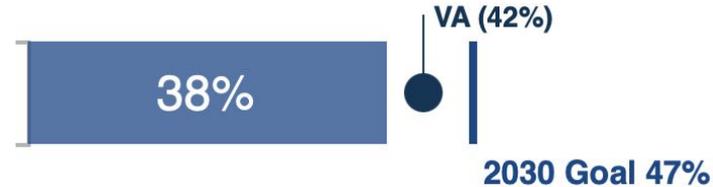
Postsecondary Attainment

To meet projected demands of North Carolina businesses, at least **60%** of workers will need a non-degree credential or postsecondary degree by **2030**.

FAFSA Completion Rate: Percentage of North Carolina high school seniors completing Free Applications for Federal Student Aid (FAFSAs)



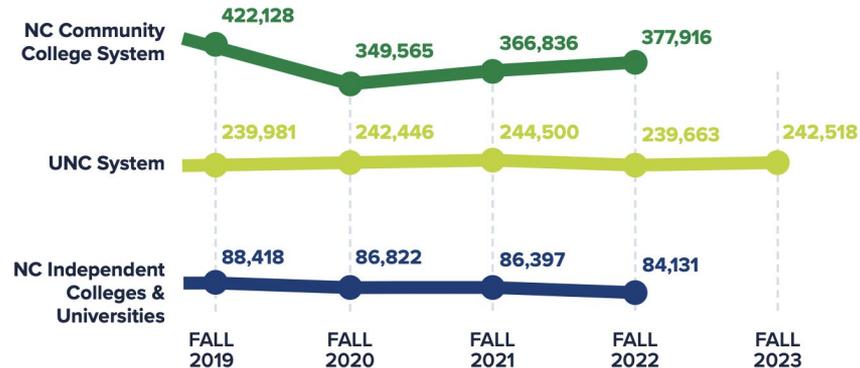
Postsecondary Enrollment Rate: Percentage of North Carolinians aged 18-24 enrolled in a postsecondary institution



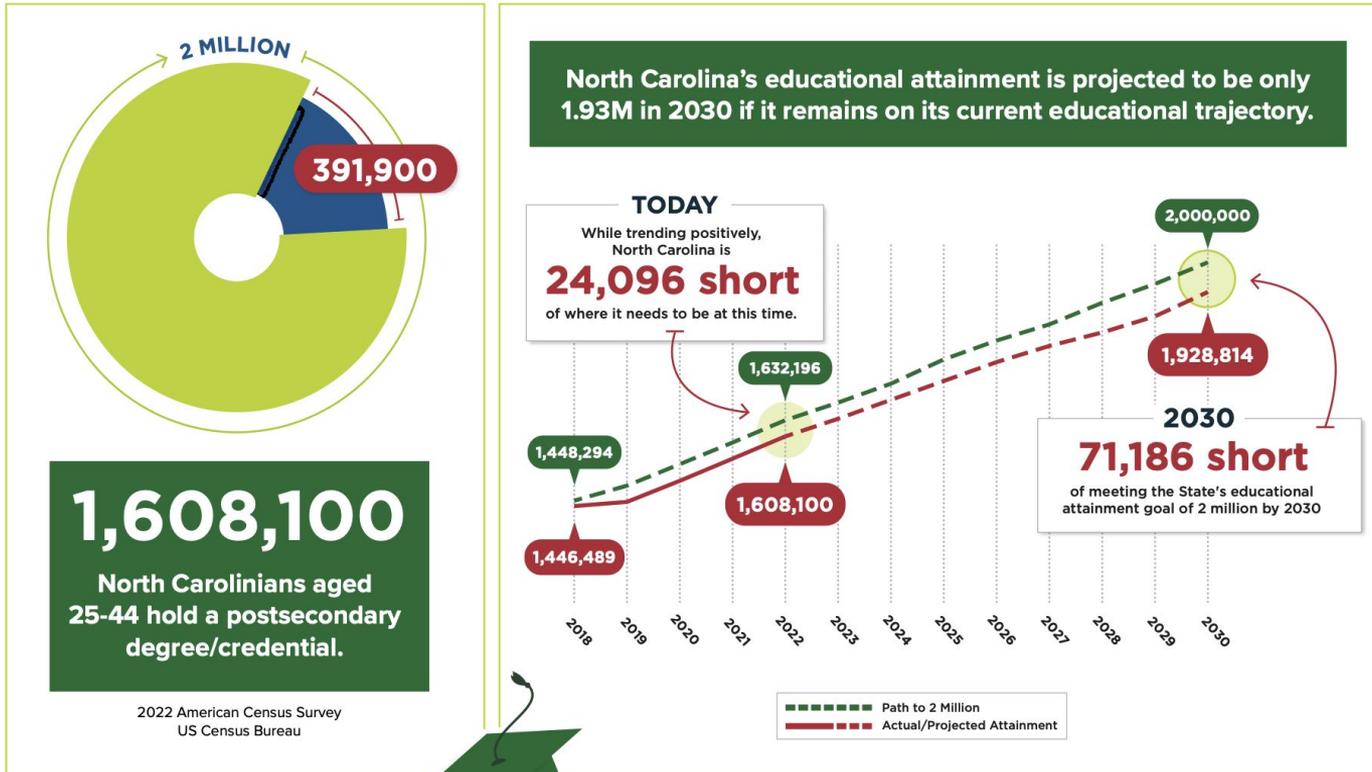
MyFutureNC

In February 2019 the MyFutureNC Commission established a goal to have **2 million** North Carolinians between the ages of 25-44 to hold a high-quality credential or postsecondary degree by the year 2030, representing one of the highest educational attainment targets in the nation.

North Carolina College Enrollment By Institution Sector



Postsecondary Attainment



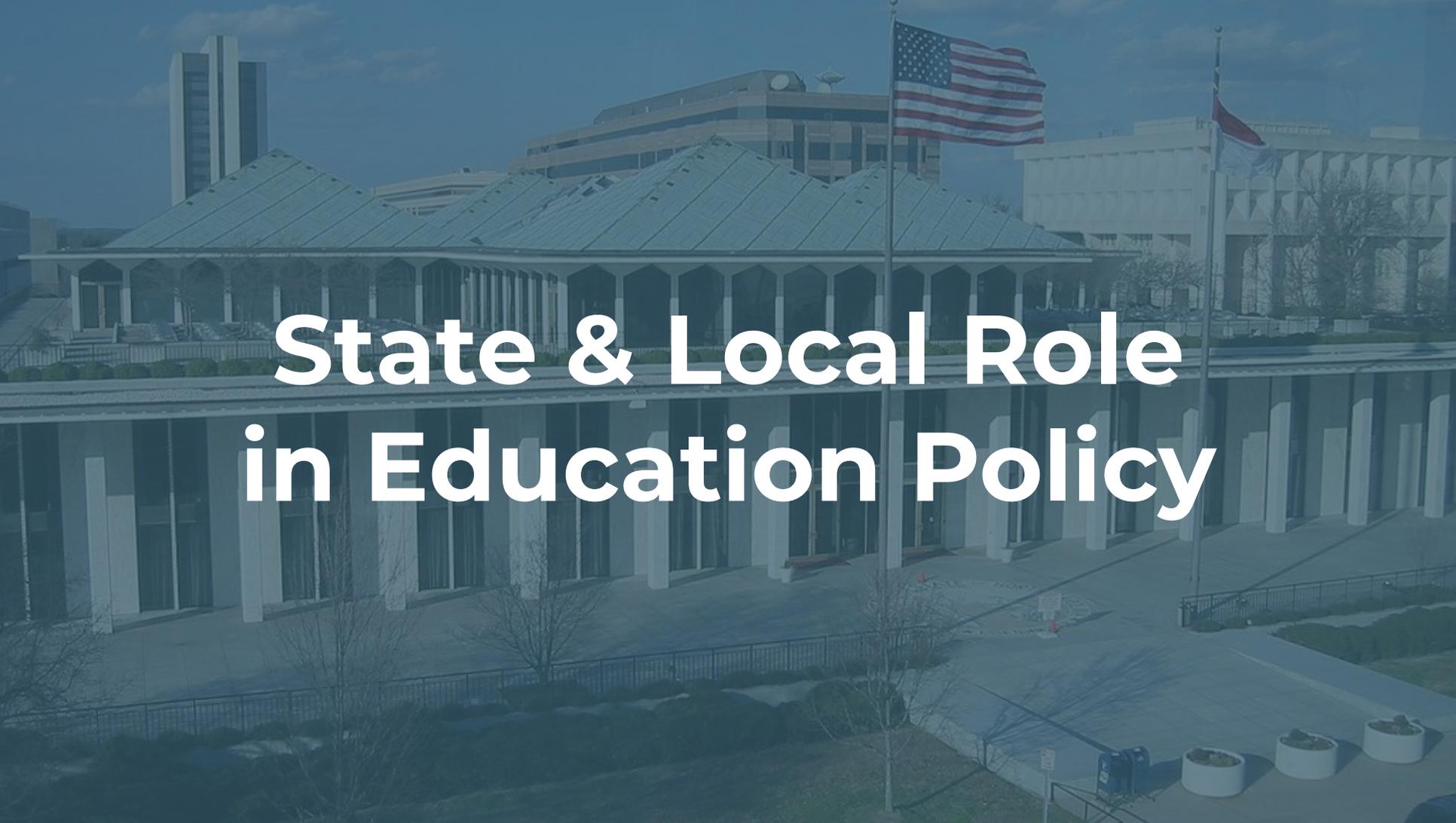
Governance of NC Public Schools

State and Local Role

Federal Role

School Finance

Leandro v. State



State & Local Role in Education Policy

State and Local Role



State Government Responsibilities:

- Personnel issues (state salary schedule, retirement plans, etc)
- Personnel allocations through class size provisions & allocation formulas
- Standardized testing policies
- Paying for performance rewards and consequences
- Certification and licensure standards

Local Government Responsibilities:

- Construction and maintenance of school facilities
- Providing student transportation
- Hiring personnel
- Funding programs, technology, personnel, and materials not provided by the state

Local Level Entities

County Commissioners: The county commissioner is responsible for appropriating local funds to the county, including the budget for public schools. This elected official also has the authority to approve any local initiatives that require new local funds or to cover funding that is not provided by the state.

Boards of Education: Local school boards do not have taxation authority and must develop a budget based on the appropriation from the county commissioner. Additionally, the locally elected school boards shape policy and make critical decisions related to schools in their districts. Local school boards also elect a district superintendent.

District Superintendent: The local superintendent oversees all schools in a district and carries out state and local policies at the district level.

State Level Entities

State Board of Education (SBE): The SBE sets overall state policy and procedures regarding education, including testing, teacher pay, and curriculum. The SBE generally does not have the authority to provide funding for education policy initiatives. Instead, it manages the state education funds. Any rules and regulations issued by the SBE are subject to the laws governed by the NC General Assembly.

NC General Assembly (NCGA): The NCGA holds control over the allocation of funds for public schools, giving it great power in directing education policy in North Carolina. The NCGA also creates legislation for public education.

Governor's Office: The Governor influences education policy by proposing new initiatives through their annual budget presentation, appointing members to the State Board of Education, issuing executive orders, and by exercising veto power of legislation passed by the General Assembly.

