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# TOP

EDUCATION ISSUES

# 2021



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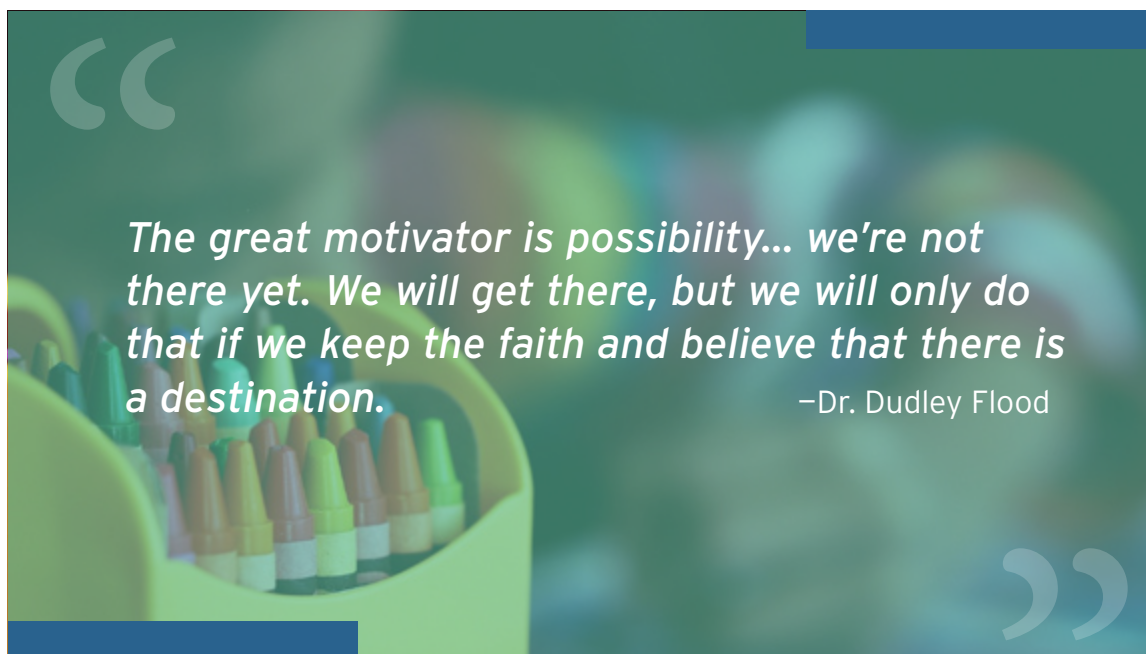
PUBLIC SCHOOL  
**FORUM** *of north carolina*

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# Introduction

We find ourselves at a critical moment in which we face growing inequities, complexities, and crises that span all aspects of our lives. During these times, we must focus on how to make progress towards a more just and equitable world. Central to change is, and always has been, the ability of our communities to thrive and for our young people to receive a high quality and equitable public education to ensure they are prepared for college, career, and engaged citizenship and that North Carolina continues to have a strong workforce and thriving economy for all.

Central to the Public School Forum of North Carolina's mission is the imperative to ensure that all students in North Carolina have equitable access to a meaningful, high quality education through a strong system of public schools. It is important to note that equitable does not mean equal. Achieving equitable access to high quality education for all requires that every child has what they need to be successful, and that oppressive systems are dismantled and structural inequities are redressed. Equity is at the core of the Forum's policy and programmatic work and is both the overarching umbrella and the common thread throughout each of our Top Education Issues.



# About the Top Education Issues



The 2021 Top Education Issues outline the Forum's priorities on what should be at the forefront of education policy decisionmaking in the coming year, as we work toward eliminating the systemic racism and inequities that exist and are reflected in our educational system. The issues are informed by engagement with our board and advisory board members, educators and students across the state, and key partners and stakeholders, and provide evidence-based analysis and recommendations to help guide discussions and consideration by state and local policymakers of the most critical needs facing public school students across the state.

Last year, our 2020 Top Education Issues began with the statement, "we believe it will be evident that our state faced a pivotal moment in time when it comes to our system of K-12 public education," which certainly has come to pass in more ways than we ever could have imagined at the time. In education and beyond, COVID-19 illuminated and exacerbated the inequities that exist in our society, and the pandemic's impact will undoubtedly be felt for many years to come. Despite the incredible challenges that our public school communities have faced as a result of the pandemic, this past year has also shone a bright light on the strength and resilience of North Carolina's students, families, educators, and administrators.

The path forward – as we work to address short-term COVID recovery needs and longer-term, systemic inequities in our educational system – will be challenging. Several of the Forum's Top Education Issues align with the [Leandro Fiscal Year 2021 Action Plan for North Carolina](#), which was agreed upon by all parties in the [Leandro v. State of NC](#) case and approved by Judge David Lee in September 2020. This action plan, written in the context of the pandemic, details the initial steps in what will eventually be an eight-year

plan outlining necessary actions for the state to meet its constitutional obligation to provide a [sound basic education to every child in North Carolina](#) – especially to those who have been historically and consistently denied access to resources and opportunities.

## Tracking Progress

Last year, our Top Education Issues for 2020 set the stage for the Forum's priorities for the next decade, as the state works toward the goal of ensuring that every child is provided with equitable educational opportunities. This year's report focuses on specific actions that we hope to see our policymakers tackle in the 2021-22 legislative sessions. Over the next two years, the Forum will work toward, monitor, and track progress on these Top Education Issues. Our [Metrics Table](#) identifies specific goals and measures of progress for each of the Top Education Issues. We have much work ahead of us; and despite the challenges of this past year, our state leaders have an opportunity to set North Carolina's public schools on a path to make our public school system stronger and more equitable than ever before.



