

NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

2017-18 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The North Carolina School Boards Association is the unified voice for ALL school districts across the state. NCSBA is a volunteer membership association representing all 115 local boards of education in North Carolina and the board of the Cherokee nation. For the general improvement and betterment of public education in North Carolina, NCSBA will advocate for the following items during the 2017-18 legislative session.

Ensuring Student Success

NC Pre-K Program

The State-funded prekindergarten program - NC Pre-K – provides high-quality early educational opportunities to North Carolina’s at-risk children. Studies have consistently found that children who participate in the program emerge better prepared for school and are more likely to read at grade-level by 3rd grade than their at-risk peers. Current funding levels provide for approximately 29,400 slots but there are tens of thousands more eligible at-risk youth who could benefit from the program. Lawmakers should continue to expand this program.

Early Grade Interventions

State leaders set aside \$20M in 2015 for 1st and 2nd grade reading camps. To help ensure students read at grade level in 3rd grade, NCSBA believes a greater emphasis is required in earlier grades. Therefore, NCSBA recommends expanding K-2 reading opportunities and programs, including reading coaches and reading camps.

School Calendar

The school calendar can have an impact on student achievement. While NC’s charter schools have complete flexibility to design calendars that best fit their student’s needs, NC’s public school districts are subject to calendar restrictions that are not conducive to student learning and success. Some problems created by the current school calendar include:

- Major disruption when scheduling make-up days from significant inclement weather.
- First semester exams are after Christmas break.
- The late second semester starting point shortens the time available for AP/IB students to receive instruction prior to administration of those exams.

NCSBA requests that the General Assembly revise the current school calendar law.

School Technology – Fines and Forfeitures

In August, 2008, the courts found that the State owed public schools \$747 million in technology funding. North Carolina’s Constitution requires the clear proceeds of all civil penalties, fines and forfeitures collected by State agencies to be distributed to the public schools and the court

ruled that this requirement was not being followed. An arrangement for settling the full debt has still not been established. School board members have identified school technology funding as a high priority with public school classrooms transitioning into the digital learning age. The General Assembly could help districts address these needs by setting up a method to repay the money owed through the court order. NCSBA is committed to working with the General Assembly to find a method of repaying the debt that is viable for all parties.

Grades 4-8 Initiatives

While early grade initiatives are important, the General Assembly should make sure not to lose focus on areas like upper elementary and middle school. School board members believe that:

- Reading coaching services should be established in grades 4-8 to help sustain student reading gains.
- Students in grades 4 and 5 should be allowed to attend reading camps.
- School board policies on class size limits in grades 4-8 should be required.

Class Sizes Grades K-3

For many years, K-3 average and maximum class size numbers exceeded the teacher/student ratio allotment. Districts used funds created by the difference for specialty teachers, like art, music, and PE. This has been a core component of providing a sound, basic education. This practice, per the 2016 Appropriations Act, is to be eliminated in the 2017-18 school year. NCSBA requests that the current statute, 115C-301, be modified to reflect the current practice of average and maximum class size limits while at the same time lowering those numbers to reflect additional resources that the General Assembly has provided to school districts in grades 1-3.

Ensuring Efficient Operations

School Board- County Commission Relations

Local education funding in North Carolina is structured differently than most other states. While over 90 percent of the 15,000 school boards in the nation are able to raise their own revenue, North Carolina's local school boards must rely on another local governmental unit, the county commissioners, to provide their funding. Good governance and policymaking starts with elected bodies respecting each other's authority and autonomy but this becomes difficult when funding for one is tied to the other.

Local school boards have the ability to initiate lawsuits against county commissioners if local funding is not sufficient. This tool provides important checks and balances that force county commissioners to the negotiating table. In recent years, representatives of county commissioners have pushed bills to restrict this one method school boards have to influence local school funding. This authority should not be taken away as long as the current funding mechanism is in place.

At the same time, to improve efficiency, the General Assembly should enact legislation that would allow a transfer of fiscal accountability to requesting school boards so that they can be held directly accountable for all aspects of public education in that service area.

Public School Accountability

Lawmakers should do the following with regard to school accountability:

- Create a single statewide accountability system for schools that is aligned with the requirements of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).
- Revamp the A-F grading formula to give more credit to growth, at least at a 50-50 split, which will more accurately reflect what is going on in our public schools.

Low-Performing Schools

The definition of a low-performing school was changed by the General Assembly in 2015. The new definition needs further revision to better identify those schools that are most in need of assistance. Specifically, a school that has met growth should not be identified as low-performing. When a school or school district is identified as low-performing there needs to be a funding stream available to allow for additional interventions. NCSBA recommends that the General Assembly set up a program where low-performing schools and districts could secure additional State funds through an application process where they explain how the funds will be used to improve outcomes.

Charter Schools

The current public school funding structure should be revised so that school districts and charter schools both receive local tax dollars directly from county commissioners, essentially funding charter schools like city districts. This would disentangle the financial relationship between local school boards and charter schools and ensure that charter schools are receiving their fair share of local tax dollars.