State Level Entities

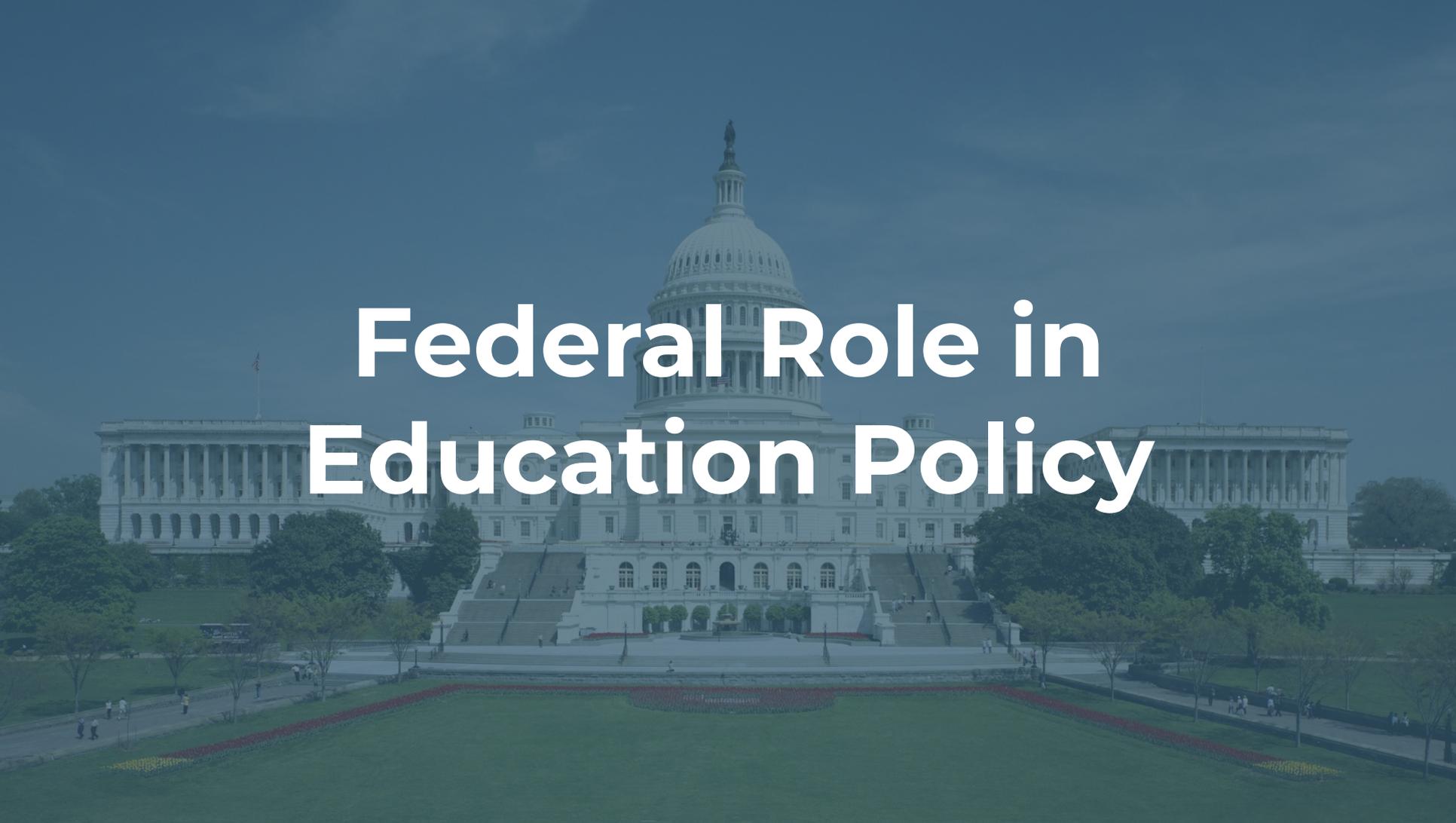
NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI): The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI) is charged with carrying out the directives of the State Board of Education and the General Assembly. NC DPI employees are responsible for all federal and state requirements of the public education system, including testing, accountability, curriculum, and state licensure and personnel issues.

The State Superintendent of Public Instruction: The State Superintendent is an elected official chosen by North Carolina voters in general elections every four years to lead the Department of Public Instruction. Like the Governor, the State Superintendent commands positional power and frequently advances new initiatives.

North Carolina Budget Process

- [Bills and Laws](#)
- [Find Your Legislators](#)



A wide-angle photograph of the United States Capitol building in Washington, D.C., featuring its iconic white dome and neoclassical architecture. The building is set against a clear blue sky. In the foreground, there is a large green lawn with a circular flower bed in the center, and several people can be seen walking on the paths. The entire image has a semi-transparent dark blue overlay.

Federal Role in Education Policy

Federal Role

While the majority of decisions regarding education happen at the state and local levels, the federal government plays an important role in the following ways:



Establishing, allocating, and monitoring federal financial aid programs for education



Prohibiting discrimination and ensuring equal access to education



Focusing national attention on key education issues



Collecting data on schools nationwide.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

The Every Student Succeeds Act is the latest reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act and was approved by Congress in December 2015. This law provides significant federal support for programs to serve students in kindergarten through 12th grade and replaced the previous No Child Left Behind legislation.

ESSA:

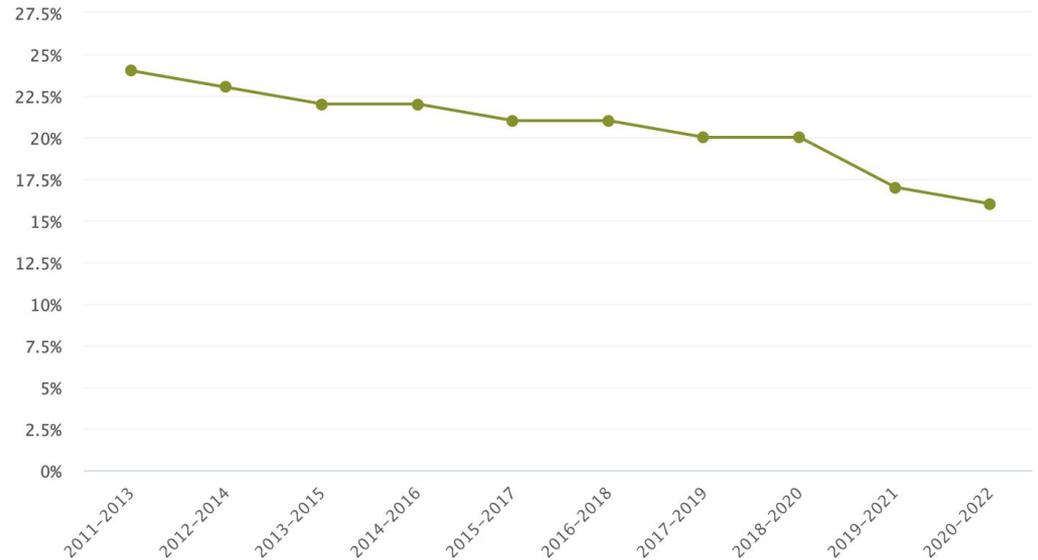
- maintains annual assessments in grades 3-8 and high school.
- sets parameters for a state's accountability system, but gives each state the flexibility to design a school accountability system that best meets the needs of the students in the state
- gives states the flexibility to work with local stakeholders to determine how educators should be evaluated and supported each year
- requires states to identify, at a minimum, the lowest 5% of Title I schools and high schools with graduation rates lower than 67%. These are the schools that are part of Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI).

School Nutrition

School lunch is critical to student health and well-being, especially for low-income students—and ensures that students have nutrition they need throughout the day to learn. Research shows that receiving free or reduced-price school lunches **reduces food insecurity, obesity rates, and poor health.**

Between 2020-2022, **16%**, or nearly **400,000**, of North Carolina's children were living in a **food-insecure household.**

NC Children living in Food-Insecure Households



School Nutrition

National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

The National School Lunch Program helps provide nutritionally balanced meals to students in elementary, middle and high schools. Under the NSLP, school food authorities must serve meals that meet the federal Dietary Guidelines for Americans and must offer these meals at a reduced price or at no additional charge to students who qualify.

School Breakfast Program

Under the School Breakfast Program, schools and institutions that provide their students with breakfast meals that meet the federal Dietary Guidelines for Americans receive monetary subsidies from the USDA.

Special Milk Program

In the Special Milk program, the USDA provides monetary subsidies to all eligible schools and institutions that serve milk to children.

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP)

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program provides fresh produce to select schools across the nation.



School Finance

State Role: NC Constitution

The people have a right to the privilege of education, and it is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right.

Article I, Section 15.

The General Assembly shall provide by taxation and otherwise for a general and uniform system of free public schools, which shall be maintained at least nine months in every year, and wherein equal opportunities shall be provided for all students.

Article IX, Section 2.

How Public Schools are Funded

“The people have a right to the privilege of education, and it is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right.”

State

Instructional Expenses

Personnel (salaries and benefits)
Instructional Materials
Transportation
Supplemental Funds

Local

Capital Expenses

Buildings
Maintenance

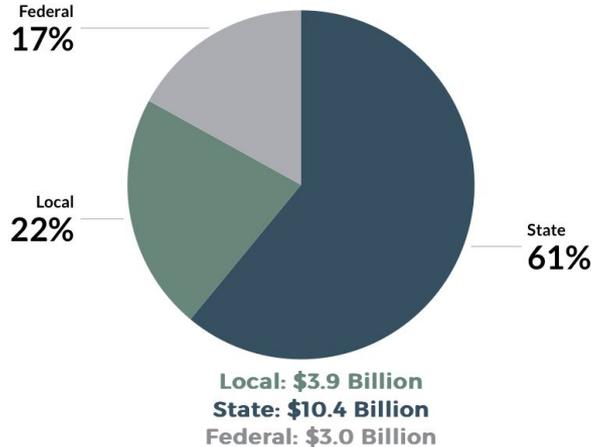
Federal

Specialized Expenses

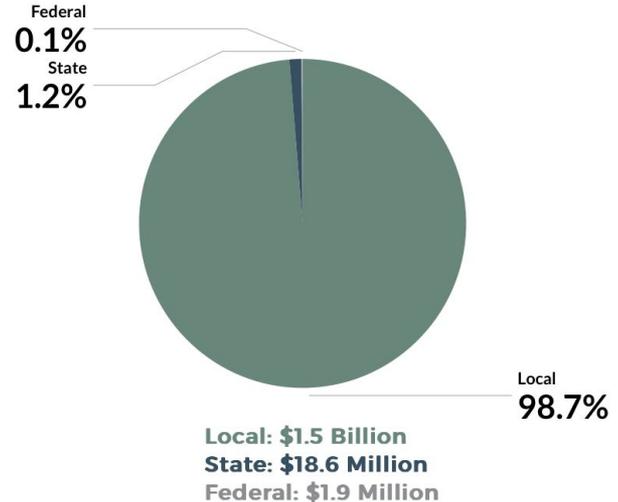
Targeted Funding
Title I Schools
COVID Relief

School Finance

2022-23 Funding Sources:
Instructional Expenses

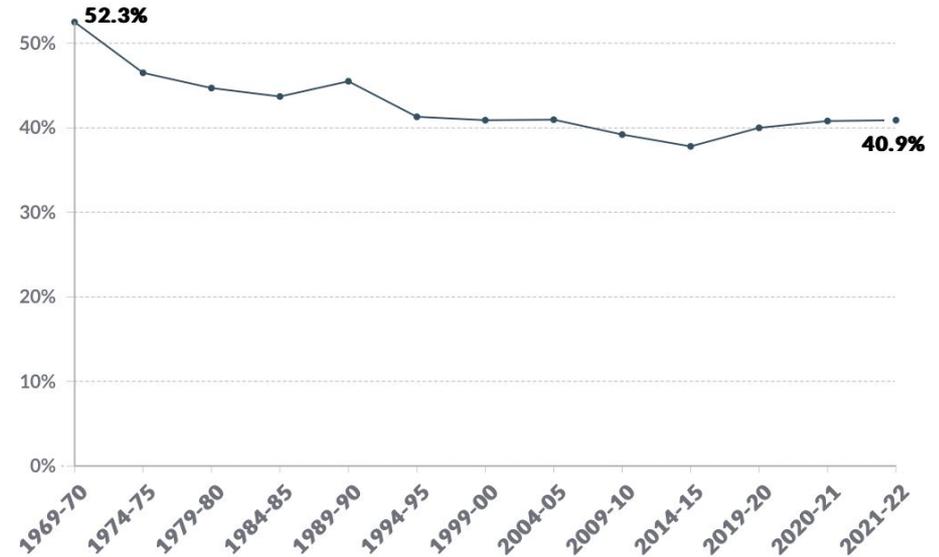


2022-23 Funding Sources:
Capital Expenses



The percentage of the state's General Fund dedicated to education has declined since 1970.

NC Spends Smaller Percentage of General Fund on Education Over Time



Source: DPI Highlights of the Public School Budget

School Finance: Fast Facts



Per the [NC State Constitution](#), the North Carolina General Assembly is responsible for providing, through taxation and otherwise, a general and uniform system of free public schools.



