

# 2014 Priorities for Strengthening & Enhancing Public Education in North Carolina

The North Carolina Association of School Administrators asks that the General Assembly, the Governor, the State Board of Education and other state leaders work with our organization and the 7,000 school leaders in our membership on focused initiatives that will attract and retain the highest quality personnel to work in public schools across the state and to support enhanced achievement of North Carolina students, ensuring readiness for competition in our global economy. The following are NCASA's recommendations for legislative actions that will assist with these goals and help move the state's public schools to the next level.

## **1. Attract & Retain the Best Public School Teachers: Competitive Compensation**

## **2. Adequate Resources for North Carolina's Public Schools**

## **3. Accountability System That Nurtures Academic Improvement**

## **4. Increased Local Control & Flexibility to Implement Reforms & Enhance Performance**

## **5. Increased Accountability in Taxpayer-Funded Education Provided outside Public Schools**



North Carolina  
Association of School Administrators

## Attract & Retain the Best Public School Teachers: Competitive Compensation

Ensuring North Carolina students are receiving a high quality education is impossible without simultaneously attracting some of the state's best and brightest individuals to enter the teaching profession, stay in the classroom, and influence the learning experience in a positive way. Current North Carolina teacher salaries are deterring, rather than attracting and retaining, dedicated professionals needed as educators. Teachers who entered the profession six years ago are earning the same pay as those in their first year of teaching, and an alarming number are crossing into neighboring states to receive higher pay. The current salary schedule requiring a teacher to work 15 years to earn \$40,000 with a bachelor's degree makes it difficult for North Carolina public schools to compete against private sector employers that offer better pay – particularly in fields requiring strengths in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The recent law change mandating elimination of the salary supplement for teachers and certain instructional support personnel who earn master's and/or doctoral degrees exacerbates ongoing problems with the current salary schedule, which needs a major overhaul. School administrators view an ongoing restoration of these supplements as critical for attracting and retaining effective personnel to North Carolina classrooms in order to ensure high quality educational services for students. At a minimum, all individuals who completed advanced degree work by the 2012-2013 year should be provided the supplement upon program completion in recognition of the investment of time and resources expended. NCASA urges the General Assembly to work with all public school stakeholders through the Task Force on Teacher and School Administrator Effectiveness and Compensation, authorized under the 2013 state budget, to identify and implement recommendations that will achieve the following:

- » **Re-establish a state-funded scholarship program** to attract high-performing high school students into teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities across the state,
- » **Increase the pay of beginning and early-career teachers,**
- » **Address an increase in teacher base pay before addressing pay for performance measures,**
- » **Adjust teacher salaries in order to compete within our region** and exceed the national average by 2018,
- » **Condense the salary schedule from 37 years to 15 years,**
- » **Provide targeted increases at various steps of the salary schedule** to occur at times when teachers leave the profession,
- » **Allow pay incentives for hard-to-staff subject areas and in high-needs schools,**
- » **Reinstate master's degree and doctoral degree supplements on an ongoing basis, and**
- » **Layer merit-based pay on top of a well-performing salary schedule** to further incentivize outstanding performance in the classroom.

## Adequate Resources for North Carolina's Public Schools

A high-performing K-12 education system is crucial for North Carolina to develop and attract sustainable, well-paying jobs and ensures North Carolina's students are strong competitors in our global economy and are prepared to become the local, state and federal leaders essential to the future. To accomplish this, the state should dedicate significant resources to public schools, restoring reductions in North Carolina's per-student funding (declining since 2008), and focusing on increased investments in technology essential for engaging 21st Century learners. The first installment of this state investment should be dedicated to a sustainable revenue stream earmarked for digital learning, and funding from the following reductions to personnel and classroom resources should be restored:

- » **\$120 million** cut to Teacher Assistants for 2013-2014
- » **\$286 million** cut to Classroom Teachers for 2013-2014
- » **\$17 million** cut to Instructional Support for 2013-2014
- » **\$77 million** non-recurring cut to instructional resources and digital content in 2012-2013 not restored
- » **\$38 million** non-recurring cut to classroom supplies in 2012-2013 not restored & exacerbated by a \$7 million recurring reduction in 2013-2014

## Accountability System That Nurtures Academic Improvement

**School Performance Grades** | Over the last two years, North Carolina has moved toward implementing an "A-F" school performance grading system intended to make it easier for the public to determine if a school is meeting expectations for educating students and enhancing their achievement. Those letter grades, while beneficial in their simplicity, may mislead the public to downgrade their perception of a school, unless factors that contribute to an effective learning environment are calculated along with academic achievement and student progress. The new grading system needs further refinement – or delay – before the first grades are issued in August 2014 to add the following components:

- » **Provide incentives**, such as a letter grade increase, to lower-performing schools that make great strides in increasing student achievement,
- » **Reward consistently high performance** in schools with 80% or more of their students scoring at or above grade level expectations, and
- » **Allow the State Board of Education to adjust the grading system** on an ongoing basis as needed to prevent excessive swings in letter grades when a new curriculum and assessments are introduced.

