

NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

2023-2024 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The North Carolina School Boards Association (NCSBA) is a volunteer membership association representing all 115 local boards of education in North Carolina and the board of the Cherokee Central School. NCSBA provides advocacy, leadership, and services that enable school boards to govern at the highest level. For the general improvement and betterment of public education in North Carolina, NCSBA will advocate for the following items during this legislative biennium.

Retaining Top Talent & Improving Working Conditions

Teachers: Too many classrooms statewide are filled with long-term substitutes. Students deserve high-quality, full-time teachers. NCSBA believes a competitive market salary is essential to retaining these teachers. Lawmakers should continue to provide raises for all teachers – prioritizing those with 15+ years of experience. Improving the teacher pipeline should also be a high priority.

Additional teacher pay investments include: restoring master’s pay in a teacher’s subject area and providing incentive pay for mentor teachers.

Moreover, appropriating funds to provide more K-3 teacher assistants will increase teacher retention and aid in improving student performance in the State’s Read to Achieve program.

Exceptional Children (EC) Teachers: Finding EC teachers continues to be a challenge for school districts across the State. More than half of the State’s school districts report having a higher number of students with disabilities than is covered by the 13% State funding cap. It is critical, therefore, that lawmakers continue to raise the funding cap. NCSBA believes additional pay and support will go a long way in retaining these essential teachers.

Bus Drivers & Noncertified Personnel: School districts statewide continue to struggle filling noncertified personnel positions, particularly bus drivers. A lack of experienced bus drivers is both a safety and academic issue because students are

expected to arrive to school safely and on time. Lawmakers should, therefore, provide pay raises for all noncertified personnel, with a priority on bus drivers.

Mental Health Support Personnel: The General Assembly should provide higher salaries for these professionals to become more competitive with the private sector.

School Facilities: The General Assembly should continue to provide funding to address school capital needs across the State.

School Safety

School Resource Officers: In recent years, North Carolina has endured more than 300 school-based juvenile gun offenses; yet hundreds of our public schools do not have a designated school resource officer (SRO). Increased state funding is needed to ensure there is an SRO in every school.

Mental Health Support Personnel: Suicide rates among 10–17-year-olds are at the highest level in a decade. School supports for mental health are currently insufficient to meet expanding needs. Legislators should commit to improving the below ratios.

	<u>Nationally Recommended Ratio</u>	<u>NC's 2020-21 Ratio</u>
School Social Workers:	1:250	1:1,025
School Psychologists:	1:500	1:1,815
School Counselors:	1:250	1:335
School Nurses:	1:750 (1 per school)	1:890

Improving the ratios will also help reduce the burden placed on educators to identify and address student mental health issues. Additionally, if a school district is unable to recruit a school psychologist, the district should be given flexibility to use funds in the school psychologist allotment for other mental health support personnel positions.

School Safety Grants: Current funding for these grants expires after the 2022-23 school year. Since the cost to provide safe school campuses is high, these investments should increase and be recurring.

Accountability

School Grades and Statewide Testing: The current formula to determine school grades, 80% student achievement and 20% student growth, is too heavily concentrated on test scores and does not adequately reflect school quality and student performance. NCSBA believes consideration should be given to the N.C. Department of Public Instruction's advisory group that first convened in September 2022 to create recommendations for redesigning the school accountability model. Additionally, any attempt to reform North Carolina's model should require a comprehensive review and revamp of the statewide testing program to ensure it aligns with its intended goals.

Low-Performing Schools: The definition currently in place for a "low-performing school" is misleading and requires modification. A school that "meets expected growth" should not be labeled as low performing. Indeed, a "D school" that meets expected growth is arguably doing better by its students than a "B school" that is not meeting expected growth.

Student-Centered Calendar

North Carolina is one of only two states with state mandated start and end dates to the school year. The State's rigid calendar law has direct repercussions on traditional public-school students. Charter schools and low-performing Restart schools, however, do not fall under the State's school calendar law – and their students are benefiting. Studies show that shortening the long summer break and taking exams before Christmas improves student achievement and future opportunities.

The current calendar law makes it very difficult for most public high school students and mid-year graduates to enroll in higher education courses in the second semester because those classes begin weeks before the first semester of high school ends. Allowing school districts to align their second semester with community colleges and universities does not require additional funding. NCSBA believes that school districts should have more local authority to create school calendars that maximize student outcomes and best meet the needs of local communities.

Administrator Ethics Training

Due to various levels of experience within the administrative ranks and the complexity of ethics laws, there should be a requirement for all school administrators involved in the making or administering of contracts to have ethics training. For

example, roughly 50% of North Carolina’s school districts are led by a superintendent who only has four years or less of experience in the position.

School Finance Officers

A school finance officer serves “at the pleasure of the superintendent” and is the only school district employee who cannot appeal their firing to the school board. To avoid putting a finance officer in a compromising situation with no recourse, they should have the same dismissal procedures as all other employees and similar contractual terms as assistant superintendents.

School Technology

A 2008 court order directed the State to transfer \$748 million dollars, spent unconstitutionally by state agencies, to public schools for school technology needs. At this point, the State still owes public schools \$730 million in technology funding. The House passed a bill during the 2019-20 legislative session to address the issue, however, the bill never made it across the finish line.¹ As the need for technology continues to grow, NCSBA remains fully committed to working with the General Assembly to reach a solution.

Local School Funding Structure

School districts and charter schools should both receive their percentage of per pupil local tax dollars directly from county commissioners.* The existing structure requires the county to transfer the entire allotment to the school district and then requires the district to disburse the funds to the appropriate charters. The proposed change mirrors the structure that counties with multiple school districts currently use to distribute local funds. Revising how local education dollars are distributed will create efficiency and reduce the financial friction between districts and charters.

*Districts would continue to certify that students are from their district.

¹ Education Bond Act of 2019, House Bill 241, Sec. 5

Opportunity Scholarship Program

The existing reporting requirements for the Opportunity Scholarship Program make a meaningful evaluation of student performance nearly impossible. Current regulations require participating private schools to administer and submit student scores from a standardized test of their choice – of which a wide variety exist. As a result, students in the voucher program do not have scores on a common metric that can be compared to other voucher students (let alone to public school students).

Participating private schools should be limited to administering the most commonly used norm-referenced tests, for voucher students, to adequately evaluate student performance and the overall impact of the program. The tests include the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the Terra Nova, the Stanford Achievement Test, the Woodcock Johnson, or the Northwest Evaluation Association's Measures of Academic Progress.

Leandro

The General Assembly should fully fund years four and five of the *Leandro* Comprehensive Remedial Plan without supplanting other education funds.

High School Athletics

Charter and private schools have an unfair advantage over traditional high schools, especially 1A schools. Because charter and private schools do not have attendance boundaries, they should be prohibited from competing in 1A playoffs. (One consideration is to bump them up to 2A playoffs.)

Guiding Principles

During each legislative session there are always unanticipated bills introduced that affect public schools. The following are guiding principles that 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 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.
- NCSBA supports legislation, policies, and initiatives that better prepare young children for success in the K-12 education system and in life.
- NCSBA opposes directing tax dollars to K-12 private schools that are not accountable for the public funds.