

Legislative Agenda: Provide a sound, basic education to all NC children

Background

Over the past decade, per-pupil spending has declined by 6% in North Carolina, leaving our state ranked the 6th lowest in the nation on this measure (according to the [recently released WestEd report](#).) For 2019 Per-Pupil funding was estimated at \$9,907, which is \$3,013 less than the US average of \$12,920. NC public schools have added more than 90,000 students, including many more English language learners and students living in poverty. According to the latest figures, almost half of North Carolina's children live in poor or low-income households and 22% live in poverty (ncchild.org). Little investment was made to expand school resources with the 2018 budget adjustments. Allotments for teaching assistants, textbooks, at-risk student services and more are still below 2008-2009 levels when adjusted for inflation. As of February 1, 2020 no 2019 budget was passed. This is unacceptable and cannot create the schools our students deserve. Adequate, equitable funding ensures the optimal classroom environment and learning resources so all children can succeed.

Legislative priorities

The Leandro case remains one of the biggest education policy issues in North Carolina. The Supreme Court ruled in 1997 and 2004 that North Carolina has a constitutional obligation to ensure all children have access to a sound basic education. This includes equitable access to resources and opportunities, well-trained teachers and principals, and adequate funding. The State continues to fall short of this mandate. The WestEd [report](#) includes eight recommendations for how NC can comply with the directive to provide a sound, basic education to all NC children. Public Schools First NC supports legislation that supports the eight critical needs identified in the WestEd Report:

1. Revise the state funding model to provide adequate, efficient, and equitable resources. These resources should be aligned to student needs in every school and district.
2. Provide a qualified, well-prepared, and diverse teaching staff in every school.
3. Provide a qualified and well-prepared principal in every school.
4. Provide all at-risk students with the opportunity to attend high-quality early childhood programs.
5. Direct resources, opportunities, and initiatives to economically disadvantaged students.
6. Revise the student assessment system and school accountability system.
7. Build an effective regional and statewide system of support for the improvement of low-performing and high-poverty schools.
8. Convene an expert panel to assist the Court in monitoring state policies, plans, programs, and progress. This monitoring should ensure the state's ongoing compliance with the Leandro requirements.

Public Schools First NC is committed to the passage of child-centric legislation based on these identified critical needs. We advocate for adequate, equitable education funding that reflects the national average by 2021. We believe legislators should fulfil their constitutional obligation as stated in the Leandro decision of providing ***every child*** with a sound, basic education.

Legislative Agenda: Provide a sound, basic education to all NC children

Specifically we support legislation that would:

- **Increase teacher pay for all teachers** to at least the national average; especially offering veteran teachers an increase to recognize their skills and experience
- **Close the gap** between high and lower wealth counties by making funding models more equitable.
- **Fully fund the class size mandates for grades K-3** including additional personnel and capital funding.
- **Reinstate supplements** for teachers who earn advanced degrees
- **Increase per pupil funding to national averages**, including adequate funding for both textbooks and technology
- **Increase funding for school construction** and put a statewide school construction bond on the 2020 ballot.
- **Restore full-time teacher assistants** in each classroom for grades K-3
- **Provide additional funding** to restore class size caps for grades 4-5

Trauma-informed curricula with a focus on social and emotional learning

Children across North Carolina suffer Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in various forms including abuse, neglect and the effects of poverty, systemic racism and homophobia. The trauma of ACEs can cause children to develop toxic stress, affecting them not just emotionally but psychologically and biologically. LGBTQ+ students of color face compounded stress as they experience racism in addition to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Mental health care should be a priority for all youth. Adults can help children with toxic stress, not by erasing their trauma but by helping children develop resilience. Teaching children resilience requires trained and attentive school personnel. This learned skill set can act within a child as a buffer for the ACEs they have endured. PSFNC supports legislation that:

- **Increases funding to hire more helping professionals** (school psychologists, social workers, counselors, and nurses) to meet nationally recommended ratios. Schools need these staff to meet the social, emotional and mental health needs of students
- **Provides trauma-informed training** for all school staff with an emphasis on Social and Emotional Learning and implement trauma-informed district-wide policies and programs
- **Provides better healthcare and mental health services** for children and families in our communities

Integration and equitable distribution of resources

A focus on school integration and equitable distribution of education resources is especially important now, when [schools across the country are re-segregating](#) at an alarming rate. Levels of segregation in our nation's schools are now at levels not seen since the 1960s. School segregation limits educational opportunities and resources for black and brown students, isolates groups of students and limits interactions across groups. Schools with lower-income, high-minority student populations tend to have fewer resources and employ teachers who have less training. Integration has benefits for all students, including improved test scores, a decrease in drop-out rates, an increase in capacity for working with others, decreased levels of prejudice and much more. Public Schools First NC supports legislation that:

- **Moves away from traditional punitive discipline** that contributes to the school-prison pipeline by removing students from the classroom and educational opportunities.
- **Works to provide equitable and adequate distribution** of highly qualified teachers who can provide quality instruction, equitable access to educational resources, advanced courses, and a focus on [restorative justice](#) to ensure that all students graduate high school ready for career or college
- **Produces integrated, equitable schools** by investing in traditional public schools that serve all children and stopping the diversion of public funding for privatization
- **Establishes a more balanced and student-centered** assessment system
- **Ensures resources** go to students who need them the most

