



NORTH CAROLINA PTA LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

The bylaws of the National PTA and the North Carolina PTA both provide that a core purpose of PTA is "to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children."

The 2021 - 2022 Legislative Advocacy Priorities will guide North Carolina PTA's work during the 2021-2022 year and thereafter until modified by the NCPTA Legislative Advocacy Chair.

The NCPTA Legislative Chair will modify and add advocacy priorities as they arise and present themselves. This document includes but is not limited to all of the programs, initiatives, legislation, and policies that the North Carolina PTA will encourage, support, and advocate for on behalf of children in North Carolina.

In keeping with the North Carolina PTA's mission and support of our existing and long-standing policies, the North Carolina 2021 - 2022 State Legislative Advocacy Priorities are as follows:

NCPTA will advocate, encourage, and support initiatives that positively impact children at all government levels-- local, state, and federal. NCPTA will continue to advocate for substantial funding, highly qualified, licensed, and certified teachers and administrators in all schools. We believe that every child should have access to a world-class education, allowing them to reach their full potential by facilitating academic and cultural excellence using scholarly research and proven methods led by educators.

SCHOOL FUNDING

The state government in North Carolina is required by law to ensure that every school system has sufficient funds to provide every child with the opportunity for a well-rounded education as defined by the North Carolina Supreme Court and the laws of the state. Local governments also provide funds, but the state is required to make sure the total amount of funding is adequate and appropriate. The national average for per-pupil spending in 2019 was \$12,612 compared to NC's per-pupil spending of \$10,165. Over the past decade, per-pupil spending has declined by 6% in NC, resulting in our state's ranking of 6th lowest in the nation (WestEd 2019 report). North Carolina ranks 45th in school spending and 47th in funding.

NCPTA will advocate, encourage, and support initiatives that positively impact children at all government levels-- local, state, and federal. NCPTA will continue to promote, support, and advocate for robust and appropriate funding, highly qualified licensed and certified teachers, and administrators in all schools. We believe that every child should have access to a world-class education, allowing them to reach their full potential by facilitating academic and cultural excellence using scholarly research and proven methods led by educators.

North Carolina PTA will support initiatives as well as encourage and advocate for legislation and policies that:

- Support funding formulas that will provide the necessary operational funding for all schools.
- Allows for ample capital funding for all schools, including statewide assistance in the form of bond issuances or other programs to help fund and meet local capital needs.
- Support initiatives that will provide licensed and certified educators for every classroom and licensed administrators for every school.
- Support full funding of the Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Fund.
- Allows for the exemption of public schools from the state sales tax.
- Allows for the raising of teacher salaries to the national average.
- Provide an increase in per-pupil funding.
- Provide complete funding of the Federal funding program to support the requirements of the “Every Student Succeeds Act” program.
- Support efforts for the maintenance and total funding of the Low Wealth Supplemental Fund.
- Provide school districts with funds sufficient enough to guarantee the complete funding of all the funding formulas.
- Support legislation that further clarifies the process, procedure, and definitions related to the low-performing school process.
- Allows for increasing funding to replace every crumbling infrastructure (especially in rural areas of North Carolina).

TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

NCPTA recognizes that every school’s success depends on the teachers and administrators in collaboration with parents, families, businesses, and the overall community.

North Carolina PTA will support initiatives as well as encourage and advocate for legislation and policies that:

- Compensate teachers adequately to reward their essential work to our society, which encourages them to stay in the profession and attract additional teachers.
- Increase the supply of licensed and certified educators, expand the pathways to becoming a teacher to more universities, and local teacher development programs to replenish the diminishing teacher workforce.
- Develop opportunities to increase a more racially diverse teaching pool. NC must restore its teacher pipeline and increase diversity in the profession.

