

# TOP EDUCATION ISSUES 2020



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# INTRODUCTION

For more than twenty-five years, the Public School Forum of North Carolina has published an annual list of the top issues that we believe should or will likely be at the forefront of conversations around K-12 public education policy in the upcoming year. We intend for these publications, compiled through engagement with our staff, board members, and partners, to provide evidence-based analysis and recommendations to help guide discussions and consideration by state and local policymakers of the most critical issues facing public school students across the state.

As we prepared to enter into a new year and a new decade in 2020, our team began our work on this year's report by reviewing the issues that we have highlighted in our "Top Ten Education Issues" publication over the past five years. Through this process, we identified areas of progress, stagnation, or regression when considering the extent to which our state's education policies are meeting the needs of all of North Carolina's students. Upon review, we recognized that many of the central issues we have identified have been repeated year after year and are interconnected around the central goal of ensuring that every child in the state has equitable access to a meaningful, sound basic education.

Overall, legislation and policies either enacted or ignored over the past five years have done little to address the most critical issues facing our public schools. North Carolina continues to grapple with inadequate and inequitable resources to meet even the most basic student needs, as well as widespread teacher shortages, massive disparities in educational opportunity and outcomes based on a range of characteristics including race, socioeconomic status, language, geography, and a political environment that has made support for a strong system of public education an issue of *contention* instead of *cohesion*. The most recent legislative session was no different, and due to a still-unresolved impasse between Democratic and Republican leaders, the 2019-2020 school year began without a newly enacted budget in place.

We are hopeful that our leaders will reach a budget compromise in the upcoming short session to allocate much-needed new resources to our public schools this year. However, the Forum is also looking beyond 2020, as we expect to see important developments in the decades-long *Leandro* case following the release of WestEd's "Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina," and recommendations compiled by the Governor's Commission on Access to Sound Basic Education. Given this, we have an unprecedented, once-in-a-generation opportunity to begin charting a new future for our state's public schools. The comprehensive road map put forth by these groups has the potential to transform every topic we've covered in our recommendations over the past five years. For that reason, this year, our Top Education Issues list has been distilled into one driving issue, which is for our state leaders to **take immediate and intentional actions to meet our constitutional obligation to provide each child a sound basic education**. You'll also find in our report five Key Priorities that all relate to our Top Education Issue and will be top of mind for 2020.

This year will undoubtedly bring some substantial changes, perhaps most notably because it is a major election year. Regardless of the outcomes of the upcoming elections, it is our hope that our current and new leaders can come together with educators, families, community, and business leaders to prioritize and invest in the public education system that was promised to each and every one of our children, so that their constitutional right to a sound basic education will be realized, regardless of their background.



# TOP EDUCATION ISSUE OF 2020:

**TAKE IMMEDIATE AND INTENTIONAL ACTIONS TO MEET  
OUR CONSTITUTIONAL OBLIGATION TO PROVIDE EACH  
CHILD A SOUND BASIC EDUCATION.**

When historians look back on 2020, 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. In 2019, a major development in the school funding case known as *Leandro* came to pass when a much-anticipated report conducted by the independent, nonpartisan, court-appointed research organization, WestEd, was submitted to the courts and later released to the public.

The report, "Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina," is based on 13 extensive research studies conducted by WestEd and their partners at the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation and the Learning Policy Institute. The purpose of these studies was to assess what it would take to ensure that our state fulfills its constitutional obligation to provide every child access to a sound basic education. This report comes twenty-five years after five low-wealth North Carolina counties filed suit against the state, arguing that their schools were not receiving adequate funding to provide a quality education for their children.

**A "sound basic education" is one that will provide the student with at least:**

- (1) sufficient ability to read, write, and speak the English language and a sufficient knowledge of fundamental mathematics and physical science to enable the student to function in a complex and rapidly changing society;
- (2) sufficient fundamental knowledge of geography, history, and basic economic and political systems to enable the student to make informed choices with regard to issues that affect the student personally or affect the student's community, state, and nation;
- (3) sufficient academic and vocational skills to enable the student to successfully engage in postsecondary education or vocational training; and
- (4) sufficient academic and vocational skills to enable the student to compete on an equal basis with others in further formal education or gainful employment in contemporary society.<sup>1</sup>

The WestEd report makes clear what many educators, parents, researchers, and state leaders have been saying for years: **the state is not providing the resources required to meet the fundamental needs of all of our students, to the detriment of our children and the future well-being of our state as a whole.** In fact, the researchers found that North Carolina is “further away from meeting its constitutional obligation to provide every child with the opportunity for a sound basic education than it was when the Supreme Court of North Carolina issued the *Leandro* decision more than 20 years ago.”<sup>2</sup>

As stated in our number one education issue last year, a strong and equitable system of public education benefits all individuals in our society, not only those who attend or have children who attend public schools. As public and private sector leaders across North Carolina have recognized for most of our history, it is both a moral and economic imperative that all of our children are able to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to join the 21st-century workforce and to participate fully in our democratic society. The urgent need to finally provide equitable educational opportunities to our students should be heeded by all, regardless of political party, and demands a dedicated, collaborative effort.

The urgency and opportunity available to us in the coming decade has also been echoed by the myFutureNC Commission. In early 2019, the Commission issued a report entitled “A Call to Action for the State of North Carolina,” which included a proposal for a statewide higher education attainment goal that by 2030, two million 25 to 44-year-olds in North Carolina will hold a high-quality postsecondary credential or degree.<sup>3</sup> In

order to successfully meet this ambitious goal, the Commission emphasized the need to increase access to educational opportunities at all levels and to address the inequities experienced by students of color, low-income students, students with learning disabilities and those who speak English as a second language. As of now, less than 20 percent of high school graduates in North Carolina meet all college readiness indicators,<sup>4</sup> and half of all North Carolina employers report that they are unable to hire the workers they need because candidate pools lack the skills and education necessary to perform job functions.<sup>5</sup> We must recognize that to bridge these gaps and realize the Commission’s attainment goal, our state leaders will be required to make substantial and targeted investments in our public schools. We’re fortunate to have a valuable resource in the WestEd report, which offers a clear road map on how to do just that.

