

PUBLIC SCHOOLS, PUBLIC GOOD: WHAT NORTH CAROLINA CAN ACHIEVE WHEN WE FULLY INVEST IN OUR CHILDREN

North Carolina Association of Educators

Executive Summary

North Carolina's public schools are doing extraordinary work, often with limited resources and under increasing strain. Every day, educators show up for their students. Schools serve as anchors for their communities. Students bring creativity, resilience, and ambition into classrooms across the state. These strengths are real, and they matter.

But they are not being matched by the state's level of investment.

Over the past decade, North Carolina has moved in a direction that prioritizes tax cuts for corporations and private school subsidies over sustained investment in public education. As private school vouchers expand and scheduled tax cuts reduce state revenue, public schools are left to do more with less, stretching educators, limiting opportunities for students, and widening disparities between communities. These disparities fall most heavily on working families and communities of color, which are more likely to rely on public schools and less likely to benefit from tax cuts and private school subsidies.

Recent national analyses show that North Carolina has fallen near the bottom nationally in education funding and educator pay when adjusted for inflation,¹ with teacher salaries declining by nearly ten percent during the pandemic years, the largest drop of any state. Much of the state's recent funding growth came from temporary federal COVID relief dollars that have now expired, exposing a deeper funding cliff for public schools.

A separate national report ranks North Carolina last in the nation for education funding effort² and overall funding level, reflecting policy choices that directly shape classroom conditions, educator stability, and student opportunity statewide.

This paper offers a different vision.

It calls for a renewed commitment to North Carolina's public schools, one that puts students, educators, and communities ahead of corporate giveaways. It advances a clear vision for increasing state investment in public education, including a long-term goal of increasing the state's contribution to per-student funding to \$20,000 by 2030. The paper makes clear that reaching this goal will require the North Carolina General Assembly to reverse policy choices that have drained resources from public schools, including tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy and the expansion of private school vouchers, and strengthening the collective voice of

¹ Reason Foundation. K–12 Education Spending Spotlight 2025, 2025. <https://spending-spotlight.reason.org/>

² Education Law Center. Making the Grade, 2025. <https://edlawcenter.org/research/making-the-grade-2025/>

educators, families, and communities to advocate for the public schools that serve nearly all of North Carolina's children.

It asks a simple but powerful question: *What could North Carolina's public schools achieve if the state invested **\$20,000 in per-student spending?***

The answer is clear. With increased, predictable, and equitable funding, public schools can provide smaller class sizes, competitive educator pay, modern and safe facilities, robust student supports, sports and enriched learning opportunities that prepare students not just for tests, but for life. Communities benefit when schools are strong, local economies grow, families stay, and civic life flourishes.

This paper centers the people at the heart of public education: students who deserve a full and engaging education; educators who want the time and support to do their best work; and communities that rely on schools as hubs of opportunity and connection. It highlights what is already working in North Carolina's public schools and shows how much more is possible when those strengths are met with adequate resources.

The paper also outlines a clear path forward. By rolling back the expansion of private school vouchers and tax cuts, and prioritizing public education in state budgeting decisions, North Carolina can reinvest in its schools in ways that benefit every child, regardless of their race, income, or school district. This is not about scarcity. It is about values and choices.

At its core, this white paper affirms a shared belief: public education is a public good. It is foundational to democracy, economic opportunity, and community well-being. Choosing to invest in public schools and

public school children is choosing a stronger future for North Carolina.

WE ENVISION A NORTH CAROLINA WHERE PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE WELL-FUNDED, EVERY CHILD CAN THRIVE, AND BUDGET DECISIONS MAKE KIDS OUR TOP PRIORITY, NOT CORPORATE INTERESTS.

The question before us is not whether we can afford to invest in public education, but whether we can afford not to.



The People Behind the Promise of Public Education

Before turning to data, policy choices, and pathways forward, it is important to begin with the people who make public education real in North Carolina.

Across the state, educators, students, and communities are doing remarkable work, often under conditions shaped by limited resources and competing priorities. Their experiences illuminate both the strength of public education today and what becomes possible with sustained investment.

A Student's Story

Jordan is a tenth grader who loves music and dreams of becoming an audio engineer. School is where he discovered this passion, first through band, then through a digital media elective that allowed him to explore sound design. His teachers see his potential and encourage him, even as they juggle packed schedules and limited resources.

Jordan's school does its best, but opportunities feel fragile. The counselor serves hundreds of students. Electives depend on enrollment and staffing. Jordan wonders how many more doors could open if his school had the support to expand what it offers.

An Educator's Story

Ms. Alvarez has taught middle school science in North Carolina for more than a decade. She loves watching students discover curiosity and confidence through hands-on learning. Like many educators, she has learned to adapt, sharing supplies, mentoring new teachers after hours, and supporting students well beyond academic instruction.

