

# TOP 10

EDUCATION ISSUES  
2016



CELEBRATING 30 YEARS  
1986 2016

**PUBLIC SCHOOL  
FORUM** of north carolina

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# INTRODUCTION

Uncertainty was the dominant theme in North Carolina education policy in 2015, as the General Assembly debated the state budget well into September—the longest delay in more than a decade. The wait strained schools, students, and families, as funding for teacher assistants and driver education hung in the balance. In addition, a recent legislative change meant that growing school districts had to wait until well after school had started to find out whether they would even receive funding for all the students they served.

As the Forum enters its 30th year in 2016, we continue our tradition of forecasting the ten issues most likely to impact public schools across the state in our *Top Ten Education Issues for 2016*.

Two ongoing tensions underlie much of the current debate over the future of public education in North Carolina. The first concerns the amount of money available to support public schools. Even though in 2015 the state's economic recovery resulted in a surplus for the first time in years, the benefit to our public schoolchildren was nowhere near what it could have been without past years' changes to the state's tax code that "shrunk the pie" and left significantly less money available for all public priorities, including schools.

The second tension played out in the past year through wildly divergent impressions of state leaders' support for public education. Some legislative leaders and Governor McCrory urged educators and the public to focus on positive movement on salary and education spending as indicators of their support for public schools. However, at the same time, many state leaders pushed hard to cut TAs and driver education, nixed numerous promising education proposals, expanded the state's private school voucher program, weakened charter school accountability, and doubled down on an A-F grading system transparently designed to show, as Senator Rucho publicly stated, that the public school system has failed.

These tensions are interwoven throughout this year's Top Ten Issues. Our first two issues deal directly with the need to take bold steps to remedy years of stagnant education spending, and to reimagine structures around teaching and school leadership to make the best use of available resources. We also spotlight the importance of investing in early childhood education and improving access to high-quality expanded learning opportunities.

The state finds itself at a crossroads on charter schools. In one direction lie states with lax oversight and a free-market ideology toward charters, which is a recipe for poor results and significant inequities. Down the other path are states that hold charter schools to the "grand bargain" of strong autonomy for heightened accountability, and where charter schools help remedy rather than exacerbate racial and socioeconomic inequities.

Also under the domain of "school choice," some legislators want to continue expanding the state's voucher program or even to extend state policy to provide "Education Savings Accounts (ESAs)," which place state education funds in private accounts to be managed by parents—similar to vouchers but even less accountable.

The remaining issues in our Top Ten deal with major structural and systemic issues that shape the context within which students are educated: racial equity, academic standards, the evaluation of school performance and A-F grades, and the state's approach to supporting struggling schools.

Our Top Ten Issues of 2016 goes to print just weeks after President Obama signed the federal Every Student Succeeds Act into law. The effects of the newest version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act will be manifold, as it will return authority to state governments that previously resided at the federal level throughout the No Child Left Behind era. States will now have more control over how they evaluate school and teacher performance and what they do to support struggling schools. While the law maintains some federally mandated testing requirements, it also encourages states to limit additional testing. Although the full impact of the new law is impossible to predict, it is clear that with more authority shifting to the state and local levels, each of the issues mentioned in this publication will take on heightened importance, as will the impact of state and local leadership on education.

## **DIRECT ADEQUATE RESOURCES TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS, TEACHERS, AND LEADERS**

**1**

- › Prioritize public schools in policy choices that shape the state's revenue picture
- › Target increased funding to attract and retain great teachers and leaders
- › Prepare for the next generation of public schooling by funding school- and system-level innovation
- › Reject calls for rigid and damaging limits on education spending such as a "Taxpayer Bill of Rights" (TABOR)

## **TRANSFORM THE PROFESSION TO MAKE NC A TEACHING DESTINATION AGAIN**

**2**

- › Rapidly raise teacher pay to the national average and #1 in the Southeast
- › Support districts in developing career advancement opportunities for teachers
- › Renew support for UNC colleges of education while opening the state's doors through reciprocity and exploring promising alternative routes to teaching
- › Target additional pay incentives to hard-to-staff subjects and high-need schools

## **EMPHASIZE QUALITY, NOT QUANTITY, IN CHARTER SCHOOL GROWTH**

**3**

- › Focus on quality and accountability in new charter policies
- › Support gold-standard research on who North Carolina charter schools serve and how well they serve them
- › Compromise to achieve fair funding formulas and practices
- › Continue proceeding cautiously on virtual charter schools

## **ELEVATE RACE AS A FOCAL POINT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION**

**4**

- › Apply a disparate-impact lens to racial analysis
- › Create racially and socioeconomically inclusive and integrated schools
- › Eliminate racial gaps in student discipline
- › Recruit and retain more teachers of color
- › Embrace more culturally responsive pedagogy
- › Limit the use of vouchers to disadvantaged students who have not been served well in public schools

**TOP 10**

**EDUCATION ISSUES**

**2016 SUMMARY**

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### **FIX THE BROKEN A-F GRADING SYSTEM**

- › Adjust A-F grading formula to emphasize growth and additional factors
- › Commit to the 15-point grading scale
- › Analyze letter grades and school demographics
- › Use letter grades to identify schools for support

6

### **SUPPORT THE STATE'S STRUGGLING SCHOOLS**

- › Amend the definition of "low-performing schools" to de-link the label with the flawed A-F grading scheme
- › Support low-performing schools by reinvesting in those schools and their communities
- › Demand a "no excuses" mentality in school turnaround
- › Adopt an evidence-based approach in crafting turnaround policy

7

### **MAINTAIN HIGH STANDARDS FOR NORTH CAROLINA**

- › Follow through on the State Board of Education's review process
- › Reject wholesale adoption of another state's standards
- › Listen to educators in deciding how to modify the standards
- › Support rigorous professional development for classroom teachers to implement the current standards

8

### **MAKE EVIDENCE-BASED DECISIONS ON EXPANSION OF PRIVATE-SCHOOL VOUCHERS**

- › Limit program expansion unless and until research has shown the positive impact of vouchers on North Carolina student outcomes
- › Keep the use of vouchers limited to high-quality educational options, and to disadvantaged students who have not been served well in public schools
- › Reject efforts to create Education Savings Accounts (ESAs)

9

### **EXPAND ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

- › Increase funding for early childhood education to pre-recession levels
- › Unite public and private stakeholders around the key metric of third-grade reading success

10

### **BUILD BRIDGES FOR STUDENTS THROUGH EXPANDED LEARNING**

- › Develop and implement strong quality review for expanded learning opportunities
- › Provide access to a quality data collection tool for program use and to better connect schools with expanded learning opportunities
- › Create and publicize expanded career paths

# 1

## DIRECT ADEQUATE RESOURCES TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS, TEACHERS, AND LEADERS

As defined in the *Leandro* case, the state has the responsibility to provide all North Carolina children “the opportunity to receive a sound basic education.” Judge Manning has explained that this constitutional guarantee has three elements: that “every classroom be staffed with a competent, certified, well-trained teacher; that every school be led by a well-trained, competent principal; and that every school be provided, in the most cost-effective manner, the resources necessary to support the effective instructional program within that school so that the educational needs of all children may be met.”

