

Our Top Education Issues represent the Public School Forum’s policy agenda for the 2025-26 legislative biennium.

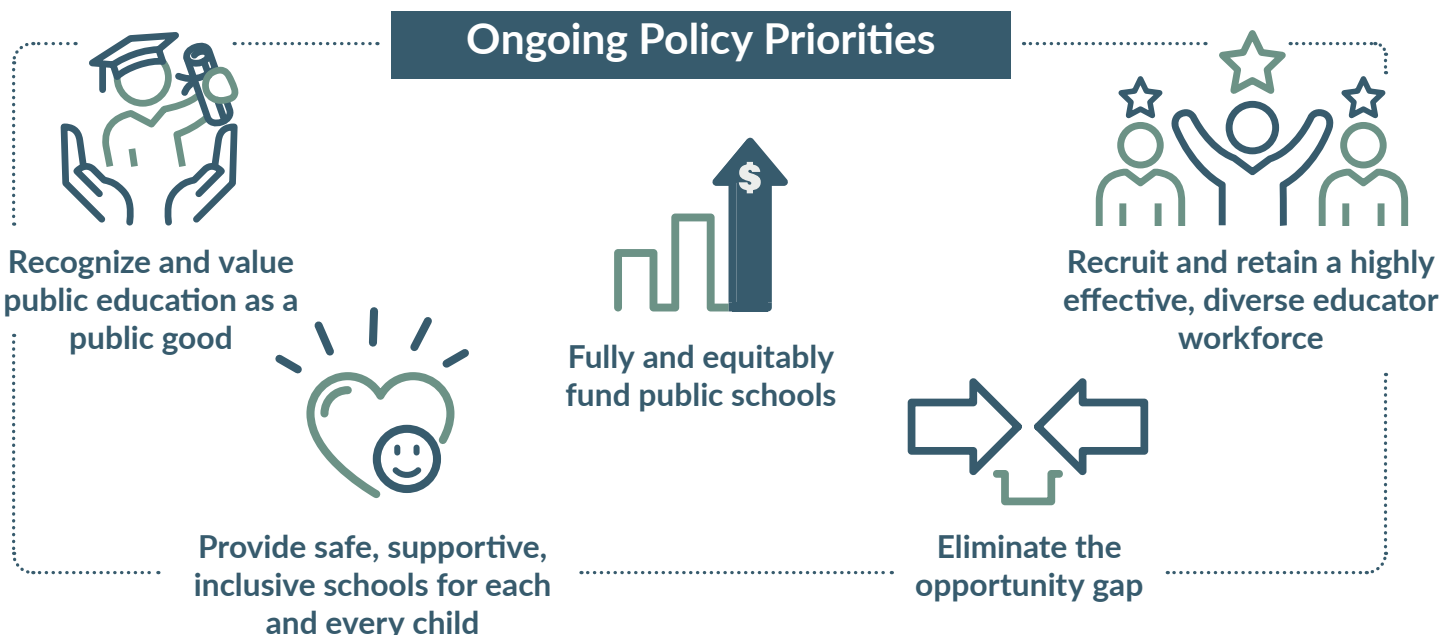
- 1** Ensure our School Funding System is Equitable, Adequate, and Flexible to Meet Students’ Unique Needs.
- 2** Make Educator Pay Competitive in North Carolina.
- 3** Address Critical Needs to Support Child Well-Being and Success In and Outside of School.
- 4** Adopt Assessment and Accountability Policies that are Fair and Effective.

Top Education Issues 2025

2025 promises to be a year of transition for North Carolina’s children, accompanied by both significant challenges and tremendous opportunities. Our local public schools will play a unique and central role as our state contends with leadership changes across all levels of government, rapid technological and economic transformation, and demographic growth and change. Furthermore, recent devastation from Hurricane Helene serves as a sobering reminder of the potential impact of natural disasters on our school communities, and our students and educators in Western North Carolina will be recovering for years to come. The next legislative biennium presents a critical moment to serve and equip our students, their families, and their communities for all that lies ahead as we enter into the second quarter of the 21st century. In the face of ongoing political, technological, and cultural change, our local public schools remain open to all, ready to tackle these challenges and to prepare our children for life.

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.