The WestEd consultants identified 8 critical needs facing North Carolina schools, with a lens towards serving the whole child across the PreK-12 continuum. Their findings make clear that the state’s investments in public education are not keeping pace with the needs of North Carolina children, which are becoming increasingly complex for several reasons. First, due to ever-shifting demands of the workforce in our increasingly technologically advanced society, curricular standards and benchmarks for providing a sound basic education have changed. Moreover, over the past twenty years, we have seen substantial growth in overall public school enrollment and in the number of students with higher levels of need, who require additional levels of funding and support.



Source: WestEd, Learning Policy Institute, & Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University (2019). Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina. San Francisco, CA: WestEd. pg.32.

<sup>1</sup> *Leandro v. State*, 346 N.C. 336, 488 S.E.2d 249 (1997).

<sup>2</sup> WestEd, Learning Policy Institute, & Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University (2019). Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina. San Francisco, CA: WestEd. pg. 31

<sup>3</sup> myFutureNC Commission. (2018). A Call to Action for the State of North Carolina.

<sup>4</sup> Tippet, R. & Kahn, N. (2018). Bringing it all together: Leaks in the postsecondary pipeline. Raleigh, NC: myFutureNC Commission.

<sup>5</sup> NCWorks Commission. (2018). Employer needs survey. North Carolina Department of Commerce.

The price tag associated with WestEd's recommendations is likely to garner pushback from some who may argue that school spending is not directly tied to improved educational outcomes. However, recent research has clearly shown the opposite. A 2015 study found that increasing per-pupil spending by 10 percent for each year of public schooling led to significant increases in educational attainment, higher wages, and reductions in adult poverty rates, especially for children from low-income families.<sup>6</sup> Others have found that improvements in funding adequacy and equity are associated with substantial increases in student achievement<sup>7</sup> and intergenerational social mobility.<sup>8</sup> Investments in strategies to increase students' educational attainment are tied to greater economic growth overall, which is likely to result in substantial net benefits for taxpayers, even if they do not have children in public schools.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, how the additional funding is spent also matters, and a per-pupil spending indicator is by no means the only measure of the extent to which we are providing students with equitable access to a sound basic education. As is noted in the WestEd report, it is critical that additional resources be targeted directly towards students who have been historically underserved. Thirty-three percent of traditional public schools in North Carolina are considered to be high-poverty, meaning that more than 75 percent of the student population is economically disadvantaged, and nearly two-thirds of the state's 115 school districts are classified as low-wealth.<sup>10</sup> Students of color, non-native English speakers, students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students disproportionately attend high-poverty schools. And high-poverty schools and schools serving higher proportions of students of color are far less likely to have access to well-qualified teachers and principals, challenging curriculum, and other resources essential to providing access to a sound basic education.<sup>11</sup>

There are also a number of policy recommendations put forth by WestEd that align with those that have been proposed by the Forum that require no additional funding to implement. We address some of these in our **Key Priorities**, which you'll find in the following pages of this report. While the key priorities we included in this year's Top Education Issues encompass ambitious goals specific to K-12 public education, they are still not exhaustive of all that must be done in the coming year and beyond to ensure that all students in North Carolina have access to a sound basic education.

Following the release of the WestEd report, Judge David Lee signed a consent order in January 2020 agreeing with the conclusion by all parties in the *Leandro* suit that a definite action plan must be implemented this year for the successful provision of the constitutional *Leandro* rights – a sound basic education for all. By March 30, 2020 all parties will lay out specific actions that defendants (i.e. the State) must implement to address the issues identified by the court-ordered report produced by WestEd as well as in the January 2020 consent order. It is our hope that this order will prompt lawmakers to immediately initiate both short and long-term steps to address the demonstrated needs of our public schools.

While we could look at 2020 as just another year in which we will continue to see more of the political battles and stagnant progress that has characterized much of the last decade, we hope that this decade will usher in a renewed opportunity to transform public education in the state of North Carolina. It is time for stakeholders to make our state a leader in public education once again by creating a more equitable and higher quality system of public education as mandated by our state constitution that will secure the future civic and economic well-being of our children and our state overall. It will take time, resources, and collaborative effort, but it is well within our ability to accomplish this, and the investment now will pay off exponentially in the future.

*“North Carolina’s PreK-12 public education system leaves too many students behind – especially students of color and economically disadvantaged students. As a result, thousands of students are not being prepared for full participation in the global, interconnected economy and the society in which they will live, work and engage its citizens. The cost to those students, individually, and to the State are considerable and if left unattended will result in a North Carolina that does not meet its vast potential.”<sup>12</sup>*

<sup>6</sup> Jackson, C. K., Johnson, R. C., & Persico, C. (2016). The effects of school spending on educational and economic outcomes: Evidence from school finance reforms. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 131(1), 157-218.

<sup>7</sup> LaFortune, J., Rothstein, J., & Schanzenbach, D. W. (2018). School finance reform and the distribution of student achievement. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 10(2), 1-26.

