

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
COUNTY OF WAKE

IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE  
SUPERIOR COURT DIVISION  
95-CVS-1158

HOKE COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION;  
HALIFAX COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION;  
ROBESON COUNTY BOARD OF  
EDUCATION; CUMBERLAND COUNTY  
BOARD OF EDUCATION; VANCE COUNTY  
BOARD OF EDUCATION; RANDY L. HASTY,  
individually and as Guardian Ad Litem of  
RANDELL B. HASTY; STEVEN R. SUNKEL,  
individually and as Guardian Ad Litem of  
ANDREW J. SUNKEL; LIONEL WHIDBEE,  
individually and as Guardian Ad Litem of JEREMY  
L. WHIDBEE; TYRONE T. WILLIAMS,  
individually and as Guardian Ad Litem of  
TREVELYN L. WILLIAMS; D.E. LOCKLEAR,  
JR., individually and as Guardian Ad Litem of  
JASON E. LOCKLEAR; ANGUS B. THOMPSON  
II, individually and as Guardian Ad Litem of  
VANDALIAH J. THOMPSON; MARY  
ELIZABETH LOWERY, individually and as  
Guardian Ad Litem of LANNIE RAE LOWERY,  
JENNIE G. PEARSON, individually and as  
Guardian Ad Litem of SHARESE D. PEARSON;  
BENITA B. TIPTON, individually and as Guardian  
Ad Litem of WHITNEY B. TIPTON; DANA  
HOLTON JENKINS, individually and as Guardian  
Ad Litem of RACHEL M. JENKINS; LEON R.  
ROBINSON, individually and as Guardian Ad  
Litem of JUSTIN A. ROBINSON,

Plaintiffs,

and

CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG BOARD OF  
EDUCATION,

Plaintiff-Intervenor,

and

RAFAEL PENN; CLIFTON JONES, individually  
and as Guardian Ad Litem of CLIFTON

MATTHEW JONES; DONNA JENKINS  
DAWSON, individually and as Guardian Ad Litem  
of NEISHA SHEMAY DAWSON and TYLER  
ANTHONY HOUGH-JENKINS,

Plaintiff-Intervenors,

v.

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA and the STATE  
BOARD OF EDUCATION,

Defendants,

and

CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG BOARD OF  
EDUCATION,

Realigned Defendant.

### **COMPREHENSIVE REMEDIAL PLAN**

In *Leandro v. State of North Carolina*, 346 N.C. 336, 488 S.E.2d 249 (1997), the Supreme Court affirmed the fundamental right of every child to have the opportunity to receive a sound basic education. Despite significant State efforts to improve educational opportunities since that decision, and the subsequent decision in *Hoke County Board of Education v. State of North Carolina*, 358 N.C. 605, 599 S.E.2d 365 (2004), this constitutional right has been and continues to be denied to many North Carolina children.

On January 21, 2020, with the benefit of the findings, research, and recommendations of WestEd's report, *Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina*, and the Governor's Commission on Access to Sound Basic Education, this Court entered a *Consent Order* negotiated by the State Board of Education; the Office of the Governor and North Carolina Department of Justice (representing the State); the Plaintiff school districts; and the Plaintiff-Intervenors (*January 2020 Consent Order*). In the *January 2020 Consent Order*, the Court reiterated prior findings in this case and emphasized that North Carolina's PreK-12 education system leaves too many students behind, especially students of color and economically disadvantaged students. As a result, thousands of students are not being prepared for full participation in the global, interconnected economy and the society in which they will live, work, and engage as citizens. Therefore, the Court ordered the State Defendants, in consultation with each other and the plaintiff-parties, to develop and present to the Court a *Comprehensive Remedial Plan* (Plan).

The specific objective of the Plan was to satisfy the State's and State Board of Education's obligations to assure every child the opportunity to obtain a sound basic education. The Plan was to include actions to be implemented by 2028 such that those actions would provide the opportunity for a sound basic education to all children in or before 2030. The Court ordered the State Defendants to include within the Plan the specific long-term actions that must be taken, a timeframe for implementation, an estimate of resources in addition to current funding, if any, necessary to complete those actions, and a proposal for monitoring implementation and assessing the outcomes of the Plan. While the Parties were consulting and developing the Plan, the

COVID-19 pandemic struck. The pandemic dramatically altered the landscape for our students, schools, state, and nation. In response, the General Assembly passed, and the Governor signed a series of bills intended to help address the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the State's residents. Those bills included the investment of federal Coronavirus Relief Funds from the CARES Act to support K-12 students during the crisis and to help K-12 public schools prepare to meet students' needs during the 2020-21 academic year. These funds were not intended to remedy the historical and unmet needs of children who are being denied the opportunity for a sound basic education but were intended to help mitigate the unavoidable loss of educational opportunities caused by the pandemic.