There have been moments when she has wondered how long she can keep going. Large class sizes



make it harder to give each student the attention they deserve. Pay that lags behind neighboring states makes staying in the profession a difficult choice. Still, she stays because her students need her.

In recent years, Ms. Alvarez has watched the strain on her school grow more visible. Science labs go without updated equipment and old HVAC systems make classrooms frosty or sweaty, depending on the day. She also sees the strain on her colleagues. Many juggle second jobs just to make ends meet, while others have left the profession entirely in recent years.

Ms. Alvarez represents thousands of educators who remain deeply committed to public education, even as the system around them is stretched thin.

A Community's Story

In Haywood County, the public school remains a central gathering place even as the community navigates profound change. Friday night games still bring neighbors together. School concerts and events double as community reunions. Teachers know families by name, and graduates often return to raise their own children there. In a county that has weathered the closure of a major mill and repeated environmental disasters, including Hurricane Helene, the school stands as one of the few stable institutions anchoring daily life.

Yet the strain is visible. The school building shows its age. Repairs are delayed. Staff wear multiple hats to fill gaps left by limited resources. Community pride remains strong, but so does the sense that the school, and the town it serves, could be stronger with greater investment. Similar dynamics are playing out in Eastern North Carolina, where some rural communities have lost their local hospital, forcing families to travel long distances for care and employment. In these places, public schools are often the largest remaining employers and the most consistent public institutions. They host meetings, provide meals, and offer a sense of continuity in communities facing population loss and economic uncertainty. When schools are underfunded, the impact extends far beyond the classroom. These impacts are not evenly distributed: rural communities, low-income and working-class communities, and communities of color are more likely to experience school underfunding alongside hospital closures, job loss, and reduced public services.



These stories are not exceptions. They reflect the lived reality of public education across North Carolina, where schools continue to hold communities together, even as long-standing underinvestment limits what they are able to provide

Public Schools as the Backbone of North Carolina's Communities

Public schools are among North Carolina's most vital public institutions. They educate the vast majority of the state's children, employ hundreds of thousands of educators and staff, and serve as consistent points of connection for families and communities across urban, suburban, and rural regions.

Beyond academic instruction, public schools provide essential services that support student well-being and family stability. These include school meals, transportation, counseling, extracurricular programming, and safe environments where students can build relationships and a sense of belonging. Across all North Carolina communities, particularly rural ones, schools are among the largest employers and serve as central gathering places for civic life.

COMMUNITY ANCHOR

“When our school thrives, the whole town thrives. It’s where we gather, where our kids grow up, and where our future takes shape.”

— **Quinn Ray, Elon Town Council Member**

This central role means that the condition of public schools is inseparable from the condition of the communities they serve. When schools are adequately funded, communities are better positioned to thrive. When schools are stretched thin, the effects ripple outward, impacting families, local economies, and long-term opportunity.

The People at the Heart of Public Education

Educators

North Carolina’s educators bring deep commitment, professional skill, and care to their work. Teachers, instructional support staff, counselors, and administrators routinely go beyond their formal job descriptions to meet students’ academic, social, and emotional needs. Many spend personal time and resources supporting their classrooms and school communities.³

However, sustained underinvestment has made it increasingly difficult for educators to remain in the profession. Large class sizes, limited planning time, and salaries that lag behind national and regional benchmarks contribute to rising turnover and workforce instability.^{4, 5, 6}

For those that remain in the profession, these pressures come at a personal cost, long hours that extend into evenings and weekends, time taken away from their own families, and growing strain on

their physical and financial well-being. These challenges are particularly acute in high-need schools and rural districts, where recruitment and retention are already difficult. Educators are not expecting extravagance. They are demanding the conditions necessary to do their jobs well and to ensure students have the learning environments they need to thrive and to build long-term, sustainable careers in public education.

STAYING BECAUSE IT MATTERS

Ms. Alvarez has taught middle school science in North Carolina for more than a decade. She believes deeply in public education—and in her students’ potential. Like many educators, she stretches limited resources, mentors colleagues, and shows up every day determined to make learning meaningful.

Her story reflects the quiet strength of North Carolina’s public schools: committed educators doing extraordinary work, even when the system around them is strained.



³ North Carolina Association of Educators. New Report Reveals NC Teachers Spend Over \$1,600 Out of Pocket to Supply Classrooms; Rank 2nd Worst In the Nation, 2025. <https://www.ncae.org/about-ncae/media-center/press-releases/new-report-reveals-nc-teachers-spend-over-1600-out-pocket-supply-classrooms-rank-2nd-worst-nation>

⁴ North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. 2023-2024 State of the Teaching Profession in North Carolina, 2025. <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/documents/files/state-teaching-profession-2023-24/open>

⁵ BEST NC. Teacher Pay in North Carolina: A Smart Investment in Student Achievement, 2025. <https://bestnc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/BEST-NC-Teacher-Pay-in-NC-2025-Edition.pdf>

⁶ National Education Association. Rankings of the States and Estimates of School Statistics, 2025. <https://www.nea.org/resource-library/educator-pay-and-student-spending-how-does-your-state-rank>

Students

Students across North Carolina bring talent, curiosity, and ambition into their classrooms. They benefit most when schools are able to offer not only strong academic instruction, but also arts education, career and technical pathways, athletics, and mental health support.