# TOP

EDUCATION ISSUES

# 2021

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# 1 Broadband Access



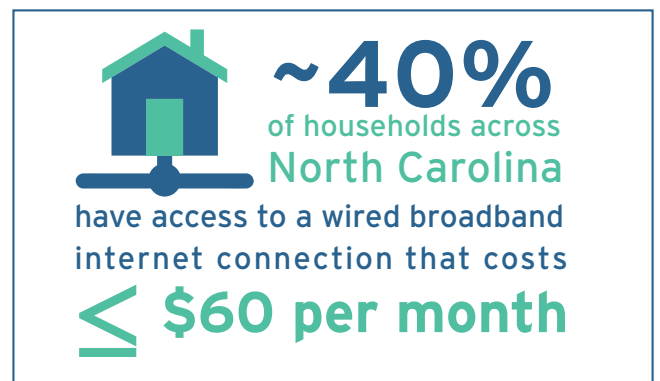
## Why it Matters

High-speed internet, or “broadband,” is defined as a download speed of 25mbps or higher. It is critical for work, school, and life in North Carolina – especially as families and educators engage in remote learning efforts during the pandemic. Over 30 percent of households across our state do not adopt broadband due to affordability, a lack of infrastructure, and/or a gap in digital literacy skills. As of spring 2020, approximately 192,000 students, or nearly 15 percent of the public school student population, lacked high-speed internet access in their homes. Ensuring all North Carolina households have access to broadband will be a multi-stakeholder effort. Understanding access, digital literacy, and engagement is important as we continue the transition and recovery from COVID-19 and beyond.



## Recommendations

- **Fortify short-term broadband access solutions to address affordability concerns.** During COVID-19 many stakeholders have implemented short-term solutions to broadband access for students, including WiFi hotspots, “park and learn” internet sites, deployment of devices, and digital literacy training. Post pandemic, *affordability* will be a primary concern, notably the difficulty in paying for internet service plans that these devices require. The second federal coronavirus stimulus package provides \$50/month subsidies for low-income households to support broadband service plan affordability, but additional long-term solutions to the affordability challenge will be needed.
- **Gather better data.** Accurate and current data on broadband access is needed to implement long-term solutions that eliminate the digital divide. To augment the federal data that is available, the North Carolina Department of Information Technology launched a [statewide survey](#) to gather more complete data to guide further investments. The state will need to increase its support for the continuation of robust data analysis and mapping of the state’s broadband infrastructure needs.
- **Deploy long-term access solutions for students and households.** The extension to use the federal coronavirus recovery aid until the end of 2021 provides time to establish the longer-term efforts and solutions. At the state level, expanding the state’s GREAT Grant Program, which has disbursed tens of millions of dollars directly to Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to connect rural, economically distressed communities to the internet and continues to experience high demand, will help to implement long-term solutions. This is also critical to support student engagement with learning opportunities.
- **Support local communities to invest in broadband infrastructure.** The state should authorize local governments and counties to invest in and build broadband infrastructure that they can then lease or allow Internet Service Providers to use, as well as help local communities build the capacity they need to take advantage of funding and grant opportunities.



Source: Coble, C. (2020). Perspective| The Reality of Broadband in North Carolina. EdNC. <https://www.ednc.org/perspective-the-reality-of-broadband-in-north-carolina/>

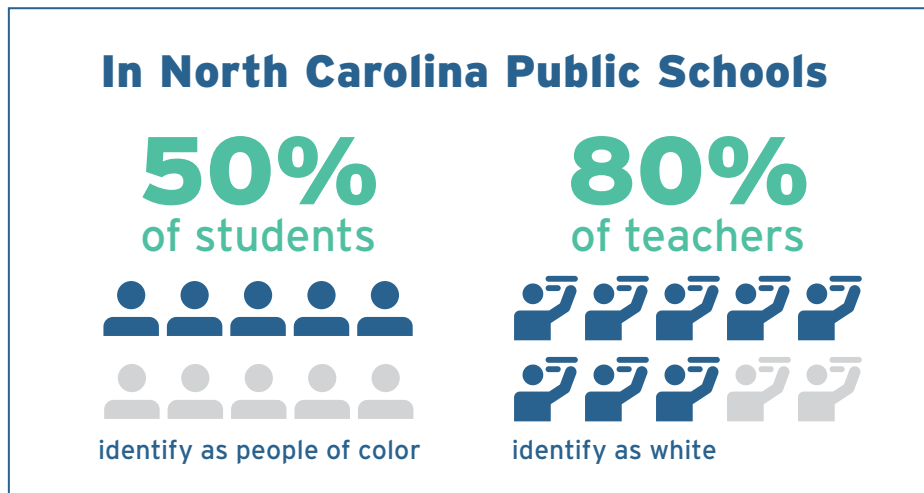
# 2

## Teacher & Principal Recruitment, Retention and Diversity



### Why it Matters

Access to effective teachers and principals are the first and second most important school-related factors, respectively, that impact students' academic outcomes.<sup>1</sup> The ability to recruit and retain high quality teachers is critical, but North Carolina continues to experience considerable challenges in most grade levels and subject areas. Educator preparation programs in North Carolina have experienced declining enrollments of more than 50 percent since 2008-2009. While students of color comprise over half of the total student population in our state, 80 percent of our teachers are white. Research has found that students of color have stronger academic and social-emotional outcomes when they have same-race teachers in their classrooms,<sup>2</sup> and all students are at a disadvantage by not having teachers of color.<sup>3</sup> Teacher shortages are expected to be dramatically exacerbated with the pandemic that has left many educators feeling unsafe teaching in person in the classroom. North Carolina has strong programs in place to to identify and grow principals, but recruiting and retaining principals remains a challenge, especially in high-poverty schools.<sup>4</sup> A concerted effort to continue to grow preparation, recruitment, retention, and support through professional learning is critical to ensure every school has a high quality principal.



### Recommendations

- **Raise teacher and instructional support staff salaries by 5 percent and reinstate health benefits for retirees.** North Carolina has seen some increases in teacher pay over the past decade; however, the state remains in the bottom half of the nation in teacher pay rankings. There is a substantial gap in average teacher pay across districts, with teachers in four out of five districts receiving less pay than the state average.<sup>5</sup> With a long-term goal of having teacher salaries at least at the national average, raising teacher and instructional support staff salaries by at least an average 5 percent in the coming legislative session, consistent with the Leandro Short-term Action Plan, is paramount in recruiting the number of high quality teachers we need to ensure our students are able to succeed. In addition, state leaders must reinstate health benefits for state employee retirees, including educators – a benefit that was lost at the beginning of 2021.