On June 15, 2020, the Parties submitted a *Joint Report to the Court on Sound Basic Education For All: Fiscal Year 2021 Action Plan For North Carolina (Joint Report)*. In the *Joint Report*, the Parties identified immediate action steps the State would take in Fiscal Year 2021 (2020-21) to begin to adequately address the constitutional violations in providing the opportunity for a sound basic education to all children in North Carolina. These steps were, in part, an effort to "front load" the Comprehensive Remedial Plan and initiate certain systemic changes recommended by WestEd and the Governor's Commission and adopted by this Court. The Court incorporated the substantive components of the *Joint Report* in a *Consent Order* filed on September 11, 2020 (*September 2020 Consent Order*). Due to the unprecedented and unanticipated impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, not all of these actions were implemented by the State in Fiscal Year 2021. Consequently, the State Defendants have committed to incorporating and implementing any unmet actions in the *Comprehensive Remedial Plan*.

The State Defendants now submit the broader *Comprehensive Remedial Plan* mandated in the Court's *January 2020 Consent Order* and *September 2020 Consent Order*. The Parties agree that the actions outlined in this Plan are the necessary and appropriate actions needed to address the constitutional violations in providing the opportunity for a sound basic education to all children in North Carolina. The State commits to meeting these actions under the timeframes set forth herein.

The Plan draws upon, among other things, WestEd's research and the Governor's Commission's recommendations. It addresses not only the key issues highlighted in the *Leandro* rulings but also identifies programs and resources to assist schools and school districts in mitigating the disproportionate impact the pandemic and resulting school closures have had on at-risk students and to improve their opportunities to obtain a sound basic education.

The Comprehensive Remedial Plan identifies both broad programs and discrete, individual action steps to be taken to achieve the overarching constitutional obligation to provide, -all children the opportunity to obtain a sound basic education in a public school. Each action is aligned to at least one of the seven key areas outlined in the Court's *January 2020 Consent Order*. Those components are:

1. A system of teacher development and recruitment that ensures each classroom is staffed with a high-quality teacher who is supported with early and ongoing professional learning and provided competitive pay;
2. A system of principal development and recruitment that ensures each school is led by a high-quality principal who is supported with early and ongoing professional learning and provided competitive pay;
3. A finance system that provides adequate, equitable, and predictable funding to school districts and, importantly, adequate resources to address the needs of all North Carolina schools and students, especially at-risk students as defined by the *Leandro* decisions;

4. An assessment and accountability system that reliably assesses multiple measures of student performance against the *Leandro* standard and provides accountability consistent with the *Leandro* standard;
5. An assistance and turnaround function that provides necessary support to low-performing schools and districts;
6. A system of early education that provides access to high-quality prekindergarten and other early childhood learning opportunities to ensure that all students at-risk of educational failure, regardless of where they live in the State, enter kindergarten on track for school success; and
7. An alignment of high school to postsecondary and career expectations, as well as the provision of early postsecondary and workforce learning opportunities, to ensure student readiness to all students in the State.

The Plan details the actions the State and State Board of Education are committed to taking and the corresponding goals that they intend to achieve by 2028, with the full educational benefits of these measures realized by 2030.

All Parties agree that the actions outlined in the Plan are necessary and appropriate actions that must be implemented to address the continuing constitutional violations and to provide the opportunity for a sound basic education to all children in North Carolina.

Consistent with the Court's mandate, the State Defendants have regularly consulted with the Plaintiff-parties in the development of the Comprehensive Remedial Plan.