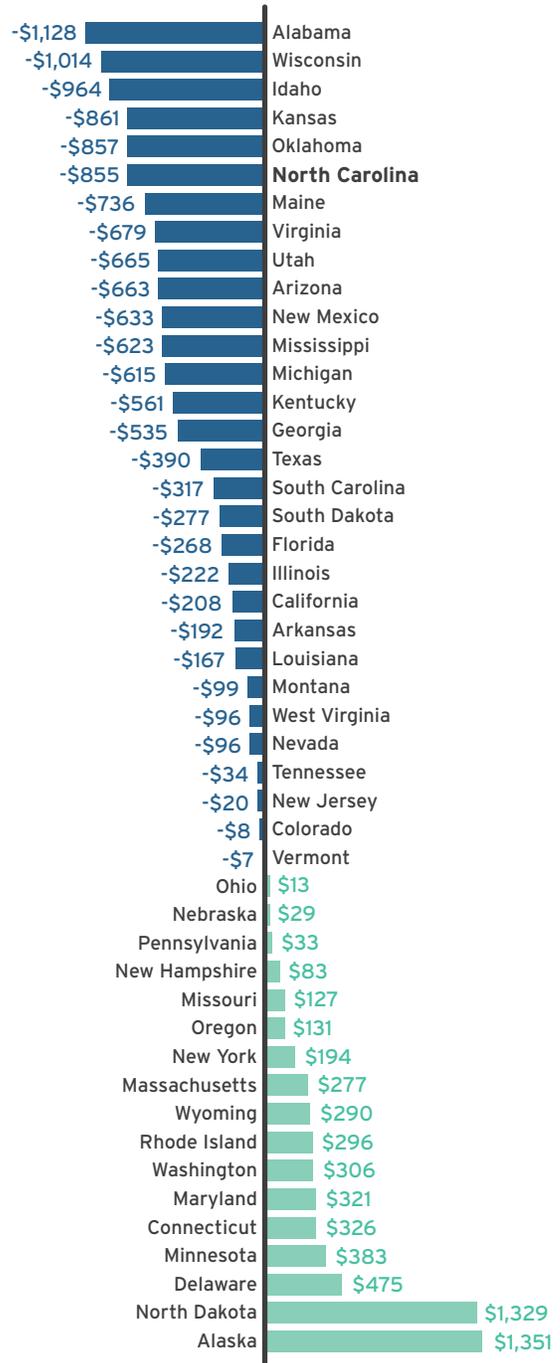
While the court’s focus on teacher and school leaders is sound and backed by a mountain of research and data on the factors that matter most to student outcomes, the resources question looms large. Even the strongest teachers and school leaders cannot adequately serve each child while operating on a shoestring. North Carolina is 43rd in per-pupil spending, adjusting for inflation, and spends \$855 *less per student* in 2015 than it did in 2008. The recession undoubtedly contributed to the drop, but only five states experienced worse declines over the same period.

In light of these trends, North Carolina will need to increase its investment in public education dramatically to attract and keep the best and brightest in teaching and school leadership, and to enable them to deliver effective instructional programs.

In the past year, as the economy continued its recovery, the state made welcome but limited additional investments in educator pay and other key areas of the K-12 education budget. A year that could have seen North Carolina take a giant leap toward the national average in teacher pay and per-pupil spending instead saw a modest one-time across-the-board \$750 “bonus,” bumps for beginning teachers, and step-based raises for a fraction of the state’s veteran educators. Priorities including pay raises, teacher assistant funding, and driver’s education were pitted against each another in

### DOLLARS SPENT PER STUDENT STILL DOWN IN MOST STATES SINCE 2008

CHANGE IN SPENDING PER STUDENT, INFLATION-ADJUSTED, FY08 TO FY15



Note: Hawaii, Indiana, and Iowa are excluded because the necessary data to make a valid comparison are not available.  
Sources: CBPP budget analysis and National Center for Education Statistics enrollment estimates.  
Source: <http://www.cbpp.org/research/most-states-still-funding-schools-less-than-before-the-recession>

<sup>1</sup> All calculations of teacher salaries under the old schedule include longevity pay to allow accurate comparison with salaries under the current schedule, which have longevity pay “built in.”

legislative wrangling, resulting in pitched battles among worthy alternatives. Similarly, numerous innovative proposals sent forth by the House became bargaining chips in negotiations with the Senate, stacked up against funding for other critical items.

At every turn, educators heard that the revenues “just weren’t there” and that funding important priorities would necessitate cuts elsewhere. This view neglected the impact of recent tax code changes on the state’s revenue picture. Even modest reversals of recent tax policy changes would have made it possible to fund many of the worthy education priorities that were

instead cast aside during the budget process. In future years, particularly when the state experiences surpluses, we strongly urge state leaders to prioritize support for public schools above further tax cuts.

In any event, educators and members of the public should understand that the funding available to support public schools is both a function of broader economic factors and deliberate tax policy choices made by the same members of the General Assembly whose duty it is to safeguard every child’s right to have an opportunity to receive a sound basic education.

## LOOKING AHEAD IN 2016

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The Forum recommends a dramatic funding policy shift to increase the state’s ability to support North Carolina’s public schools.

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- › **Prioritize public schools in policy choices that shape the state’s revenue picture.** Beginning in 2016, the Governor and members of the General Assembly should commit to a dramatic increase in funding for public schools, making tax policy choices and other decisions to increase future revenues to meet student needs and satisfy the state’s constitutional obligations under *Leandro*.
- › **Target increased funding to attract and retain great teachers and leaders.** As the state’s revenue picture brightens, either through an improving economy or funding policy choices, the state should prioritize dramatic increases in funding for teacher pay (see Top Ten Issue #2), and bold investments in school leaders. Limited funding in 2015 for a principal preparation pilot was a start, but it will take more extensive and sustained investment to show that North Carolina is ready to back up state leaders’ statements about the importance of school leadership with financial investment in principal pay and to support the creation of new programs and the expansion of proven existing programs such as the Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA).
- › **Prepare for the next generation of public schooling by funding school- and system-level innovation.** State leaders should allocate funding to implement the North Carolina Digital Learning Plan. They should also support initiatives that will pave the way for North Carolina’s public schools to continue to serve as national leaders well into the future, particularly in the areas of personalized learning, early college high schools, competency-based learning, and STEM education.
- › **Reject calls for rigid and damaging limits on education spending such as those that would be mandated under a “Taxpayer Bill of Rights” (TABOR).** A proposal to enshrine a Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR) in the state constitution, set forth in Senate Bill 607 (2015), would have reduced annual state revenues by billions of dollars, further hampering the ability of the state to support public priorities including education. Colorado’s experience with TABOR has shown the damage that such a policy change can cause to a state’s economy and public services.

# 2

## TRANSFORM THE PROFESSION TO MAKE NC A TEACHING DESTINATION AGAIN

North Carolina faces a burgeoning teacher shortage and widespread dissatisfaction in its teaching corps. Salaries have stagnated for years, and even with steps in the right direction the past two years, we're still near the bottom on teacher pay. The 2015-16 budget increased beginning teacher pay from \$33,000 to \$35,000, provided a one-time \$750 bonus for all teachers and administrators, and funded step increases for educators moving to higher bands on the new tiered salary schedule created in 2014. Nevertheless, the state's teacher pay still ranks 42nd nationally, up from 47th last year, and second-to-last in the Southeast. This is not a new problem. North Carolina ranks dead last, nationally, in teacher salary growth over the past decade.

Additionally, teacher turnover is at a five-year high, according to this year's annual "teacher turnover report" from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Since 2010, the number of teachers leaving because they are "dissatisfied with teaching" or to make a career change has *nearly doubled*, and the number of those leaving to teach in other states has *more than tripled*.

The causes for this exodus are numerous. A recent national news article spotlighted the plight of Dan and Katie Mangum, a husband and wife who left Asheville's public schools for teaching jobs in Georgia, after

realizing that moving to *any* of the surrounding states would allow them to dramatically improve their pay. It wasn't all about the money, though. "A big thing was just a lack of respect," Dan said, noting how difficult it was to watch a "revolving door" of teachers entering and exiting the profession year after year.