Yet many students attend schools where counselors serve hundreds of students, where electives are limited by staffing constraints, and where aging facilities undermine learning environments. These limitations are not reflections of students' potential, but of policy choices that constrain what schools can provide.

A FULLY FUNDED PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM WOULD ALLOW STUDENTS TO LEARN IN ENVIRONMENTS THAT NURTURE THE WHOLE CHILD—ACADEMICALLY, SOCIALLY, AND EMOTIONALLY.

MORE THAN A TEST SCORE

Jordan is a tenth grader who discovered his love for music through band and a digital media elective. School is where his talent emerged—and where teachers encourage him to imagine a future in audio engineering.

Like many students, Jordan isn't asking for more pressure. He's asking for opportunity.



What Fully Funded Public Schools Make Possible

Fully funded public schools are not simply better resourced, they are fundamentally better positioned to meet the needs of students, educators, and communities. When funding is adequate, predictable, and equitable, schools can move beyond triage and toward intentional, long-term improvement. This vision calls for North Carolina to dramatically increase its per-student investment, reaching \$20,000 by 2030, so that public schools have the stable resources needed to support students, retain educators, and anchor thriving communities. The result is a system that nurtures student learning, sustains a strong educator workforce, and strengthens the communities schools serve.

Student Learning and Well-Being

Increased and sustained per-student funding allows schools to create learning environments where students are known, supported, and challenged. Smaller class sizes make it possible for educators to differentiate instruction, respond to individual learning needs, and build trusting relationships with students. In these settings, students are more likely to stay engaged, receive timely feedback, and develop confidence in their abilities.

Fully funded schools are also able to expand access to counselors, social workers, nurses, and mental health professionals, supports that are essential to student success. When a counselor is responsible for hundreds of students, individualized guidance becomes difficult.

Similarly, in many public schools across the state, nurses are only able to be on site one day per week, limiting schools' ability to respond to student health needs in real time. With adequate staffing, schools can provide proactive academic advising, college and career planning, and mental health support, rather than relying on crisis response alone.

Expanded funding also enables schools to offer a broader and more balanced curriculum. Students benefit from consistent access to arts education, world languages, career and technical education, and extracurricular activities that help them discover interests and talents beyond tested subjects. These opportunities are particularly important for students from historically marginalized communities, including many students of color, who are more likely to attend schools where enrichment programs are the first to be cut when budgets are tight.

Research consistently demonstrates that sustained investments in public education are associated with improved academic outcomes, higher graduation rates, and greater long-term economic mobility, with the largest gains from low-income backgrounds and communities of color.^{7, 8, 9}

These outcomes are strongest when funding is predictable and equitable, enabling schools to plan strategically rather than respond to short-term budget uncertainty.

A PLACE OF POSSIBILITY

With increased investment, Jordan's school becomes a place where students explore interests, connect learning to careers, and receive guidance along the way.

In fully funded schools, students are prepared not just for tests—but for futures they can see themselves in.

Educator Stability and Excellence

Fully funded public schools create the conditions necessary for educators to thrive professionally. In this paper, “fully funded” means a level of state investment that is sufficient to support competitive pay, manageable class sizes, and stable staffing

across districts, reflected in a long-term goal of reaching \$20,000 per student in state funding by 2030. At that level of investment, competitive compensation allows districts to recruit and retain talented educators, reducing turnover that disrupts learning and strains remaining staff. When educators are paid competitively with neighboring states and professions, teaching becomes a viable long-term career rather than a short-term commitment.

Beyond salary, adequate funding this level of per-student investment supports manageable workloads and professional growth. Fully funded schools can maintain reasonable class sizes, hire sufficient instructional support staff, and provide time for collaboration and mentoring. New educators benefit from structured induction and coaching, while experienced educators have opportunities to lead, innovate, and refine their practice.

⁷ Jackson, Johnson, & Persico (National Bureau of Economic Research). The Effects of School Spending on Educational and Economic Outcomes, 2015. https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w20847/w20847.pdf

⁸ Baker, B.D. (Learning Policy Institute). How Money Matters (research brief), 2018. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/how-money-matters-brief>

⁹ Learning Policy Institute. How Money Matters: Education Funding and Student Outcomes (fact sheet), 2025. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/how-money-matters-factsheet>

Schools with stable teaching staff are better able to build strong instructional cultures, align curriculum and practice, and sustain improvement over time. Research shows that teacher stability is one of the most important factors in student achievement, particularly in high-need schools.^{10, 11}

Investment in educators is not only a workforce strategy, it is one of the most effective ways to improve student outcomes.