<sup>8</sup> Biasi, B. (2019). School Finance Equalization Increases Intergenerational Mobility: Evidence from a Simulated-Instruments Approach. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

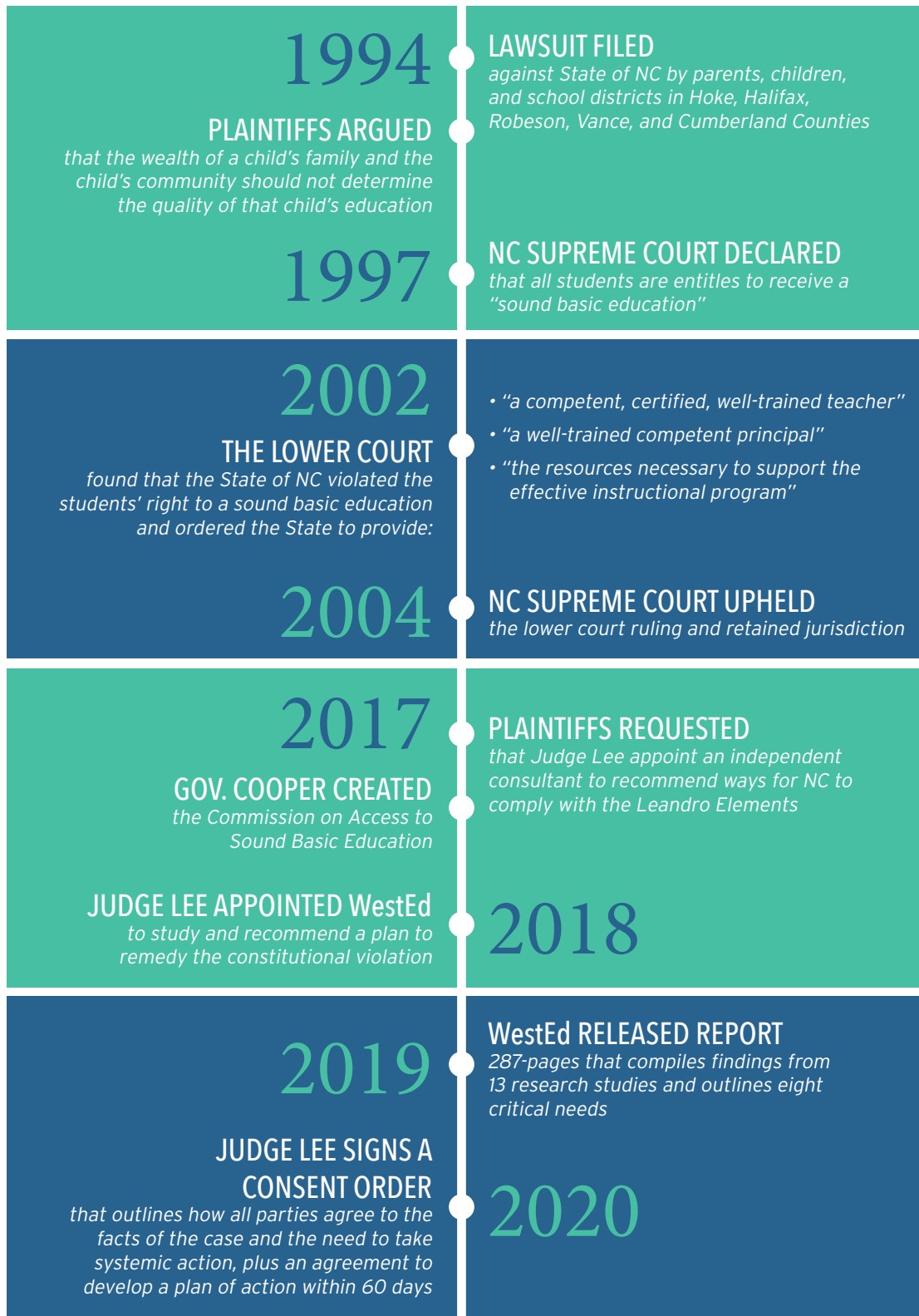
<sup>9</sup> Carroll, S. J., & Erkut, E. (2009). How taxpayers benefit when students attain higher levels of education. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation; Belfield, C. R., and Henry M. Levin, eds. *The price we pay: Economic and social consequences of inadequate education*. Brookings Institution Press, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (February 2018). *Highlights of the NC Public School Budget*.

<sup>11</sup> WestEd, Learning Policy Institute, & Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University (2019). *Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

<sup>12</sup> Consent order regarding need for remedial, systemic actions for the achievement of Leandro Compliance (2020).

# LEANDRO V. STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA TIMELINE



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

***- N.C. Const. art. I, § 15.***



# KEY PRIORITY ONE:

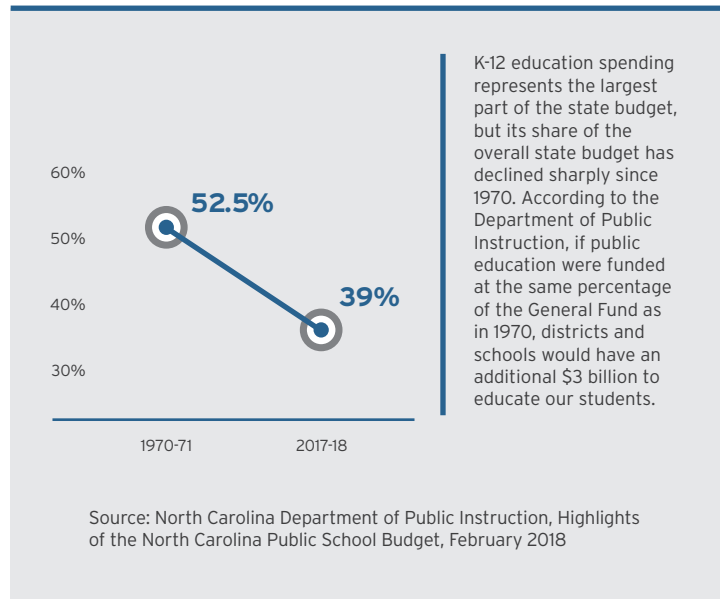
## REDESIGN OUR SCHOOL FINANCE SYSTEM TO DRAMATICALLY IMPROVE ADEQUACY, EQUITY, AND FLEXIBILITY

In North Carolina, as is required by our state constitution and further codified by the 1931 and 1933 School Machinery Acts, the state – rather than local districts – bears the primary responsibility of providing all students with access to a free, uniform system of public education. The 1997 and 2004 Supreme Court rulings in the *Leandro* case reaffirmed the responsibility of the state to ensure that all children have the opportunity to receive a sound basic education. This obligation includes but is not limited to ensuring that all classrooms are staffed with competent, certified, and well-trained teachers and principals and that all students have equitable access to sufficient resources to support instruction.<sup>13</sup> As the Court ruled in 2004 and has been demonstrated most recently in the WestEd report, the state has consistently denied students in North Carolina this constitutional right due to inadequate and inequitable funding, especially affecting students in low-wealth schools and counties.