- **Use innovative strategies to build the teaching pipeline.** By expanding and financially supporting teacher pipeline programs that aim to recruit homegrown teachers to work in their local communities, North Carolina can more effectively invest in the future teacher workforce – and the future economy. Some promising models include the Partnership Teach program at ECU, Halifax Community College and Elizabeth City State University’s 2+2 Teacher Prep Program, and Johnston County and NCSU Dual Enrollment Program.
- **Expand racial and ethnic diversity of the teacher workforce.** As recommended by Governor Roy Cooper’s DRIVE taskforce, North Carolina leaders can develop and expand entry points into the educator pipeline that are based on models with proven success in recruiting racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse educators; provide sustainable investments in educator preparation programs at North Carolina’s Historically Minority Serving Institutions (HMSIs); and adjust North Carolina’s teacher licensure requirements to permit teacher candidates to demonstrate their competency through multiple performance measures, in lieu of licensing exams, that are less likely to generate racial, ethnic, and linguistic disparities. North Carolina should also expand the NC Teaching Fellows program to additional colleges and universities across the state, especially to HBCUs.
- **Provide supports for beginning teachers.** Provide support to the North Carolina New Teacher Support Program, as laid out in the Leandro short-term action plan. This would provide comprehensive induction services to 300 additional beginning teachers in low-performing, high-poverty schools.
- **Strengthen the pipeline, ongoing professional learning, and pay schedule for principals.** North Carolina has made several important steps for principal preparation, recruitment, and support across the state and must continue to invest and expand these efforts to ensure that every school has a high quality principal. Once principals are leading in our schools, they need ongoing, job-embedded professional learning and support to be prepared for the changing landscape and additional demands. This was critical before the pandemic and even more so with the current learning environments and through COVID-19 transition and recovery. NC must also ensure that the principal pay schedule allows our state to remain competitive with other states.

# 3 Social and Emotional Learning



## Why it Matters

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is a critical part of addressing the whole child in our education system, and this year has made the importance of SEL even clearer. SEL can improve students' social-emotional skill development, attitudes, and general well-being, in addition to their academic outcomes<sup>6</sup>. Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) include coming to school hungry or not having basic needs met, experiencing a traumatic event such as abuse, or living with a caregiver with a mental illness or substance abuse. What is not included in the definition of an 'ACE' are instances of racism and discrimination or the experience of a global pandemic, which we know are events that may be causing significant stress and trauma for students throughout our country right now. When trauma is present, students arrive at school besieged by the neurological impact of a stress response system that is operating on high alert, with attention focused on scanning the environment for danger rather than concentrating on school work. Too often, behaviors that are connected to trauma are addressed through punitive discipline rather than SEL support. It is therefore imperative that we work to address students' mental health needs and ensure that they feel physically and emotionally safe when they enter the school building, so that they are able to self-regulate and are ready to learn.



## Recommendations

- **Increase flexible funding for Student Instructional Support Personnel (SISP).** To meet the academic, physical, and mental health needs of students and to ensure that schools are safe and supportive learning environments, North Carolina should increase the number of school counselors, nurses, social workers, and psychologists to begin to meet national guidelines, initially prioritizing high-poverty schools. North Carolina should also provide school districts appropriate flexibility in position allotments for these personnel so that they may strategically hire staff to best meet the needs of their students.<sup>7</sup> North Carolina may also need to consider an evaluation of the pay scale for these roles to ensure they are able to attract qualified individuals to fill vacant positions.
- **Support schools and educators to understand ACEs and SEL and to implement effective Trauma-informed SEL Programs for their students.** Many educators, administrators, and school staff will need support to implement ACEs training, SEL, and trauma-informed practices. This requires human and financial resources to help build capacity in schools by funding and providing additional professional learning, school-level coaching, and resources for this work.

Social  
Workers  
recommended



1:250  
actual 1:1,289

School  
Psychologists  
recommended



1:500  
actual 1:1,800

School  
Counselors  
recommended



1:250  
actual 1:353

School  
Nurses  
recommended



1:750  
actual 1:1,013



# 4

## Inclusive, Culturally Responsive Curriculum and Pedagogy



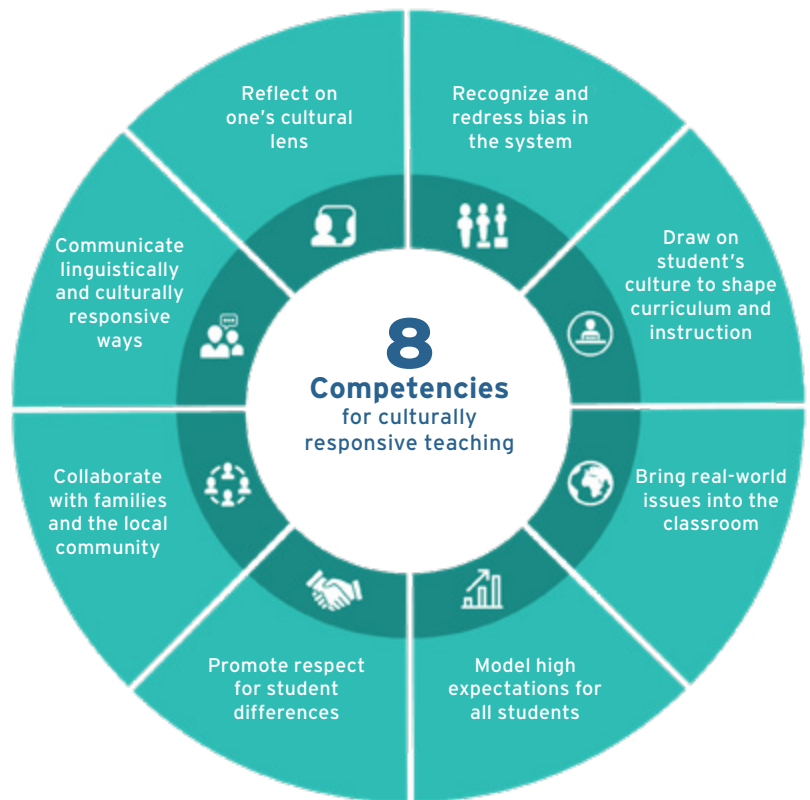
### Why it Matters

Culturally responsive or relevant pedagogy that draws from and honors the cultural knowledge and understandings that students bring into the classroom can improve students' brain processing, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills; strengthen their racial and ethnic identities; promote feelings of safety and belonging; and increase engagement and motivation.<sup>8</sup> Curriculum and pedagogy needs to be made more relevant, engaging, and inclusive to North Carolina's very diverse student population – many of whom have traditionally been excluded from mainstream curriculum and pedagogy – so that our schools can better meet these students' social, emotional, and intellectual needs.