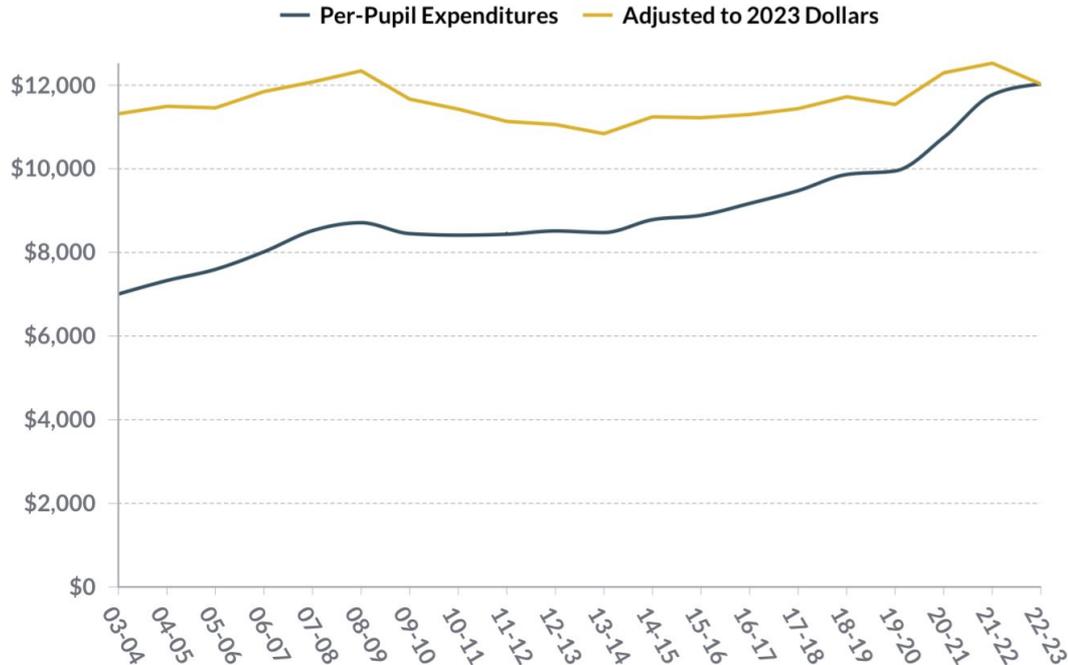
If North Carolina spent at the national average, schools would have an **additional \$4,867 dollars** to spend per student.



North Carolina's per-pupil spending was **ranked 48th nationally**, in comparison with all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

School Finance: Fast Facts

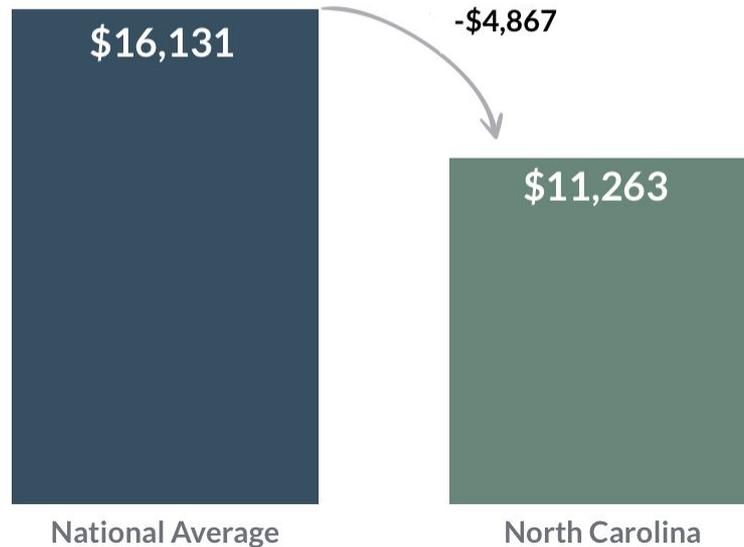
Inflation-Adjusted Per-Pupil Expenditures in North Carolina



School Finance: Fast Facts

North Carolina Spending per Student Compared to the National Average

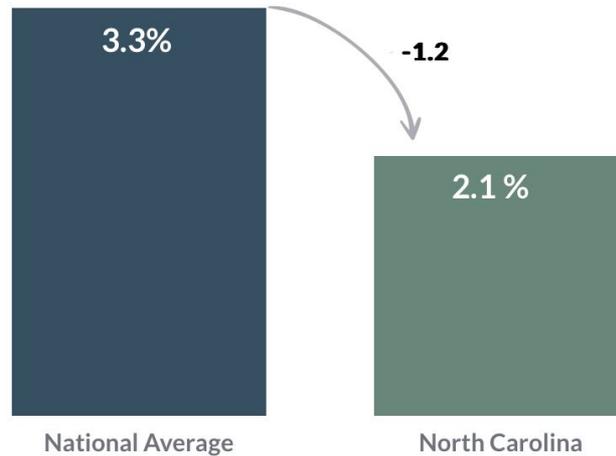
2021



School Finance: Fast Facts

North Carolina Funding Effort Compared to the National Average

2021



North Carolina ranks **49th** in funding effort. This is a measure of the **percentage of a state's GDP** that is allocated towards funding public education.

Federal COVID Relief Funding

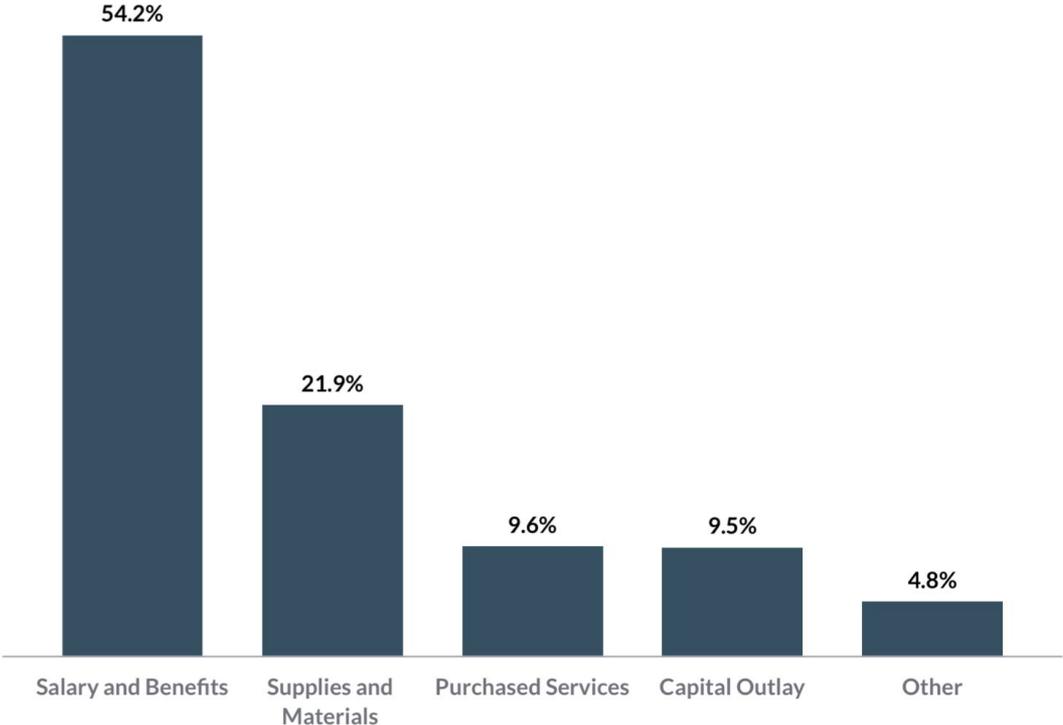
North Carolina received over \$5.7 billion in K-12 COVID relief funding from the federal government. The funding came from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (**ESSER**) Fund and the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (**GEER**) Fund.

These funds were distributed through the following:

- ESSER I: \$396 million
- GEER I: \$95 million
- ESSER II: \$1.6 billion
- GEER II: \$42 million
- ESSER III: \$3.6 billion

Districts must spend all remaining ESSER III funding by September 30th, 2024.

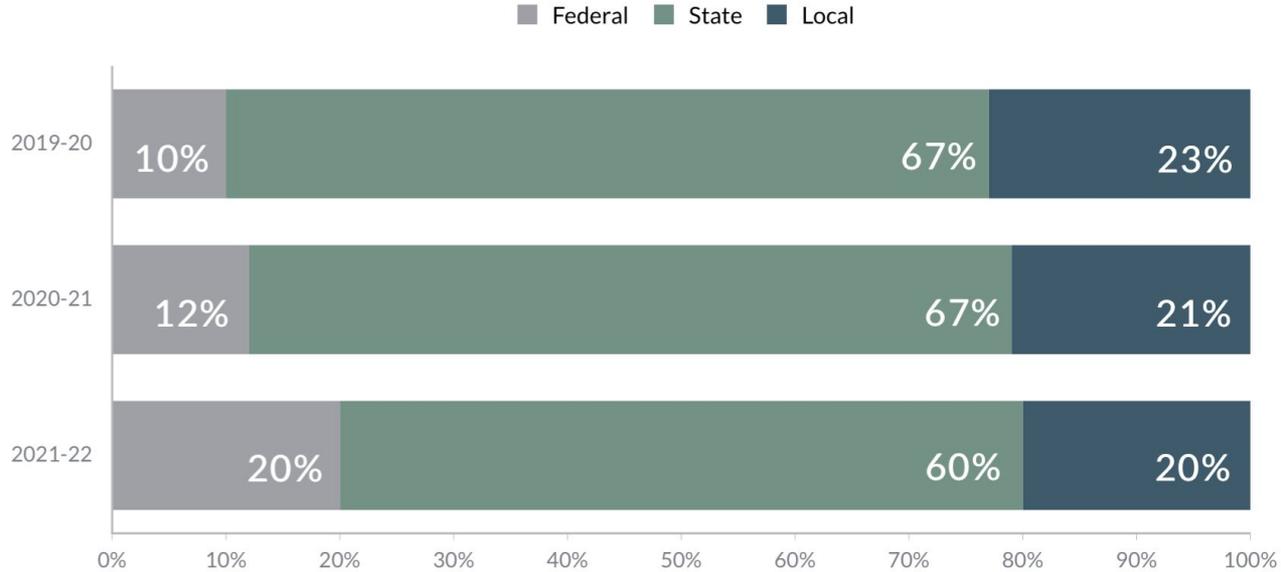
Federal COVID Relief Funding: Expenditures by Object



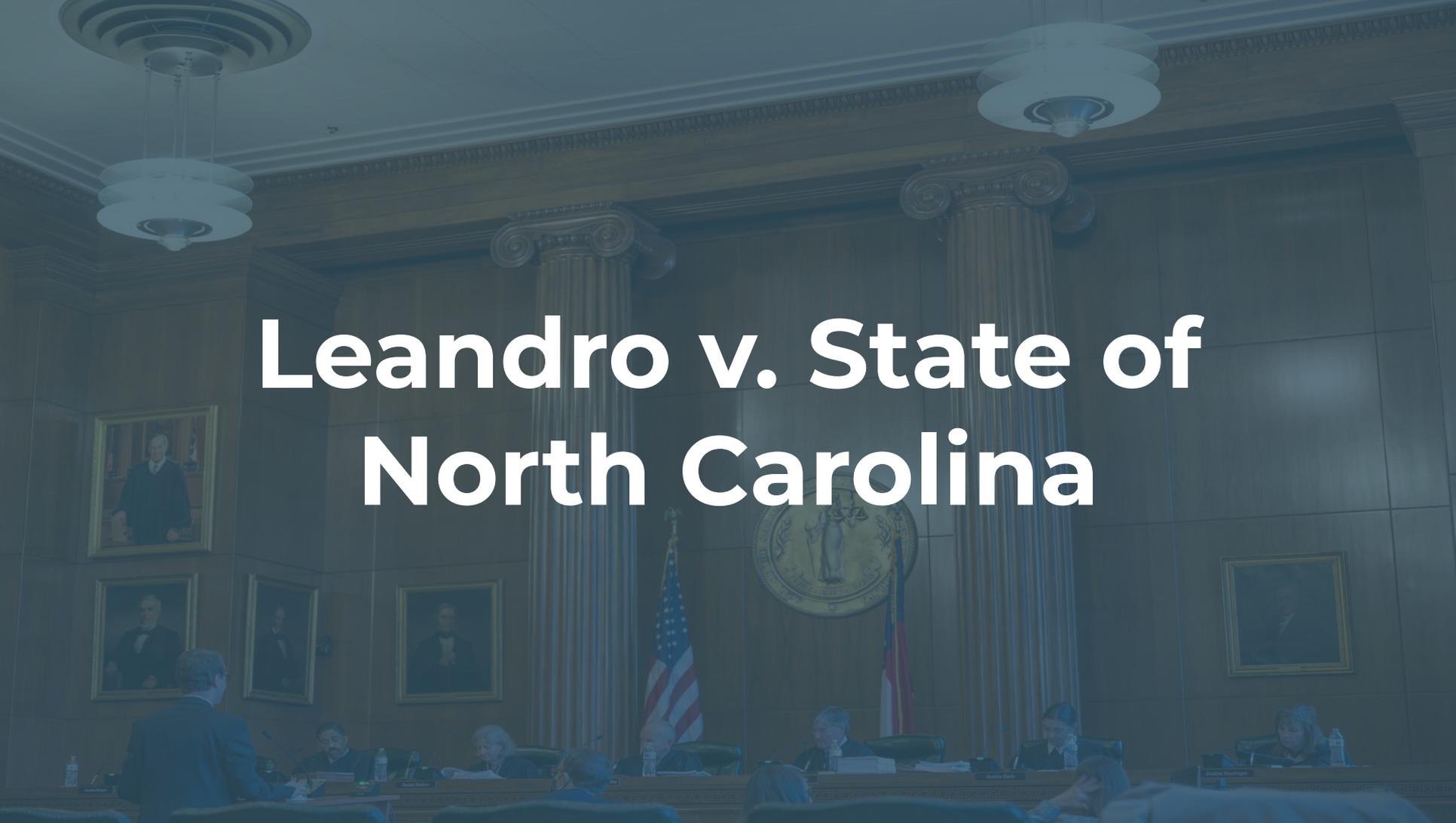
Source: [NCDPI COVID Allotment and Expenditures Data Visualization](#)