*When adjusted for inflation, per-pupil spending in North Carolina has declined by approximately 6 percent since 2009-10.<sup>14</sup>*

Our state was ranked 48th in the nation on per-pupil spending after adjusting for regional cost differences in 2019.<sup>15</sup> When adjusted for inflation, per-pupil spending in North Carolina has declined by approximately 6 percent since 2009-10.<sup>16</sup> This has coincided with deep cuts to corporate and income taxes, which have not led to exceptional economic growth and have cost the state billions of dollars in revenue that could have gone towards funding our public schools.<sup>17</sup> North Carolina ranked 49th nationally on a measure of funding effort, or the level of spending on education as a percentage of state wealth overall.<sup>18</sup> It is clear, therefore, that we can afford to do much more than we are currently to **adequately** fund our public schools.

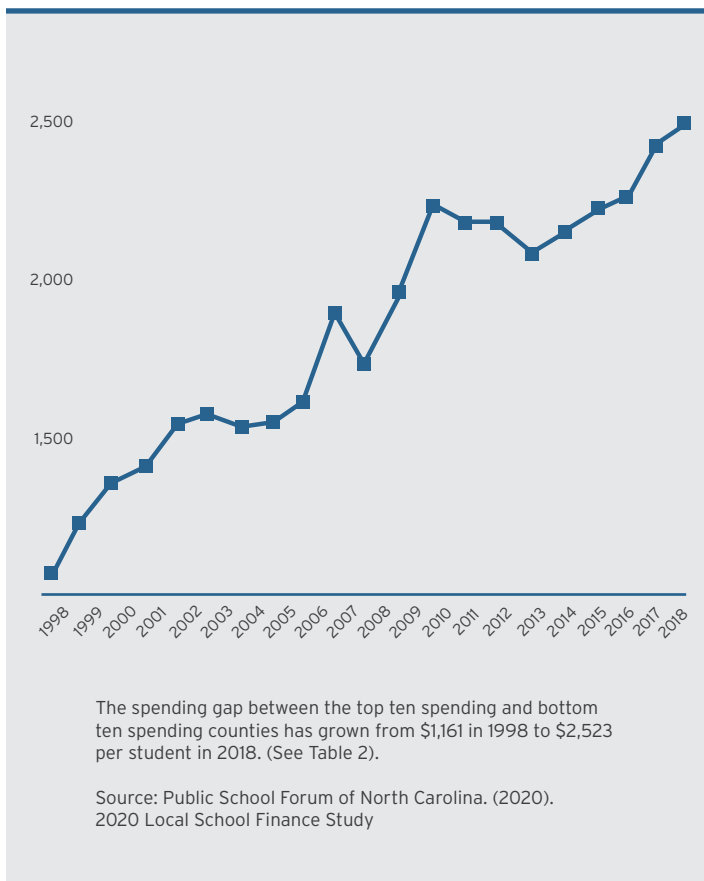
### K-12 SPENDING (% OF GENERAL OPERATING BUDGET)



As a result of insufficient state funding, local districts have been forced to take on an increasing role in funding instructional expenses. The Forum's annual Local School Finance Study has demonstrated that there continues to be a large and growing gap in the capacity of low-wealth and higher-wealth counties to provide the local funds needed to supplement public school dollars from the state. Our most recent study of the 2017-2018 budget year found a gap of \$2,253 in local spending per student between the ten wealthiest and ten poorest counties in North Carolina, even while the ten poorest counties tax themselves at nearly double the rate of the wealthiest counties in an attempt to adequately fund their schools. While low-wealth and small-county supplemental funding from the state has helped to address these disparities, the amounts of funding remain inadequate. As a result, **equity** of opportunity across districts is a growing concern, as low-wealth districts struggle to meet their local schools' infrastructure needs, provide their classrooms with textbooks and supplies, and offer competitive salary supplements to help them recruit and retain high-quality teachers.



## WIDENING LOCAL SPENDING GAP



Adding to the hardships faced by under-resourced districts, the General Assembly has imposed legislative restrictions on the **flexibility** of districts to use state funds to address their specific needs. North Carolina currently uses a resource allocation model in which funding is provided to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) through different types of allotments. These include position allotments for classroom teachers and instructional support and categorical allotments for items such as transportation, teacher assistants, supplies and supplemental funding for children with disabilities. Many of these allotment categories continue to be funded well below pre-Recession levels. And while districts were previously allowed to move funds from one allotment to another as budgeting needs arose, recent legislative restrictions have been placed on allotments for teacher assistants, exceptional children, academically or intellectually gifted students, and textbooks, thereby exacerbating the already significant challenges that districts must overcome in their effort to provide their students with a sound basic education.<sup>19</sup>

The Forum concurs with the recommendations from WestEd that the state must **take immediate steps to create a long and short-term plan that will dramatically increase state funds for public education**. Our leaders' obligation to take action starting this year to address issues contained in the WestEd report was affirmed in the January 2020 consent order signed by Judge Lee, and specific actions required are expected to be made public by March 30. Lawmakers should also **remove restrictions on allotments** to allow districts to exercise their local judgment in the allocation of resources based on their students' needs. Most importantly, the state must ensure that students, schools, and districts that have been chronically under-resourced receive the additional funds necessary to create equitable learning opportunities and to realize the results of a sound basic education.