### Recommendations

- **Revise the state social studies standards.** The State Board of Education is currently in the process of revising the state social studies standards to ensure that curriculum is inclusive and representative of the racially and ethnically diverse student population in North Carolina. The recommended revisions of these standards represent important steps and will also require professional learning, resources, and support to ensure that educators are adequately equipped to implement them with fidelity.
- **Assess curriculum in all disciplines to ensure inclusivity and cultural responsiveness.** North Carolina can begin the process of developing standards to evaluate and improve the cultural responsiveness of curriculum in all disciplines, including math, science, and English/language arts.
- **Prepare teachers and school leaders to equitably serve a racially and ethnically diverse student population.** All educators must be well-equipped with the skills to implement culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy in North Carolina's public schools. State leaders should fund ongoing, job-embedded professional learning and mentorship opportunities for preservice and current teachers and school leaders. Student teachers should also be placed in schools that mirror the diversity of the state with respect to both location and student population.



Source: New America Foundation. (2020) Culturally Responsive Teaching: A Reflection Guide. <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/culturally-responsive-teaching/teacher-competencies-that-promote-culturally-responsive-teaching/>

# 5

## Flexibility for Local School Districts



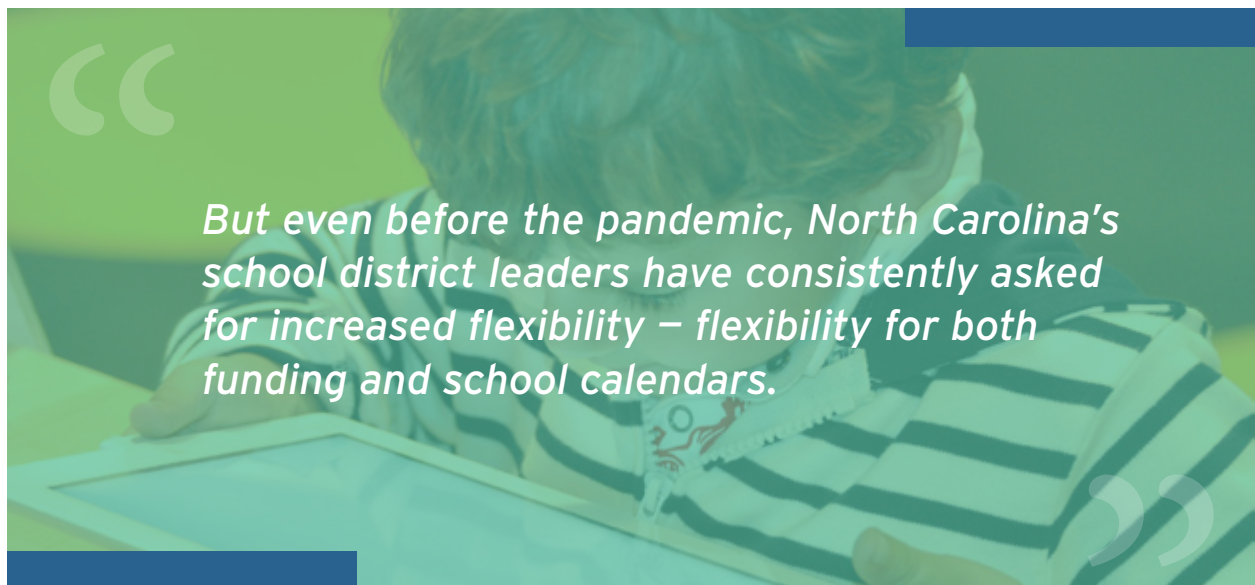
### Why it Matters

The pandemic has shown us that local school districts can be very nimble in developing innovative ways to meet students' needs. With necessary, temporary flexibilities granted to districts as a result of COVID-19, local school leaders quickly developed virtual learning academics and implemented creative approaches to deliver nutrition and other services to students. But even before the pandemic, North Carolina's school district leaders have consistently asked for increased *flexibility* – flexibility for both funding and school calendars. To facilitate new innovations in the delivery of instruction and other wrap around services going forward, the flexibility to do what is best for students is needed now more than ever before.



### Recommendations

- **Increase Local Education Agency (LEA) budgetary flexibility.** As called for in the Leandro short-term action plan, this can be accomplished by lifting restrictions on critical allotments through the ABC transfer system. Some specific line items that need flexibility for districts to more effectively serve our students' local needs include, but are not limited to, textbooks, low wealth supplemental funding, and classroom supplies, in addition to other funding areas. This is particularly important for low wealth school districts that have minimal local funding to supplement necessary expenses.
- **Provide school calendar flexibility to all districts.** This is critically important so that local school districts can align with local community college and university calendars to meet the needs of their students in the contexts of their communities. This is also important as we focus on the transition and recovery from COVID-19, as districts try to build in expanded learning opportunities for students.
- **Extend flexibility to districts on seat time requirements.** The flexibility would enable local school districts to continue to provide innovative instructional solutions in a range of learning environments to all students.