Federal COVID Relief Funding

Education Expenditures by Source of Funds

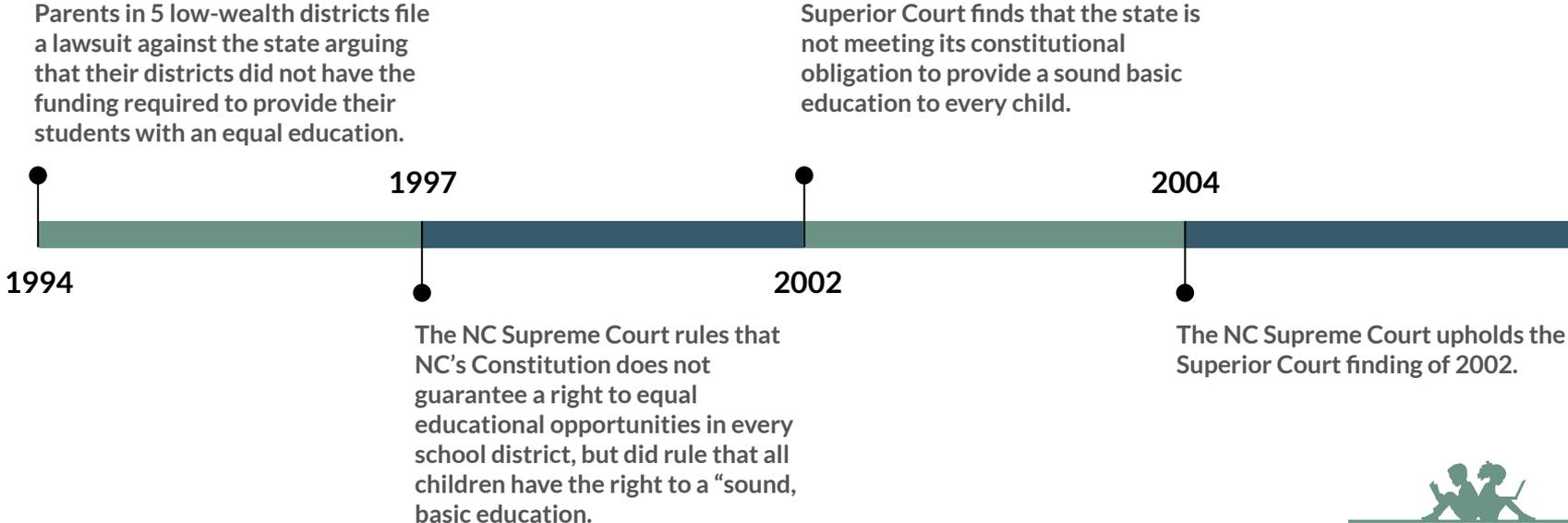


The percent of education expenditures coming from the Federal level increased by 8 percentage points in the 2021-22 school year due to the COVID relief funding.

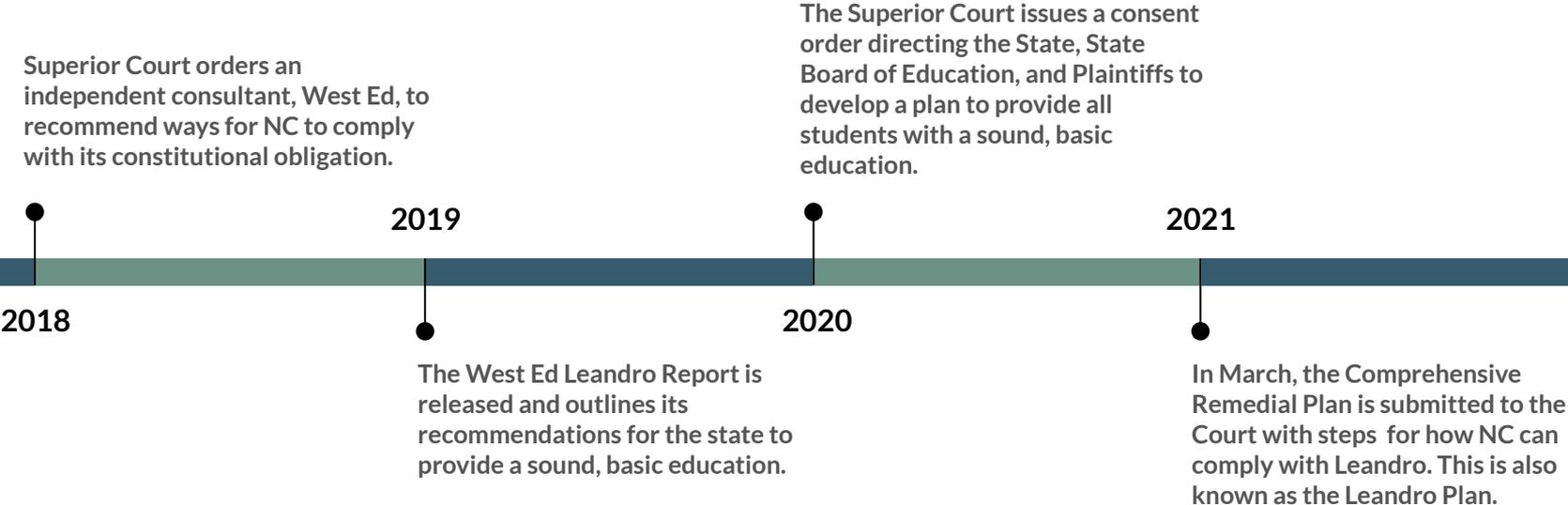


Leandro v. State of North Carolina

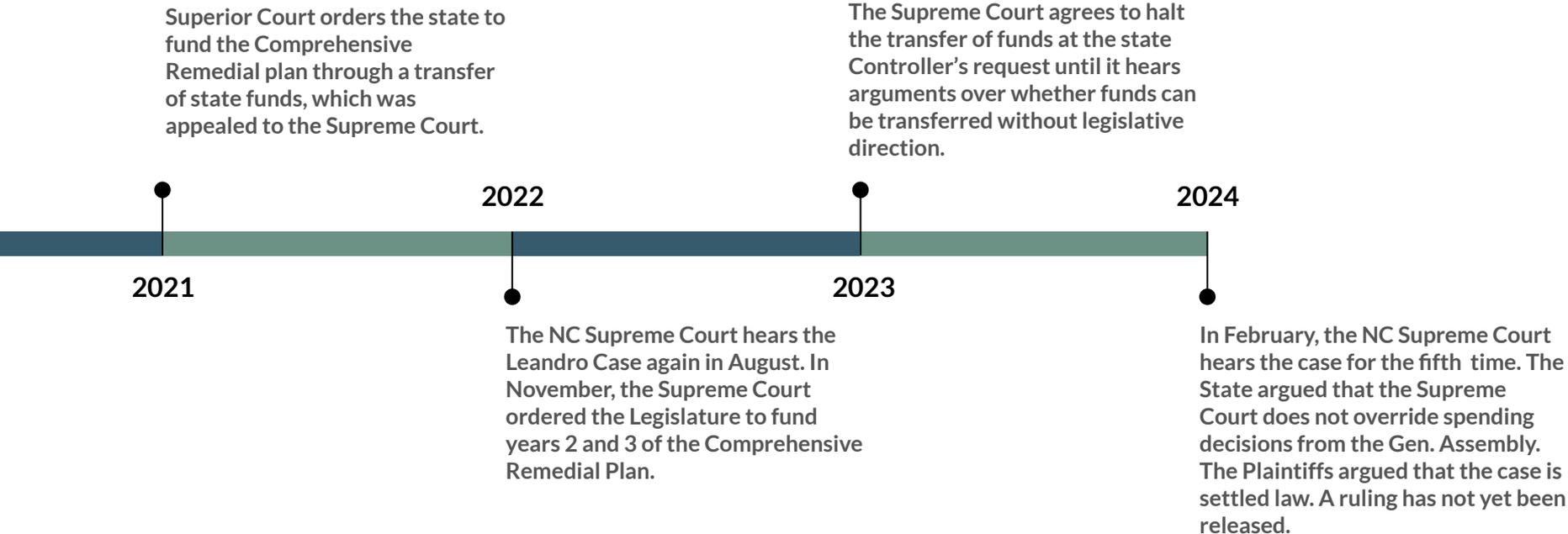
Leandro v. State of North Carolina



Leandro v. State of North Carolina



Leandro v. State of North Carolina



Components of a “Sound, Basic Education”



Ability to read, write and speak the English language and sufficient knowledge of mathematics and physical science.



Sufficient academic and vocational skills to enable a student to compete on an equal basis with others in further education or future employment.



Sufficient knowledge of geography, history, and basic economic and political systems.



Sufficient academic and vocational skills to engage in post-secondary or vocational training.

Leandro v. State of North Carolina Mandates

Further, a Trial Court and the state Supreme Court later found that three main mandates must be upheld. These mandates would serve as the foundation for future Leandro litigation. They are as follows:



A well-trained, competent teacher in every classroom.



A well-trained, competent principal in every school.



Enough resources that every child has an equal opportunity for education.

Comprehensive Remedial Plan



A financial system that provides adequate and equitable funding



A well-prepared, high-quality, supported teacher in every classroom



A well-prepared, high-quality, supported principal in every school



Access to high-quality early education



Assistance for schools and districts designated as “low-performing”



An assessment and accountability system that reliably assesses multiple measures of student performance



Alignment of high school to postsecondary and career expectations to ensure student readiness

Current Education Policy Issues in NC

Teachers

School Facilities

School Calendar

Accountability

Standards + Curriculum

School Choice

Technology + Digital Learning

School Safety

Early Childhood

Student Mental Health

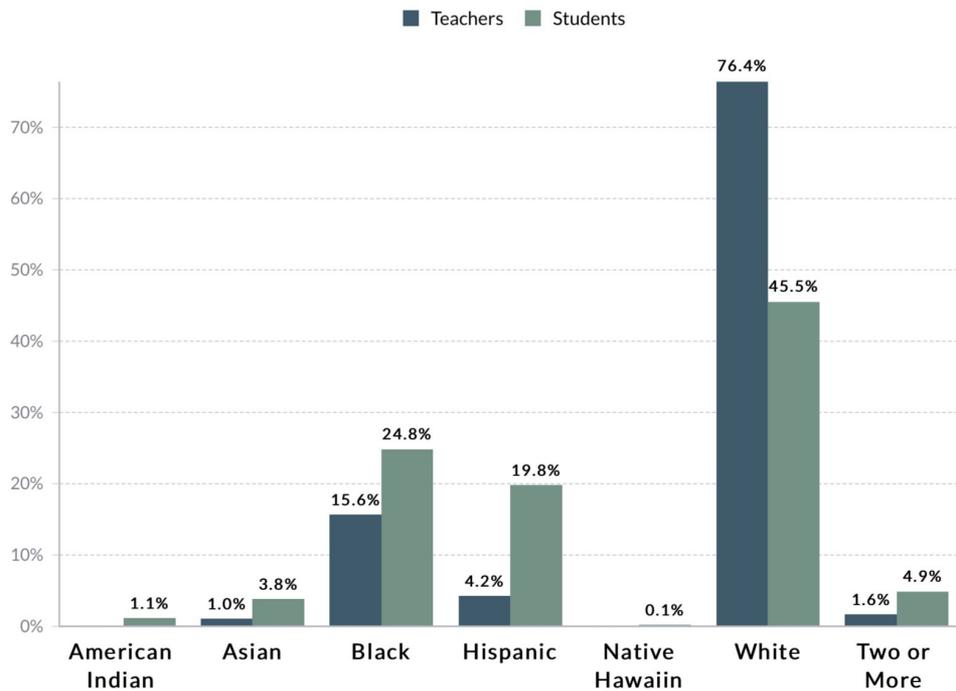
Out-of-School Time

A photograph of a classroom scene. A teacher, a woman with dark hair wearing a patterned red and blue shirt, stands in the background smiling. In the foreground, three students are seated at desks. On the left, a boy in a denim jacket is partially visible. In the center, a girl with blonde hair wearing denim overalls is looking down at a book. On the right, another girl with blonde hair in a patterned shirt is also looking down at a book. The background shows a bookshelf with books. The entire image has a blue tint and a semi-transparent dark blue overlay.