<sup>19</sup> WestEd, Learning Policy Institute, & Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University (2019). Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

<sup>14</sup> Education Week. Quality Counts 2019: Chance for Success.

<sup>15</sup> Education Week. Quality Counts 2019: Chance for Success.

<sup>16</sup> WestEd, Learning Policy Institute, & Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University (2019). Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

<sup>17</sup> Leachman, M. (2018). North Carolina's Tax Cuts Haven't Caused the Economy to Surge. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

<sup>18</sup> Farrie, D., Kim, R., & Sclarra, D.G. (2019). Making the Grade 2019: How Fair is School Funding in Your State? Newark, NJ: Education Law Center.

<sup>19</sup> WestEd, Learning Policy Institute, & Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University (2019). Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.; Public School Forum of North Carolina. (2019). Local School Finance Study.

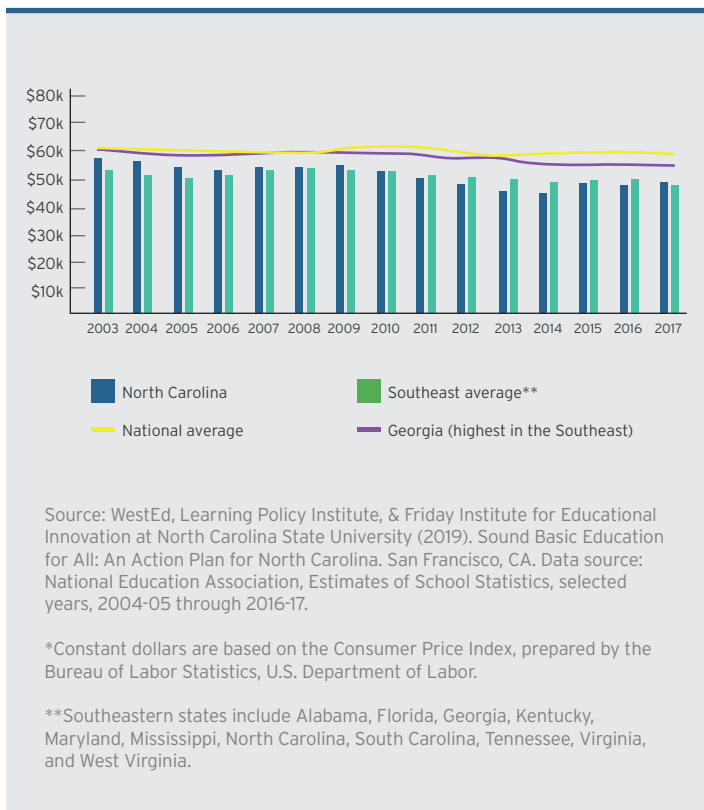


# KEY PRIORITY TWO:

## OVERHAUL EDUCATOR COMPENSATION, RECRUITMENT, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Teachers have seen some improvements in pay since the Great Recession, rising from a ranking of 46th in the nation in 2013 to an estimated 29th in 2019.<sup>20</sup> However, much of those pay increases have been targeted toward beginning teachers, and average salaries vary widely across districts.<sup>21</sup> While the modest improvements have been welcomed, what the teaching profession has lost over this time has overshadowed the salary adjustments.

### AVERAGE ANNUAL K-12 TEACHER SALARIES, 2003-2017 (IN CONSTANT 2017 DOLLARS)



At the state level, there continues to be zero dollars budgeted for professional development, on top of years of cuts to classroom resources, textbooks, and teaching assistants; and the desperate need for a statewide bond for facilities has been ignored, making for very challenging conditions for teaching and learning in many schools. The profession has also witnessed the end of career status (also known as tenure), Master's degree salary supplements, longevity pay, and retiree health benefits for teachers who will begin their careers in 2021.

The current state of the profession not only hurts today's teachers, but dramatically impacts our ability to recruit and retain high quality educators, especially those of color. In 2018-2019, there were 1,698 teacher vacancies across the state on the 40th day of school.<sup>22</sup> Teacher education programs have experienced declining enrollments of more than 50 percent since 2008-2009.<sup>23</sup> And while students of color comprise over half of the total student population in North Carolina, 80 percent of our teachers are white.<sup>24</sup> The WestEd report has made it clear that without a strong, diverse, and well-prepared teacher workforce, our constitutional obligation to ensure every child has a sound basic education will not be met. The report highlights the key building blocks that were in place in North Carolina during the 1980s and 1990s to recruit, retain and compensate a high quality teacher workforce. Those building blocks included incentives for strong candidates to prepare for, enter and stay in teaching through the original NC Teaching Fellows and Principal Fellows programs, rich professional development offerings for teachers through the NC Center for the Advancement of Teaching and the NC Teacher Academy, rigorous standards for teacher preparation and mentoring and induction for beginning teachers.<sup>25</sup>

It's time to recommit our state to programs like these that will ensure a robust teacher workforce in the decades to come. That means enacting a much **more inclusive and aggressive teacher compensation** plan that brings us to at least the national average and fairly compensates all educators, including our veteran teachers. We also support the recommendation by the Governor's Commission on Access to Sound Basic Education to authorize a study examining

the level of pay necessary for teacher salaries to become comparable to those of other professions that require similar credentials, education, responsibilities, and skills. Additionally, we must develop a **recruitment and retention plan that reaches more teachers of color** and incentivizes talented educators to teach and lead at high needs schools, where teacher shortages, vacancies and concentrations of unqualified teachers are highest.