*But even before the pandemic, North Carolina's school district leaders have consistently asked for increased flexibility – flexibility for both funding and school calendars.*

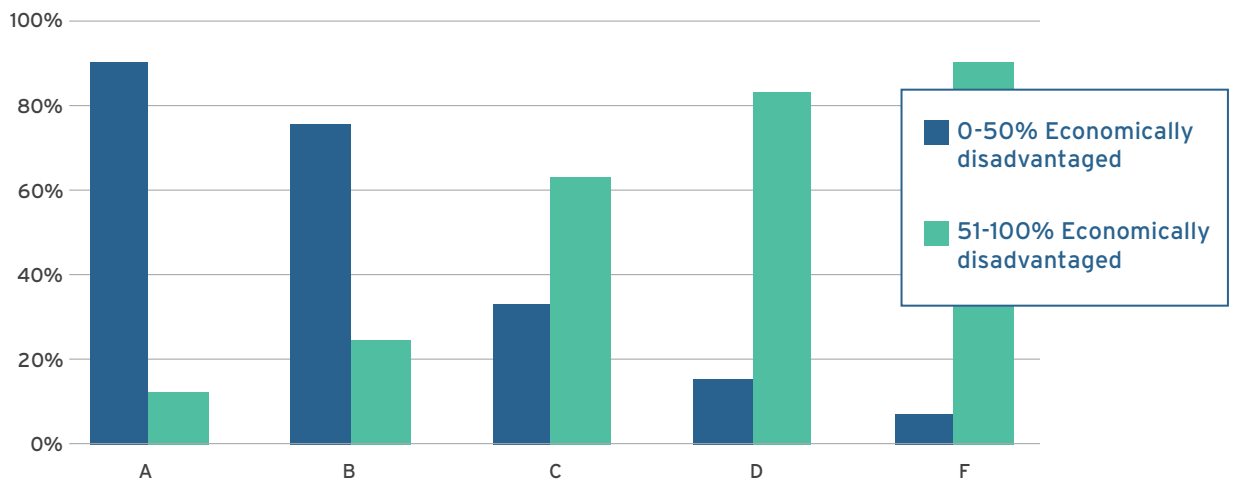
# 6 Assessment and Accountability



## Why it Matters

Standardized tests can be useful to make uniform comparisons across students, classrooms, schools, and subgroups, and can shine a light on the educational needs of historically marginalized and underserved students. These standardized tests are typically given on one day and provide one measure of a student's progress; and our current End of Course or End of Grade standardized testing does not typically provide the opportunity to impact instruction for individual students. The high-stakes nature of assessment policies has led to increased stress and anxiety for students as well as educators whose job status and pay are sometimes directly tied to their students' performance on these assessments. This year, COVID-19 has presented further challenges with regard to assessment and accountability, setting up a scenario in which students feel unsafe sitting for exams. Assessment outcomes, as a result, may not provide a valid picture of learning gains or losses during this time.

**School Performance Grades by Percent Economically Disadvantaged  
(Current Formula) 2018-2019**



Source: Antosyk, E. (2019). Mapping the 2018-2019 School Report Cards. EdNC.



## Recommendations

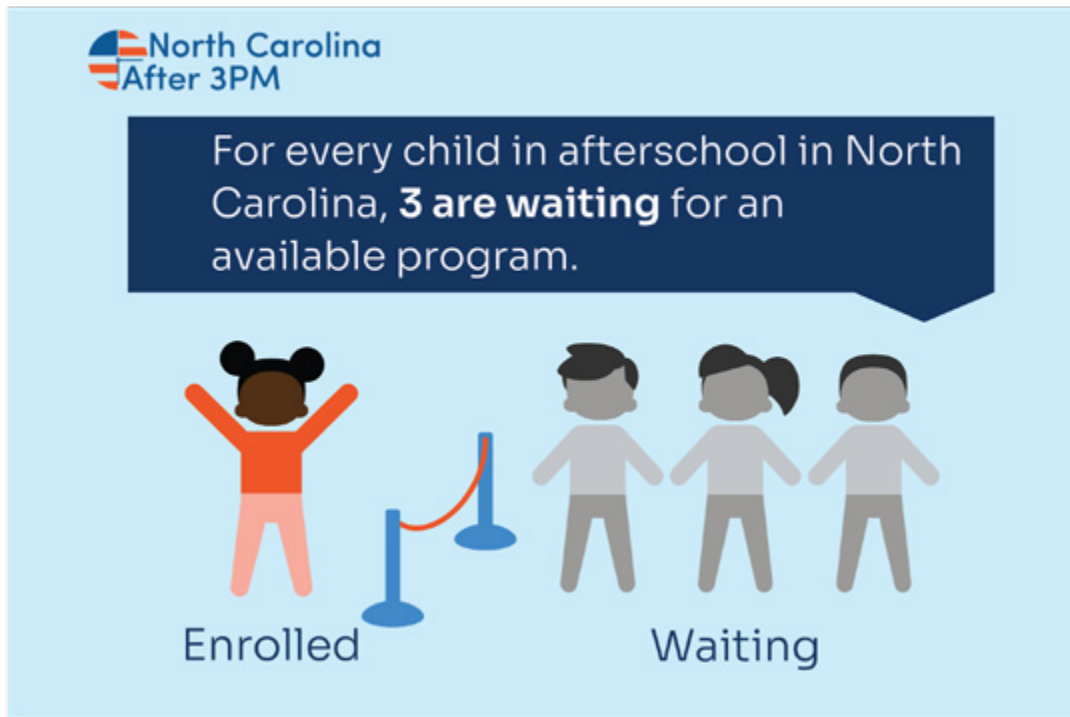
- **Amend the state's current accountability model.** North Carolina should make changes to its accountability model so that it reliably assesses multiple measures of student progress. In addition, A-F school grades currently serve more as an indicator of the socioeconomic status of a school's student population, rather than a reflection of a school's ability to improve students' academic progress. While the Forum would like to see A-F school grades eliminated, the formula for awarding them should at a minimum be revised to reflect a 50/50 split between student growth and student proficiency.
- **Ensure students and educators do not suffer undue penalty from assessments administered during COVID-19.** The Forum recommends multiple short-term actions to relieve students and families from concerns they have with regard to undergoing assessments during the pandemic. These recommended actions include seeking federal waivers for statewide assessments, suspending A-F school grades for the 2020-21 academic year, promoting expanded testing windows, pausing the rule that End of Course tests account for 20 percent of a student's grade, and removing student performance on standardized tests from the evaluation process for teachers and from compensation packages for principals, while holding salaries harmless. [For more information, [read our policy brief here.](#)]

# 7 Afterschool Programs and Expanded Learning



## Why it Matters

Programs that support students outside of the traditional school day here in North Carolina augment the academic, social, and emotional learning for our students. For every dollar spent on afterschool programs, there is a three dollar return on that investment.<sup>9</sup> The Afterschool Alliance finds that North Carolina ranks in the top 10 states in the nation for its afterschool programs, and overall parent satisfaction ranks North Carolina first out of all 50 states.<sup>10</sup> However, unmet demand for these programs remains very high, especially among low-income families who report cost as a significant barrier. For every child in an afterschool program in North Carolina today, three more are waiting to get in. And that unmet need is even more stark in rural communities across our state.