Teachers

Teacher Diversity

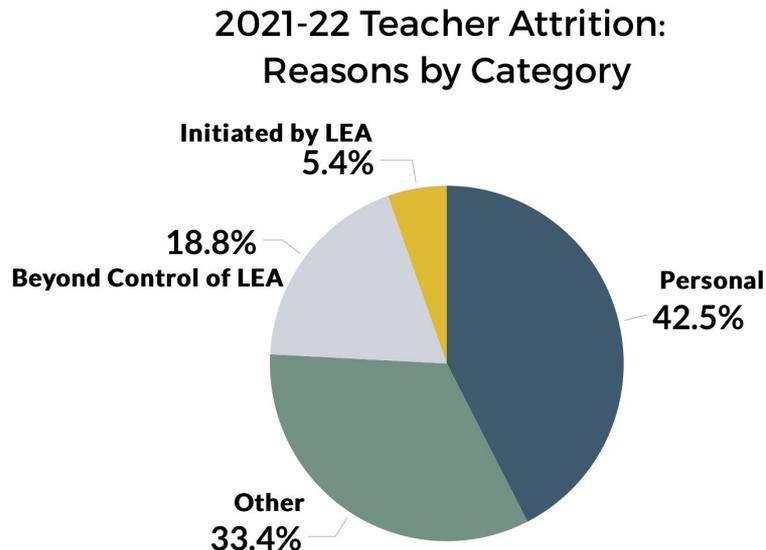
North Carolina public schools employ more than **100,000 teachers** across the state. In 2021-22, 93,962 teachers were employed in traditional public schools and 8,502 were employed in charter schools.



Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Teachers are the number one school-based factor impacting student outcomes. Recruiting and retaining quality teachers for North Carolina's classrooms is a top priority, and an increasing challenge.

Teacher recruitment and retention challenges pose significant equity concerns because schools in high-poverty areas have had a particularly difficult time attracting and retaining teachers.

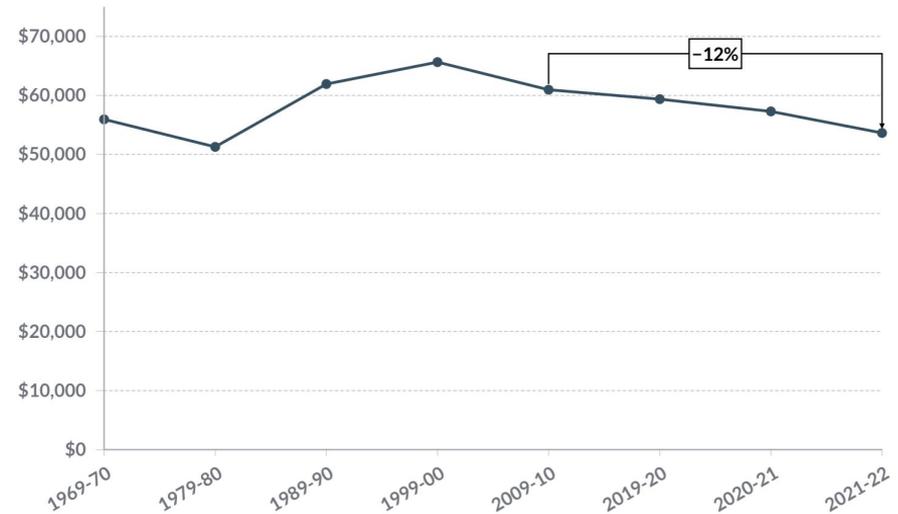


Teacher Pay

In 2021-22, North Carolina was estimated to rank **36th** in the nation in teacher pay, with an average teacher salary of **\$54,863**. This figure includes local salary supplements, which vary widely across districts. The average teacher pay in North Carolina fell **\$11,882 below the national average** salary of \$66,745 in 2021-22

Adjusting for inflation, the average teacher salary in the state **dropped 12%** between 2009-10 to 2021-22, while the national average salary dropped by 7.8% over the same period.

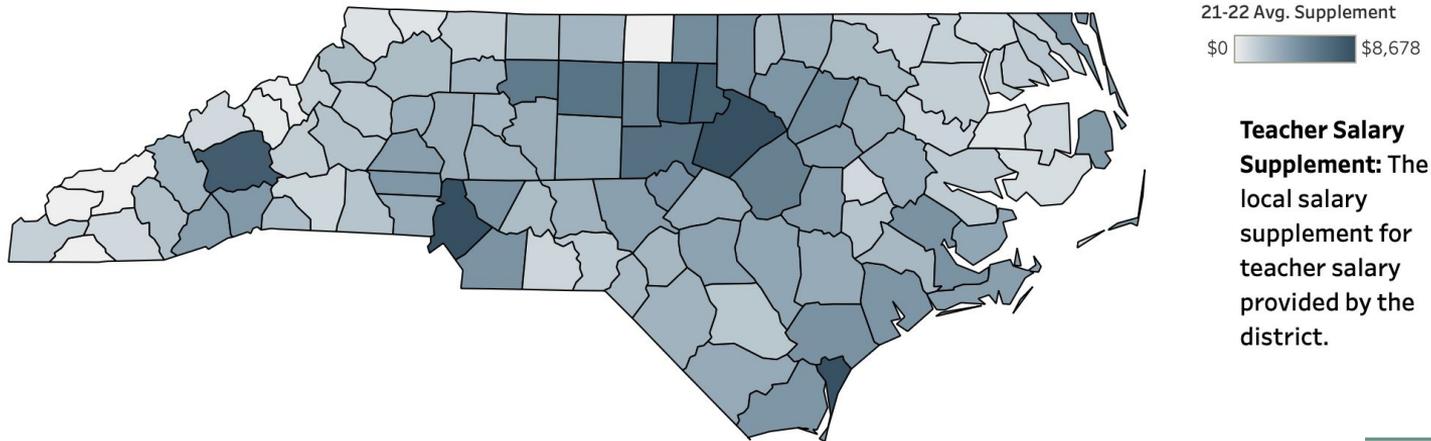
Inflation-Adjusted Estimated Average Teacher Salary in North Carolina



Local Salary Supplement

After a base salary is set by the state, a teacher's salary may then be augmented by local school system supplements in an effort for districts to recruit teachers to work in their schools.

In some school systems, teacher supplements are as little as **\$0**. In other systems, such as Chapel Hill-Carrboro, Wake County, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg, salary supplements are over **\$8,000**. The average local salary supplement in the state was **\$6,053 in 2022-23**.



Local Salary Supplement

In the 2021-23 biennium budget, state lawmakers included **\$100 million** to provide additional teacher salary supplements of up to **\$4,250**. The state provided this funding to 95 counties in an effort to close the large disparities between richer and poorer counties. The amounts vary by county and the program targets rural and low-wealth areas.

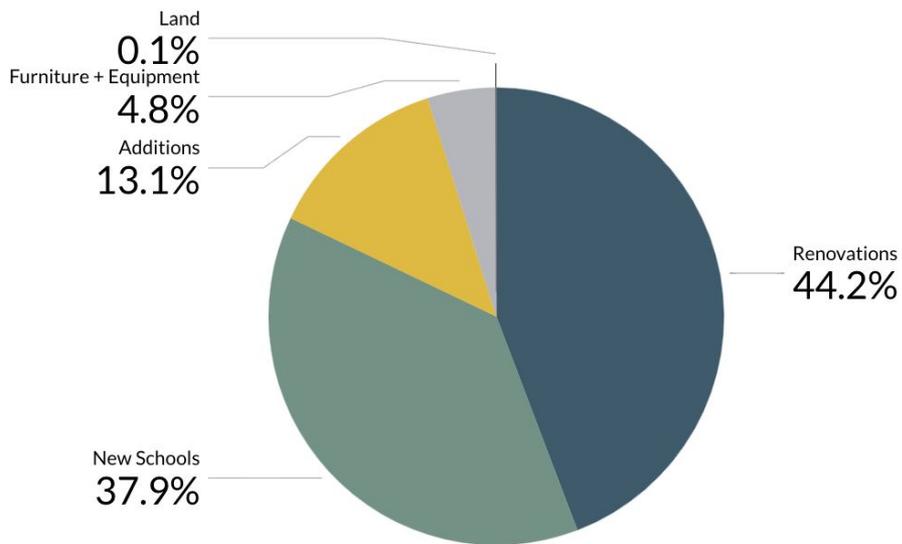
More information on the state appropriations for the teacher salary supplement can be found [here](#).



School Facilities

School Facilities

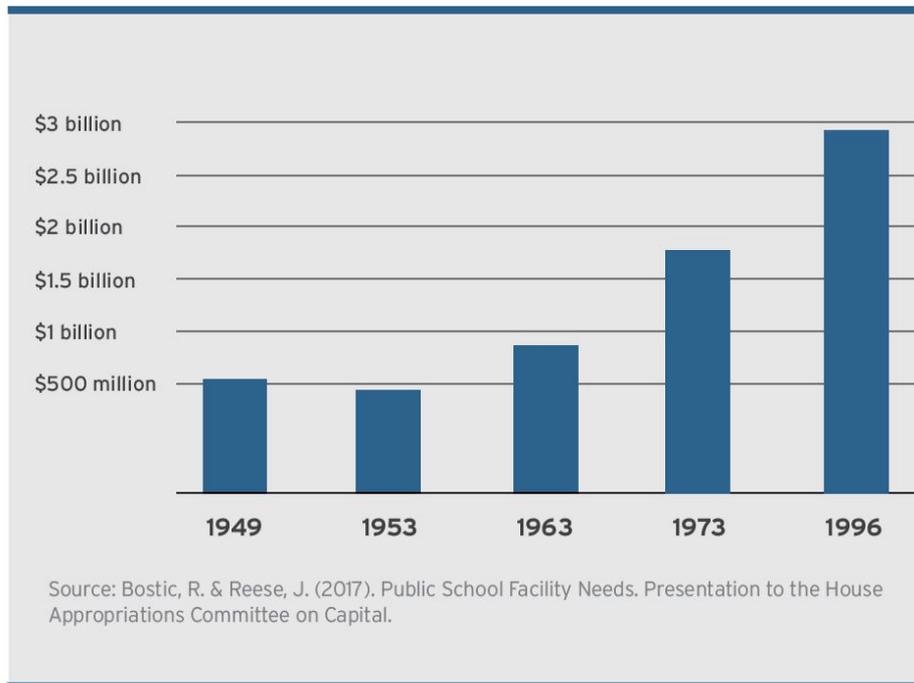
NC Five Year Facilities Needs



\$12.8 Billion in Facilities Needs

School Facilities

STATEWIDE BONDS ISSUED FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION, 1949-1996 (ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION)



A photograph of a classroom with rows of blue desks and brown chairs. In the background, there is a green chalkboard and a whiteboard. The entire image is covered with a semi-transparent blue overlay. The text "School Calendar" is centered in white.

School Calendar

School Calendar



Under current legislation, traditional public schools can open no earlier than the Monday closest to August 26 and close no later than the Friday closest to June 11.



In 2012, the North Carolina legislature increased the state's minimum instructional days to 185. This is higher than any state except Kansas.



Districts in North Carolina have continued to push for more calendar flexibility, arguing that the current calendar law prevents districts from aligning their calendar according to local nuances. In the 2023 legislative session, over twenty bills were filed in the House and Senate to allow school districts more flexibility.

A large, multi-story brick building with a central arched entrance, surrounded by trees and a lawn. The word "Accountability" is overlaid in large white text.