To teachers like the Mangums, state leaders' actions have consistently degraded them over the past half-decade, as the legislature has slowly chipped away at policies that could have kept them and other great teachers in the state's classrooms. From the loss of master's pay, longevity pay, and financial supports for teachers working to acquire National Board Certification, to elimination of career status, to discontinuation of the Teaching Fellows Program, the past five years have at times felt to teachers like an extended campaign against the public schools and the people who work in them.

As troubling as recent trends have become, the picture becomes even bleaker when one considers the continuing precipitous drop in enrollment in the UNC system's Colleges of Education. This crucial tributary flowing into the state's teacher pipeline produces more than a third of all North Carolina teachers, and researchers have found these teachers outperform those prepared through other channels.

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
State Turnover Rate	11.2%	12.1%	14.3%	14.1%	14.9%
# of Teachers Who Resigned to Teach in Another State	312	341	455	734	1028
# of Teachers Who Resigned Due to Dissatisfaction with Teaching or to Make a Career Change	640	816	887	1011	1209



## LOOKING AHEAD IN 2016

As North Carolina's teacher crisis has steadily deepened over the past five years, educators have faced the increasingly grim reality that existing holes are too deep to fill through traditional approaches and limited influxes of resources. What's needed now is nothing short of a massive, sustained, and transformational investment in how the state supports its teachers.

### > **Rapidly raise teacher pay to the national average and #1 in the Southeast.**

Salaries are not the only factor drawing teachers to the profession or determining how long they stay or why they leave. But there is no doubt that a dramatic increase in teacher pay is necessary to make the state's public schools a career destination again for promising teaching candidates, from within the state and without. Rapid ascendance to the national average is the strongest strategy to counter a decade of stagnation, and would place us at the top of the regional rankings as well.

### > **Support districts in developing career advancement opportunities for teachers.**

State leaders should provide substantial autonomy for districts to design and market innovative roles for teachers, and to differentiate pay based on the skills and competencies demanded by these roles. Several districts began constructing detailed and innovative staffing plans in 2015. As such efforts take root, the state should provide financial and other supports to enable small and low-wealth districts to take full advantage of policy flexibility to maximize their ability to attract and retain excellent teachers through high-paying, redesigned roles.

### > **Renew support for UNC colleges of education while opening the state's doors through reciprocity and exploring promising alternative routes to teaching.**

Senate Leader Phil Berger recently explained his view that, "We either need to fix our schools of education in North Carolina or scrap them in favor of new, different approaches to teacher preparation." This false choice neglects the obvious and vastly more productive option of identifying needed improvements in the state's

education schools and supporting the schools in making those improvements, while at the same time thoughtfully supporting and scaling alternative programs that meet agreed-upon measures of success. North Carolina also must amend its reciprocity policy to allow qualified teaching candidates from other states to move expeditiously into our classrooms.

- > **Target additional pay incentives to hard-to-staff subjects and high-need schools.** State and district leaders should utilize pay as a "carrot" to entice promising teaching candidates to choose to teach subjects such as math, science, and special education, and to teach in high-need schools.

## CHANGE IN EDUCATION DEGREE ENROLLMENT (2010-14)

UNC SYSTEM PROGRAM	ENROLLMENT CHANGE (# OF STUDENTS)	ENROLLMENT CHANGE (%)
Appalachian State	-998	-26.3%
East Carolina	-568	-16.5%
Elizabeth City State	-350	-53.4%
Fayetteville State	-401	-52.4%
N.C. A&T	-378	-29.9%
N.C. Central	-344	-47.1%
N.C. State	-551	-30.4%
UNC-Asheville	-209	-37.1%
UNC-Chapel Hill	-40	-40.8%
UNC-Charlotte	-821	-26.0%
UNC-Greensboro	-601	-25.1%
UNC-Pembroke	-518	-33.9%
UNC-Wilmington	1	0.1%
Western Carolina	-479	-24.7%
Winston-Salem State	-273	-45.3%

Source: UNC Educator Quality Dashboard. Numbers reflect both bachelor's and master's degree programs.

# 3

## EMPHASIZE QUALITY, NOT QUANTITY, IN CHARTER SCHOOL GROWTH

North Carolina lifted its 100-school cap on public charter schools in 2011. Since then, the state's charter sector has expanded rapidly. North Carolina now has 158 charter schools, including 11 new brick-and-mortar schools and two virtual charter schools opened last fall. The state's charter schools serve approximately 70,000 students, around five percent of all public school students in the state, a marked increase from just three years ago, when there were fewer than 45,000 students in the state's charter schools.

Charter schools serve larger percentages of students in some North Carolina counties than in others. There are currently 10 districts that have more than 10 percent of their public school students attending charter schools, a list topped by Halifax County (19.7 percent) and Person County (19.1 percent). The state's two largest districts, Wake and Charlotte-Mecklenburg, send a combined 21,694 students to charter schools, almost seven percent of all public school students in those districts.

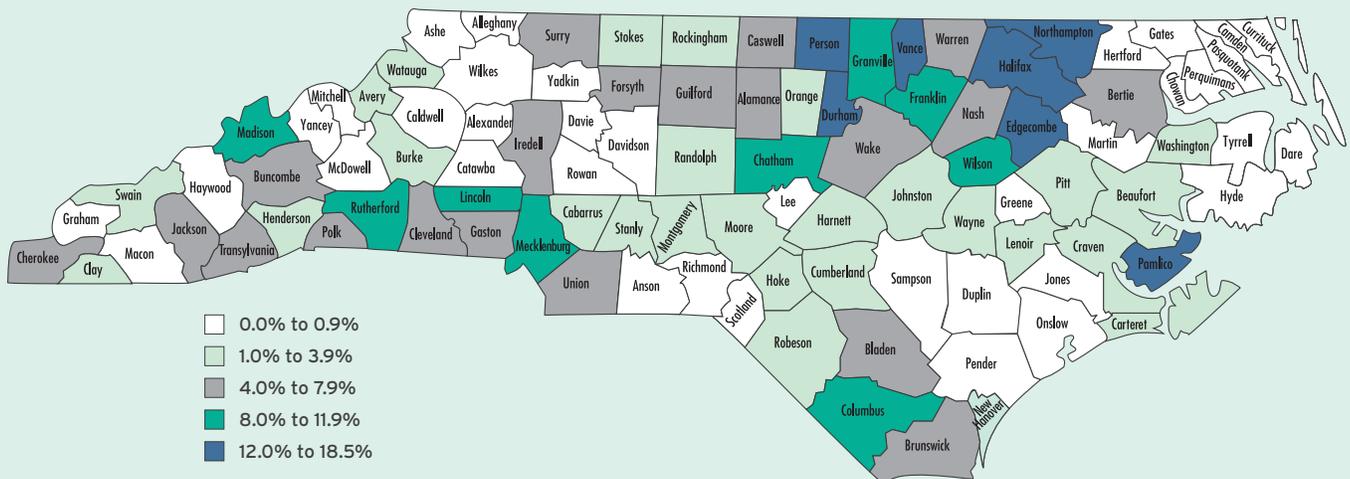
Stanford University's Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO) updated its seminal national study of charter school outcomes in 2013. The study found that in North Carolina, charter schools outperform comparable district schools in reading and underperform them in math. A 2015 Public School

Forum analysis of school performance grades found charter schools in North Carolina more than twice as likely to have received "A" grades (11% compared to 5% of district schools) but *also* more than twice as likely to have received "F" grades (14% compared to 6%). North Carolina's charter schools were vastly more likely to serve large percentages of wealthier students (see figure, "Schools of Privilege" on the following page).