WHAT INVESTMENT MAKES POSSIBLE

Ms. Alvarez imagines a classroom where smaller class sizes allow deeper relationships, where modern labs spark curiosity, and where collaboration time helps educators grow together.

With sustained investment, teaching becomes not just a calling—but a sustainable career. When educators have the tools to thrive, students do too.

When schools are well resourced, they often serve as central gathering places for their communities. School buildings host events, partnerships, and services that bring people together and strengthen local connections. In moments of crisis, from severe storms to public health emergencies, schools often become lifelines, places where families turn for information, resources, and stability. Stable, well-supported schools contribute to a sense of continuity and shared investment in place, reinforcing community stability and encouraging local economic activity. Businesses and employers, in turn, value communities with strong public schools as places where employees want to live, work, and stay.

Community and Economic Benefits



The benefits of fully funded public schools extend far beyond the classroom. Strong schools are foundational to healthy, thriving communities. They help families put down roots, support local businesses, and prepare students with the skills and confidence needed to participate in regional economies.

Investment in public education also strengthens civic life. Students who experience supportive, engaging schooling are more likely to develop a sense of belonging and responsibility to their communities. As adults, they are more inclined to participate through volunteering, civic engagement, and leadership. Over time, these patterns help build stronger social bonds and greater resilience within communities across North Carolina.

¹⁰ Ronfledt, Loeb, & Wyckoff. How Teacher Turnover Harms Student Achievement. American Education Research Journal, Vol. 50: Issue 1, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831212463813>

¹¹ Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond (Learning Policy Institute). Teacher Turnover: Why It Matters and What We Can Do About It, 2017. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/teacher-turnover-report>

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

When schools are fully funded, the benefits ripple outward. Modern facilities, stable staffing, and expanded programs strengthen not just classrooms, but entire towns.

Investment in public education is investment in community vitality.

In this way, investing in public education is not a narrow policy choice. It is a comprehensive strategy for strengthening communities, expanding opportunity, and securing North Carolina's future. Having seen what schools make possible, we now turn to what has limited them.

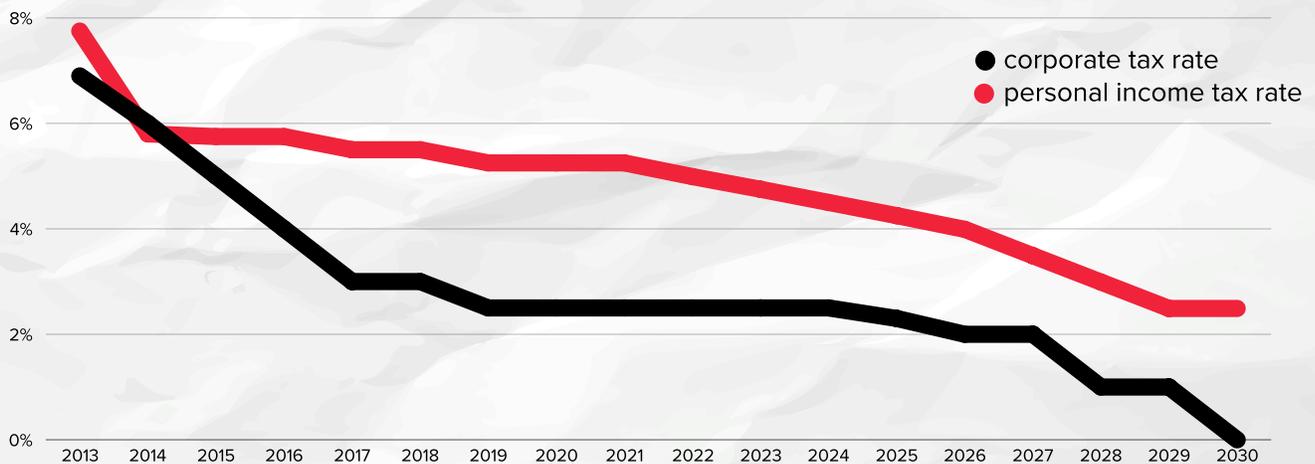
The Policy Choices Shaping School Funding

Understanding what is possible requires examining the choices that shape school funding today. The funding challenges facing North Carolina's public schools are the result of deliberate policy decisions

Since 2013, state leaders have enacted a series of laws that steadily reduced personal income tax rates and set the state on a path to eliminate the corporate income tax entirely. Under current law, profitable corporations will pay zero in state income taxes beginning in 2030,¹² even as income taxes continue to provide more than half of the state's funding for public services, including public education.

NC CORPORATE TAX RATE FALLS TO 0% BY 2030

Tax cuts since 2013 have already reduced revenue by \$18 billion. Reduced revenue means less resources for public schools and other essential services.