Grow Your Own teacher preparation programs that recruit and train local community members, career changers, paraprofessionals, after-school program staff, and others currently working in schools to enter the teaching profession are an example of a promising model that could be replicated across North Carolina.<sup>26</sup> And in its original form, the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program was highly successful at producing teachers who were more effective and stayed in the profession longer than those entering through other pathways.<sup>27</sup> North Carolina should restore the current, scaled-back version of NC

Teaching Fellows to the program it once was, which recruited more than 11,000 teacher candidates into the profession over its lifetime and offered enhanced training opportunities that equipped those teachers with high quality pedagogical skills.<sup>28</sup>

We must also invest in ongoing and in-depth training for both current and pre-service teachers to **foster racial equity in our schools**. The state should provide support for the development and refinement of curriculum for professional development and educator preparation programs to address racial bias and prepare teachers to implement culturally responsive and inclusive practices in their classrooms. This should be considered an important component to providing an equitable, sound basic education to our increasingly racially/ethnically diverse student population in North Carolina.



<sup>20</sup> National Education Association. (2019). Rankings of the States 2018 and Estimates of School Statistics 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Public School Forum of North Carolina. (2019). North Carolina's "Average" Teacher Pay Myth.

<sup>22</sup> Public Schools of North Carolina. (2020). 2018-2019 State of the Teaching Profession in North Carolina. Report to the North Carolina General Assembly.

<sup>23</sup> WestEd, Learning Policy Institute, & Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University (2019). Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

<sup>24</sup> Hinchcliffe, K. (2019). NC's Teacher Diversity Gap: Where are All the Black and Brown Teachers? Raleigh, NC: WRAL.

<sup>25</sup> WestEd, Learning Policy Institute, & Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University (2019). Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

<sup>26</sup> WestEd, Learning Policy Institute, & Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University (2019). Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

<sup>27</sup> Henry, G. T., Puritel, K. M., Bastian, K. C., Fortner, K. C., Thompson, C. L., Campbell, S. L., & Patterson, K. M. (2013). The effects of teacher entry portals on student achievement. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 65(1), 7-23.

<sup>28</sup> Public School Forum of North Carolina. A Legacy of Inspired Educators: A Report on the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program 1986-2015.



# KEY PRIORITY THREE:

## REVAMP OUR SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY MODEL: ELIMINATE OR REVISE THE A-F SCHOOL GRADING SYSTEM

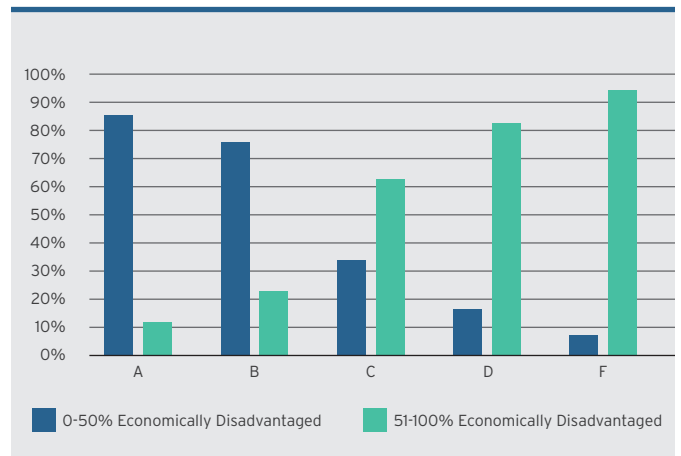
As we have consistently noted since the enactment of North Carolina’s A-F school grading system in 2015, this method for assessing and rating our public schools as it is currently designed is not an accurate measure of a school’s performance when it comes to educating our children. Of the 16 states that use A-F school grades, North Carolina’s system is the only one to give such an undue and significant weight (80%) to student proficiency rather than growth.<sup>29</sup> Only 20 percent of a school’s letter grade is derived from its growth score, which utilizes a complicated metric to look at how students improve on tests over time—a more meaningful reflection of how a school and its educators are helping students progress and succeed academically.

A-F school performance grades using the current formula are more indicative of the percentage of students in a school who are living in poverty rather than actual student learning. In 2019, 93 percent of schools that received a grade of “F” enrolled a student population in which more than 50 percent of students were economically disadvantaged. If the formula were revised to be based entirely on student growth, the distribution of grades by poverty level would be much more balanced.<sup>30</sup>

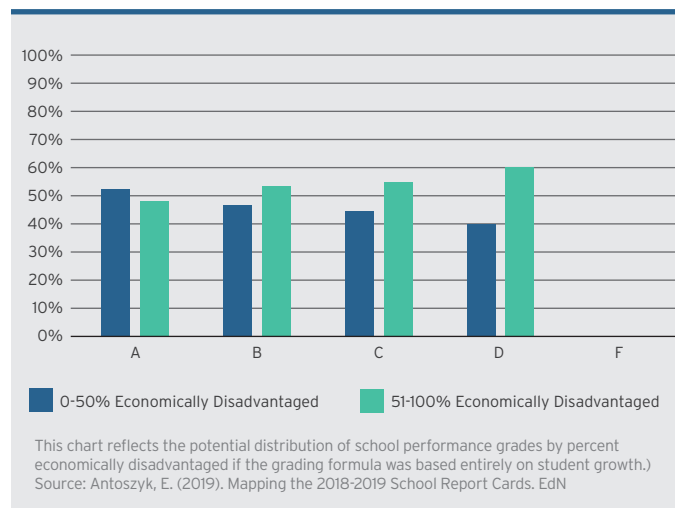
Over the years, Republican and Democratic lawmakers have sponsored legislation to modify the A-F school grading system so that it more accurately reflects school effectiveness. In 2019, lawmakers approved legislation that codified the 15-point grading scale that was set to revert to a 10-point scale beginning with the 2019-2020 school year; however, no progress was made to revise the formula to give greater weight to student growth.

