



November 9, 2021

Governor Cooper, Speaker Moore, and Senator Berger:

North Carolina's public schools stand on the brink of crisis as they face a fourth month in this fiscal year and nearly four full years without a comprehensive state budget. Staffing shortages in all ranks of school personnel are worsening as employees receive pay not competitive with what they could earn in the private sector or in neighboring states. Principals and superintendents are driving buses, working in school cafeterias, and leading classrooms where substitutes cannot be found to cover for absent teachers. This personnel crisis is something our local school districts, even with increased support from local counties and the time-limited and restricted infusion of federal COVID relief funding, cannot address alone.

The North Carolina Association of School Administrators (NCASA), in unison with our two core affiliates, the North Carolina School Superintendents' Association (NCSSA) and the North Carolina Principals and Assistant Principals' Association (NCPAPA), respectfully urge you, our top state leaders, to compromise and quickly deliver a state budget that allocates greatly-needed resources for increasing pay, improving working conditions, hiring additional personnel and providing other needed support for quality teaching and learning in classrooms across the state.

We understand that your differences in priorities and political ideologies make compromise and collaboration challenging, but we know you are united in your desire to support our public schools and the 1.4 million students they serve. The budget proposals you each have pushed forward all contain important priorities for K-12 education. We, on behalf of more than 7,000 school leaders across the state, urge you to find common ground that addresses the following key issues that need time-sensitive attention in the 2021-2022 state budget:

School Personnel Compensation & Benefits

- Utilize the state's 2020-21 revenue surplus and additional federal COVID-19 relief funding, where allowable, to provide compensation increases to all public school employees in 2021-2022, with focused adjustments as follows:
 - **Teachers & Instructional Support** – Provide significant increases to all, with additional boosts for veteran teachers with 15 or more years of experience and reinstate advanced degree supplements as proposed by the House.
 - **Principals and Assistant Principals** – Increase salary schedule steps for all and ensure any whose pay would decrease from ADM losses or lack of school growth scores from 2020-21 due to COVID-19, are held harmless; provide assistant principals with a 22% differential on the teacher salary schedule per the House proposal; and reconnect principals to that same schedule with a significant differential above the assistant principals they supervise.
 - **Non-Certified & Classified Personnel** – Address the critical shortage of non-certified personnel such as bus drivers, custodians, and cafeteria workers by transitioning the pay scale for these employees to \$13/hour in 2021 and \$15/hour in 2023. Provide state funds to assist LEAs in covering equitable increases for employees in this category who are paid with local or federal funds, as proposed by the Governor.
 - **Central Office** – Provide increases at least equal to those provided to state agency, community college, and university employees, including any bonuses that are issued.

- **Health Reimbursement Arrangement (HRA)** – Support the House proposal for providing at least \$500 in a new NC Retirement HRA to state-funded employees hired on or after January 1, 2021, to help them cover increasing health insurance costs in retirement, since they will not receive State Health Plan coverage.

Student Mental Health & Safety

- Support the Senate proposal for increasing funding for school psychologists and ensuring at least one school psychologist is assisting students in each district.
- Provide an additional flexible pot of state funding for districts to recruit and retain school nurses, counselors, psychologists, and social workers to address specific student mental health needs and staffing shortages in their individual districts.
- Provide at least \$10 million for school safety grants in 2021-22 and support the House proposal to make the school safety grants program permanent.

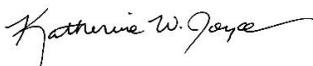
School Funding Model & Business Modernization

- Fully fund the first two years of the *Leandro* recommendations as outlined in the Governor’s budget proposal to ensure our state meets its constitutional obligation to provide a sound basic education to each and every North Carolina student.
- Support the Senate’s position on not reducing allotments for a difference in actual and anticipated ADM and providing separate contingency reserves that would allocate \$22 million for any excess K-12 enrollment and \$40 million for increases in exceptional children enrollment.
- Support House and Senate positions to provide \$48.8 million to advance the School Business System Modernization Plan.

While this list does not address all of the difficulties our school leaders and their staff and students are facing, we believe immediate and substantive action in these areas will ultimately have a significant impact on student learning outcomes. For North Carolina to be the education leader it can and should be, we first need your leadership and agreement to provide robust support to our public education system.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and please let us know how we may assist you on your important next steps.

Respectfully,



Katherine W. Joyce, NCASA Executive Director



Jack Hoke, NCSSA Executive Director



Dr. Shirley Prince, NCPAPA Executive Director