## 2021 - 2028 ACTIONS

In his January 21, 2020 Consent Order, Judge David Lee identified seven required components to “address critical needs in public education and to ensure that the State is providing the opportunity for a sound, basic education to each North Carolina child, and further hold itself accountable for doing so.” Those seven key areas are

1. A system of teacher development and recruitment that ensures each classroom is staffed with a high-quality teacher who is supported with early and ongoing professional learning and provided competitive pay;
2. A system of principal development and recruitment that ensures each school is led by a high-quality principal who is supported with early and ongoing professional learning and provided competitive pay;
3. A finance system that provides adequate, equitable, and predictable funding to school districts and, importantly, adequate resources to address the needs of all North Carolina schools and students, especially at-risk students as defined by the *Leandro* decisions;
4. An assessment and accountability system that reliably assesses multiple measures of student performance against the *Leandro* standard and provides accountability consistent with the *Leandro* standard;
5. An assistance and turnaround function that provides necessary support to low-performing schools and districts;
6. A system of early education that provides access to high-quality prekindergarten and other early childhood learning opportunities to ensure that all students at-risk of educational failure, regardless of where they live in the State, enter kindergarten on track for school success; and
7. An alignment of high school to postsecondary and career expectations, as well as the provision of early postsecondary and workforce learning opportunities, to ensure student readiness to all students in the State.

The eight-year Comprehensive Remedial Plan is organized around those seven key areas outlined by Judge Lee. The Plan includes a series of actions, aligned to the seven key areas, and the discrete, individual action steps to be taken to achieve each overarching action. Each action also has a corresponding goal that the State and NC State Board of Education (NC SBE) intend to achieve by 2028, with the full educational benefits of these measures realized by 2030. The Parties agree that the actions outlined in this Plan are the necessary and appropriate actions needed to adequately address the constitutional requirement to provide the opportunity for a sound basic education to all children in North Carolina.

Consistent with the Court’s Order, included in the Comprehensive Remedial Plan is an Appendix that details the implementation timeline for each action step, as well as the estimated additional State investment necessary for each of the actions described in the Plan. For all action steps identified, the State and the NC SBE are committed to prioritizing the allocation of resources and personnel to achieve these goals.

While this Comprehensive Remedial Plan was under development, the COVID-19 pandemic struck and dramatically altered the landscape for our students, schools, state, and nation. With many schools closed across North Carolina for much of 2020, the pandemic has further exacerbated many of the inequities and challenges that are the focus of the *Leandro* case, particularly for the at-risk students who were the focus of the original *Leandro* rulings. While all children have experienced significant disruption or trauma, the pandemic’s public health, economic, and educational costs are disproportionately borne by Black, Latino, Native, and low-income North Carolinians, and the *Leandro* remedy implementation must prioritize providing resources for those students.

To address the impact of COVID-19 on schools and students, Congress has passed a series of bills to provide additional resources directly to school districts.

- In March 2020, Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), which provided funding to school districts through the Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER). These funds were intended to help school districts respond to the impact of COVID, including addressing the academic needs of students during the pandemic. North Carolina received \$390 million in ESSER funds, 90% of which were distributed to school districts and charter schools around the state based on the number of students from low-income families served. Districts and charter schools have until September 2022 to spend these funds.
- In December 2020, Congress passed the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), which provided additional funding through the Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief II Fund (ESSER II) to school districts. North Carolina received \$1.6 billion in ESSER II funding, 90% of which will be distributed to school districts and charter schools around the state also based on the number of students from low-income families served. Districts and charter schools have until September 2023 to spend the funding.
- In March 2021, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan, which includes more than \$120 billion for public schools across the country to help safely re-open schools and to mitigate the academic and social-emotional effects of the pandemic on students. North Carolina will receive an estimated \$3.6 billion for K-12 education, 90% of which will be distributed to school districts and charter schools around the state based on the number of students from low-income families served. Funds may be used for a variety of purposes, including addressing the unique needs of low-income children or students, children with disabilities, English language learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and foster care youth, and implementing full-service community schools. Districts and charter schools are required to use at least 20% of the funds to address learning loss. Districts and charter schools have until September 2024 to spend the funding. The American Rescue Plan also provides North Carolina with an estimated \$1.3 billion in supplemental funding for Child Care and Head Start.

