



## American Federation of Professional Educators in North Carolina

### Legislative Priorities

#### 1) Adequate and Sustainable Funding for Public Schools

North Carolina must ensure that public schools are funded at levels that allow districts to provide high-quality instruction, maintain essential programs, and respond to changing educational needs.

- Restore a minimum funding requirement for education lottery revenues, ensuring a predictable share supports public schools.
- Ensure education funding keeps pace with student needs and inflation.
- Prioritize investments in proven programs such as early childhood education, teacher preparation, student health services, and academic support programs.
- Support innovative public school delivery models (specialized academies, virtual programs, and program-based pathways) that respond to evolving student and family needs.
- Support strategic facility planning and right-sizing of school infrastructure to address enrollment shifts caused by demographic change, rural population decline, and the growth of alternative education options.

*North Carolina ranks 47th in the nation in school funding adequacy according to the 2026 Adequacy and Fairness of State School Finance Systems Report. At the same time, the share of lottery revenue directed toward education has declined significantly from the 35% originally promised when the lottery was created in 2005 to approximately 20% in 2024.<sup>1</sup>*

#### Why It Matters

*Stable and adequate funding ensures schools can provide strong instructional programs, maintain staffing levels, and respond to new learning models that families increasingly demand. Investing in public schools strengthens local communities and supports the long-term economic competitiveness of North Carolina. Additionally, many districts are experiencing enrollment pressures due to declining birth rates, rural population changes, and the expansion of alternative education options. Maintaining aging facilities at reduced capacity strains local budgets and can divert resources away from instruction and building maintenance.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://publicschoolsfirstnc.org/resources/fact-sheets/the-facts-on-the-nc-education-lottery/>

## 2) Nationally Competitive Compensation and Benefits

North Carolina must establish a compensation and benefits system that allows the state to recruit and retain highly qualified educators in a competitive national labor market.

- Increase starting teacher pay to at least \$50,000.
- Ensure compensation reflects professional responsibility, licensure requirements, and advanced degrees.
- Provide annual raises that at minimum match cost-of-living adjustments (COLA/CPI).
- Eliminate the salary plateau between years 15–25, ensuring consistent step increases throughout an educator’s career.
- Address salary compression caused by reliance on internationally recruited teachers, ensuring compensation structures do not undercut wages for North Carolina educators.<sup>2</sup>
- Restore master’s degree pay for relevant advanced degrees.
- Restore retiree health benefits for newly hired educators.
- Ensure affordable State Health Plan premiums for educators, particularly veteran teachers.

*North Carolina ranked 42nd in starting teacher pay and 38th in average teacher salary in FY 2022–23, with average compensation \$13,038 below the national average. When adjusted for inflation, educators earn approximately \$17,000 less than they did in 2000. At the same time, teachers with 15–25 years of experience receive minimal step increases, and recent adjustments equated to roughly 1.55% growth during a period when the Consumer Price Index averaged approximately 3%.<sup>3</sup> Increases in State Health Plan premiums and the elimination of retiree health benefits for new hires have significantly reduced the competitiveness of the profession.*

### Why This Matters

*Competitive compensation and benefits are essential to recruit qualified educators, retain experienced teachers, and maintain stability in North Carolina classrooms. Strengthening educator compensation is an investment in student success, workforce development, and the state’s long-term economic growth.*

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of State, BridgeUSA J-1 Teacher Program (22 CFR §62.24).

<sup>3</sup> <https://publicschoolsfirstnc.org/resources/fact-sheets/the-facts-on-teacher-pay/>

### **3) Accountability & Fiscal Responsibility in the Opportunity Scholarship Program**

North Carolina should ensure that taxpayer funds used for private school vouchers meet strong standards for accountability, transparency, and equitable access.

- Restore income eligibility limits for the Opportunity Scholarship Program by repealing provisions of HB 259 (2023) that removed income caps.
- Slow the rapid expansion of voucher appropriations, including funding increases authorized through HB 10 (2024).
- Require private schools receiving public funds to meet basic accountability and transparency standards, including:
  - nondiscrimination protections for students
  - financial transparency and reporting
  - academic performance reporting comparable to public schools.

*Opportunity Scholarship appropriations are projected to reach \$8.75 billion cumulatively by 2034-35 following recent legislative expansions. Since the removal of income limits, the majority of applicants—55%—now come from higher-income families, including 18% from households earning over \$259,740 annually.<sup>4</sup>*

*At the same time, analysis of participating schools found that 88% of schools receiving significant voucher funding had at least one policy allowing discrimination based on factors such as religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation, academics, or lifestyle.<sup>5</sup>*

#### Why It Matters

*Public funds should be used responsibly and equitably. Strong accountability standards help ensure that taxpayer dollars support student success, fair access, and responsible stewardship of public education resources, while maintaining strong public schools that serve the vast majority of North Carolina students.*

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<sup>4</sup> North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA). **Opportunity Scholarship Program Applicant Data, 2024–2025.**

<sup>5</sup> *Public Schools First NC*. Private School Discrimination Policies and Opportunity Scholarship Participation Analysis (2022-23).

#### **4) Collective Bargaining Rights**

*North Carolina law prohibits public employee collective bargaining. Under N.C. Gen. Stat. §95-98, contracts between government employers and labor unions are invalid, preventing teachers and other public employees from negotiating compensation, benefits, or working conditions through collective bargaining.*

##### Why It Matters

*Allowing educators to collectively negotiate employment conditions would strengthen teacher recruitment, retention, and workplace collaboration, helping school districts address staffing challenges and support stable learning environments for students. Research consistently shows that schools with stronger educator voice in decision-making experience lower turnover and more stable instructional environments, which directly benefits student learning.<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> Igersoll, R., & May, H. (2012). The Magnitude, Destinations, and Determinants of Mathematics and Science Teacher Turnover. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 34(4), 435–464.