Sales Tax Refund/Exemption

From 1998 until 2005, local boards of education could provide additional educational opportunities with savings from a sales tax refund. Currently, cities, counties, public universities, charter schools, private schools, and countless other entities either receive a sales tax refund or are exempt from ever paying sales tax. *If North Carolina's tax code is going to continue to allow some governmental entities and others to not pay sales tax to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars, then local boards of education should either be granted a sales tax exemption or have its sales tax refund reinstated.*

School Construction/Capital Funding

School environment and infrastructure are strongly linked to student outcomes. DPI's most recent survey shows public school capital infrastructure needs is \$8 billion over the next five years. The General Assembly needs to develop methods to assist school districts in handling this

staggering backlog in order to better serve students. NCSBA believes the best way to help districts is through a two-pronged approach:

- A significant one-time infusion of dollars in the form of a statewide bond.
- Set up dedicated funding streams so that districts have ongoing access to school capital funds from the State, which could be done by returning the lottery allocation for school construction to 40% and/or establishing more local option sales taxes for school construction.

Printed/Digital Textbooks

Textbook funding has been low for a number of years now. School districts have not had the resources to replace out of date textbooks. This funding needs to be increased.

Staffing for Student Success

Teacher Pay

School districts must be able to offer attractive compensation packages in order to hire and retain the highest quality classroom teachers. Lawmakers have improved teacher pay in recent years but more work remains to ensure the state is regionally and nationally competitive. In addition to ensuring base salaries remain strong, lawmakers should reinstate salary supplements for teachers who earn Master's and Advanced Degrees.

School Administrator Compensation

The salary schedule for the state's school administrators needs significant reform. Compensation levels of school administrators have become problematic around the state. Studies show that school administrator salaries in NC are ranked 50th in the nation.

Non-Certified Personnel Compensation

Raises for non-certified school staff have been relatively low in recent years. School districts need to be able to offer competitive compensation in this area as many of these positions are difficult to recruit and fill.

Teacher Assistants

Lawmakers should invest in additional teacher assistant positions. School districts continue to have significant needs for more teacher assistants in early grades especially with the implementation of Read to Achieve and the amount of one-on-one assessing that is required.

Staff Professional Development

The State has not provided funding for professional development since 2008. Local funding has not been able to make up for this shortfall. Professional development programs are more

important than ever as teaching methods have evolved and the role of school staff has become more complex. The State should once again provide professional development funds.

Teacher Licensure

Lawmakers should consider ways to smartly reduce barriers to licensure and entry into the teaching profession to help districts address classroom staffing challenges. One specific method of doing this would be to allow districts to accept an out-of-state teacher's license without additional testing if the candidate has classroom experience.

School Vouchers

Opportunity Scholarship Program Accountability

The state's school voucher program for low-income students needs to be accountable and transparent to the taxpayers of North Carolina who fund it. There are several options the State could implement to accomplish this at schools accepting public monies, including:

- Course of Study/curriculum standards.
- Requiring that no more than half the school's curriculum can be online.
- Testing requirements, whether EOG/EOC, or a State Board-approved alternative.
- Establishing that classroom teachers must have earned at least a bachelor's degree.
- Setting a cap on the percentage of a school's total enrollment that can be comprised of voucher-funded students.
- Directing that schools must have been open for at least three years.
- School Accreditation requirements.

Education Savings Accounts

NCSBA opposes Education Savings Accounts (ESAs), which are part of the voucher family. Unlike the Opportunity Scholarship program where funds can only be used for a private school, ESAs provide much more flexibility. ESAs divert funds from the public school system directly to the parent and the funds can be used for home schooling expenses, tutoring, private school, computers, and building up savings for college.

Guiding Principles

North Carolina has long recognized the essential nature of public education by providing an opportunity for a sound, basic education. Legislative and policy making bodies must dedicate themselves to maintaining the common system of public education. During each legislative session there are always unanticipated bills introduced that affect public schools. The following are guiding principles NCSBA will use to evaluate legislation that is introduced during the legislative session.

- NCSBA opposes any legislation that would violate federal laws or the state constitution.

- NCSBA opposes any legislation that would require school systems to expend additional financial resources without the State providing those necessary resources. NCSBA also will continue to advocate for funding for currently existing mandates.
- NCSBA opposes any legislation that attempts to diminish or take away local control and supports legislation that provides additional local control and decision making.
- NCSBA supports legislation that creates safe environments for students and staff as long as it is consistent with the aforementioned principles.
- NCSBA supports providing school districts with funds sufficient to guarantee full funding of all funding formulas.
- NCSBA supports an efficient hiring system for employees that will provide a competitive salary and benefits package for all school employees.

Please go to the Governmental Relations section at www.ncsba.org for Issue Briefs on each of these items. For more information, please contact:

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