Painting all charter schools, even in a single state, with a broad brush ignores crucial differences among schools' educational programs, demographics, and school cultures, and the impact of each of these on performance. The actual picture of charter schools in North Carolina, or any state, is more complex, which is why strong charter authorizing and charter policies focused on quality and equity are crucial to supporting charters as a valuable part of a healthy overall public school ecosystem.

Unfortunately, in 2015, the General Assembly lowered the accountability bar for charter schools. House Bill 334 made it more difficult for authorizers to refuse to renew schools' charters by making renewal the default, in contrast to the law it replaced, which required charter schools to earn renewal through solid academic performance. Other states that have gone down this path, including Ohio, Texas, and Utah, have

### PERCENTAGE OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MEMBERSHIP AT CHARTER SCHOOLS: MONTH 1 2013-14



> SCHOOLS OF PRIVILEGE  
(25% OR LESS LOW-INCOME STUDENTS)

**7%**  
OF NORTH CAROLINA  
DISTRICT SCHOOLS

**45%**  
OF NORTH CAROLINA  
CHARTER SCHOOLS

suffered declines in charter school accountability and performance. The same bill shifted some control and oversight responsibilities for charter schools away from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), and sponsors of the bill originally sought to have the office removed from DPI entirely. In addition, some legislative leaders have accused the Office of Charter Schools in recent years of being too stingy with charter school approvals.

All of this has generated concern, even among charter leaders and advocates, that the state is headed down a path toward increasingly lax quality standards and little attention paid to advancing equity through the continuing growth of the state's charter sector. Every failing charter school and every charter school that increases inequities causes deep harm to the reputations of other charter schools and the sector as a whole.

## LOOKING AHEAD IN 2016

North Carolina is at a crossroads on charter policy. New laws that decrease charter school oversight and accountability will lead to further declines in quality and equity. State leaders should actively move in the opposite direction, demanding strong performance and swift closure of charter schools that don't achieve it, as well as equitable access for students from disadvantaged groups to all schools of choice.

> **Focus on quality and accountability in new charter policies.** National charter school advocates have recently spotlighted the importance of closing low-performing charter schools and developing sophisticated and rigorous accountability systems for charter schools, making sure these systems take into account student demographics, including the percentage of at-risk students served.

> **Support gold-standard research on who North Carolina charter schools serve and how well they serve them.** Repeating a 2015 recommendation, the public and the charter sector need solid data gathered and analyzed by reputable researchers on charter school outcomes and demographics, as well as evidence of whether certain schools engage in "creaming" of top students or excluding students with behavioral issues and certain types of disabilities. This research should include uncovering patterns of resegregation or new divisions based on race or socioeconomic status within the charter sector. In line with these analyses, state leaders should act to remedy declines in quality or increasing inequities.

> **Compromise to achieve fair funding formulas and practices.** In 2015, charter advocates and other education organizations worked with legislators to attempt to forge a compromise to address several

categories of funding provided to district schools but not shared proportionately with charter schools. These groups should renew their efforts in 2016, recognizing that charter students are public students who deserve strong support, but that not every category of funding should necessarily be provided to charter schools. State leaders should also ensure funding fairness related to mid-year student transfers.

> **Continue proceeding cautiously on virtual charter schools.** This is the first year in operation for the state's two new virtual charter schools. The jury will be out on their performance for at least several years, but the performance of similar schools in other states should give state leaders pause before permitting their expansion without strong evidence of success here, including success recruiting and serving disadvantaged and challenging students. A 2015 Stanford University study found that compared to their peers in traditional public schools, virtual charter students' lost the equivalent of 72 days of learning in reading and a full year's worth of learning in math. The Tennessee Virtual Academy, operated by K12 Inc. (the same for-profit company that operates one of North Carolina's two virtual charter schools), was ordered to close in April 2015 due to continual low performance but later allowed by court order to remain open for at least one more year.

# 4

## ELEVATE RACE AS A FOCAL POINT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

In spite of years of progress during the Civil Rights era and since, unfortunately, race still has a tremendous influence over the educational outcomes of students in North Carolina. Racial gaps can be found in nearly every aspect of the academic experience. Race is a determining factor in everything from what school a student attends, to how discipline is handled, to access to rigorous courses, to levels of academic achievement.

For the first time in our state's history, the majority of public school students are non-white. Rapidly changing demographics present new challenges in how our state provides equal educational opportunity to all students.

In several districts, we are witnessing the resegregation of school systems along racial lines. Schools with concentrated poverty also tend to be highly characterized by race. In Mecklenburg and Davidson Counties, for example, black students are more than eight times more likely to attend high-poverty schools than white students. In Mecklenburg, 49 percent of black students attend high poverty schools, while only 9 percent of white students do. And racially and socioeconomically isolated schools have doubled in Wake County in 2008.

Other counties are also grappling with challenges related to racially imbalanced schools. Halifax County is made up of three districts, despite the fact that the county as a whole serves fewer than 7,000 students. Two of the districts serve 85 percent and 94 percent black students, while the third serves 65 percent white students. In a split decision in June 2015, a federal appeals court upheld the end of desegregation oversight in Pitt County, but many worry that a return to racially imbalanced schools there is just a matter of time. Harnett County is the subject of a recent lawsuit alleging racial discrimination in student assignment. And with more North Carolina students attending charter schools, it has become more relevant that recent research indicated the state's charters becoming more racially identifiable.

Across schools of varying racial compositions, a racial achievement gap persists. African American, Latino, and American Indian students still lag significantly

behind whites in NAEP performance, graduation rates, ACT/SAT scores and overall educational attainment. While minority students have made gains, complete gap closure and full racial equity in student achievement remain elusive.

Disparities also exist in discipline data, with students of color disproportionately represented in the rates of short- and long-term suspensions. Black students have the highest rate of suspensions, followed closely by American Indians. Black students are 4.3 times as likely to be suspended as their white counterparts, while American Indian and Multiracial students are as much as twice as likely.

### LOOKING AHEAD IN 2016

State, district, and school-level leaders, and community groups must pay special attention to race and the role it plays in the educational experiences of students. Consistently articulating race as a focal point in discussions about public schools and education policy will help policymakers and practitioners provide students of all racial backgrounds the opportunity to receive a sound basic education.

- > **Apply a “disparate impact” lens to racial analysis.** In order to thoroughly pursue racial equity, policymakers and practitioners must monitor the *effects* of policies, even though they may not have been created with discriminatory intent. This will require a commitment to disaggregate data and analyze the implications at the school, district, and state levels.
- > **Create racially and socioeconomically inclusive and integrated schools.** The research of Amy Hawn Nelson at UNC Charlotte's Urban Institute demonstrates that segregation perpetuates the existence of achievement gaps. Significant progress was made to desegregate schools in the 1960s and 1970s, in the wake of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. However, since this

period, many court desegregation orders have been lifted and segregation has grown anew along racial and poverty lines (double segregation), including in school districts throughout North Carolina. Our public leaders must renew their commitment to make inclusive and integrated schools a state and local priority.

> **Eliminate racial gaps in student discipline.**

Students of color continue to be disproportionately represented in the discipline data of many schools. North Carolina has been a national leader in collecting this school and district level racial data in school discipline. North Carolina compiles a comprehensive report with data disaggregated by race and makes it available to the public. Although we have succeeded as a state in reducing the number of overall short-term and long-term suspensions, racially-marked discipline disparities persist. Research has indicated that this is not due to a higher rate of infractions. Students frequently suspended from school are also predisposed to getting in trouble with the law, leading to a School-to-Prison Pipeline. Therefore, our state and district education leaders should take steps to assist districts and schools in continuing to identify and eliminate racial gaps in school discipline.