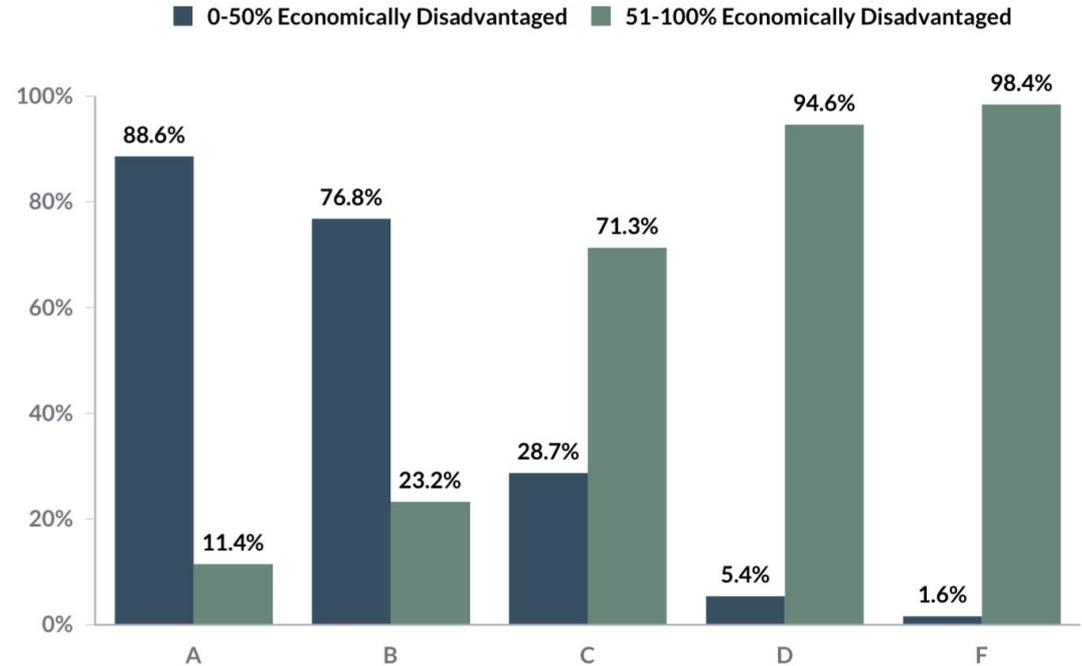
Accountability

School Accountability

North Carolina currently utilizes an accountability model that relies on a system of assigning A-F grades to all schools in the state based on a formula that combines student achievement (80%) and student growth (20%).

There is a significant correlation between school performance grades and the proportion of students in a school who are economically disadvantaged.

2022-23 School Performance Grades by Percent Economically Disadvantaged



School Growth Score

All other states that use A-F grades place a greater emphasis than North Carolina on growth while deemphasizing achievement. The reason for this is simple: school achievement scores reflect single point-in-time test results, over which schools have far less control than growth, which is designed to measure the impact schools and teachers have on students' academic progress.

August 2022, First
Day of 5th Grade



2nd grade reading level

June 2023, Last Day
of 5th Grade



4th grade reading level



Achievement mindset: The student is reading below grade level.
Growth mindset: The student has demonstrated amazing progress.

School Performance Grade Redesign

In 2023, DPI revealed its plan for a redesigned school performance grading system with the goal of piloting the new system in the 2024-25 school year. The current system includes only two performance indicators: **student achievement (80%)** and **student growth (20%)**. The redesigned system would add the following 8 indicators to determine school performance:

Academic Indicators:

- Five-Year Graduation Rate
- Improving Student Group Performance
- Postsecondary Outcomes - Employed, Enlisted, Enrolled
- Postsecondary Preparation Inputs

School Quality Indicators:

- Extra/Intra-Curricular Activities
- Durable Skills
- Chronic Student Absenteeism
- School Climate

Teacher Accountability

Teachers are also evaluated and held accountable for student's academic success. The goal of evaluating teachers is to “assess the teacher's performance in relation to North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards and to design a plan for professional growth.” The five North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards that are used to assess teachers are:

1. Teachers Demonstrate Leadership
2. Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students
3. Teachers Know the Content They Teach
4. Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students
5. Teachers Reflect on Their Practice

A photograph of a library interior, overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The scene shows rows of wooden bookshelves filled with books. In the foreground and middle ground, there are several wooden tables with blue chairs. Some tables have book displays on them. In the background, a person is visible near a service counter. A large whiteboard or display board is mounted on the wall, showing a diagram with a central globe and surrounding boxes. The overall atmosphere is quiet and educational.

Standards & Curriculum

Standard Course of Study

The ***North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS)*** aims to ensure that each grade or proficiency level and each high school course in every public school are utilizing a uniform set of learning standards outlining what students are expected to know and be able to do upon completion of the course or school year.

Per NC State Board of Education policy, each content area's standards are reviewed every five to seven years to ensure the NCSCOS consists of clear, relevant standards and objectives. The standards Review, Revision, and Implementation process provides a comprehensive study of each content area organized by grade level, proficiency level, and/or course.

Most recently, the NC State Board of Education approved new [Social Studies standards](#) in 2021 and new [Science standards](#) in 2023.

Early Literacy: Read to Achieve

To address low reading proficiency in grades K-3, NC lawmakers passed the **Excellent Public Schools Act of 2012**. The law tasked DPI with the development, implementation, and continuous evaluation of a plan to improve reading achievement in public schools. This law allowed DPI to base its literacy program on any current empirical research in reading development.

In response, DPI developed the [Read to Achieve](#) program with the goal of ensuring that every student read at or above grade level by the end of third grade. Read to Achieve was implemented in the 2013-14 school year.

Since its inception, the state has spent more than **\$150 million** on Read to Achieve implementation. However, in 2023, NC DPI data showed that despite the efforts of Read to Achieve, only **68.7** percent of first graders, **62.6** percent of second graders, and **48.2** percent of third graders are reading at grade level, and **22.4%** of 3rd grade students in the 2022-23 school year were retained for not reading proficiently for their grade level. **This rate is double the rates prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Early Literacy: The Science of Reading

In response to the ongoing low reading proficiency, NCGA passed an updated **Excellent Public Schools Act of 2021**. This differed from the 2012 Act in that it eliminated DPI's ability to use *any* "current empirical research" in reading development and mandated that the statewide literacy instruction program be based on a specific body of research called the Science of Reading.

[Science of Reading](#) is a body of research, *not a curriculum*, that investigates how people learn to read. It is a literacy instruction framework through evidence-based reading instruction practices that address the acquisition of language, phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics and spelling, fluency, vocabulary, oral language, and comprehension that can be differentiated to meet the needs of individual students.

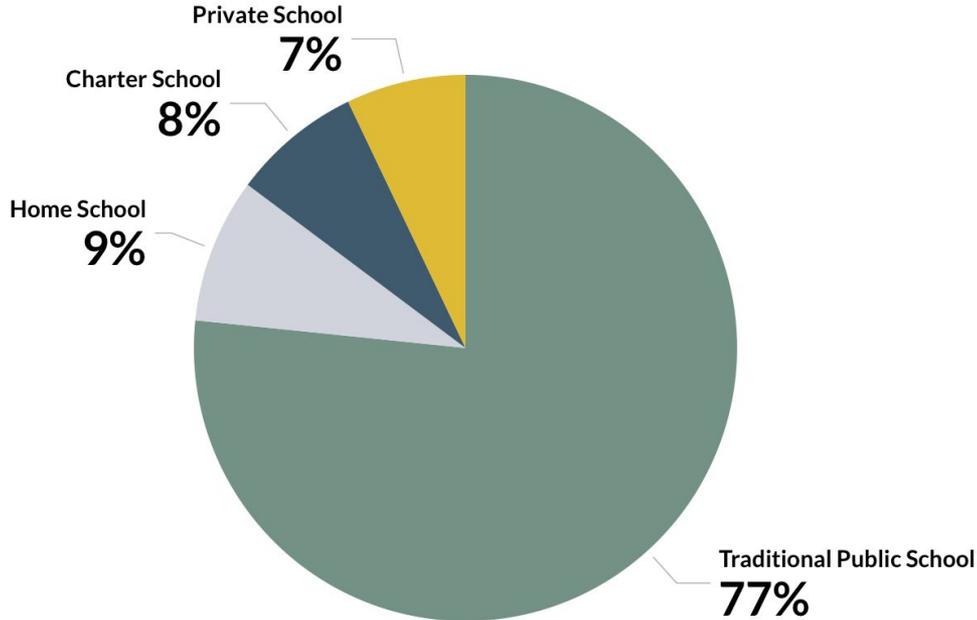
The NCGA also [mandated](#) that PK-5 teachers receive training in the Science of Reading. The training, often referred to by its acronym LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling), requires more than **160 hours of training for teachers over two years**. The rollout and adoption of this program aims for teachers to have a common language to discuss **reading instruction and literacy**, and to allow districts to **collaborate more effectively**.

The image shows three yellow school buses parked in a row on an asphalt surface. The buses are viewed from a front-quarter perspective. The bus in the foreground is the most prominent, with the number '282' on its side and a license plate that reads '23 B20-D'. The middle bus has the number '216' visible. Each bus features a 'SCHOOL BUS' sign on the roof and a red octagonal 'STOP' sign on the side. The background consists of tall, green pine trees under a clear blue sky. The entire image has a semi-transparent blue overlay.

School Choice

School Choice

2022-23 Student Enrollment by School Type



2,500+

**Traditional Public
Schools**

206

Charter Schools

94K

Home Schools

884

Private Schools

Source: NCDPI Statistical Profile [Table 1](#) (Public) and [Table 3](#) (Charter); NCDOA [Statistical Summary for Private Schools](#); [NCDOA Home School Statistical History](#); NCDPI [Annual Charter School Report 2022](#)

School Choice Options: Traditional Public Schools

Traditional public schools are both **publicly funded and publicly governed**. They are **free** for all children, and no child can be turned away from attending.

Traditional public schools **must comply with state and federal rules and regulations**, including staffing, finance, and curriculum. Public schools must also provide **transportation** and access to **free and reduced lunch services**.

Students are assigned a traditional public school based on their home location.

School Choice Options: Magnet Schools

Magnet schools are considered part of the traditional public school system, operating under the same local administration and local school board. The unique feature of magnet schools is that they have a **focused theme and a curriculum aligned to that theme**. Some of these themes include STEM, fine and performing arts, Montessori, language immersion and international studies.

Students do not attend magnet schools based on the location of their home and zoned school boundaries as they do for traditional public schools. Interested students instead have to apply and are selected based on a **lottery** (within the school district) or **prioritized criteria**.

School Choice Options: Charter Schools

Charter schools are **publicly funded, privately governed schools** that are **exempt** from many state and local laws governing public schools, but are required to meet performance and operational standards. Charter schools are nonsectarian and tuition-free.

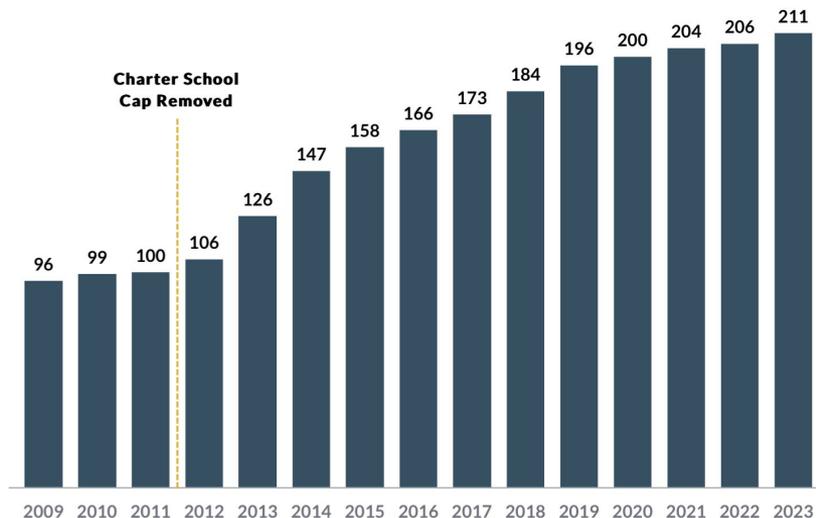
While a traditional public school must staff fully licensed teachers, **only 50% of charter school teachers must be fully licensed and have a college degree.** Charter schools are also exempt from following state curriculum requirements, school calendar laws, and providing transportation and free and reduced lunch.

Previously, the State Board of Education was involved in the charter school approval process. However, in 2023, the NCGA **passed a bill** that transferred all approval and renewal power to the Charter Schools Review Board. Eight of the eleven members of the board are **chosen by the General Assembly.**

Charter Schools by the Numbers

In 2023-24, North Carolina had 211 operating charter schools, including two virtual charter schools. Charter schools in North Carolina receive funding based on the average per pupil allocation in the local education agency (LEA) from which the student came. In 2022-23, charter schools received **\$985,919,148 in state funds for 137,500 expected students**. State funds may be used for any purpose other than purchasing a building.

The Number of Charter Schools Doubled after NCGA Removed the Cap



School Choice Options: Private Schools

Private schools are largely **unaccountable to government institutions** and are traditionally privately funded, through a variety of sources including tuition, private grants, and fundraising from parents or private organizations. Today, many private schools in North Carolina also receive substantial public dollars through **state voucher programs**.

Students typically have to apply to be admitted to a private school. Private schools do not have to meet state-approved academic standards, make budgets public, adhere to open meetings and records laws, or, for the most part, publicly report student achievement. Private schools can also utilize admissions policies that **exclude children based on certain characteristics**, such as religion, sexual orientation, and academic performance.