To account for this increase in federal funding and current school district capacity to manage increased federal funding in the short-term, the implementation of the Comprehensive Remedial Plan, specifically the additional state investments in supplemental funding to districts, have been estimated to provide a larger scale up in the later years of the eight-year plan. Actions in the early years of the Plan are intended to lay the foundation for actions and investments in the later years of the plan and to support school districts in managing and maximizing new federal funding that will be critical in these next few years. The NC SBE and the Department of Public Instruction are developing plans to help build capacity in school districts to effectively maximize these funds. This work will also help to build capacity for school districts to maximize the additional state investments over the eight years of the Plan.

However, these federal funds are not intended to address, nor do they address, the significant and recurring needs that school districts face in providing a sound basic education to all students. The actions and investments identified in this Plan are intended to meet those significant and recurring needs over the long-term.

## **I. A Well Prepared, High Quality, and Supported Teacher in Every Classroom**

This section of the Action Plan addresses

*A system of teacher development and recruitment that ensures each classroom is staffed with a high-quality teacher who is supported with early and ongoing professional learning and provided competitive pay.*

*Hoke Cty. Bd. Educ. v. State*, No. 95 CVS 1158 (Sept. 11, 2020)

ACTIONS	2030 GOALS
Increase the pipeline of diverse, well-prepared teachers who enter through high-retention pathways and meet the needs of the State's public schools.	NC's public and private educator preparation programs (EPPs) will prepare 5,000 teachers per year.
Increase the pipeline of diverse, well-prepared teachers by expanding the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program.	The NC Teaching Fellows program will select 1,500 Fellows per year.
Support high quality teacher residency programs in high need rural and urban districts through a State matching grant program that leverages ESSA Title II funding.	Each high need rural and urban school district will have access to a high quality residency program that provides support for faculty advising, teacher tuition and stipends, and ongoing induction support.
Provide support for high quality teacher recruitment and development programs.	Each high need school district will have access to high quality teacher recruitment and development programs, including Grow-Your-Own and 2+2 programs to attract and prepare high school students, teacher assistants, and career professionals.
Provide support for Grow-Your-Own and 2+2 programs that help recruit and prepare teachers in high need communities.	
Significantly increase the racial and ethnic diversity of North Carolina's qualified and well-prepared teacher workforce and ensure all teachers employ culturally-responsive practices.	North Carolina's teacher workforce will better match the diversity of the State's student population.
Provide high quality comprehensive mentoring and induction support for novice teachers in their first three years of teaching to increase both their effectiveness and their retention.	All teachers with fewer than three years of teaching experience will be provided evidence-based, comprehensive induction services.
Implement differentiated staffing models that include advanced teaching roles and additional compensation to retain and extend the reach of high performing teachers.	All school districts will implement differentiated staffing models that include advanced teaching roles and additional compensation.
Develop a system to ensure that all North Carolina teachers have the opportunities they need for continued professional learning to improve and update their knowledge and practice.	All teachers will have access and time to participate in high quality programs that meet their individual professional growth needs.
Increase teacher compensation and enable low wealth districts to offer salaries and other compensation to make them competitive with more advantaged districts.	Salaries will be competitive with other states and with other career options that require similar levels of preparation, certification, and experience.
Low wealth districts and high-poverty schools will provide incentives for the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers.	

**A. Increase the pipeline of diverse, well-prepared teachers who enter through high-retention pathways and meet the needs of the State’s public schools.**

North Carolina had a very robust system for developing and supporting its teacher workforce through reforms and investments in the 1980s and 1990s, including incentives for strong candidates to prepare for, enter, and stay in teaching; rigorous standards for educator preparation; mentoring and induction for beginning teachers; rich professional development offerings; and teacher compensation approaching the national average.

These investments paid off, as there was a period in the 1990s when North Carolina virtually eliminated teacher shortages and had the greatest gains in student achievement of any state, along with the greatest narrowing of the achievement gap. However, most elements of this teacher workforce development and support system have since been reduced or eliminated (WestEd, 2019, p. 53).

North Carolina–trained teachers have the highest levels of effectiveness and retention of any major pathway in the State. Cutbacks in incentives for teaching and in capacity to prepare and retain teachers have produced shortages, which are often filled by lateral-entry teachers, who have the lowest levels of effectiveness and retention. To meet the goal of preparing 5,000 teachers per year, the State will strengthen capacity within North Carolina’s educator preparation programs, both public and private, and increase the number of graduates.

