

Restoring North Carolina's Public Schools

Years of mismanagement and underinvestment are undermining North Carolina's public schools

NORTH CAROLINA'S PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM WAS ONCE THE ENVY OF THE SOUTH. Over the past eight years, however, lawmakers have undermined our public school system by:

1. Denying schools the necessary resources to allow students to flourish
2. Prioritizing school choice and privatization schemes that ignore the underlying challenges faced by North Carolina's students
3. Implementing half-baked versions of programs that have failed elsewhere.

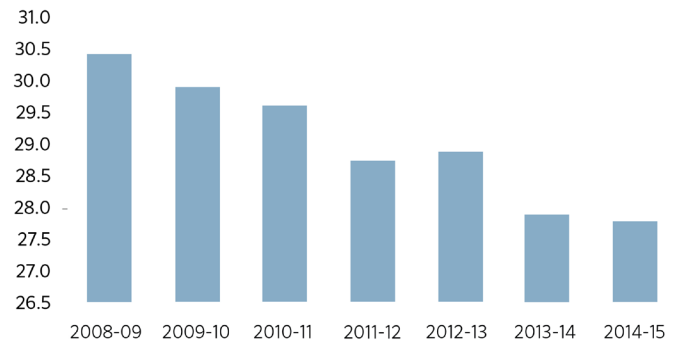
Our students, particularly students of color and those from low-income families, are paying the price. A new focus on meeting student needs can reverse these trends and restore our schools to greatness.

■ Eight years of inadequate funding

North Carolina's school funding effort (school spending in relation to size of our economy) continues to fall. North Carolina's school funding effort ranks 46th in the nation and dead last in the Southeast.

Despite recent economic growth, real per-student funding is 5 percent below pre-Recession levels. North Carolina schools have fewer teachers, support staff (nurses, counselors, librarians, etc.), teacher assistants, textbooks, and supplies. Per-student funding in South Carolina is nearly \$2,400 (25 percent) greater than in North Carolina.

Public School Spending as Share of GDP



■ Students are paying the price

After decades of improvement, student achievement has plateaued or fallen over the past eight years. Other states are passing North Carolina by, as indicated by our declining rankings on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Students of color and students from low-income families are disproportionately paying the price. According to NAEP results, Black and Hispanic students are falling behind their white classmates. Students who qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch (a measure of family income) have fallen further behind their wealthier classmates in 8th grade math and reading.

■ A better path is possible

The recipe for successful schools is not complicated. Lawmakers simply need to provide schools with the funding necessary to attract and retain a motivated, professional staff, and then provide educators with the resources necessary to ensure all students can be successful. The table below lists other priorities to remove learning barriers and promote student flourishing.

North Carolina’s lawmakers can reverse recent trends by recognizing that:

- **Governing effectively means governing openly and respecting the voices of parents and educators;**
- **The barriers faced by students of color and those from low-income families must be directly confronted;**
- **Public schools provide shared societal benefits and are meant to promote human flourishing rather than simply developing workers; and**
- **School choice is not substitute for school quality.**

Student Readiness	Student Health	Diversity
• Pre-kindergarten	• Mental health (ACEs)	• School integration
• Early literacy	• Vision/hearing/dental	• Teachers of color
	• School meals	• Parental engagement
Enrichment	Safety	Professional Educators
• Art, music, PE	• Nurses & counselors	• Competitive pay
• Field trips	• Restorative justice	• Career status
• After-school programs		• Career pathways
		• Decision-making

■ What you can do:

- ✓ Share today’s information with your networks
- ✓ Engage your local leaders to stand for public schools
- ✓ Be a year-round voice for public schools
- ✓ Determine where candidates stand on public school issues

Ten questions to ask political candidates:

1. Funding for staffing levels for nurses, counselors, and psychologists remains about half of recommended levels. **How can we address school safety issues while ignoring students’ mental health needs?**
2. North Carolina is losing its experienced teachers, and enrollment in teacher preparation programs has plummeted. **How will you restore the teaching profession in North Carolina?**
3. School integration is a low-cost intervention that benefits all students. **What are you doing to ensure schools and classrooms are meaningfully integrated?**
4. **What do you think the best strategy is for turning around low-performing schools?**
5. Funding for textbooks and supplies is about half of pre-Recession levels. **How will you ensure teachers have the resources necessary to do their jobs?**
6. Black and Hispanic students continue to face lower achievement levels as measured by state tests and higher rates of suspension than their white classmates. **How will you work to reduce these disparities?**
7. Studies (including one using North Carolina data) regularly find that a diverse teaching corps has incredibly beneficial impacts, particularly for Black male students. **How will you recruit and retain teachers of color?**
8. School performance grades effectively measure socioeconomic status, rather than the amount of learning taking place. **How will you amend our school performance grades to ensure they no longer stigmatize schools with low-income students?**
9. North Carolina’s voucher program has been rife with fraud, and lawmakers have actively resisted serious efforts to determine whether the program is helping or hurting voucher students. **Should this program be guaranteed annual funding increases while funding for traditional, inclusive public schools wallows below pre-Recession levels?**
10. Studies have found that North Carolina’s charter schools create financial strains on traditional public schools and contribute to racial segregation without improving student performance. **How can you ensure that charter schools equally serve all students without creating added pressures on the traditional schools serving the vast majority of public school students?**