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

- North Carolina ranks 48th in the country on per-student spending when adjusting for regional cost differences, falling nearly \$5,000 below the national average and 49th in the nation on funding effort, or the amount of funding per student relative to the state's wealth overall.¹
- In total, nearly \$1 billion was appropriated to the Opportunity Scholarship Program in 24-25.² Many private schools, including those receiving taxpayer dollars through school vouchers, are inaccessible to large numbers of students and families in North Carolina because of cost, services provided, or admissions policies that discriminate based on religion, disability, academics, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

..... **2025-26 Policy Actions**



- ✓ Prioritize adequacy, equity, transparency, and flexibility in North Carolina's school funding system. Ensure that any changes to the school finance model are informed by stakeholder input and that no districts lose money.
- ✓ Prioritize public dollars for local public schools that serve all children. Require all schools receiving taxpayer funds to practice non-discriminatory admissions policies.

2 Make Educator Pay Competitive in North Carolina.

- North Carolina teacher pay ranks 42nd in the nation for beginning teachers (\$40,136 on average) and 38th in the nation for average overall salary (\$56,559 on average).³ North Carolina educators earn 25% less than comparable college graduates.⁴ Compensation is consistently cited as the top reason why educators are considering leaving their jobs. Approximately 75% of educators in this category say they put more into their job than they receive in return, and 69% feel that their total compensation does not reflect their qualifications and efforts.⁵
- The current principal compensation plan in North Carolina leads to large and unpredictable swings in pay, does not consider the complexity of the school, and de-incentivizes aspiring principals to stay in the field.⁶
- Attrition for North Carolina teachers was 11.5% for the 2022-23 school year, up from 7.8% in 2021-22,⁷ and the burnout rate for K-12 educators outpaces all other professions nationally.⁸ The number of teachers who left teaching in North Carolina due to career dissatisfaction and/or for a career change more than doubled between 2019 and 2023.⁹

..... **2025-26 Policy Actions**



- ✓ Increase base pay for teachers each year, to reach the national average by 2030.
- ✓ 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.

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

- Students have experienced significant increases in mental health disorders in recent years, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation,¹⁰ and North Carolina’s children of color and LGBTQ+ youth are suffering disproportionately.¹¹ Students who experience repeated adverse childhood experiences suffer academically and are more likely to be suspended or expelled.¹²
- Students continue to be absent from school at significantly higher rates than they were prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹³ Recent research finds that poor mental health is linked to chronic absenteeism.¹⁴
- Approximately 80% of North Carolina students’ time is spent outside of school, yet not all students have access to high-quality out of school time programming. For every child enrolled in afterschool, 3 more are waiting for an available program.¹⁵ Studies have found that afterschool programs promote short and long-term academic gains, decrease risky behaviors and absenteeism, and improve physical health.¹⁶

2025-26 Policy Actions



- ✓ Create safe, affirming school environments for all students with adequate staffing of the school-based mental health workforce.
- ✓ Enact local policies that prioritize the mental health of students and educators and expand social and emotional learning programs that support student well-being.
- ✓ Close the afterschool, summer learning, and enrichment funding gap with funding designated for school- and community-based programs.

4 Adopt Assessment and Accountability Policies that are Fair and Effective.

- North Carolina’s A-F school performance grades are determined by a formula based 80 percent on proficiency (one-time test score) and 20 percent on growth over time. This model tells us very little about how students and schools are actually performing; but instead reflects which schools have the largest proportions of students living in low-wealth households.
- The Praxis Core exam, a requirement for entry into North Carolina educator preparation programs, is not predictive of effectiveness in the classroom and can be a barrier to entry into the profession for prospective educators.
- Private schools receiving taxpayer dollars in the form of school vouchers are held to minimal accountability and reporting requirements, making it very difficult to meaningfully assess and compare metrics of student progress and success. Out of the 200 private schools that received the most voucher funding in the 23-24 school year, only 42% were accredited, 8.5% publicly shared test scores, and 2% required teachers to be certified by the state.¹⁷

2025-26 Policy Actions



- ✓ Adopt a new statewide school accountability model incorporating multiple measures of school success accompanied by a plan for 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.

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.



Scan to view our Top Education Issues and Data Sources Online

Our Mission

To inspire meaningful action on North Carolina’s most important public education issues.



Scan to view our 2025 Local School Finance Study



Scan to view our 2024 Impact Report

Endnotes

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- 12 NC Center for Resilience and Learning. (2022). Supporting Trauma-Informed Schools across NC. <https://resilienceandlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/RL-Overview.pdf>
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