Source: The Afterschool Alliance. (2020). America After 3PM 2020.



## Recommendations

- **Increase state support for North Carolina's afterschool programs.** Communities face major funding constraints for afterschool programs, which leads to the significant unmet demand. Federal and state investments are critical to ensure access for all families who want and need their children to participate in afterschool programs. Historically, these programs have bipartisan support because they promote workforce development, increase community safety, promote leadership and skill development, and provide greater support for working families, which are critical to the success of our local communities.

# 8

## Early Childhood Education and Literacy



### Why it Matters

High quality care and learning environments beginning at birth are critical to the success of North Carolina's children and set the foundation for how children are positioned to succeed in school and beyond. Early childhood education is typically defined as the span of time between birth through age 8 and includes child care, informal and formal education, and literacy. North Carolina faced challenges in all of these areas pre-pandemic, and each has been affected even more by COVID-19.

According to recent research, pre-pandemic, only half of all parents were able to access any type of center-based or formal early childhood care. Six months into the pandemic, this rate fell to less than one-in-three.<sup>11</sup> Further, the analysis finds that "households of color face more early education challenges: the care they rely on is lower quality, with fewer employer supports; and the pandemic has disproportionately impaired their access to child care."<sup>12</sup> For our economic recovery and future prosperity, it is imperative that North Carolina takes swift action to support these critical workforce support structures that can ensure all of our children are well cared for and well prepared for academic and social success.

Additionally, having a laser-focus on literacy in these early years is essential to supporting our students to reach their full potential. According to a longitudinal study of the long-term impacts of reading proficiency, students who were not proficient in reading by the end of third grade were four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers, and 88 percent of students who did not graduate from high school struggled with reading in the third grade.<sup>13</sup> In 2018-19, 56.8 percent of third graders were considered grade-level proficient in reading.<sup>14</sup> North Carolina, in partnership with school districts and educators, has the opportunity to invest deeply in supporting all students in literacy as a critical part of a more equitable and high quality education.







## Recommendations

- **Ensure COVID relief funds stabilize the child care system.** Federal and state COVID relief funds should be allocated for the stabilization of child care centers across the state that have suffered severe fiscal impacts due to COVID-19.
- **Increase compensation for early childhood educators.** The development of a robust statewide compensation plan for early childhood educators that sets wages adequate for attracting and retaining a high quality educator workforce is paramount to ensuring all children have access to high quality learning environments during the years before they set foot in a kindergarten classroom.
- **Improve childcare subsidy rates.** As called for by the NC Early Education Coalition, the Forum also believes in the urgency of developing and funding a new child care subsidy rate structure that provides child care programs in all 100 counties with adequate and equitable rates that incorporate the true cost of care, including workforce compensation and benefits.
- **Support implementation of the Leandro short-term action plan.** The plan specifically calls for scaling up NC Pre-K and Smart Start, as well as strengthening the NC Infant Toddler Early Intervention Program, among other important calls to action.
- **Support schools, teachers and students in literacy improvements.** As North Carolina's third grade students continue to grapple with achieving proficiency in reading, North Carolina should prioritize supporting schools and families in efforts to improve literacy rates. These efforts can begin early, with both ensuring that NC Pre-K and Smart Start have the resources necessary to expand access to families across North Carolina, as well as the thoughtful design of reading interventions grounded in positive outcomes that are supported in grades K-3.

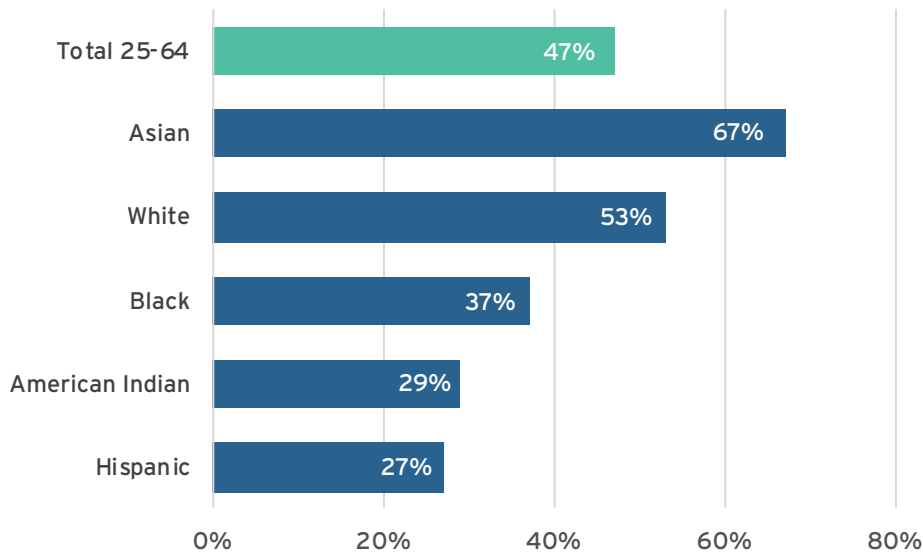
# 9 Post-Secondary Attainment



## Why it Matters

As technological advancement continues to transform the 21st-century labor market, more and more jobs across all industries are requiring candidates to hold postsecondary credentials or degrees. Through the work of myFutureNC, the state of North Carolina has set an ambitious goal for 2 million North Carolinians to have a high-quality postsecondary credential or degree by 2030. As of 2018, 1.3 million North Carolina residents held a postsecondary credential or degree, and without any changes to our current system, this number is expected to reach only 1.7 million by 2030.<sup>15</sup> Making this goal a reality requires strategic investments and supports for districts, schools, and students.

**Percentage of NC Adults (25-64) with a postsecondary degree or nondegree credential, by race/ethnicity (2016)**



Source: Tippet, R. and Stanford, J. (2019). NC's Leaky Educational Pipeline & Pathways to 60% Postsecondary Attainment: Report for the John M. Belk Endowment. Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. [www.ncedpipeline.org](http://www.ncedpipeline.org).



