

Investing in our children today paves the way for a better tomorrow for North Carolina.

To that end, Public Schools First NC supports an inclusive, fair, innovative and accountable public education system that nurtures and prepares each child for success in school and life.

Public schools are the heart of our community.

Public schools are the foundation of the American dream and the core of America's strength. Public schools must provide all children with an education, regardless of their race or their parents' income or where they live. With adequate resources and excellent teachers, public schools are the best places to promote student growth and academic achievement. They also bring communities together and are often the only place where different kinds of people come together with a shared purpose.

Public schools benefit everyone—from the students they serve to the businesses that recruit well-educated graduates to the taxpayers who benefit when well-prepared students graduate and give back to the community. When a society educates its citizens, it preserves our democracy and fuels a vibrant economy.

Public Schools First NC therefore encourages the passage of child-centric legislation that embodies these critical priorities:

Adequate, equitable funding that reflects the national average by 2020.

Adjusted for inflation, North Carolina is spending \$855 less per student this year than in 2008; textbook funding has dropped by more than \$50 per student over the same period. Adequate, equitable funding ensures the optimal classroom environment and learning resources so all children can succeed. Public Schools First NC supports legislation that fully funds:

- **Textbook** spending at 2008 levels (at least \$67.15 per student).
- A **digital textbook plan that is funded for each school district.**
- **Smaller class sizes in grades K-5.**
- **Teacher assistants** in all K-3 classrooms.

Access to high-quality pre-school, so each child comes to school "kindergarten ready."

Research overwhelmingly supports high-quality pre-kindergarten programs as a means of preparing the highest-risk children for success in grades K -12. Today, only 40 percent of eligible children receive funding to attend an NC pre-K program; nearly 40,000 eligible children are not being served.

Public Schools First NC believes that fully funding NC Pre-K for at-risk children reduces disparities in student achievement tied to socioeconomic status. Pre-k has been shown to provide lifelong, positive results for children and the communities in which they live.

Exclusive use of public funds for public education.

Public Schools First NC does not support funding vouchers for private education, particularly as the constitutionality of the program remains to be determined by the NC Supreme Court.

Programs and compensation that encourage recruitment, preparation, support and retention of professional, experienced educators.

North Carolina's reputation as an educational leader is well known, and the quality of our public schools has made our state attractive to new families and businesses. A successful public school education depends on quality public school teachers.

Investing in a strong, permanent teacher workforce must include:

- Paying *all* teachers and other education professionals at the national average by 2020.
- Providing funding for ongoing professional development.
- Restoring funding for the NC Teaching Fellows program.
- Rewarding experience and restoring Masters pay.
- Evaluating teachers fairly using a variety of tools, not just student test scores.

Flexibility that allows public school districts to open their own charter schools.

Charter school legislation should be amended to allow local school boards to approve and govern their own charter schools. This would allow local school districts the opportunity to try different educational strategies while serving all children and providing full fiscal accountability to the public.

Charter schools that maintain fidelity to the original 1996 legislation, including the sharing of best practices with traditional public schools.

Public Schools First NC believes that all NC charter schools should be held to the same careful oversight, accountability, and transparency regarding academic standards and financial review as traditional public schools. Charter schools should:

- *Not* be operated by private, for-profit entities.
- Offer a qualitatively different educational experience from what is available in traditional public schools.
- Annually document and share innovative best practices.
- Work in partnership with local school districts.
- Offer free and reduced lunch, transportation, and services for students with disabilities, limited English proficient students, and academically gifted students.
- Protect *all* students against discrimination.

Restoration of state funds for driver education courses.

The elimination of a \$200 per-student appropriation funded by the State through the Highway Trust Fund places an undue financial burden on local school districts. Public Schools First NC supports the restoration of funding for driver education.

Local school districts should have school calendar flexibility

Allow LEAs to set school start and end dates for the annual school year based on what promotes retention and improves school attendance and graduation.