In 2022-23, North Carolina private schools served **126,768 students at 884 schools**. Over **68%** of these students attended religious schools. In 2023, the average NC private school [tuition rates](#) were estimated at **\$9,437 for elementary schools and \$10,756 for secondary schools**.

Opportunity Scholarships

In 2013, the NCGA created Opportunity Scholarships, a voucher program that provides state-funded scholarships for students to attend private schools, including those that are religiously-affiliated.

In 2023, the NCGA expanded the program to include eligibility for all families with no income cap. For the 2024-25 school year, scholarships are worth between **\$3,360 and \$7,468** depending on [family income](#).

More than **\$4.7 billion** will be spent on the voucher program over the next 10 years. By the 2029 school year, the Opportunity Scholarship program is expected to spend over **\$500 million annually**.

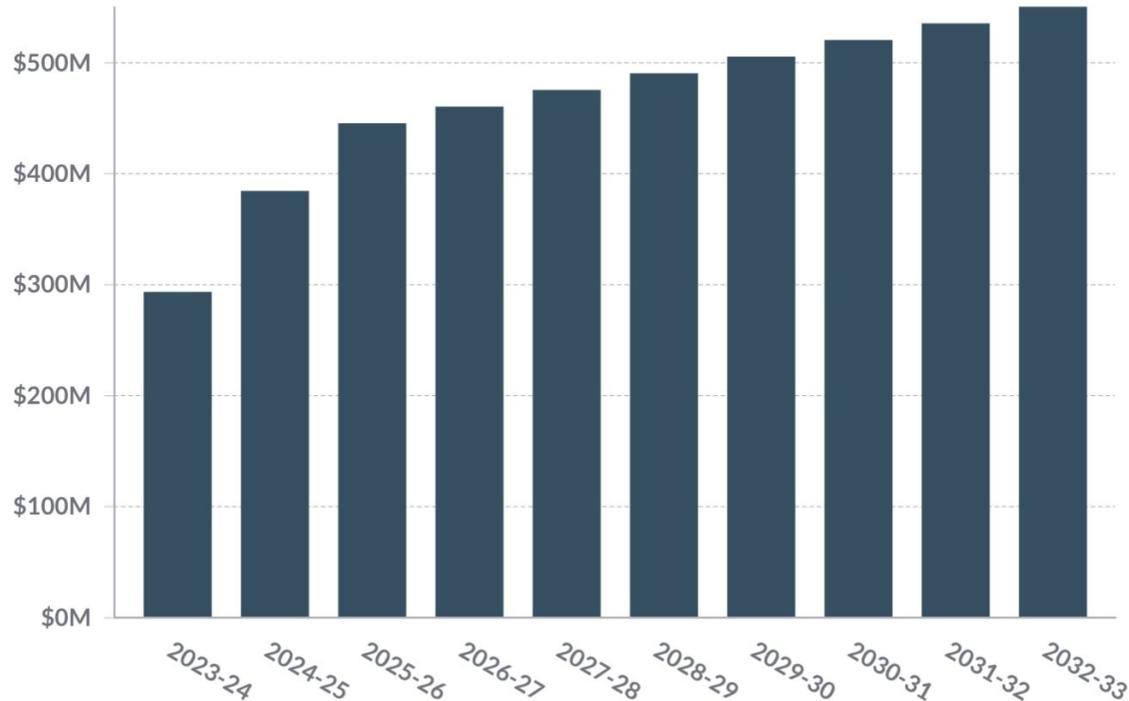
In the 2023-24 school year, North Carolina provided over **\$150 million** in vouchers to **32,511 recipients** enrolled at **589 nonpublic schools**.

Opportunity Scholarships and Accountability

Public Schools	Private Schools
Teachers must be certified	No teacher certification requirements
School calendar law requires 185 days or 1,025 hours of instruction	No requirements for minimum hours/days of instruction
Follow NC Standard Course of Study	No accreditation requirements; no curricular requirements
Participate in state testing program, data are publicly available	Common exam required in grades 3,8, & 11; data only reported for schools with 25+ voucher students in a single grade
Accept all children, provide free/reduced lunch and transportation	Set own admissions requirements and tuition; do not provide free/reduced lunch or transportation

Opportunity Scholarships

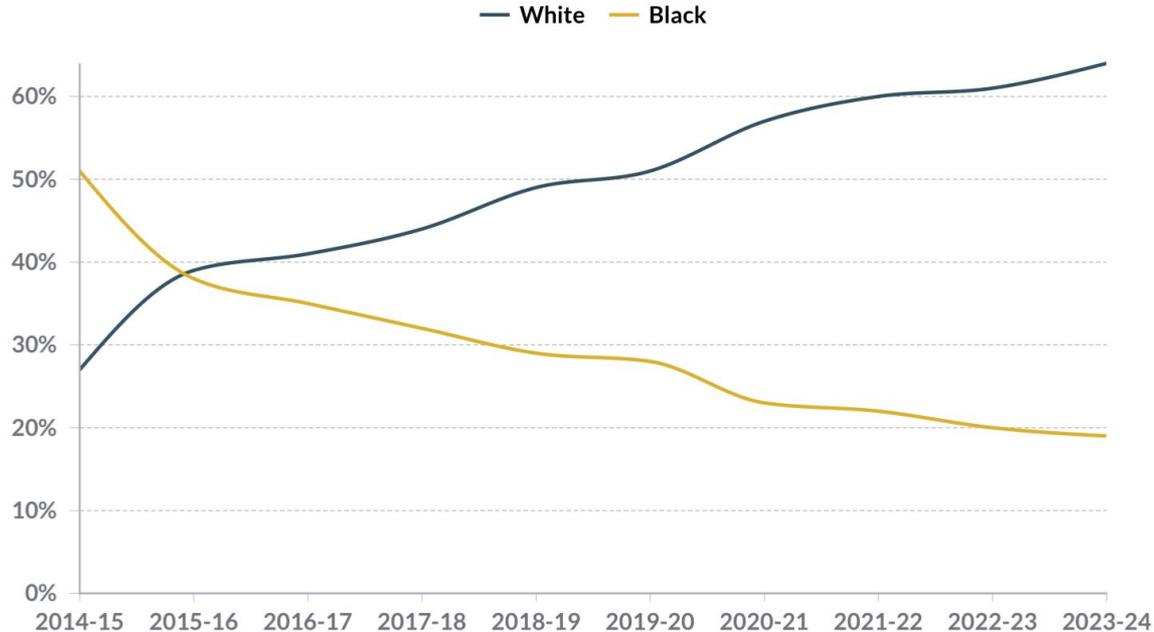
2023-25 State Budget Appropriates \$4.7 Billion to Vouchers Over Next Decade



Opportunity Scholarships

Share of Black NC Voucher Students Consistently Declines

Share of Black and White Opportunity Scholarship Recipients Over Time



A laptop screen in the foreground shows a video conference with several participants in a grid layout. The text "Technology & Digital Learning" is overlaid in large white font across the center of the image. In the background, a larger monitor displays a document with text and a diagram. The overall scene is dimly lit with a blue tint.

Technology & Digital Learning

Technology and Digital Learning

The lack of broadband access in rural communities creates a critical issue known as the homework gap. North Carolina has the **second largest population of rural students** in the nation.

Students may lack home access for a number of reasons, including not having connection options or parents not subscribing due to either cost or not finding it to be important.

Most recent estimates show that **14%** of North Carolina's rural households do not have access to broadband internet.

North Carolina Investments in Broadband

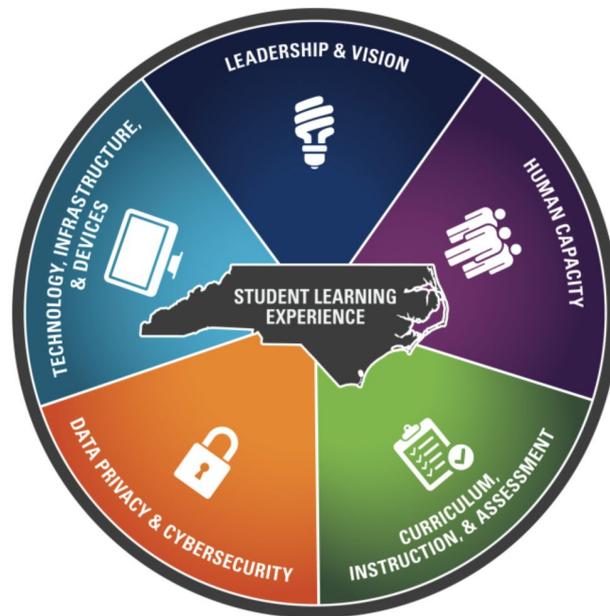
\$1.2 Billion

In 2021, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Cooper established the **nation's first** Office of Digital Equity and Literacy. North Carolina will invest \$1.2 billion in American Recovery Plan (ARP) funds to **close the digital gap by 2025**.

North Carolina Digital Learning Initiative

The Digital Learning Initiative focuses on providing digital teaching and learning supports and resources for North Carolina Public School Units. These supports include:

- Designing and Implementing the [North Carolina Digital Learning Plan](#)
- Providing Professional Learning Around Digital Teaching and Learning Pedagogies and Resources
- Curating and Developing Resources Related to the Goals Established in the Digital Learning Plan
- Conducting Research to Inform the Design of Digital Teaching and Learning Professional Learning and Resources



Digital Learning Standards

Effective starting in the 2020-21 school year, North Carolina adopted the **International Society for Technology in Education Standards for Students** to serve as the state's standards for K-12 digital learning. The digital learning standards must be implemented by teachers in all subject areas and are intended to ensure that **all students have equitable opportunities to learn in digitally-enabled classrooms**. The standards include:

- Digital citizenship, data privacy, and cyber safety
- Digital-aged skills that enable students to be college and career ready
- Creation, collaboration, communication and critical thinking skills
- Inquiry and design thinking and learning opportunities

How to Use AI Responsibly **EVERY** Time

Artificial Intelligence in Schools

In 2024, DPI released a guidebook for the use of generative artificial intelligence in public schools, becoming the **fourth state education agency in the nation** to do so. NCDPI encourages public school units to responsibly embrace AI and incorporate AI Literacy for all staff and students.

The guidebook includes an initial set of recommendations that will be expanded in the coming months. Districts are encouraged to create accompanying guidelines that are specific to their schools.

E **VALUATE** the initial output to see if it meets the intended purpose and your needs.

V **ERIFY** facts, figures, quotes, and data using reliable sources to ensure there are no hallucinations or bias.

E **DIT** your prompt and ask follow up questions to have the AI improve its output.

R **EVISE** the results to reflect your unique needs, style, and/or tone. AI output is a great starting point, but shouldn't be a final product.

Y **OU** are responsible for everything you create with AI. Always be transparent about how you've used these tools.

A group of young people, mostly teenagers and young adults, are participating in a protest or rally. They are holding a large white banner. The banner features a stylized American flag with horizontal stripes and the text "STUDENTS DEMAND ACTION FOR GUN SENSE IN AMERICA". The background is a blurred crowd of people, suggesting a large gathering. The overall tone is serious and focused on social activism.

School Safety



**STUDENTS
DEMAND
ACTION**

FOR GUN SENSE IN AMERICA

StudentsDemandActionMinnesota@gmail.com

School Safety



In NC public schools, there were **13,193** total reported crimes in 2022-23. The rate of crimes reported increased to **8.77 acts** per 1000 students in 2022-23.

Reporting Year	Total Acts	Acts Per 1000 Students
2022-23	13,193	8.77
2021-22	11,170	7.51
2020-21	1,535	1.04
2019-20	7,158	4.69
2018-19	9,554	6.29
2017-18	9,747	6.48
2016-17	9,834	6.5

School Safety

Since the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, more than **360,000** US students have experienced gun violence in schools.

In 2022, **34 students and adults died while more than 43,000 children were exposed to gunfire at school.** The 2022 school year had the highest number of school shootings since Columbine with 46 across the country.

Many have called for stricter gun laws as a preventative measure, including banning the sale of assault weapons, increasing the minimum purchase age, and enforcing universal background checks.

Center for Safer Schools

The North Carolina Center for Safer Schools was established in 2013 by Governor Pat McCrory. The Center is housed within the NC Department of Public Instruction, and serves as a hub of information and technical assistance on school safety. The work of the Center includes the administration of the NC School Safety Grants Program and as well as the following:

- Education and training of schools and other stakeholders
- Receiving consultation and assistance from advisory Task Force
- Anonymous Reporting
- Focusing on 6 sub-areas: Mental Health, Physical Security and Emergency Preparedness, School Climate and Discipline, Substance Use, Gang Intervention, and School Resource Officers (SROs)

School Resource Officers

In 2023, there were an estimated 1500 school resource officers (SRO) across the state who are disproportionately **male** and **white** (80% and 75% respectively). Nearly 7% of SROs had not completed the mandatory SRO training and were not enrolled in the training and only 22% completed the Advanced SRO training, which is optional.