> **Recruit and retain more teachers of color.** There is an overall need to attract more talent to the profession, but there is also a stunning lack of diversity in the teaching force. In North Carolina, 84 percent of teachers are white, even though the majority of students are non-white. This means that teachers are not representative of the populations they teach. Greater efforts must be made to incentivize the recruitment and retention of teachers of color, so that students of color receive instruction and have role models at school who share their backgrounds, and so that all students are exposed to educators from a variety of racial and ethnic groups.

> **Embrace more culturally responsive pedagogy.** With the changing demographics in our student populations, teachers must be empowered to respond to the diverse needs of their student populations. All students must be made to feel a sense of belonging not only in the classroom practice, but also in the delivery of curriculum. Teachers who understand the populations they teach and respond to the cultural needs of their students will be well-positioned to equalize opportunity for all students. Training teachers to detect implicit bias and embrace culturally responsive pedagogy is a necessity in trying to achieve equity in public schools.



Note: Race/Ethnicity was not reported or was reported as "Other" for 1,776 short-term suspensions in 2009-10, 77 in 2010-11, 110 in 2011-12, 264 in 2013-14. Rates calculated by dividing number of suspensions in race/ethnicity category by membership in that race/ethnicity category and multiplying by ten.  
 Source: State Board of Education (2015). Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee: Consolidated Data Report, 2013-2014.

# 5

## FIX THE BROKEN A-F GRADING SYSTEM

Earlier this year, for the first time, schools across North Carolina received School Performance Grades of A, B, C, D, or F. Grades for the 2013-14 year were released in February and grades for the 2014-15 year were released in September.

The school performance grades were the result of legislation passed in 2013 by the General Assembly, when North Carolina became one of fifteen states to adopt an A-F grading system. For most schools, the grade is a combination of two factors:

- > School Achievement Score (80 percent of overall grade)—the percentages of students proficient on end-of-grade and end-of-course tests, graduation rate, and college and workplace readiness measures.
- > School Growth Score (20 percent of overall grade)—improvement on the school achievement score factors from one year to the next, using EVAAS, a tool developed by NC-based SAS Institute, Inc., that measures the impact schools and teachers have on students' academic progress.

These two factors are combined to create a single School Performance Score of 0-100, which results in a grade for each school according to the following scale: A = 85-100, B = 70-84, C = 55-69, D = 40-54, F = less than 40. Based on legislation passed in 2015, this 15-point grading scale will remain in place through the 2015-16 year. After that, the scale is set to shift to a 10-point grading scale: A = 90-100, B = 80-90, C = 70-80, D = 60-70, F = less than 60.

Analysis of the first two rounds of School Performance Grades revealed a strong correlation between the grades and poverty—a link discussed in detail in the Forum's policy brief, *A is for Affluent*. Looking at our state's highest-poverty schools—the 325 district and public charter schools statewide serving at least 85 percent low-income students—none received an A, and only two received B's. At the other end of the spectrum, out of 222 schools statewide serving less than 25 percent low-income students, none received an F and only one received a D. Nearly 90 percent of those schools received A's or B's, including more

GRADES BY SCHOOL POVERTY PERCENTAGE



Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2015, September 2). *2014-15 Performance and Growth of North Carolina Public Schools Executive Summary*.



than 95 percent of district schools. The 2014-15 grades released in September repeated this trend (see “Grades by School Poverty Percentage”).

The current system, with its heavy emphasis on achievement over growth, inflates the importance of single point-in-time test results, over which schools have

far less control than growth. As a result, our system of letter grades says little about the impact schools and teachers have on students’ academic progress. Instead, the system simply “pits our richest and poorest schools against one another for the sake of comparison.”

## LOOKING AHEAD IN 2016

The Forum recommends revising the A-F grading formula and using the grades, not to label schools, but to provide them with much-needed support.

› **Adjust A-F grading formula to emphasize growth and additional factors.** Several bills filed during the 2014 and 2015 legislative sessions aimed to improve the grading formula by increasing the weight given to student growth. Other options that have been discussed include publishing separate grades for achievement and growth; including additional measures focused on growth among schools’ lowest-performing students, schools’ effectiveness closing achievement gaps, or college and workforce readiness; or affording schools multiple grading alternatives.

› **Commit to the 15-point grading scale.** The impending shift to a stricter 10-point grading scale looms large for struggling schools and districts. If the 10-point scale had been in place last year, 71 percent of the state’s schools would have received D’s or F’s. Any changes to the grading scale should be considered only in tandem with changes to the formula, and even then lawmakers should proceed cautiously to arrive at a fair and credible grading system.

› **Analyze letter grades and school demographics.** The current system is so strongly correlated with non-school-based factors that it may not be possible to glean lessons learned about what schools can

do to improve student outcomes. Nevertheless, careful analyses of the schools that succeed in spite of the grading system’s systematic biases may reveal patterns of practice or supports that allow those schools to serve challenging or disadvantaged students well. For instance, we learned from analysis of 2013-14 School Performance Grades that 12 out of 17 schools that received A’s while serving at least 50 percent low-income students were Early College High Schools. That may suggest that there are lessons other schools in the state can learn from their approach about serving low-income students well.

› **Use letter grades to identify schools for support.** Even under a grading formula strongly linked to poverty, letter grades signal schools that need intensive support. What is the point of designating schools with A-F grades if not to target support to them? It may be, as Senator Bob Rucho candidly stated, simply “to show that the [public school] system has failed and we’re out fixing it.” If it is actually more than that, then the legislature should demonstrate it by targeting assistance to struggling schools. For more thoughts on strategies for providing this support, see the separate Top Ten Issue for 2016 on Supporting the State’s Struggling Schools.

# 6

## SUPPORT THE STATE'S STRUGGLING SCHOOLS

In 2010, North Carolina received a \$400 million grant from the federal Race to the Top program, making the state one of 12 to secure funding under this highly competitive initiative. Among other benefits, this grant allowed the state to undertake an ambitious school turnaround effort. North Carolina implemented its “Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools” (TALAS) initiative from 2011-12 through 2014-15. At the December 2015 State Board of Education meeting, the Department of Public Instruction’s Division of District and School Transformation introduced its plans to continue providing support to the state’s struggling districts and schools.

For the current academic year, 581 public schools (traditional and charter) have been classified as “low-performing,” up from 367 last year. The increase is a direct result of a change mandated by the General Assembly in 2015 that ties the “low-performing” label to the A-F grades and whether or not the school exceeded expected growth. New *district* criteria also increased the number of low-performing districts in the state, to 15 districts compared with only two that would have qualified under the previous definition.<sup>7</sup>

The question of which schools are “low-performing” is just the first step. Far more important are the supports or interventions provided to whichever schools are identified. North Carolina’s TALAS initiative included comprehensive needs assessments, planning support, coaching, and professional development. Other interventions might include programs designed to attract and retain excellent teachers and school leaders in schools designated as low-performing. Or, a state or district might target individual schools

or groups of schools to participate in programs that provide specific supports to high-need students, possibly in partnership with social service organizations and other community institutions that address students’ non-academic needs.

A legislative proposal circulated last session but never heard in committee would have removed the state’s lowest-performing schools from their districts, placed them in a separate statewide “Achievement School District,” and converted them to charter schools. This would have made North Carolina the latest of several states to adopt a “recovery district” approach to school turnaround. Under this approach, a state takes over a group of low-performing schools based purely on school-level performance, not geography, and often contracts with charter operators to run the schools. Other states have created “innovation zones,” where under-performing schools and districts receive exemptions from policies related to staffing, scheduling, curriculum, and budgets.<sup>8</sup>

An additional category of options involves the state taking direct control of aspects of the operations of a district or a set of schools. In August 2015, the State Board began exercising an extensive role in Halifax County Schools over the district’s budget, personnel decisions, and student course assignment. Other states’ laws give state education agencies the authority to place low-performing districts or schools under “receivership,” where the state appoints an individual or organization (the “receiver”) to exercise some or all of the authority of the superintendent and/or the local school board.