## Recommendation

- **Implement school calendar flexibility.** State leaders should provide school districts with more flexibility in creating their school calendars to better align with the local community colleges and four-year institutions. Doing so would provide students with better opportunities to participate in dual-enrollment courses, certificate programs, and other career and technical opportunities. Currently, the traditional high school calendar ends the first semester in mid-January, while postsecondary institutions end in December. As a result, students taking dual-enrollment courses must operate on two different calendars simultaneously.

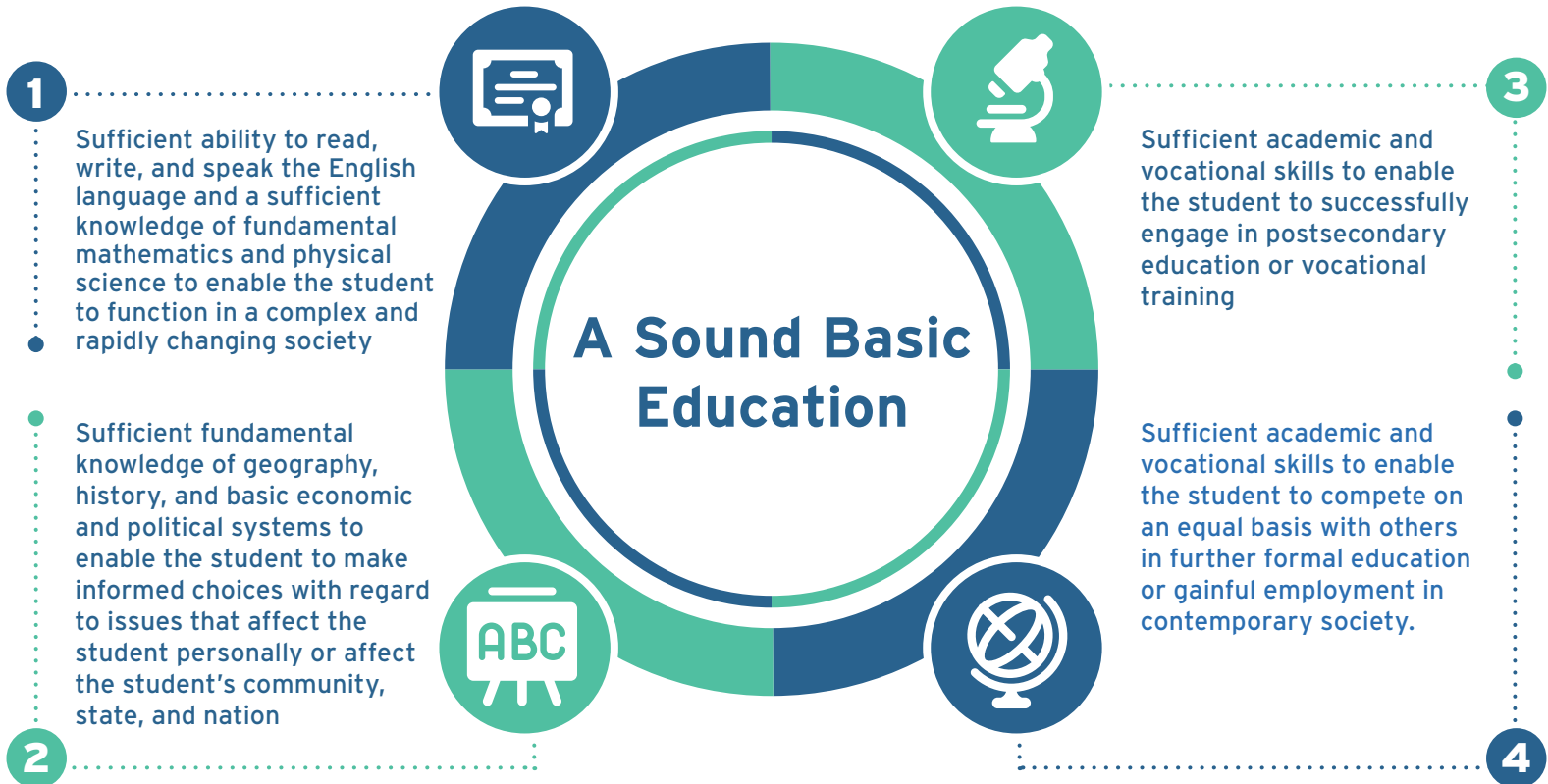
- **Provide additional support for Cooperative Innovative High Schools.** [Cooperative Innovative High Schools](#), which include early colleges, are small public high schools that are typically located on the campus of a community college or university. These schools specifically target students who may be at risk of dropping out of high school, first generation college students, and other students who would benefit from their accelerated programming. Students at these schools work towards completing both a high school diploma and an associate's degree, transferable credit, or a certificate. Additional financial support for Cooperative Innovative High Schools is needed to allow more high school students the opportunity to complete high school courses that will lead to college credit or a credential.
- **Expand access to college and career advising.** One of the best ways to equip students with support in pursuing, applying for, and enrolling in college or pursuing a high quality credential is to connect them with a college counselor or career coach. Many schools rely on school counselors to fulfill this job, but these counselors are often overwhelmed with students and other responsibilities. In North Carolina, public schools have an average ratio of 353 students per counselor. Dedicated college counselors and career coaches can focus on supporting students with their application process, as well as informing younger students of their college and career options. For the coming year, the Forum supports the recommendations of the Fiscal Year 2021 Action Plan, which include expanding the [NC Community College System Career Coaches program](#) and expanding the reach of the [College Advising Corps](#) in low-wealth North Carolina school districts.

# 10 Adequate and Equitable State Funding to Support Public Schools



## Why It Matters

The 2021 Top Education Issues report identifies critical needs facing our students and schools during COVID-19 recovery and beyond, and the majority will require investments from the NC General Assembly in order to be realized. This year, we will look to our state legislators to provide the resources necessary to support our educators and students during this challenging time, while also keeping an eye on investments that support long-term goals. Meeting the requirements laid out in the [Leandro Fiscal Year 2021 Action Plan](#) and subsequent orders are essential steps toward ensuring the state's students will have the resources they need to achieve academic success both during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The data presented throughout the Top Education Issues demonstrate why the investments make sense for North Carolina - to ensure an equitable and high quality education for all and a strong workforce and economy for our state.