- Support and expand mentor programs to help new teachers.
- Provide adequate professional development for all teachers throughout their careers.
- Ensure that trained and effective administrators lead every school.
- Support an efficient hiring system for all school employees that will provide a competitive salary, health coverage, and other necessary benefits for all school employees.
- Will support all educators' fair and equitable evaluation tools that will guide their ongoing development, moving away from student test scores as the primary determination.
- Increase the number of fellowship opportunities for Historically Black Colleges and Universities targeting our rural and vulnerable communities.
- Recruit and retain a more racially diverse teacher workforce in Pre K-12 schools. Research shows that students perform better overall in their educational experience when they have had a teacher of the same racial background.
- Helps to restore the North Carolina teacher pipeline, being mindful of the need to increase diversity in the profession.
- Invest in teacher and principal training programs to address shortages, improve retention and increase mentoring support and professional development, especially for new teachers.
- Provide financial and other incentives for college students to select education as a major.

PARENT, CAREGIVER, FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Parents, caregivers, and their children are the primary consumers of our nation and state's public education system. Over 40 years of data show that family engagement in schools has a drastic impact on student achievement and school improvement. However, many states and school districts need to make more family engagement investments and ensure parents should have a seat at the table when decisions are made and work with parents and families as partners throughout the school year.

All schools need support and engagement from parents, caregivers, families, and communities as they are all an integral part of a school's success. North Carolina PTA will continue to help facilitate and further this engagement.

North Carolina PTA will support initiatives as well as encourage and advocate for legislation and policies that:

- Encourage parents, caregivers, families, and communities to become more engaged in their children's education and help them understand the inner workings to support their education and success.

- Encourage teachers and administrators to welcome parents, caregivers, families, and communities to engage in meaningful decision-making opportunities centering on their child.
- Encourage elected officials to support ongoing parental and family engagement in public schools by providing special funding for parenting and family skill-development and other educational opportunities to support their child's education.
- Ensure state and local education agencies and schools use federal funding to support evidence-based family engagement programs as required by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).
- Provide ongoing training and professional development on effective family engagement practices for educators and school-based personnel.
- Include evidence-based family engagement strategies throughout the entire education continuum from early childhood through postsecondary exploration and career opportunities.
- Support meaningful engagement of parents and families at the state, district, and school level, on an ongoing basis, in the creation of education policies, especially those that directly impact students and families.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the primary federal law authorizing state and local aid for special education and related services for children with disabilities. IDEA requires states to provide a free and appropriate public education to children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment possible. North Carolina PTA is committed to ensuring students with special needs have access to opportunities that make them college and career-ready and that parents are closely involved in the process. Every child deserves a high-quality education. The North Carolina PTA will work tirelessly to ensure all children, including those with special needs, have access to an optimum learning environment.

There are over 203,000 children in NC identified as children with disabilities. COVID-19 and the move to virtual learning has resulted in and caused significant and negative impacts on these students. Some children with disabilities simply cannot learn in an online environment. Many have lost access to helping professionals, therapists, and assistive technology when their schools closed. As these vulnerable students return to school buildings, they will require additional support due to lost instructional time and require help resetting their emotional and social functioning needs.

North Carolina PTA will support initiatives as well as encourage and advocate for legislation and policies that:

- Remove the cap on special education funding to allow coverage of all eligible children.
- Increase spending levels to fund special education service costs fully.
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- Ensure students with special needs are college and career-ready by receiving quality instruction and support from teachers, school counselors, and other specialized school support personnel that have completed the state licensure or certification process.
- Require schools to use positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) as an alternative to exclusionary school discipline practices such as in and out-of-school suspensions.
- Increase funding for Parent Training and Information (PTI) Centers to teach families of children with different abilities how to support and advocate for their child.

HEALTH & WELLNESS

The education of children to a great degree depends on their overall health. Our public schools must help children learn the value of balanced nutrition, sensible exercise, and good overall health. North Carolina PTA will support, encourage and advocate for policies at all levels of government as well as for school programs that help to maintain the health and wellness of all children and policies that will bring health care to families who are in need of it, especially low-income families, rural families, Black, LatinX and immigrant families, along with those who have been the most disproportionately harmed by the pandemic.

North Carolina PTA will support initiatives as well as encourage and advocate for legislation and policies that:

- Support the medical and mental health of all students K-12 with innovative funding solutions for increased non-teaching staff, including but not limited to nurses, counselors, psychologists, and social workers in schools, provided in-person or according to the best practices in telehealth access.
- Close the “coverage gap” by accepting federal funds to expand the NC Medicaid program.
- Merge the NC Health Choice program with NC Medicaid. This step would reduce administrative duplication, and ensure continuous, quality coverage for enrolled children – particularly those with special health care needs.
- **Recommendation:** Address student mental health, suicide prevention, and physical health needs by appropriating at least \$10M to decrease the dire shortage of school nurses in North Carolina.