¹² North Carolina General Assembly. Session Law 2021-180, 2021. <https://www.ncleg.gov/BillLookUp/2021/s105>

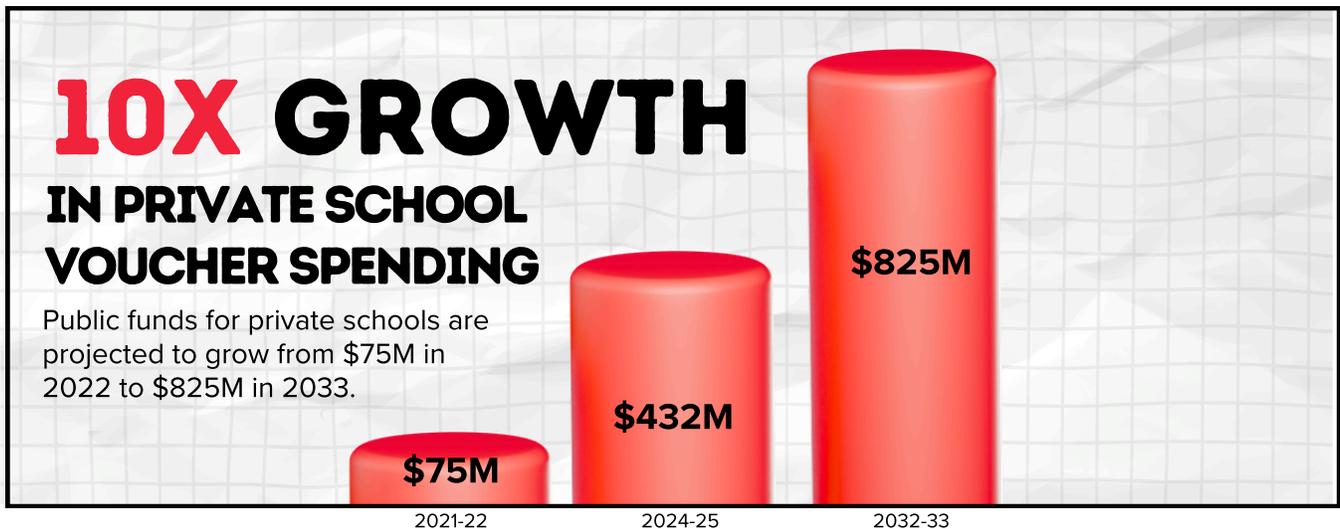
These tax policy choices have significantly reduced the state’s recurring revenue capacity. As a result of income tax cuts enacted since 2013, North Carolina is now losing nearly \$18 billion in revenue each year,¹³ resources that could otherwise support public schools, educator pay, and student services.

These losses come at a time when education costs are rising due to inflation, enrollment growth, aging facilities, and increasing student needs. While the state’s population and economy continue to grow, tax cuts prevent revenue collections from keeping pace with the cost of delivering high-quality public services and maintaining infrastructure, including public schools, needed to meet that population growth.

At the same time, the state has dramatically expanded private school vouchers through the Opportunity Scholarship Program. What began as a targeted program to aid low-income families and

students of color, has become a universal entitlement, with \$7 billion committed through 2033¹⁴ and annual spending rising from \$75 million in 2021–22 to \$825 million by 2032–33.¹⁵ In the 2024–25 school year alone, the state spent approximately \$432 million on vouchers,¹⁶ the majority of which went to students who were already attending private schools.¹⁷ This represents a significant redirection of public funds away from traditional public schools, even as those schools face staffing shortages, aging facilities, and growing demands for student support.

Taken together, tax cuts and voucher expansion represent billions of dollars in policy-driven disinvestment from North Carolina’s public schools. These choices constrain per-student funding, suppress educator pay, and widen disparities between districts, leaving North Carolina ranked 50th out of 50 states in education funding effort and near the bottom in overall funding outcomes shaped by deliberate fiscal priorities, not economic necessity.



¹³ NC Budget and Tax Center. North Carolina Should Fund Our Future by Taxing Corporations and the Rich. 2025. <https://ncbudget.org/fundourfuturefactsheet/>

¹⁴ Public School Forum of North Carolina. Understanding the Cost of Expanding School Vouchers, 2024. <https://www.ncforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/2024-Voucher-Expansion-Analysis.pdf>

¹⁵ North Carolina General Assembly. Session Law 2024-55, 2024. <https://www.ncleg.gov/BillLookUp/2023/H10>

¹⁶ NC State Education Assistance Authority. Summary Data. <https://www.ncseaa.edu/opportunity-scholarship-summary-of-data/>

¹⁷ WUNC. Report Shows Most NC Voucher Recipients Already Attended Private School – Here’s Why that Matters, 2025. <https://www.wunc.org/education/2025-06-05/private-school-voucher-recipients-nc-opportunity-scholarship>

WHEN DOORS OPEN

Right now, counselors serve hundreds of students and electives depend on limited funding. Even so, Jordan's potential shines through.

Investment unlocks opportunity, ensuring that talent, not ZIP code or budget constraints, determines what students can achieve.