The Forum believes now is the time to align this accountability model with the recommendations contained in the WestEd report. “...Under *Leandro*, North Carolina needs a reporting system that enables it to identify how schools and the students in them are performing in particular areas so that they can design and target useful interventions for those who need them.”<sup>31</sup> North Carolina’s A-F school grading system takes a summative approach that obscures individual student performance on a variety of indicators, thereby making it impossible to see how schools can improve, and compelling families and the most experienced teachers to simply turn away from those schools that are labeled as low-performing – even if their students are making substantial progress. If a consensus cannot be achieved around the **elimination of this model** for something more nuanced, then **revising the formula** so that at a minimum, grades are calculated using a 50 percent growth, 50 percent proficiency model, is a start.

**SCHOOL PERFORMANCE GRADES BY PERCENT ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED (CURRENT FORMULA) 2018-19**



**SCHOOL PERFORMANCE GRADES BY PERCENT ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED (100% GROWTH FORMULA) 2018-19**





# KEY PRIORITY FOUR:

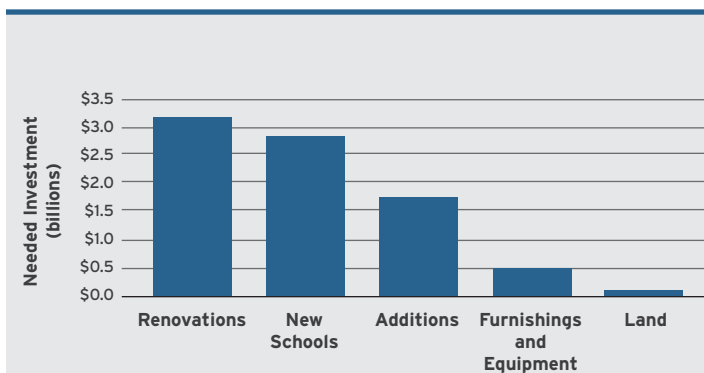
## SUPPORT A MAJOR STATE INVESTMENT TO FULLY FUND NORTH CAROLINA'S \$8 BILLION+ SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

North Carolina's school buildings are in desperate need of repair, replacement, and reconstruction. Most recent estimates place the statewide need at \$8 billion for school construction costs over the next few years – and that figure has likely grown since that analysis. Historically, the state has passed a bond referendum for capital construction nearly every decade since the mid-20th century – but the last K-12 school bond of \$1.8 billion was passed almost 25 years ago in 1996.<sup>32</sup>

The current state budget stalemate has barred any additional infusion of funds into school capital needs as we head into 2020. The General Assembly's 2019 budget proposal included \$4.4 billion over ten years for school construction that would be drawn from the State Capital Infrastructure Fund (SCIF), instead of a bond. Governor Cooper has called for a compromise \$3.5 billion bond referendum to be placed on the ballot, instead.

**We support a statewide school infrastructure bond over**

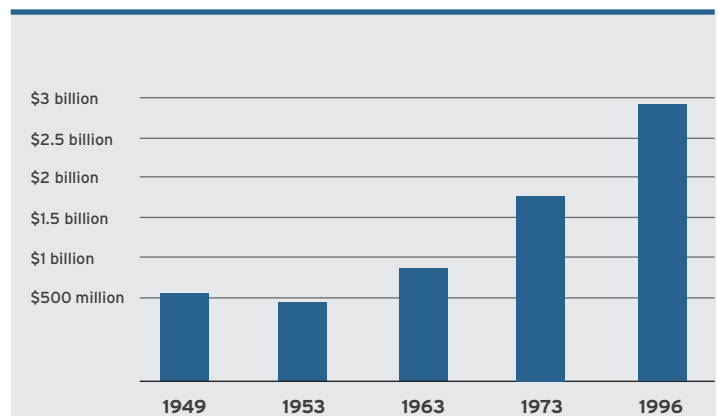
### MORE THAN \$8 BILLION IN SCHOOL FACILITY NEEDS BY FY2020-21



Source: McHugh, P. & Nordstrom, K. (2019). Make Space for Learning: Current Options to Meet North Carolina's School Facility Needs Fall Short of Sustainable Solutions. Budget & Tax Center, North Carolina Justice Center. Source note: Data reflected the need identified between FY 2015-16 and FY 2020-21 by the most recent Statewide Facility Needs Survey.

**the SCIF "pay-as-you-go" approach.** Funding school capital expenses through the SCIF relies on future revenues and future approval by new legislatures, which could provide considerable uncertainty based on current economic forecasts. That model also makes it more difficult for school districts and local county commissioners to enter into building contracts as available funds are subject to legislative change over time. As such, this model could allow lawmakers to renege on their school construction funding promises going forward if there is an economic downturn, and over time it is predicted that this mechanism will also likely result in a reduction of available funds for teacher pay, school safety personnel and other operating needs. A statewide bond, on the other hand, is voter-approved and funds are guaranteed and can be targeted toward counties with the greatest need. However, given the level of infrastructure needs facing our schools, any additional state funding would be better than none.

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



Source: Bostic, R. & Reese, J. (2017). Public School Facility Needs. Presentation to the House Appropriations Committee on Capital.

<sup>29</sup> Murray, K., & Howe, K. R. (2017). Neglecting Democracy in Education Policy: AF School Report Card Accountability Systems. Education policy analysis archives, 25(109), n109.

<sup>30</sup> Antoszyk, E. (2019). Mapping the 2018-2019 School Report Cards. EdNC.

<sup>31</sup> WestEd, Learning Policy Institute, & Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University (2019). Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

<sup>32</sup> Bostic, R. & Reese, J. (2017). Public School Facility Needs. Presentation to the House Appropriations Committee on Capital.