## LOOKING AHEAD IN 2016

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Many education leaders are understandably frustrated with the recent changes to the definition of “low-performing school,” which have resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of schools given that label. But what will matter even more in the long term is the set of strategies used to support these schools, and the willingness of state leaders to invest the time and funding required to help the schools improve.

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- › **Amend the definition of “low-performing schools” to de-link the label with the flawed A-F grading scheme.** State leaders should immediately amend the definition of “low-performing schools,” giving strong consideration in crafting the definition to the number of schools that can be supported through state or local turnaround efforts. As it stands, for many schools the “low-performing” label is nothing more than condemnation based on demographic factors beyond their control, with little or no constructive support to help them address student needs.
- › **Support low-performing schools by reinvesting in those schools and their communities.** A mix of incentives to attract and retain great teachers and leaders; planning supports, coaching, and professional development for teachers; leadership coaching and support for school and district leaders; and wraparound services for students and families may be needed as part of turnaround efforts to give them the best odds of long-term success. This will require significant, targeted, and sustained investment.
- › **Demand a “no excuses” mentality in school turnaround.** In addition to strong teachers and school leaders, one attribute successful school turnaround efforts may share is the belief that all children, even those who present the most significant challenges, can learn at high levels when given appropriate support.
- › **Adopt an evidence-based approach in crafting turnaround policy.** No one doubts that turning around low-performing schools is among the greatest challenges facing educators and education policymakers today. In considering the turnaround alternatives mentioned above, leaders should be guided by the evidence about what is most likely to lead to success for every student, not by ideology.

# 7

## MAINTAIN HIGH STANDARDS FOR NORTH CAROLINA

In 2014, the General Assembly created the Academic Standards Review Commission (ASRC) to review and propose modifications to North Carolina's Standard Course of Study in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics. The ASRC released its recommendations in December 2015. The same legislation also directed the State Board of Education to consider the ASRC's recommendations, conduct its own review, and propose modifications to the ELA and math standards. These processes will likely lead to some common-sense changes to the standards.

The ASRC's work and responses to it across the state consistently affirmed that **educators overwhelmingly support** the current standards. Opportunities for teachers and school leaders—those who know the standards best—to provide their feedback led to important, constructive critique and suggestions to modify some standards. Many veteran teachers criticized a lack of training and resources for effective implementation, while reaffirming their support for the standards themselves. For beginning teachers, whose coursework in teacher preparation programs was focused on aligning instruction with the new standards, both the standards and implementation challenges were energizing and full of potential, and discussions about replacing the standards were confusing and disheartening.

The state's business community and many education groups strongly support the standards. The Hire Standards coalition, made up of about 70 businesses and education organizations led by the N.C. Chamber,

stated, "While no standards are perfect, ... North Carolina has raised expectations. Teachers have responded favorably and have called for stability. Teachers know that if we set high expectations, students will rise to them." Consistency and high expectations are recurring themes highlighted by North Carolina businesses focused on the future of the state's workforce.

As the ASRC conducted its work in 2015, many concerns surfaced unrelated to the standards themselves. Some commission members and parents raised curricular issues, which are not dictated by standards or related to the ASRC's charge. Others offered inaccurate and unhelpful assertions that the standards were created and forced upon North Carolina by the federal government, even though it was state leaders, through the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) that spearheaded the **state-led initiative** to develop the standards. And finally, some commissioners used ASRC meetings to offer misguided commentary on the inability of poor children to learn at high levels, which they then used to argue that the standards were too rigorous and set unrealistic expectations for students.



## LOOKING AHEAD IN 2016

The Forum supports the State Board of Education's review process as mandated in 2014's Senate Bill 812. We remain hopeful that the process will result in beneficial modifications to North Carolina's Standard Course of Study that take into account the bill's criteria, the views of educators, and the needs of students.

- › **Follow through on the State Board of Education's review process.** With the ASRC's recommendations in hand, the State Board of Education should conduct its own careful and searching review of the NC ELA and math standards and ensure that all modifications meet the criteria set forth in statute. North Carolina will be well-positioned to effectively use the additional authority granted to states under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) if it maintains high standards by keeping the current Standard Course of Study largely intact, with minor modifications.
- › **Reject wholesale adoption of another states' standards.** The ASRC seriously considered but ultimately did not recommend replacing the North Carolina math standards for grades K-8 with Minnesota standards. In considering the Minnesota standards and any other states' standards, the State Board should carefully consider the quality of the proposed standards as well as the degree to which they "meet and reflect North Carolina's priorities," as mandated in statute.
- › **Listen to educators in deciding how to modify the standards.** North Carolina teachers and school leaders have emphasized the need to stay the course on the current standards while making common-sense modifications. The standards are still relatively new, educators' experiences with them have been largely positive, and the complaints they have can be addressed through modifications and improved professional development related to implementation of the standards. Dramatic

changes now would frustrate the years of training that teachers have received and effort they have put into learning and implementing the standards. As one group of concerned math teachers wrote to the ASRC, "Educators around our state have worked countless hours on creating completely new, integrated mathematics courses, and our work should not be wasted." Implementing an entirely new set of standards now would also entail massive costs in terms of money and teachers' time spent on the transition.

- › **Support rigorous professional development for classroom teachers to implement the current standards.** We recommend intensive capacity building and professional development for district leaders, teachers, and principals. Educators support the current standards and have asked for the time and support to work out the kinks and implement the standards effectively.

### › SENATE BILL 812 (2014)

Senate Bill 812 directs the State Board of Education to consider the recommendations of the Academic Standards Review Commission, conduct its own review of the state's ELA and math standards, and propose modifications to ensure that they meet the following criteria:

- › Increase students' level of academic achievement
- › Meet and reflect North Carolina's priorities
- › Are age-level and developmentally appropriate
- › Are understandable to parents and teachers
- › Are among the highest standards in the nation

# 8

## MAKE EVIDENCE-BASED DECISIONS ON EXPANSION OF PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHERS

- > In July 2015, the North Carolina Supreme Court upheld the state's "Opportunity Scholarships" program, permitting North Carolina to continue as one of 14 states with voucher programs that use taxpayer dollars to pay private school tuition.
- > The program permits eligible students to receive vouchers of up to \$4,200 per year. The North Carolina General Assembly created the program in the 2013-15 state budget, allotting \$10.8 million for vouchers for the 2014-15 school year. In the wake of the 2015 court ruling, legislators added \$6.8 million for vouchers in 2015-16 and \$14 million in 2016-17, bringing the total support for the voucher program to \$17.6 million in 2015-16 and \$24.8 million in 2016-17. This marks a 129 percent increase in program funding in just two years, and will permit the issuance of approximately 6,000 vouchers in 2016-17.
- > Studies on voucher programs' effects on student performance have revealed mixed results. To date, the most rigorous research has failed to show strong evidence of sustained, improved academic performance for students using vouchers, though some studies have demonstrated links between vouchers and improved performance for specific demographic groups. Differences in how voucher programs are implemented from state to state also hamper the ability of researchers to draw solid conclusions about program impacts.
- > Currently, only students with household incomes under 133 percent of the free and reduced lunch price guidelines are eligible to receive vouchers. This reflects a concerted effort to serve students who stand to gain the most financially from the voucher program. Additionally, to begin receiving vouchers, students must be entering kindergarten or must have attended a public school the previous semester. This requirement keeps the focus of the program on families who do not believe their children's educational needs were adequately