Additionally, COVID-19 health is unlike any health crisis that has been experienced in our state and country before. The effects of financial uncertainty and social isolation are taking a toll on families across the state of North Carolina. Addressing the diverse needs of our state’s most negatively impacted populations is critical to ensuring that we all can make a strong recovery.

The measures we recommend will increase access to health care for those who need it most right now.

- Young children with special health care needs
- Youth in need of crisis support

- The more than one million North Carolinians – including hundreds of thousands of parents and caregivers who are currently weathering this pandemic with no health coverage.

FOOD SECURITY & CHILD NUTRITION

In North Carolina, hunger is a critical threat, and it was urgent before the pandemic. One in five children in North Carolina live in families that are considered “food insecure.” Food insecurity can mean being worried about running out of food before your next paycheck, cutting the size of children’s meals, or skipping meals entirely because there isn’t enough money for groceries. In North Carolina, we have the 10th highest rate of food insecurity in the nation, with nearly 480,000 children without enough to eat, and that was before COVID-19.

North Carolina PTA will support initiatives as well as encourage and advocate for legislation and policies that:

- Support the NC Farm to School program:
 - Seek funding to include \$10.7 million recurring and \$1.7 million nonrecurring from the NC General Assembly to increase school nutrition programs’ ability to purchase North Carolina grown food.
- Support the NC School Nutrition Indirect Costs Policy/Financial Solvency Initiative:
 - Amend the statute to require three months of operating costs in the school nutrition program account before indirect costs can be assessed and capping the amount of indirect costs that can be assessed at 8%.
- Support the NC School Lunch Reduced Price Co-Pay initiative:
 - Seek recurring annual funding to eliminate the reduced-price co-pay for school lunches. Prevent schools from charging school employees and parents more for the same meal.
- Support the Categorical Eligibility School Meal Qualification Policy Initiative:
 - Change state policy to reduce the administrative burden on school nutrition programs.
- Support GAP Certification
 - Support CFSA in getting funding to be included in the state budget to cover the costs of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Certification for farmers, which is required to sell to schools.
- Boosts child health by including robust school meal requirements on milk, whole grains, fruits, vegetables, calorie limits, and sugar and sodium limits.
- Requires schools to make nutrition information more readily available and enhance parents’ and caregivers’ opportunities to participate in the development of local school wellness policies.
- Ensures all students have access to school meal programs.

- Delivers technical assistance and resources to schools that are not meeting the nutrition standards.
- Establishes guidelines to provide adequate time during the school day for students to eat and to recreate.

SCHOOL TECHNOLOGY

Protecting children’s safety and their school records online and ensuring their access to high-quality digital educational opportunities is critical in the 21st century. Meaningful education data can provide positive benefits to students’ academic growth and assist teachers and families in creating more personalized learning plans to meet every child’s needs. Federal and state laws must be updated to better protect our children and their educational information online while increasing students’ access to the technological services they need to succeed in a 21st-century learning environment.

North Carolina PTA recognizes that much of learning today takes place online, and it is essential for every student to be able to continue their education at home. Unfortunately, there are still far too many children in North Carolina and the U.S. who lack access to adequate internet services when they leave school. According to a 2018 report from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), nearly 39% of households in the U.S. with school-age children lack access to the internet.

North Carolina PTA will support initiatives as well as encourage and advocate for legislation and policies that:

- Ensure children’s identities are protected online, and families and students have reasonable control over the collection, storage, and use of relevant personal education information—parents should know their rights under the law to protect their child’s personal and educational information.
- Update current laws to improve the protection of student educational records and the collection of information gathered online.
- Increases funding for technology in classrooms and technology-related curriculum.
- Decrease the digital divide and expand student access to broadband services at home and outside the school building.
- Increases access to high-speed internet for students and staff (Broadband, WiFi, and Internet) and that every child has access to 21st-century technology.
- Provide teachers and school officials with the training they need to ensure data is meaningfully used for educational purposes while keeping it protected and secured.
- Ensure parents and families have access to educational information and can interpret and use this data to support and improve their child’s education.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