Importantly, this is not a matter of economic capacity. North Carolina remains one of the fastest-growing states in the nation, with a strong and diversifying economy.¹⁸ In the early 2000s, North Carolina made a significantly stronger effort to invest in public education¹⁹ through a more progressive tax structure.²⁰ Public schools were better positioned to keep pace with enrollment growth, educator pay was more competitive, and the state's fiscal system generated the recurring revenue needed to support long-term planning.

The challenge lies in aligning fiscal priorities with the state's stated commitment to opportunity and fairness, and its constitutional obligation to provide every child a sound, basic education, as recent budget choices have prioritized corporations over kids, diverting resources away from the public schools that serve nearly all children. These choices have shaped the current landscape, concentrating benefits among corporations and higher-income households while leaving public schools, and the communities that rely on them, most under-resourced.

A Clear Path Forward

Reinvesting in public education requires intentional choices. For too long, North Carolina's budget decisions have moved in a direction that prioritizes tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations and private school subsidies, leaving public schools underfunded and students without the resources they need to succeed. Reversing course does not require new ideas; it requires the political will to align state spending with the values North Carolinians consistently express.

In a recent statewide survey, large majorities of likely voters, across parties and regions, said per-student funding is too low and strongly supported increasing public education investment, improving educator pay, and stopping taxpayer-funded vouchers from draining resources from public schools.²¹ North Carolina has made these choices before. With deliberate action, it can do so again. When the state invests in public schools, everyone benefits, but the gains are greatest for students and communities that have historically been denied equitable access to opportunity.

Rolling back the expansion of private school vouchers, tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations, and prioritizing public education in state budget decisions would restore the state's revenue capacity and allow North Carolina to make sustained, meaningful investments in its schools. These steps reflect a clear choice to put kids over corporations and to treat public education as the public good it is. Taken together, this path forward would enable North Carolina to move beyond short-term fixes and toward a stable, equitable system of public education funding.

¹⁸ Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina. For the Third Time in Four Years, CNBC Names North Carolina as America's "Top State for Business", 2025. <https://edpnc.com/news/cnbc-2025/>

¹⁹ Public Ed Works. A Long-Term Slide In NC Education Spending, 2017. <https://publicedworks.org/2017/05/nc-education-spending/>

²⁰ North Carolina Budget and Tax Center. NC's Revenue Is Declining, Even With A Growing Population And Economy, 2025. <https://ncbudget.org/ncs-revenue-is-declining-even-with-a-growing-population-and-economy/>

²¹ Internal statewide polling conducted for NCAE, 2025. Survey of North Carolina likely voters assessing attitudes toward public education funding, educator pay, tax policy, and private school vouchers.

Stabilizing and Increasing Per-Student Funding

A clear path forward begins with stabilizing and increasing per-student funding so schools can plan for the future with confidence. Predictable, recurring funding allows districts to hire staff, expand programs, and invest in long-term improvements rather than relying on one-time appropriations or temporary grants.

Increasing per-student funding, particularly in districts with higher concentrations of poverty, helps ensure that all students have access to the resources they need to succeed. Adequate funding supports smaller class sizes, instructional materials, student support staff, and enrichment opportunities that are foundational to high-quality public education. When funding is equitable and responsive to student needs, schools are better positioned to close opportunity gaps rather than perpetuate them.