**Read to Achieve Program** | Created to ensure that all children read at or above grade level by third grade, the Read to Achieve Program was part of the Excellent Public Schools Act approved in 2012. The program objectives include early identification and services for reading difficulties, increased parental notification of academic need and progress, and grade promotion based partly on reading proficiency. However, school administrators have encountered several problems while implementing the Read to Achieve Program that need the following changes enacted to ensure that the program's well intended goals can be accomplished:

- » **Reduce the number of required passages** in the portfolio option of demonstration for meeting reading standards,
- » **Provide flexibility to local school districts** regarding details of, and adequate funding for, the summer reading camps,
- » **Treat traditional public schools and charter schools equitably** with regards to the program's requirements, and
- » **Clarify details regarding testing exceptional children.**

## Increased Local Control & Flexibility to Implement Reforms & Enhance Performance

While state and federal oversight are essential in education, public schools have the potential to perform better on a rapid timetable if local education agencies are empowered to lead their own reforms. Current state laws contain numerous prescriptive mandates that leave little room for superintendents, principals and other school leaders to introduce creative ways of teaching and learning that will enhance overall outcomes in schools across the state. With this in mind, the General Assembly should expand flexibility for public school administrators to lead K-12 education reforms that best meet the needs of each local community, while continuing to hold them accountable for providing a high quality education. This may be achieved through approval of the following:

- » **Synchronize the public school calendar** with those of community colleges and universities to facilitate enhanced learning opportunities for high school students and to better accommodate block scheduling,
- » **Ensure that curriculum changes**, such as the mandate to teach cursive writing and the multiplication table, **are deemed essential** by the instructional leaders of the school district before implementation,
- » **Provide flexibility to redirect funding and other resources** to higher priority services and programs,
- » **Eliminate unnecessary or redundant reporting requirements** by schools and school districts,
- » **Retain LEA authority over all aspects of public schools**, including but not limited to, facility construction and operations, schedule, attendance zones, budget, curriculum content and delivery options, staffing levels, extracurricular activities, and other core services.

- » **Eliminate the prohibition on school counselors administering tests** to ensure adequate staffing and maintain the integrity and fidelity of all assessments mandated by the state and federal government.
- » **Reduce state-mandated tests and eliminate the mandate on scheduling them** in the last 10 days of the school year for elementary and middle schools and the last 5 days of the course in high schools. The testing schedule should be subject to local control to account for inclement weather, retesting opportunities and adequate staffing levels as determined by the school district.

## Increased Accountability in Taxpayer-Funded Education Provided outside Public Schools

North Carolina has followed national trends in providing taxpayer support for students to receive their education from providers other than traditional public schools. Lifting the cap on publicly funded charter schools that are not subject to many of the same mandates and requirements as LEA-operated schools, as well as authorizing vouchers for certain lower-income students and those with disabilities to attend private schools makes evident the state's desire to offer more choices in education. To ensure that LEAs are not disadvantaged in their efforts to compete in this enhanced school choice environment, the General Assembly should implement the following:

- » Require that all private educational entities that accept state-funded vouchers (opportunity scholarships) are **subject to the same accountability system** as LEA-operated schools,
- » **Place a moratorium on providing private school vouchers** to other student populations (especially until we see data suggesting their success),
- » **Ensure the ongoing viability of LEA-operated schools** in areas where charter schools are expanding by increasing the relevance of the LEA Impact Statement in the application process,
- » **Expand opportunities for LEAs to partner with charters and private schools** to provide support, such as transportation and meals, to enhance student services,
- » **Allow LEAs to act as the chartering entity for charter schools** within an LEA, and **allow LEAs to convert existing traditional public schools into charter schools**,
- » **Ensure that all virtual learning continues to have state oversight** through the N.C. Virtual Public School and State Board of Education, is part of blended learning along with on-site instruction, and does not negatively affect student enrollment and associated funding that the state provides to school districts, and
- » **Prohibit establishment of a virtual charter school until sufficient accountability measures can be established** to ensure only quality educational services are offered through that entity, ensure that its funding structure acknowledges the cost differences with brick and mortar schools, and does not detract needed resources from traditional public schools.

NCASA, formed in 1976 as the only professional organization that serves the entire administrative leadership team of NC's school systems and individual schools, was revamped in 2005 as the uniting organization for 11 affiliated groups of school administrators. We serve more than 7,000 individuals from all facets of public school administration statewide.

- North Carolina Principals & Assistant Principals' Association
- North Carolina School Superintendents' Association
- Personnel Administrators of North Carolina
- North Carolina Association for Career & Technical Education Administrators
- North Carolina Association of School Business Officials
- North Carolina Council of Administrators of Special Education
- North Carolina Professors of Educational Leadership
- North Carolina School Public Relations Association
- School Nutrition Association of North Carolina
- North Carolina Pupil Transportation Association
- North Carolina Technology in Education Society



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