It is critical to North Carolina PTA's mission to empower all families with the tools and practices they need to effectively engage in their child's education and development, starting at the earliest stages. High-quality pre-kindergarten programs are critical in preparing high-risk children for success in grades K-12. The advantages of attending Pre-K last throughout elementary school, holding steady for both high and low-income students. Research has shown clear benefits, but many children cannot enroll due to insufficient funding and fees required. Only 23% of four-year-old children in NC have access to Pre-K. This percentage is below the national average. There are nearly 33,000 children who are eligible but not enrolled due to lack of access. Experts suggest that many more eligible children do not even apply due to the long waiting list. Several lower-income counties are forced to refuse state funding because they do not have the funds to cover the difference between what the state pays and the programs' cost.

A child's first years are instrumental to their future development. Children with access to high-quality early education programming show increased graduation rates, higher education attainment, and lower incarceration rates. It's vital to North Carolina PTA's mission to empower all families with the tools and practices they need to effectively engage in their child's education and development, starting at the earliest stages.

North Carolina children need universal access to high-quality pre-schools to prepare them to enter kindergarten and provide a strong foundation throughout school. Universal Pre-K provides lifelong, positive results for children, their communities, and our state.

North Carolina PTA will support initiatives as well as encourage and advocate for legislation and policies that:

- Ensure and implement universal access to high-quality Pre-K.
- Ensure federal and state resources are provided to make early education programs affordable, available, and accessible for low-income families.
- Approve funding to set the child care subsidy-reimbursement rate for qualifying early childhood care and education programs to either the statewide market rate or the established county market rate, whichever is more.
 - In doing so, the statewide market rate would serve as a floor for reimbursing providers and create more significant equity in funding across the state. This will allow communities to recover from COVID-19 and ensure greater sustainability, moving forward more quickly.
- Establish professional standards and provide ongoing training and professional development for early learning and childcare providers.
- Improve and invest in the early childhood educator pipeline.
- Enhance coordination between early childhood education programs and elementary schools to improve the transition for children entering kindergarten.

- Require family engagement policies to develop, implement, and evaluate all early childhood programs, including home visiting programs.

EQUITABLE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The basis of equality of opportunity is the belief that every American child deserves a fair start in life no matter the circumstances of their background. Public education can give even the most impoverished child a chance to excel through hard work, individual initiative, and excellent teachers' nurturing guidance. The Leandro case remains one of the biggest education policy issues in North Carolina. Per the NC Supreme Court ruling in the Leandro case in 1997 and 2004, NC has a constitutional obligation to ensure all children have access to a sound, basic education. This includes equitable access to resources and opportunities, well-trained teachers, and adequate per-pupil funding. The state continues to fall short of this mandate. The WestEd report included eight recommendations for how North Carolina can comply with the directive they have been given.

North Carolina PTA will support initiatives as well as encourage and advocate for legislation and policies that:

- Revise the state funding model to provide adequate, efficient, and equitable resources. These resources should be aligned to student needs in every school and district.
- Provide a qualified, well-prepared, and diverse teaching staff in every school. Working conditions and staffing structures should enable all staff members to do their job effectively and grow professionally while supporting all their students' academic, personal, and social growth.
- Provide a qualified and well-prepared principal in every school. Principals should be prepared and supported to effectively lead continuous school improvement, support the use of a well-designed curriculum aligned with state standards, and establish a culture in which all students feel welcome, safe, supported, and challenged as learners.
- Provide all at-risk students with the opportunity to attend high-quality early childhood programs. These programs should develop all students' personal, social, cognitive, and language skills in order to prepare them to begin kindergarten fully ready to learn.
- Direct resources, opportunities, and initiatives to economically disadvantaged students. A strong focus should be placed on addressing economically disadvantaged students' needs to address the greater challenges in those contexts.
- Revise the student assessment system and school accountability system.
- Build an effective regional and statewide system of support for the improvement of low-performing and high-poverty schools.
- Ensures that an expert panel is convened to assist the Court in monitoring state policies, plans, programs, and progress. This monitoring should ensure the state's ongoing compliance with the Leandro requirements.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Public education is our nation's great equalizer—in our schools, our children have access to opportunities, experiences, and knowledge regardless of their race, religion, ability, or socioeconomic status. Our public schools will provide the educated, innovative, and creative workforce of tomorrow—the entrepreneurs, engineers, scientists, artists, and political leaders who will ensure that our nation will flourish in an increasingly competitive global economy. However, the public education system must be strengthened and supported with adequate funding.