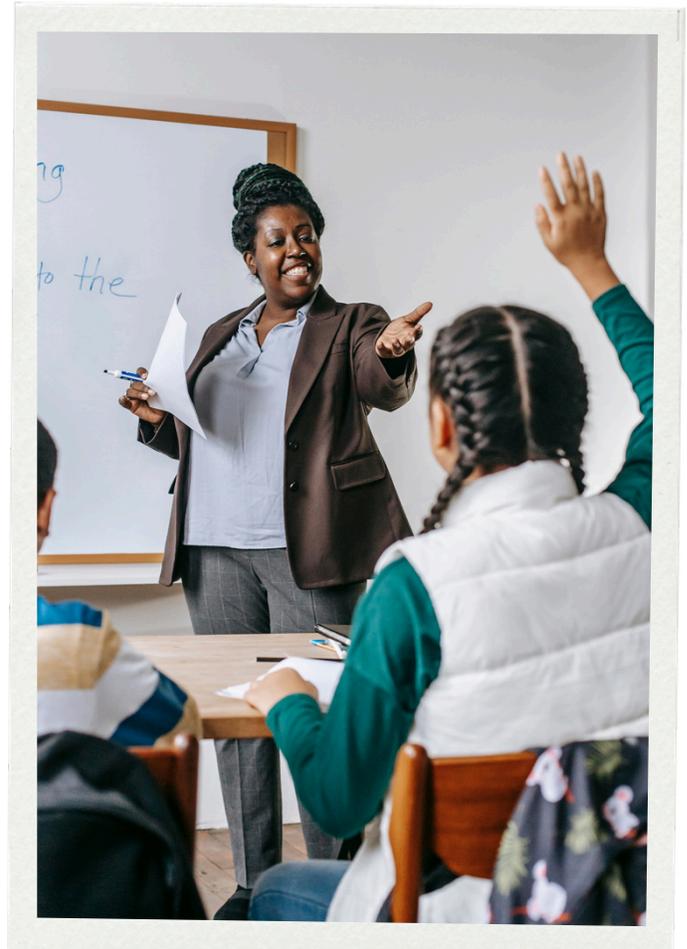


Strengthening the Educator Workforce

Any meaningful reinvestment in public education must center educators. Strengthening the educator workforce means ensuring that teachers and school staff are paid competitively, have manageable workloads, and are treated as respected professionals whose expertise is valued and trusted, with the time, autonomy, and support needed to sustain long-term careers.

Competitive compensation is essential to recruiting and retaining educators, especially as North Carolina competes with neighboring states for talent. Equally important are working conditions that allow educators to focus on teaching: reasonable class sizes, sufficient planning time, and access to instructional and student support staff.

Stabilizing the educator workforce benefits students directly. Schools with lower turnover are better able to build strong instructional cultures, mentor new educators, and maintain continuity for students and families. Investing in educators is therefore not only a matter of fairness, it is a proven strategy for improving student outcomes and strengthening schools statewide.



Modernizing School Facilities

A clear path forward also includes investing in safe, modern, and welcoming school facilities. Across North Carolina, many school buildings are aging and in need of repair. Deferred maintenance, outdated heating and cooling systems, and inadequate classroom space create barriers to learning and place additional strain on educators and students.

Modernizing facilities improves health, safety, and learning conditions. It also signals to students, educators, and communities that public education is valued. Investment in school infrastructure can reduce long-term costs, improve energy efficiency, and ensure that all students, regardless of ZIP code, learn in environments that support their success.

Reducing Disparities Between Districts

North Carolina's current funding system leaves too much to chance, resulting in stark differences in educational opportunity between districts. A clear path forward must include a commitment to reducing these disparities by ensuring that funding is distributed equitably and responsive to student needs.

Equity-focused funding recognizes that some students require additional resources to achieve the same outcomes. By directing greater investment to high-need districts and schools, the state can work toward a system where opportunity is not determined by geography, race, or income.

Fulfilling the State's Constitutional Obligation

At the heart of this path forward is North Carolina's constitutional responsibility to provide every child access to a sound, basic education. This obligation

has been affirmed by the courts and reflects a shared moral commitment to the state's children, one that most North Carolinians agree should be met through increased per-student in its public schools.

Fulfilling this obligation requires more than minimal compliance. It requires sustained investment, accountability, and a clear focus on outcomes for students. Reinvesting in public education is not optional, it is a constitutional and ethical imperative.



A Long-Term Investment in Shared Prosperity

This approach recognizes that public education is not a short-term expense to be minimized, but a long-term investment in shared prosperity. When North Carolina invests in its public schools, it invests in its workforce, its communities, and its democratic future.

Choosing this path affirms a simple truth: strong public schools are essential to a strong North Carolina.

The Moral and Civic Imperative

Public education is foundational to democracy. It is where young people learn not only academic skills, but how to live in community, how to engage across differences, think critically, resolve conflict, and participate in civic life. Public schools are among the few institutions in our society intentionally designed to bring together students from diverse backgrounds and prepare them for shared responsibility in a democratic system.

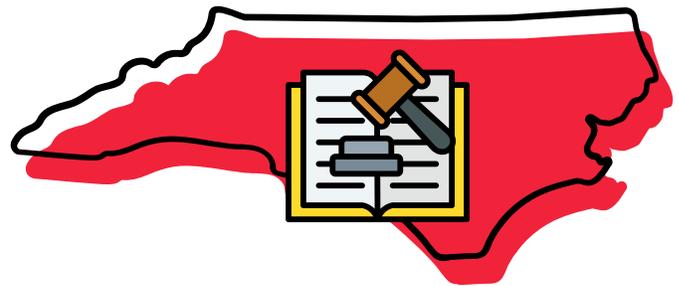
In classrooms across North Carolina, students learn what it means to belong to something larger than themselves. They practice cooperation, debate ideas, and encounter perspectives different from their own. These experiences are essential to sustaining a healthy democracy, one in which people are informed, engaged, and capable of working toward the common good.

Public education is also an expression of shared values. It reflects the belief that every child matters, that opportunity should not be determined by wealth or ZIP code, and that the future of the state depends on the success of its children. When public schools are underfunded, these values are undermined.

Chronic underinvestment has also reinforced long-standing racial and economic inequities, leaving students of color and students from low-income families more likely to learn in under-resourced schools despite equal potential. When they are fully funded, they are reinforced. Recent statewide polling confirms that these values are broadly shared, with strong majorities of North Carolinians across regions and political affiliations expressing support for increased investment in public schools and tax fairness.²²

North Carolina's constitution reflects this collective responsibility by affirming the state's obligation to provide every child access to a sound, basic education. This commitment is not symbolic. It is a promise, made across generations, that education is a public responsibility, not a private privilege.