# 129%

**THE INCREASE IN FY 2016-17 VOUCHER FUNDING COMPARED TO FY 2014-15 FUNDING.**

- met in their public schools, rather than those who never attended (or never intended to attend) public schools in the first place.
- > The debate over school vouchers weighs the promised benefits of increased choice and opportunity for students and families with concerns over quality and equity. The current law directs private schools accepting vouchers to administer state assessments (or their equivalent), report voucher students' graduation rates, provide parents with annual assessments that include standardized test scores and, when more than 25 voucher students attend a school, report their aggregate test scores. Nevertheless, it is not clear which assessments will be used, how much information parents or the state will receive to help determine the quality of education being provided, or what else will be done with this information to hold private schools accountable for their use of public funds or the quality of the education they provide with it.
  - > State leaders appear poised in 2016 to consider the creation of Education Savings Accounts (ESAs), which have been referred to as "vouchers on steroids." States with ESAs allow parents to set up accounts where a share of public money is set aside for the parents to use to pay private school tuition, purchase curriculum materials for home schooling, or defray other education-related expenses. Such programs represent a dangerous route to disinvestment from the nation's public schools in the name of unfettered parental choice, with potential negative budgetary and social impacts on schools and their communities.

## LOOKING AHEAD IN 2016

The Forum supports evidence-based practices and encourages the legislature to expand the voucher program slowly and only upon the establishment of a solid base of evidence that the program improves educational outcomes for North Carolina's most disadvantaged students.

› **Limit program expansion unless and until research has shown the positive impact of vouchers on North Carolina student outcomes.**

The lack of conclusive research on voucher effectiveness should give North Carolina pause. Without a clear model to emulate, or best practices to implement, the state should proceed with caution in expanding its voucher program. Some voucher advocates have suggested the program should continue expanding year after year to meet parent demand. This would be a misguided approach to program expansion, which should instead be tied to demonstrated evidence of improved student outcomes.

› **Keep the use of vouchers limited to high-quality educational options, and to disadvantaged students who have not been served well in public schools.** In addition to considering the level of parent interest in vouchers, the state should

safeguard the quality of education students receive with public funds by monitoring quality and barring low-quality programs from receiving vouchers. The state should also tailor the program to serve disadvantaged students who were not adequately served in public schools.

› **Reject efforts to create Education Savings Accounts (ESAs).** Creation of ESAs would be a major disinvestment from the state's public schools, one that state leaders should strenuously reject as harmful and counterproductive, particularly to the state's highest-need students.

### SCHOOLS RECEIVING THE GREATEST NUMBER OF OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIPS IN 2015-16

SCHOOL NAME	LOCATION	# OF RECIPIENTS
Greensboro Islamic Academy	Greensboro	84
Trinity Christian School	Fayetteville	80
Word of God Christian Academy	Raleigh	54
Tabernacle Christian School	Monroe	49
Fayetteville Christian School	Fayetteville	46
Victory Christian Center School	Charlotte	42
Al-Iman School	Raleigh	40
Concord First Assembly Academy	Concord	39
Mount Zion Christian Academy	Durham	39
Tri-City Christian Academy	High Point	38
Upper Room Christian Academy	Raleigh	38

Each of these schools received between \$77,000 and \$176,000 in taxpayer funds.

# 9

## EXPAND ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Children who enroll in high-quality preschool programs fare better in school and in life. They score significantly higher on math and literacy tests and are more likely to graduate from high school and go to college. The benefits extend into adulthood, with higher rates of employment, financial stability, and home ownership; longer-lasting marriages; and lower rates of incarceration, teen parenting, and drug use.

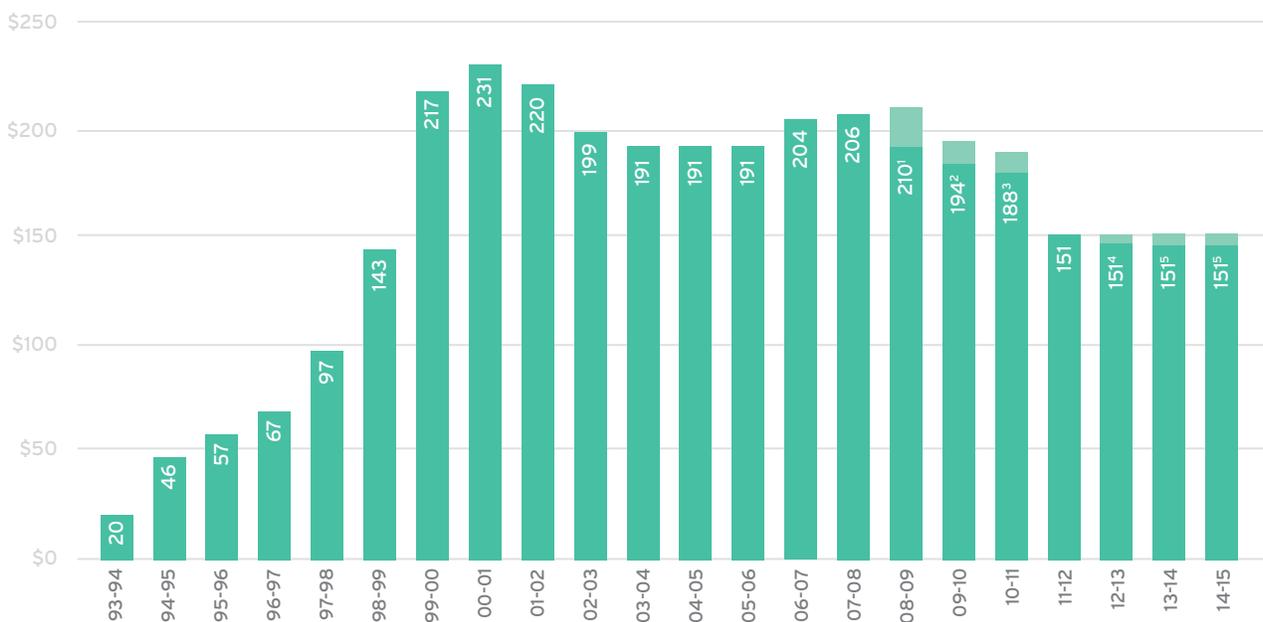
North Carolina has long been a leader in early childhood education. NC Pre-K (previously known as More at Four) is a nationally recognized, state-funded program that aims to enhance school readiness for at-risk four-year-olds from low-income families. NC Pre-K is one of only six state programs to meet all of the preschool quality standards set by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). A recent statewide evaluation of outcomes and program quality found that children enrolled in NC Pre-K made significant gains across all domains of learning. An earlier study showed children from low-income

families who attended NC Pre-K achieved higher test scores and were placed in special education at a lower rate than similar children who had not attended the program.

Smart Start is the nation's first comprehensive early childhood initiative. It is a public-private partnership providing funding to nonprofit partners in all 100 North Carolina counties to help children reach school age healthy and ready to succeed. Smart Start brings together school-based professionals and other caregivers, including doctors and social workers, to deliver a comprehensive system of care and education for every child.

In 2012, North Carolina was one of nine states to win a Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant of \$70 million, spread over four years, to build statewide systems to support early learning and increase access to high-quality programs.