North Carolina PTA will support initiatives as well as encourage and advocate for legislation and policies that will:

- Guarantee public funds are not diverted to any private school choice proposal and/or voucher system, including tax credit scholarship programs.
- Robustly fund public schools to ensure students have access to a well-rounded education and receive high-quality instruction from well-prepared teachers.
- Ensure all public-school choice and public charter school programs are accountable to the public, open to all students, comply with federal health and safety and discrimination laws, and are supported by public funds that do not divert funding from non-charter public schools.

STATE ASSESSMENTS

North Carolina's accountability system should undergo a comprehensive review to develop its defined purpose(s) and revamp the testing program to achieve the stated goals.

- Advocate for a reduced emphasis on state-mandated testing that penalizes the student rather than guiding instruction and identifying learning problems.

A-F ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

- Monitor legislation impacting the state's A-F system. Advocate for an accountability system that more broadly reviews school performance and includes a family engagement component.

Reopening of Schools

North Carolina PTA understands that the reopening of our state's preK-12 schools during the COVID-19 pandemic is vital to ensure the continuity of education. However, it should not outweigh the safety and the mental and physical health of our students, educators, school employees, and families.

North Carolina PTA will support initiatives as well as encourage and advocate for legislation and policies that:

- Plans for reopening shall incorporate the best available science and infectious disease doctors and health practitioners' expertise. Plans should also strictly follow the most up-to-date Center

for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines, including but not limited to reasonable social distancing, rigorous sanitizing processes, and viral screening and testing protocols.

- North Carolina PTA believes that our state's school districts must plan and align logistics, educational strategies, and public health approaches into one coherent response. We recognize that there will not be a one-size-fits-all process for the reopening of schools.

Inclusive stakeholder engagement is essential for effective decision-making and implementation.

- Any decision to reopen schools must involve parents, families, students, educators, school employees, public health experts, and community members in planning, implementing, and monitoring the 2021-2022 school year.

The presence of the parent and student voice and attention to unique family situations is critical to the successful reopening of schools.

- Effective stakeholder engagement must be inclusive, transparent, provide multiple opportunities for input, and include meaningful, clear, and concise communication. All information and protocols should be disseminated to parents, families, students, and communities, using current best practices for family and student engagement. Furthermore, all communications must be accessible to parents with disabilities and available in other languages.
- North Carolina Schools must be prepared to address the transition back to school, the trauma of a pandemic, and the many instructional issues, including the effects of learning loss and the digital divide.

North Carolina students will likely return to schools with serious gaps in their learning and retention and unique social-emotional needs.

- North Carolina Schools must be prepared to identify indicators, such as symptoms of trauma, learning loss, and/or retention, and have the requisite funding and community partnerships to effectively support the student and their family as reopening occurs.
- North Carolina school districts must ensure multiple modes of instruction and scheduling plans are developed in order to remediate and support students wherever they are on the continuum. Close adherence to local and state academic standards is imperative as we begin the long, arduous, and as yet unknown process of reopening our state's preK-12 schools.

North Carolina PTA strongly supports a robust federal and state investment in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which includes investments in public health, public schools, universities, hospitals, and local and state governments.

- North Carolina PTA urges the federal and state governments to provide the funding necessary to ensure that when our schools reopen, they have the resources needed to do so as safely and successfully as possible. Many of our state's school districts are already working without the resources necessary to provide an equitable education and critical supports to all students.

- The added strain of recovery from a worldwide pandemic will wreak havoc on all localities and require significant, immediate, and continuing support from federal and state funding. While our public schools have been woefully under-resourced, this next phase of “returning to school” is an opportunity to visualize what public education looks like in a post-pandemic era, to ensure every child can reach their fullest potential regardless of zip code.