Fully funding public education honors both the letter and the spirit of that promise. It affirms that the state will not settle for minimal compliance, but will invest meaningfully in the institutions that prepare young people for participation in civic and economic life. It recognizes that democracy depends on strong public schools, and that neglecting them carries consequences not only for students, but for society as a whole.



²² Internal statewide polling conducted for NCAE, 2025. Survey of North Carolina likely voters assessing attitudes toward public education funding, educator pay, tax policy, and private school vouchers.

A SHARED COMMITMENT

Community pride remains strong, even when resources are limited. There is a shared understanding that schools, and the towns they serve, could be even stronger with the right investment.

Choosing public schools is choosing the places people call home.

THIS MOMENT CALLS FOR CLARITY AND COURAGE. THE CHOICES FACING NORTH CAROLINA ARE NOT ABSTRACT OR TECHNICAL; THEY ARE MORAL. THEY REFLECT WHOSE VOICES ARE VALUED, WHOSE FUTURES ARE PRIORITIZED, AND WHAT KIND OF STATE WE WANT TO BE.

Choosing to invest in public education is choosing to strengthen democracy. It is choosing to honor educators who serve their communities. It is choosing to expand opportunities for students in every corner of the state. And it is choosing to uphold a constitutional promise that belongs to all North Carolinians.

The call to action is simple and urgent: North Carolina must choose public schools. Not as a fallback, not as an afterthought, but as a deliberate investment in our shared future.

Conclusion: Choosing Public Schools

North Carolina's public schools are not failing, policy choices are. North Carolina's public schools already reflect the dedication, resilience, and care of the people who sustain them. Every day, educators show up for their students. Schools open their doors as places of learning, connection, and possibility. Communities gather around them, not because they are perfect, but because they matter.

With sustained investment, public schools can do even more.

They can become places where educators are supported and respected as professionals, where students receive the attention and opportunities they deserve, and where communities see their shared values reflected in the institutions that serve their children. Fully funding public education is not about transforming something broken; it is about strengthening something that already works.

For years, budget decisions have prioritized tax giveaways and private school subsidies over the students and educators who make public education possible. This moment demands a different path, one grounded in shared values and collective action.

We are calling on state leaders to make our kids North Carolina's #1 priority by restoring the billions in tax breaks and private school vouchers taken from classrooms and investing them back in our schools. We are calling for \$20,000 per student funding from the General Assembly by 2030, so that every student has smaller classes, modern facilities, and the education they deserve. In doing so, we will make the billionaires and corporations finally pay their fair share.

OUR PLAN

- 1 PUT KIDS FIRST**
- 2 END CORPORATE TAX BREAKS AND VOUCHERS**
- 3 RECLAIM OUR DEMOCRACY**

For too long, billionaires and corporations have corrupted our democracy. Gerrymandered districts, politicized courts, and corporate money protect lawmakers from accountability. When politicians stop answering to voters, they start answering to donors.

Before we can put kids first, fund our schools, recruit and retain quality public school teachers and staff, and fix the tax code so that the wealthy finally pay what they owe, we must reclaim our democracy. We must strengthen democratic accountability so the people—not corporations—control our public schools and the future for our kids.

We must protect voting rights, pass fair maps, and restore checks and balances to state government. And we must finally lift the ban on collective bargaining for public school workers.

WHY EDUCATORS STAY

There are moments when Ms. Alvarez wonders how long she can keep going. Still, she stays because her students need her.

Investing in public education means honoring that commitment and ensuring educators are supported, respected, and able to build long-term careers in North Carolina's classrooms.

These demands are not radical. They reflect what North Carolinians know to be true: strong public schools are essential to thriving communities, a healthy economy, and a democratic future.

By choosing to invest in our kids, our educators, and our schools, and by building the collective power to defend those investments, North Carolina can meet its constitutional obligation and create a future where every child has the opportunity to succeed.

Choosing to invest in public schools is a choice about the future North Carolina wants to build. It is a decision to place people over profits, opportunity over austerity, and long-term prosperity over short-term savings. It is also a choice to reverse patterns of disinvestment that have disproportionately harmed Black, Brown, and low-income communities, and to build a future where opportunity is no longer predicted by race or income.

IT IS CHOOSING:



- Stronger communities, anchored by schools that bring people together
- A stable and respected educator workforce, with the support to thrive
- Expanded opportunity for students, regardless of background or ZIP code
- A more prosperous and democratic future, grounded in shared responsibility

Public education is a public good. It is foundational to economic growth, civic life, and the promise of opportunity for every child. Investing in it is essential.

THE CHOICE IS CLEAR. NORTH CAROLINA MUST CHOOSE KIDS OVER CORPORATIONS. NORTH CAROLINA MUST CHOOSE OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.