**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.

**Retaining Top Talent & Improving Working Conditions**

*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 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.

*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. Lawmakers should 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*: Hundreds of NC public schools do not have a designated school resource officer (SRO). Increased state funding is needed to ensure every school that wants an SRO is able to have an SRO.

*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 to reduce the burden placed on educators to identify and address mental health distress in students, sexual abuse, sex tracking, and other crises.

Nationally Recommended Ratio    NC’s 2020-21 Ratio

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

Additionally, if a school district is unable to recruit a school psychologist, the district should be granted a waiver to use funds in the school psychologist allotment for other mental health support personnel positions.

*School Safety Grants*: Current funding for these grants expire 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 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. 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. The NC calendar law is extremely problematic because the schedule does not permit students to take exams before Christmas which hurts student achievement. It’s also currently difficult for most public high school students and mid-year graduates to enroll in higher education courses in the second semester because those higher ed classes begin weeks before the first semester of high school ends.

**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, administering, or awarding of contracts to have ethics training.

**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. 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.

**Opportunity Scholarship Program**

The existing reporting requirements for the Opportunity Scholarship Program make a meaningful evaluation of student performance nearly impossible. Participating private schools should be limited to administering the five most commonly used norm-referenced tests, for voucher students, to adequately evaluate student performance and the overall impact of the program.

**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 schools have an unfair advantage against smaller traditional high schools, especially 1A schools. Because charter schools do not have attendance boundaries, they should be prohibited from competing in 1A playoffs.

**Guiding Principles**

The following are guiding principles that NCSBA will use to evaluate unanticipated bills that affect public education 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.