

Provide safe and equitable learning environments for our students and teachers.

Public schools must take all children and give them an opportunity to succeed academically, regardless of their race, their family income, or where they live. Further, public schools are obligated to provide safe and equitable learning environments that foster all children's potential.

Effective public schools offer an excellent educational environment where parents and teachers work together to prepare each child for their career. Effective public schools promote policies of equity and inclusion that create a respectful, safe, and healthy learning environment. Effective public schools offer a rich classroom experience with curriculum that is well-rounded, innovative and inclusive. In addition, they offer school-based services that address a child's social, emotional, and physical health needs and are available to all students. For our students to succeed in school and in life, they need a broad education that includes significant study of literature, mathematics, the arts, history, civics, science, foreign languages, and physical education. And they need access to high-quality textbooks, technology, and other instructional supplies to do so.

Finally, our public schools should provide a healthy, safe school climate with discipline practices that promote fair and respectful treatment of students. School cultures that promote equity, respect, and a sense of belonging among their students are more effective in keeping their schools safe. In addition, schools that implement prevention, early intervention, and other proactive strategies are more successful in keeping students in school and on track for graduation.

Disparities in student achievement suggest that funding for resources needed for students to succeed is not always equitable. Poverty and racial segregation are two real problems faced by our public education system. School districts cannot be solely responsible for eliminating poverty in our country. However, we as citizens can advocate for policies and programs that help all children reach their full potential and keep them on track for graduation.

Public Schools First NC strongly affirms that every child, every teacher, every member of a school's staff is entitled to a safe environment at school. **Strategies that promote safe and equitable schools include:**

All public schools should be racially and economically integrated. Studies demonstrate that all students perform better in a diverse environment. Further, disparities in student achievement suggest that funding for resources needed for students to succeed is not always handled equitably. Historian of education Diane Ravitch identifies poverty and racial segregation as the two "real problems" faced by our public education system. School districts cannot be solely responsible for eliminating poverty in our state. However, we as citizens and public education advocates can advocate for policies and programs that help all children reach their full potential and keep them on track for graduation. North Carolina must continue to work to **reduce disparities in resources between rural and urban districts** across the state, and between low and high poverty schools within the same district. It is not acceptable that children attending school in higher-poverty districts have substantially less access to state and local revenue than children attending school in lower-poverty districts.

All North Carolina young children deserve access to high-quality pre-K education. Providing pre-K education is essential to ensuring that each child comes to school "kindergarten ready." Early childhood education helps level the academic playing field, setting the stage for future success—in the classroom and beyond. North Carolina continues to have a waiting list. We support universal pre-K that is available for all students.

All schools should deal fairly with all students. Yet, North Carolina schools consistently and disproportionately suspend students of color more often than white students. Too often, the classroom is where the "pipeline" or pathway to prison begins. Students who are suspended miss a lot of school; students who are suspended more than once are more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system. Moreover, there is no evidence that suspensions or expulsions make schools safer.

All schools need programs and funding to ensure safe schools. Key to this goal is strong **violence prevention and threat-reporting programs at all schools.** Administrators, teachers and other staff need to know how to teach students alternatives to violence including peaceful conflict resolution and positive interpersonal relationship skills. There are many excellent programs but this requires allocating resources and staff training time. Further, schools need staff trained in conducting threat assessment and risk-assessment procedures that can help prevent tragedies from occurring.

All schools must have trauma-informed policies and programs. We have a critical need for more helping professionals in our public schools to help children cope with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) including bullying. Children come to school with varying levels of adverse experiences and need emotional and physical support. They need educators and other helping professionals who are trauma-informed and trained to be responsive and compassionate to help remove barriers that are impacting social, health and academic success. **Helping professionals** (school social workers, school counselors, school psychologists, and nurses) can help create a trauma-informed climate to help identify and guide students to the support services they need to be successful at school. These helping professionals are needed to train all educators on how they can create school cultures that teach resilience. In turn, every educator in the school building can help children build resilience so they can moderate the impacts of ACEs in order to be able to come to school and graduate with a chance at a healthy and productive future. (See more information [here](#).) Research shows that students are more likely to get needed mental health services at school than through any other place. For many children, school is the only safe and stable place in their lives.

All schools should have an adequate number of counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and school nurses in schools based on national standards.

[Here is what experts recommend schools have:](#)

- 1 school counselor for every 250 kids. NC pays for 1 for every 413 students.
- 1 social worker for every 250 children. NC pays for 1 per 1,922.
- 1 school psychologist for every 700 kids. NC pays for 1 per 2,483 students.
- 1 school nurse for every 750 kids. NC has one school nurse for every 1,072 children.

All schools should have policies that protect LGBTQ Youth from bias, discrimination and institutional barriers that impact their access to educational resources and opportunities. One of the most important things schools must do for LGBTQ youth is create a safe, welcoming, affirming, inclusive and supportive environment. Parents, educators and other adults who serve children have a responsibility to create safe spaces so that all students, including LGBTQ youth can thrive and reach their full academic potential. Some strategies for creating safe school environments include establishing clear and inclusive policies to support LGBTQ youth and school staff, developing a LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, being a visible advocate for LGBTQ inclusion and equality, providing nationally recommended levels of mental health staff and providing LGBTQ inclusive training for all staff. (See [here](#) and [here](#) for additional resources.)

All guns must be kept off school grounds and out of K-12 classrooms. Guns have no place at school unless being carried by trained and licensed school resource officers. Further, gun safety experts and advocates strongly oppose armed civilians/volunteers. They cite how armed civilians are not knowledgeable about the school, do not have familiarity with the students, and often lack understanding of effective school or law enforcement policies and practices. Volunteers can increase chaos and create more risk than protection for our students.

All schools must not allow arming teachers in our schools. There is no evidence that arming teachers will keep children safe at school. In fact, the research shows that arming teachers will actually make our students less safe. Using common sense, one can understand why this should not be the role or duty of our educators. Arming teachers actually increases the risks posed to our students. Both national teacher professional associations and gun safety experts agree on this point.

All schools must have adequate funding to keep schools safe ensuring school security can be funded as determined by local school districts. All schools must have ways to limit access to school buildings, monitor visitors, and prepare children and staff for physical safety threats, etc. This is an investment we must provide every school and provide the training needed to enforce strategies adopted by each school to keep children and staff safe.

All schools need violence prevention and threat-reporting programs. Administrators, teachers and other staff need to know how to teach students alternatives to violence including peaceful conflict resolution and positive interpersonal relationship skills. There are many excellent programs but this requires allocating resources and staff training time. Further, schools need staff trained in conducting threat assessment and risk-assessment procedures that can help prevent tragedies from occurring. In addition, research has shown that background checks on all gun sales, red flag laws (blocking people from having guns if they pose a danger to themselves or others), and raising the age to purchase some guns can prevent gun violence. (Updated 10-02-18.)