- i. **Goal:** NC’s public and private educator preparation programs will prepare 5,000 teachers per year.
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  1. Expand the staff of the Professional Educator Preparation and Standards Commission to increase their capacity to coordinate efforts to recruit, prepare, retain, and support the State’s teaching workforce on behalf of the NC State Board of Education and the NC Department of Public Instruction. This action step requires a recurring appropriation through 2028 to achieve the stated goal.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  2. Develop a plan for implementing a licensure and compensation reform model designed to offer early, inclusive, clear pathways into the profession, reward excellence and advancement, and encourage retention. The plan should include a focus on restoring respect for the teaching profession, building a more diverse, quality teaching force, increasing instructional capabilities, enticing more young professionals, career switchers, and out-of-staters to teaching, and investing in teachers, students and NC’s economy. This action step requires a non-recurring appropriation.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, University of North Carolina, NC Community College System
  3. Undertake an analysis of the resources and structures necessary to allow educator preparation programs in the State’s institutions of higher education to increase their recruitment, graduation, and retention of teachers and instructional support personnel to meet the State’s goal. This action step requires a non-recurring appropriation.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Public Instruction, University of North Carolina, NC Independent Colleges and Universities
  4. Provide personnel and programmatic support for TeachNC, an initiative that seeks to provide accurate and compelling information about the teaching profession to both potential candidates and the general public. TeachNC targets students who are considering their

career options and mid-career professionals who may be interested in a career change. TeachNC features a multimedia communications campaign and serves as a one-stop resource for potential teacher candidates. This action step requires a recurring appropriation to achieve the stated goal beginning in fiscal year 2022.

a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

5. Provide support for the expansion of student recruitment programs, including high school-based career academy programs, the North Carolina Teacher Cadet Program, and Teaching as a Profession, that encourage students to engage in the teaching profession and enable them to take college courses in education and areas relevant to their interests in education. This action step requires a recurring appropriation through 2028 to achieve the stated goal.

a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, University of North Carolina, NC Foundation for Public School Children

iii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2023:**

1. In accordance with the resource analysis described above, provide the targeted funding and structures necessary to increase the number of teachers and instructional support personnel graduating from NC educator preparation programs by 10 percent annually. Cost estimates for this action step will be determined on the basis of the analysis described above.

a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Public Instruction, University of North Carolina, NC Independent Colleges and Universities

2. In accordance with the resource analysis described above, provide the targeted funding and structures necessary to increase the number of teachers and instructional support personnel of color graduating from NC educator preparation programs by 5 percent annually. Cost estimates for this action step will be determined on the basis of the analysis described above.

a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Public Instruction, University of North Carolina, NC Independent Colleges and Universities

3. Study and develop a plan to implement and fund a statewide system or entity to coordinate, enhance, and evaluate efforts to recruit, place, and retain teacher candidates and beginning teachers between institutions of higher education and school districts. This action step requires a non-recurring appropriation.

a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, University of North Carolina, NC Community College System, NC Independent Colleges and Universities

iv. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2024:**

1. Based on plan developed from above study, implement and fund a statewide system or entity to coordinate, enhance, and evaluate efforts to recruit, place, and retain teacher candidates and beginning teachers among institutions of higher education and school districts. Cost estimates for this action step will be determined based on the study described above.

a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, University of North Carolina, NC Community College System, NC Independent Colleges and Universities

**B. Increase the pipeline of diverse, well-prepared teachers by expanding the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program.**

In 1986, to ensure that highly talented candidates could be recruited and could afford to enter teaching, North Carolina launched a fellowship program to recruit high school students into teacher preparation. By 2011, the highly selective North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program had recruited

nearly 11,000 candidates into teaching. The fellowship paid all college costs, including an enhanced and fully funded teacher education program, in return for several years of teaching in the State.

The program expanded the teaching pool by bringing a disproportionate number of male, minority, and STEM teachers into the profession. One study found that after seven years, Fellows' retention rates in teaching exceeded 75 percent, with many other alumni holding positions as school administrators, central office leaders, or in higher education. Another study found that North Carolina Teaching Fellows were among the most effective teachers in the State, even more effective than other graduates of University of North Carolina educator preparation programs.

In 2018, the State reinstated a limited version of the program, providing \$6 million to serve up to 160 Fellows annually (WestEd, 2019, p. 56).