Source: *Leandro v. State*, 346 N.C. 336, 488 S.E.2d 249 (1997). In 1997, the NC Supreme court held that the right to education guaranteed in the North Carolina state constitution is a right to a sound basic education, defined above. Then Chief Justice Burley Mitchell wrote, "An education that does not serve the purpose of preparing students to participate and compete in the society in which they live and work is devoid of substance and is constitutionally inadequate."



## Recommendations

- **Ensure all districts have adequate and equitable funding to support COVID-19 recovery.** All students and staff must be equipped with the resources and support they need to be safe and successful. While some districts continue with remote learning and hybrid models, as well as when schools are able to safely transition back to full-time in-person instruction, state and federal leaders must provide financial support. The state has approximately \$4 billion in unspent non-recurring funds, as well as additional federal stimulus funding that will be distributed directly to districts, which can help to address these immediate needs.
- **Provide funding for the implementation of the Leandro Fiscal Year 2021 Action Plan and subsequent orders.** The items outlined in the Fiscal Year 2021 Action Plan, many of which are included in our 2021 Top Education Issues, require an additional state investment of \$426,990,610. This includes recurring funding for additional school support personnel such as school counselors, nurses, social workers, and psychologists, expansion of the NC Pre-K program, teacher salary increases, and much more. These investments are critical in the short-term due to the impact of COVID-19, and will also begin to address the [well-documented resource inequities](#) that disproportionately disadvantage students of color, English language learners, and low-income students in North Carolina. State leaders should provide funding for all items outlined in the 2021 Action Plan as well as subsequent court orders in the Leandro case.
- **Amend the funding formula to provide additional resources to the schools and students with the most need.** The action plan calls for incremental increases in funding for the Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Funding (DSSF) allotment, beginning in 2021. Legislators should also prepare for additional investments in other critical allotments, including supplemental funding for low-wealth districts.
- **Pass a statewide school bond.** Our public schools have long been in need of a statewide bond to address what is now likely to be more than \$8 billion in school infrastructure needs.<sup>16</sup> The last K-12 statewide school bond of \$1.8 billion was passed 25 years ago, in 1996.<sup>17</sup> Interest rates are currently very low, and the time is now for the General Assembly to approve a multi-billion dollar school bond referendum to be placed on the ballot.



# Metrics to Measure Progress on Top Education Issues, 2021-2022

Area	Metrics
<b>Broadband Access</b>	<p>100% of K-12 students have access to broadband outside of school by June 30, 2022.</p> <p>Local communities with the lowest adoption rates have the capacity and resources to implement innovative approaches for long-term solutions to affordable and reliable broadband are in place in more districts.</p>
<b>Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Diversity</b>	<p>Teacher and instructional support staff salaries are increased by 5% and retiree health benefits are reinstated by December 31, 2021.</p> <p>Teacher recruitment programs are put in place by June 30, 2022 that will make progress towards increasing the current teacher pipeline to match 7.5% of our current teaching workforce (the average teacher turnover rate across the state).</p> <p>Amend state requirements for teacher licensure to replace barriers to entry that disproportionately impact educators of color, including the Praxis Core EPP entrance exam and other current licensure testing barriers, with multiple, unbiased measures of performance and effectiveness by June 30, 2022.</p> <p>NC Teaching Fellows Program includes at least one HBCU by June 30, 2022.</p> <p>Principal preparation, recruitment, and professional learning are strengthened to increase the pipeline for and retention of high quality principals by June 30, 2022.</p>
<b>Social and Emotional Learning</b>	<p>The number of social workers, psychologists, nurses, and counselors are increased so that the gaps for each role are decreased by 25% by December 31, 2021, including Social Worker at 1:1,029, Psychologists at 1:1,475, Counselors at 1:327, and Nurses at 1:1,947.</p> <p>Financial and human resources are in place to support the development and implementation of SEL and trauma-informed practices in all of our schools by June 30, 2022.</p>
<b>Inclusive, Culturally Responsive Curriculum and Pedagogy</b>	<p>New social studies standards are implemented with fidelity, including professional learning supports for all teachers of social studies by June 30, 2022.</p> <p>Pre- and in-service Educators across North Carolina have access to professional learning on culturally-responsive curriculum so that they can serve a racially and ethnically diverse student population by Summer 2022.</p>

Area	Metrics
<p><b>Flexibility for Local School Districts</b></p>	<p>Districts have the flexibility to use particular funding line items, including textbooks, low wealth supplemental funding, and classroom supplies, to meet the needs of their students by June 30, 2021.</p> <p>Districts have the flexibility to establish calendars that allow them to maximize student learning opportunities in the context of their communities by June 30, 2021.</p>
<p><b>Assessment and Accountability</b></p>	<p>Revise A-F school grades to a 50/50 split between student growth and proficiency by September 30, 2021.</p> <p>Remove any punitive measures connected with high stakes testing, while holding harmless any educators or administrators who receive additional pay based upon the testing outcomes by March 31, 2021.</p>
<p><b>Afterschool Programs and Expanded Learning</b></p>	<p>Reduce unmet demand, currently at 666,635, by 20%, to 533,300, by June 30, 2022.</p>
<p><b>Early Childhood Education and Literacy</b></p>	<p>Fund and implement a new child care subsidy rate structure that provides child care programs in all 100 counties with adequate and equitable rates that incorporate the true cost of care, including workforce compensation and benefits by June 30, 2022.</p>
<p><b>Post-Secondary Attainment</b></p>	<p>Districts have the flexibility to establish calendars that allow them to maximize student learning opportunities in the context of their communities by June 30, 2021.</p> <p>Expand the NC Community College System Career Coaches Program and the College Advising Corps to serve more low-wealth students, students of color, and English Language Learners by June 30, 2022.</p>
<p><b>Adequate and Equitable State Funding to Support Public Education</b></p>	<p>Appropriate additional state funds to fulfill the requirements of the Leandro FY 2021 Action plan and any subsequent court orders by September 30, 2021. The bulk of these funds should be recurring, and are in addition to short-term federal and state COVID relief appropriations.</p> <p>Approve a statewide school bond to be placed on the ballot by May 2022.</p>

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