SMART START APPROPRIATION HISTORY (ROUNDED TO MILLIONS)



<sup>1</sup>One time budget reduction of \$16M reduced available 08-09 budget to \$194M

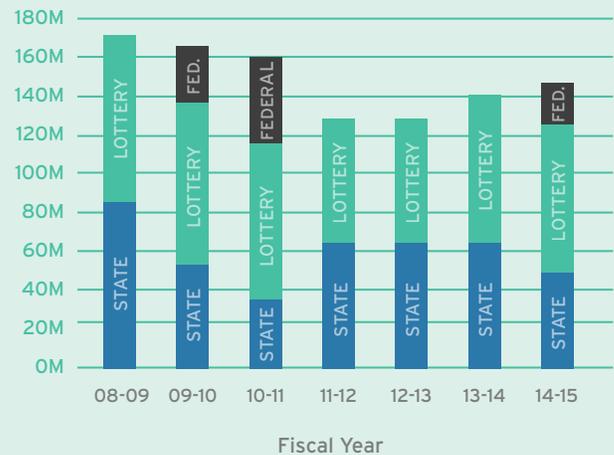
<sup>2</sup>One time budget reduction of \$7M reduced available 09-10 budget to \$187M

<sup>3</sup>One time budget reduction of \$6M reduced available 10-11 budget to \$182M

<sup>4</sup>One time budget reduction of \$1M reduced available 12-13 budget to \$150M

<sup>5</sup>Recurring budget reduction of \$3.7M reduced available 13-15 budget to \$147M

## STATE FUNDING HISTORY OF NC PRE-K (ROUNDED TO MILLIONS)



Last year, in the 2015-17 budget, the General Assembly allocated an additional \$5 million in recurring funds to NC Pre-K, locking in an expansion authorized in 2014-15, and bringing the total support for NC Pre-K to \$144.2 million. However, investment in this leading program still lags behind pre-recession levels, which reached around \$170 million in 2008-09. State investment in Smart Start has held steady at \$151 million since 2011, down from a peak of \$231 million in 2000-01. Mandated budget reductions in the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services reduced funding available for Smart Start to \$147 million in 2013-14.

## LOOKING AHEAD IN 2016

The Forum urges the General Assembly to improve access to the state's nationally recognized, award-winning early childhood programs, NC Pre-K and Smart Start. In addition, the Forum supports ongoing efforts by early childhood organizations to develop whole-child, birth-to-eight pathways to grade-level reading success by third grade.

- › **Increase funding for early childhood education to pre-recession levels.** Legislators on both sides of the aisle recognize the strong return on investment in early childhood education. Children who participate in high-quality early childhood education programs experience improved academic and social outcomes, resulting in increased productivity and lower economic and social costs. The General Assembly should prioritize increased spending in this high-impact area.
- › **Unite public and private stakeholders around the key metric of third-grade reading success.** The importance of third-grade reading has been widely recognized by educators, politicians, social service providers, and other stakeholders. It has served, among other things, as the driving force behind the Read to Achieve legislative initiative. Early childhood education stakeholders should identify population-level measures that impact third-grade reading ability, and use those measures to guide program design and policy advocacy.



# 65%

**OF NORTH CAROLINA FOURTH GRADERS  
ARE NOT PROFICIENT IN READING**

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics (2014). *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Overview*. Washington, DC: Author.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., N.C. Gen. Stat. 115C-174.11, which in 2011 eliminated statewide standardized testing except as required by federal law or as a condition of a federal grant.

# 10

## BUILD BRIDGES FOR STUDENTS THROUGH EXPANDED LEARNING

Over the past decade, there has been an increase in afterschool and expanded learning programs for families in North Carolina, growing from 10 percent of North Carolina children participating in an afterschool program in 2004 to 15 percent in 2014. This growth has been most beneficial to working parents: eight out of ten working parents in North Carolina agree that afterschool and expanded learning programs help them keep their jobs. While this growth is an improvement, there has been a decline in the average time children spend in afterschool and expanded learning programs, from ten hours per week in 2009 to only six hours in 2014. This decline has contributed to North Carolina falling below the national average for the first time and losing its place among the top ten states for afterschool and expanded learning. And yet, the unmet demand for afterschool programs continues to grow; nearly 2 in 5 children—more than half a million children—do not have access to an afterschool program but would be enrolled if one were available to them.

In 2014, 87 percent of North Carolina's parents are satisfied with their child's afterschool program, compared to 86 percent in 2009 but a sharp drop from the 2004 satisfaction rate of 93 percent. The top services parents listed as beneficial: opportunities for physical activity; beverages, snacks and/or meals; homework assistance; music or art experiences; and opportunities for reading or writing. Parents select afterschool and expanded learning programs based on the following factors: quality of care; program is a safe haven; children enjoy the afterschool program; staff are knowledgeable and well-trained; and program cost is affordable. Only 65 percent of parents felt that their afterschool and expanded learning program excited their child about learning, and only 62 percent felt that their child gained workforce skills in afterschool and expanded learning programs.

The average cost associated with afterschool and expanded learning programs in North Carolina is \$68 per week. With over 53 percent of North Carolina

students designated as low-income in 2013, families of the neediest students are not able to take advantage of their students' opportunities for afterschool and expanded learning. Investments from the federal government in North Carolina for afterschool and expanded learning programs (GEAR UP, Upward Bound, Upward Bound-Math and Science, 21st CCLC, NSF-AISL Grant) for the year 2014-15 are estimated at nearly \$20 million. These funds at best reach around 73,000 students across North Carolina, with the largest number served in GEAR UP state and partnership grants. North Carolina has continued to invest in afterschool and expanded learning programs, but cut the appropriation to \$1 million in 2015. While the After-School Quality Improvement Grant has increased support to 21 programs across North Carolina, there is still a significant gap between student needs and supports provided.

Several cities in North Carolina contribute funds to afterschool and expanded learning. An example is Charlotte: *The City of Charlotte aims to improve neighborhood quality of life through a community engagement strategy that ensures children are safe, succeeding in school, and supported by their community. An integral component to achieving this goal is providing funding to organizations that deliver high-quality, out-of-school time services to children and youth in high-need neighborhoods.* More federal, state, and local investments like those currently in place are needed to help students access and reap the benefits of high-quality afterschool and expanded learning opportunities.



# MORE THAN 295,000 KIDS

IN NORTH CAROLINA ARE ALONE AND UNSUPERVISED FROM 3 TO 6 PM.



AFTERSCHOOL IS THE  
PEAK TIME FOR KIDS TO



COMMIT CRIMES OR BECOME  
VICTIMS OF CRIMES



EXPERIMENT WITH DRUGS,  
ALCOHOL, CIGARETTES & SEX

## LOOKING AHEAD IN 2016

North Carolina has been a leader in afterschool and expanded learning opportunities, but greater investment and a renewed focus on access and quality of available options are necessary to meet the needs of the state's children and families.

### > **Develop and implement strong quality review**

**for expanded learning opportunities.** The review should take into account program goals, leadership, staff, programming, and internal and external evaluation. It will need alignment to support systems for each category, mechanisms for the provision of technical assistance, and sufficient fiscal and human resources allocated to ensure equitable application of the review to reach rural, urban, and suburban programs.

### > **Provide access to a quality data collection tool for program use and to better connect schools with expanded learning opportunities.**

It is imperative that the state support the use of a tool that will collect quality data and allow service providers and schools to maximize the benefit of expanded learning opportunities. The tool should be easy to use and need minimal updates. Utilization of HOMEBASE by expanded learning programs, for example, would create a shared system of

data support under which schools could access information about students' expanded learning experiences, and programs could tailor activities to student needs as demonstrated during the school day.

### > **Create and publicize expanded learning career paths.**

High-quality expanded learning requires staff with specialized training. Policymakers, funders, and program operators should help future ELO professionals envision full careers in the field, including exposing them to relevant training and credentialing programs, and tying compensation and career advancement to acknowledged indicators of expertise and performance. Policy efforts should also target training of expanded learning professionals in high need areas such as special education, STEM, literacy, academically or intellectually gifted (AIG), and English Language Learners (ELL).

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