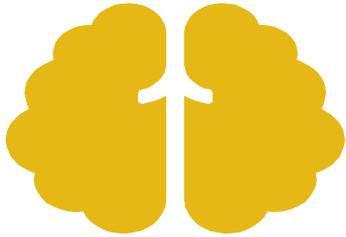
The 2022-24 School Resource Grant totaled **\$33 million** to fund over 800 positions across the state.

Data have shown that SROs increase suspensions, expulsions, police referrals, and arrests at a **rate that is twice as high for Black students compared to White students**. Research also indicates that the presence of SROs on campus does not stop school shootings from occurring. The Washington Post found that **SROs stopped only two out of 200** school shootings, and **an officer was present during four of the five worst school shootings**.

A photograph of young children in a classroom setting, sitting at a white table and eating. The children are wearing aprons and are focused on their food. The background shows wooden bunk beds and colorful wall decorations. The text "Early Childhood" is overlaid in the center of the image.

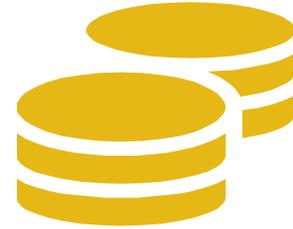
Early Childhood

Early Childhood



90%

of a child's critical brain development occurs during the first five years of life.



\$4 - \$9

in returns for every dollar invested into Early Childhood Education Programs

North Carolina's Early Childhood Education System

DPI's NC Office of Early Learning

This office administers state and federally funded programs, including the Preschool Exceptional Children's Program, Title I Preschool, and Head Start

NC Pre-K Program

This program is a state-funded initiative for eligible four-year-olds that aimed to prepare them for success entering elementary school that is housed in NC DHHS

Smart Start

This program aspires to help working parents pay for child care, improve the quality of child care, and provide health and family support services in every North Carolina county.

NC Pre-K Program

In 2022-23, NC Pre-K only had enough funding and capacity to enroll **29,842 children**, or **53%** of the over 50,000 four-year-olds in the state who are eligible for participation.

Funding expansions that began in 2017 increased the number of enrollment slots in the 2019-20 school year to more than 31,000. The **number of slots decreased** by about 900 in 2020-21, by about 200 more slots in 2021-22, and by about 100 more in 2022-23.

Longitudinal research confirms that children who [participate in NC Pre-K](#):

- Enter kindergarten more ready to learn
- Are more proficient in both reading and math
- Are less likely to repeat grades throughout elementary school
- Are less likely to be placed in special education classes, resulting in savings to the state

A young boy with short brown hair, wearing a teal polo shirt, is sitting at a white desk. He has his head buried in his arms, which are resting on the desk, suggesting he is tired or stressed. On the desk in front of him is a tablet computer. To the left, there are several colorful pens and pencils in a holder. To the right, there are sheets of paper and a pair of scissors. The background shows a white chair and a window with light-colored curtains. The entire image has a semi-transparent blue overlay.

Student Mental Health

Student Mental Health



43% of NC high school students felt sad or hopeless almost **every day**.

22% of NC high school students **seriously considered** attempting suicide.

18% of NC high school students **made a plan** for suicide.

10% of NC high school students **attempted suicide**.

Student Mental Health

	2022 Ratio	Recommended Ratio
Psychologists	1 : 1,979	1 : 500
Counselors	1 : 361	1 : 250
Social Workers	1 : 1,033	1 : 250

Parents' Bill of Rights

In 2023, the NCGA passed the Parent's Bill of Rights which includes a series of required notifications regarding a student's physical and mental health, in addition to codifying many rights already afforded to parents in the state. These notifications include any changes to services or monitoring for **mental, emotional, or physical health** or well-being and any changes to a child's **name or pronouns**.

The bill further prohibits any instruction on **gender identity, sexual activity, or sexuality** in the curriculum for kindergarten through fourth grade.

While educators and other experts overwhelmingly agree that parental involvement in the lives of their children is critically important and should be fostered, research shows that [fewer than 40 percent of LGBTQ+ youth](#) live in homes that are affirming of their identities. Regardless of its intention, mental health professionals have expressed concern that this bill could create dangerous environments for young people who may not have families who are willing or ready to provide the support they need and may lead to worse mental health outcomes. In the past year, [41% of LGBTQ+ youth](#) seriously considered attempting suicide.

School-Based Mental Health Policy

In 2020, the [NCGA required](#) the State Board of Education to adopt a school-based mental health policy and to require K-12 school units to adopt and to implement a school-based mental health plan that includes a mental health training program and a suicide risk referral protocol.

In 2021, the State Board of Education passed the [School-Based Mental Health Policy](#) that requires all public schools to adopt and implement a plan to promote student mental health and well-being and to assess and approve upon supports for the mental and social-emotional health and the substance use needs of all students.

NC School Mental Health Initiative

The [NC School Mental Health Initiative \(NC SMHI\)](#) is a multi-disciplinary partnership of stakeholders related to the provision of mental health services to children and youth. NC SMHI operates with the goal to **provide policy/legislative support and recommendations for accessible, high-quality, and coordinated mental health services**. The NC SMHI provides implementation and monitoring support related to mental health services that:

- Promote healthy development of social, emotional, and/or behavioral functioning
- Prevent problems with social, emotional, and/or behavioral functioning
- Respond to students experiencing concerns or problems with social, emotional, and behavioral functioning
- Prevent and treat substance abuse

A photograph of a school hallway where several children and adults are running. The hallway has blue doors and a light-colored floor. The scene is captured with a blue color overlay. The text "Out-of-School Time" is overlaid in white, bold font in the center of the image.

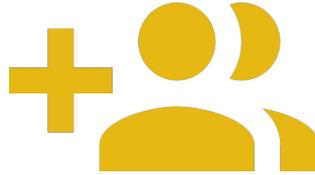
Out-of-School Time

Out-of-School Time in North Carolina



192,548

K-12 children participated in afterschool programs in the North Carolina in 2020



666,625

Additional North Carolina children would participate in an afterschool program if it were available



198,460

North Carolina children are alone and unsupervised after school

Out-of-School Time Benefits

Afterschool programs provide a **\$3** return for every **\$1** invested.
Among North Carolina students in afterschool:



90% build social skills



70% access healthy snacks or meals



72% get homework help



76% engage in STEM learning



84% participate in physical activities



81% learn life skills, like the ability to communicate

Out-of-School Time Funding

The two primary sources of public funding for out-of-school time in NC are:

Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers

- The 21st CCLC program provides federal funds to establish or expand community learning centers that operate during out-of-school hours to support academic achievement, provide enrichment opportunities, and engage families in their child's education.
- **Total 21st CCLC funding for North Carolina as of 2023 is \$38,918,368. In the 2022-23 school year, 18,676 children were served in 307 21st Century Community Learning Centers across the state.**

Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)

- North Carolina's Division of Child Development uses a combination of state and federal funds to provide subsidized child care services to low-income working families. Federal Child Care and Development Fund dollars fund child care assistance for School Age children, as well as quality supports for School Age Child Care.
- **In 2022 in North Carolina, 49% of children who received CCDF funds were school aged (ages 5 to 12). Approximately 18,304 school-age children each month received CCDF assistance. Only 17% of eligible NC children received child care subsidies.**

Out-of-School Time Funding

Other potential sources of public funding for out-of-school time in NC include:

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): In FY 2021, North Carolina reported that \$196.1 million – or 33.9% – of its total \$578 million in TANF expenditures was spent on childcare.

Extended Learning and Integrated Student Supports Grants (ELISS): In 2023, the NCGA appropriated \$7,000,000 each year from 2023-2025 from the At-Risk Student Services Alternative School Allotment for ELISS grant programs. In 2023-2024, 15 organizations serving a total of 13,193 students were recommended for \$10,700,732 in funding over the two-year period.

Elementary and Secondary Student Emergency Relief (ESSER): North Carolina received \$3.6 billion in ESSER III funding, the last and largest round of federal relief. NC DPI set aside \$50,000,000 of ESSER III to be spent on Extended Learning Recovery After-School Enrichment.

Out-of-School Time Outcomes

In 2022, among regular attendees of 21st Century Community Learning Center programs in North Carolina:



56.7% of 4th-8th graders demonstrated growth on NC Reading/Language Arts



81.5% of 4th-8th graders demonstrated growth on NC Mathematics



82.0% of 1st-12th graders demonstrated an improved attendance rate



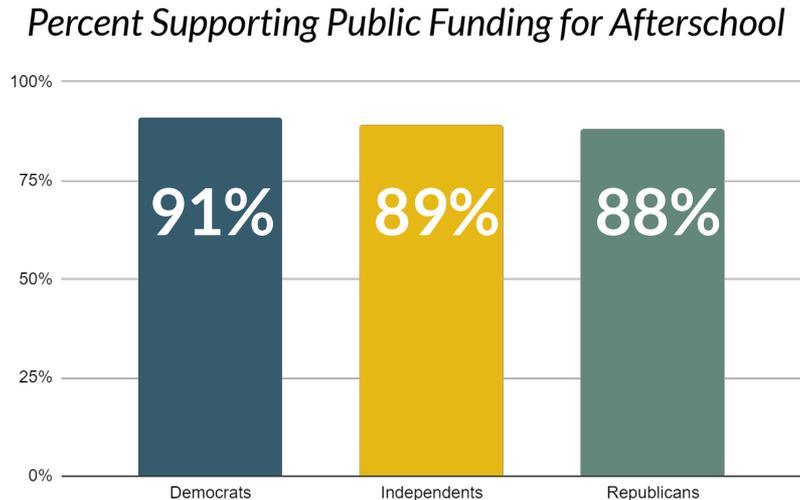
46.9% of 1st-12th graders experienced a decrease in In-School Suspensions



88.8% of 1st-5th graders demonstrated improved engagement in learning

Out-of-School Time

89% of North Carolina parents support public funding for afterschool programs.
Support for public funding is high across the political spectrum:



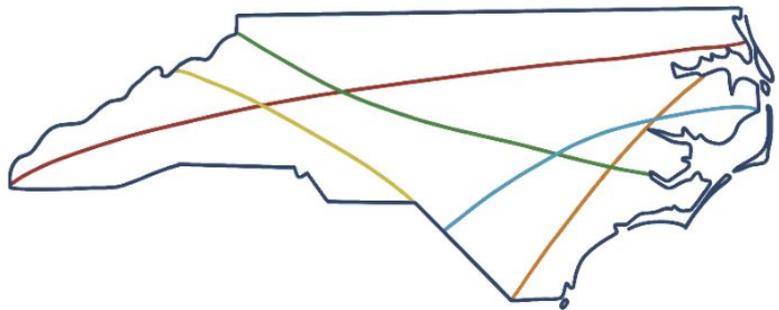
The background features a dark blue gradient with a faint silhouette of two people sitting at a table, looking at a laptop screen. The person on the left is wearing a cap, and the person on the right has curly hair. The text is centered over this background.

About the Public School Forum of North Carolina



Policy Team

The Public School Forum of North Carolina's Policy Team researches, analyzes, and advocates for policies that will enable every child to have access to a high quality, equitable education; engages policymakers, stakeholders, and networks to inform and advance policy goals; and informs and educates the public on education policy to build support for pro-public education policies and action by policymakers.



Dudley Flood Center for Educational Equity and Opportunity

THE PUBLIC SCHOOL FORUM OF NORTH CAROLINA

The Dudley Flood Center for Educational Equity and Opportunity exists to eradicate educational inequities using a framework of care by supporting students, educators, and communities. We understand that by empowering educators and students, strengthening advocacy efforts, building individual capacity, and centering historical context for present-day impact we promote equitable and sustainable systems change.



NORTH CAROLINA CENTER FOR
**RESILIENCE
& LEARNING**
PUBLIC SCHOOL FORUM OF NC

The North Carolina Center for Resilience and Learning is a whole school, whole child framework working with districts and schools across the state to create trauma-informed learning environments that are safer and more supportive for all children. The Center works with schools to create school-wide culture shifts through professional development and ongoing coaching that teaches and supports social/emotional or coping skills and builds a positive school climate with supportive relationships where kids feel physically and emotionally safe so they can focus on learning.



NC CAP is a statewide afterschool and expanded learning network, with key partners including afterschool providers, state agencies, state and local policymakers, law enforcement, universities and community colleges, business, and the philanthropic community, working together to increase access to high quality afterschool and expanded learning programs for all children and youth in North Carolina, especially for those at-risk of education failure.