# KEY PRIORITY FIVE:

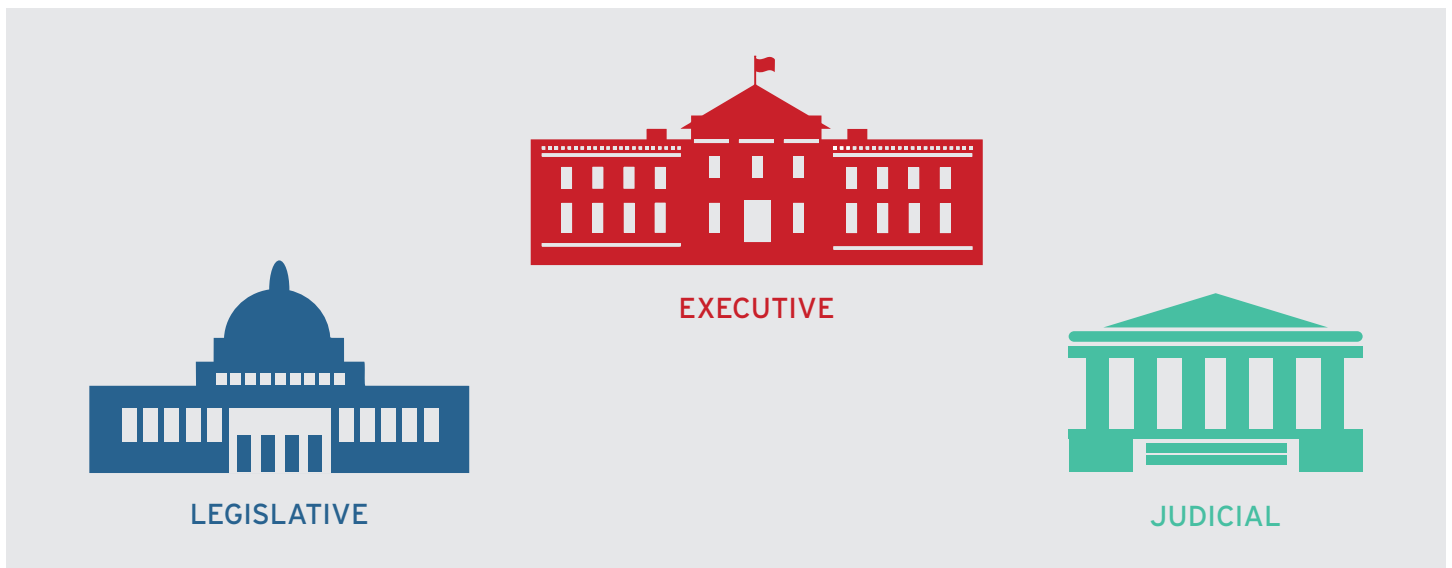
## ESTABLISH A PLAN TO MONITOR PROGRESS TOWARD LEANDRO COMPLIANCE

As the court-ordered WestEd report makes clear, North Carolina has failed to meet its constitutional obligation to provide every child a sound basic education over the past quarter century. All parties in the *Leandro* lawsuit have now agreed to an initial consent order that affirms that North Carolina should remedy this grave failure. A subsequent consent order outlining the steps that the state must take to implement necessary changes will be submitted to the court by March 30, 2020. It is now incumbent on us all to hold our state's leaders accountable and ensure that the appropriate education investments are made so that we can meet our promise to the children of our great state.

We support the WestEd report's suggestion of **convening a court-appointed expert panel to ensure that state policies, plans, and programs are moving the state toward compliance with the *Leandro* requirements.** The report's authors also suggest the requirement of annual reports compiled by the NC State Board of Education and the NC Department of Public Instruction that detail the steps undertaken to move the state toward the goal of becoming *Leandro* compliant.

In addition to those plans for monitoring our progress on the steps outlined in the consent order, we also support continued efforts to refine **statewide longitudinal data systems** that can help us understand more clearly where the gaps and areas of progress are in ensuring all children are receiving a sound basic education. A variety of agencies have made great strides in developing strong data systems, but ongoing support from policymakers and collaborative work by partners is needed to build connections for a more robust, cohesive, and accessible longitudinal data system that can better inform decision-making for a wide range of stakeholders in both policy and practice.<sup>33</sup> We believe this is a critical area of investment that can help us to measure progress on specific indicators across districts and subgroups and assess the extent to which every student is being provided with access to a sound basic education.

Finally, the Public School Forum looks forward to developing a long-term plan to assess the implementation of the *Leandro* recommendations that will likely span several years to come.



<sup>33</sup> Siddiqi, J., Sims, P. & Goff, A. (2019). *Connecting the Continuum: Longitudinal Data Systems in North Carolina*. Durham, NC: The Hunt Institute.

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## 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.

## OUR MISSION

To provide trusted, nonpartisan, evidence-based research, policy analysis and innovative programs that empower an informed public to demand that education best practice becomes common practice throughout North Carolina.

## OUR CORE BELIEFS

- Public schools are the engine and true measure of progress in a free, democratic society. They are our melting pot and unifying force. Investment in public education at all levels has had a significant impact on our state's prosperity.
- To prepare students to succeed in a fiercely competitive global marketplace, and to create a vibrant North Carolina economy, public schools should be equipped to teach to the highest standards, and to serve every student, from the most academically gifted to those who trail their peers.
- Policymakers, decision-makers, educators, parents and taxpayers should have access to nonpartisan, evidence-based research and analysis to find the strategies, and make the informed decisions and investment, needed to improve North Carolina's public schools.
- Discourse that is civil and focused on vital education issues is needed and can produce innovative thinking and consensus to shape public policy to improve public schools.
- Expanded learning opportunities -- including before, after and outside the classroom -- are essential to prepare students to succeed in a society and global marketplace that are fiercely competitive and in rapid change.
- Successful teachers prepare and motivate students to succeed in school, in the marketplace, and in life. State and local leaders -- private and public -- share the fundamental job of finding the strategies and resources needed to recruit, train, support, retain and inspire those teachers.

**We have one bias:** We believe in the fundamental value of public education and the central role it plays in our society and economy. We will always advocate for what is best for the children of North Carolina, not just what seems politically possible in the moment.

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