Legislative Agenda: Provide a sound, basic education to all NC children

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

North Carolina's long reputation as an educational leader and the quality of our public schools has made it attractive to new families and businesses. A successful public school education depends on quality public school teachers. Enrollment in the UNC system's teacher prep programs has dropped 30% since 2010. North Carolina should consider these issues to help restore its teacher pipeline:

- **Recruit teachers of color** Research shows students of color perform better on academic benchmarks when they have at least one teacher of color
- **Evaluate teachers fairly** using a variety of tools, not just student test scores
Eliminate the A-F grading system or improve it to count student growth
- **Invest in teacher and principal training programs** to address shortages and improve retention
- **Provide incentives for college students** to choose education as a major and encourage diverse applicants to enroll
- **Increase mentoring support** and professional development, especially for new teachers

Universal access to high-quality pre-school, so children come to school "kindergarten ready"

High-quality pre-kindergarten programs are a means of preparing the highest-risk children for success in grades K-12. These advantages from attending Pre-K last throughout elementary school, holding steady or growing at each grade level, for both high- and low-income students. [Research has shown](#) clear benefits from the program, but many children are unable to enroll due to insufficient funding. Approximately 23% of four-year old children have access to Pre-K in North Carolina. This percentage is below the national average. There are almost 33,000 children who are eligible but not enrolled due to lack of access. Experts suggest that many eligible children do not even apply due to the long waiting list. Universal Pre-K will provide lifelong, positive results for children, their communities, and our state. Public Schools First NC supports legislation that:

- **Implements universal Pre-K** for all eligible children
- **Improves and invests in early childhood** educator pipeline

Provide safe learning environments for our students and teachers

Every child, every teacher, every school personnel member is entitled to a safe environment at school. No one should live with the fear that sending their kids to school may be placing them in harm's way. No school staff should feel his or her lives are in jeopardy for simply showing up at work.

Public Schools First NC supports legislation that works towards creating safe, secure schools for all our students and teachers including:

- **Keep guns off school grounds** and out of classrooms including not arming teachers in our schools (does not include trained and licensed resource officers)
- **Implement required** violence prevention and threat-reporting programs at all schools
- **Strengthen** background checks governing gun ownerships and registration
- **Educate children** and their parents on gun safety/safe storage.

Exclusive use of public funds for public education

Public Schools First NC believes taxpayers' education dollars belong in properly accountable and transparent public institutions, not delivered by disparate mechanisms to private and for-profit entities that do not guarantee adequate educational outcomes for children. Therefore, North Carolina should:

- **Place a moratorium on funding vouchers** that give taxpayer money to private schools without ensuring student safety and educational achievement with no documentation on tax dollars are used

Legislative Agenda: Provide a sound, basic education to all NC children

- **Require private schools** receiving vouchers to use a nationally-normed test for students receiving vouchers to demonstrate student performance, similar to public school accountability
- **Increase charter school accountability and transparency**
- **Allow local school boards the same flexibility** as charter schools including calendar flexibility

Investing in our children today paves the way for a better tomorrow for North Carolina. **Public Schools First NC supports an equitable, inclusive, fair, innovative and accountable public education system that nurtures and prepares each child for success in school and life.**

Selected Resources:

At long last, a plan to comply with Leandro education mandate takes shape.

<http://www.ncpolicywatch.com/2020/01/22/at-long-last-a-plan-to-comply-with-leandro-education-mandate-takes-shape/>

Judge says NC is leaving too many students behind, orders state leaders to act.

<https://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/education/article239490688.html>

NC Policy Watch, The Leandro report is out. The future of public education in North Carolina starts this week. Zack Kaplan, Dec 12, 2019, <http://www.ncpolicywatch.com/2019/12/12/the-leandro-report-is-out-the-future-of-public-education-in-north-carolina-starts-this-week/>

Public Schools First NC, The Facts on Pre-K, February 2020,

<https://www.publicschoolsfirstnc.org/resources/fact-sheets/the-facts-on-pre-k/>

Public Schools First NC, Leandro, January 2020, <https://www.publicschoolsfirstnc.org/know-the-issues/sound-basic-education-leandro/>

Public Schools First NC, LGBTQ Youth and Schools, November, 2019,

<https://www.publicschoolsfirstnc.org/resources/fact-sheets/lgbtq-youth-and-schools/>

Public School Forum of North Carolina, Local Schools Finance Study, February 2020, <https://www.ncforum.org/local-school-finance-study/>

Public School Forum of North Carolina, Top Education Issues, February 2020, <https://www.ncforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Top-1-Education-Issues-2020-5-2.pdf>

Public School Forum of North Carolina, A State at Risk: Critical Investments in North Carolina's Public Schools Are Urgently Needed to Ensure Each Child Receives a Sound Basic Education, Dec 11, 2019

<https://www.ncforum.org/a-state-at-risk-critical-investments-in-north-carolinas-public-schools-are-urgently-needed-to-ensure-each-child-receives-a-sound-basic-education/>

WestEd, Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina, 2019,

<https://www.publicschoolsfirstnc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Sound-Basic-Education-for-All.pdf>

Last revised February 25, 2020