**i. Goal:** The Teaching Fellows program will select 1,500 Fellows per year.

**ii. Action Steps Initiated in Fiscal Year 2021:**

1. Increase the number of eligible teacher preparation programs from the current 5 to 8 to include high quality programs that serve additional regions of the state and to include minority-serving universities.

**a. Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, University of North Carolina, NC Independent Colleges and Universities

**iii. Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**

1. Increase funding and pursue policies to recruit and support up to 1,500 Teaching Fellows annually to:

- Incrementally scale the number of Fellows selected annually so that the program is selecting 1,500 Teaching Fellows by fiscal year 2028.
- Increase the number of eligible teacher preparation programs to appropriately accommodate the number of Fellows served in the program and to include high quality programs that serve additional regions of the State and to include minority-serving universities.
- Authorize the Teaching Fellows Commission to expand eligible certification areas beyond STEM and special education to address significant vacancies in the State.
- Provide planning, training, and ongoing support for program leaders and Fellows, including training on topics such as culturally-responsive teaching, teaching students with disabilities, and trauma-informed teaching.
- Implement targeted recruitment strategies that inform and attract candidates of color to apply to be Teaching Fellows.

These action steps require incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.

**a. Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, University of North Carolina, NC Independent Colleges and Universities

**C. Support high quality teacher residency programs in high need rural and urban districts through a State matching grant program that leverages ESSA Title II funding.**

“High-quality residency programs provide teacher preparation candidates with a full-year of postgraduate clinical training in a university–school district partnership program that provides financial support tied to earning a credential at the end of the year and a commitment to remain teaching in the district for three to five years” (WestEd, 2019, p. 64).

Research suggests that well-designed and well-implemented teacher residency models can create long-term benefits for districts, for schools, and ultimately and most importantly, for the students they serve. Key benefits include:

- Recruitment: Research suggests that residencies bring greater gender and racial diversity into the teaching workforce.
  - Retention: National studies of teacher retention indicate that around 20-30 percent of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years, and that attrition is even higher (often reaching 50 percent or more) in high-poverty schools and in high-need subject areas, like the ones in which residents teach.
  - Student Outcomes: Because most residency programs are still in their infancy, only a few studies have examined program impact on student achievement. Early studies, however, indicate that students of teachers who participated in a residency program outperform students of non-residency prepared teachers on select State assessments (Guha, Hyler, and Darling-Hammond, 2016, p. ii).
- i. **Goal:** Each high need rural and urban school district will have access to a high-quality residency program that provides support for faculty advising, teacher tuition and stipends, and ongoing induction support.
  - ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2023:**
    - 1. Provide support for high quality teacher preparation residency programs in high need rural and urban districts through a matching grant program. Teacher preparation residency programs will provide support for faculty advising, teacher tuition and stipends, and ongoing induction support. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
      - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, University of North Carolina, NC Independent Colleges and Universities

#### **D. Provide support for high quality teacher recruitment and development programs.**

“Grow-Your-Own educator preparation programs recruit and train local community members, career changers, paraprofessionals, and others currently working in schools. Drawing on their connection to the community, local graduates and community members offer a solution to teacher shortages while often increasing the diversity of the teacher workforce.”

2+2 programs help candidates begin in a local community college, with an articulated path to completion of a teaching credential in a university educator preparation program with a clinical practicum in their local schools (WestEd, 2019, p. 65).

- i. **Goal:** Each high need school district will have access to high quality teacher recruitment and development programs, including Grow-Your-Own and 2+2 programs to attract and prepare high school students, teacher assistants, and career professionals.
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2025:**
  - 1. Increase access to high quality teacher recruitment and development programs, such as TAs to Teachers, Troops to Teachers, and Pathway to Practice. Cost estimates for this action step will be determined on the basis of analysis and pilot implementation.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, University of North Carolina, NC Independent Colleges and Universities

**E. Provide support for Grow-Your-Own and 2+2 programs that help recruit and prepare teachers in high need communities.**

Several Grow-Your-Own preparation programs are underway in North Carolina and showing positive outcomes in engaging and preparing individuals to become teachers in the communities in which they live.

Partnership Teach, an initiative of the East Carolina University College of Education, offers an evidence-based, affordable, online degree completion model. Students begin by taking specific courses at any NC community college and then transfer to East Carolina to complete one of four teaching degrees. Students graduate with a four-year degree in elementary education, middle grades education, or special education. To date, Partnership Teach has allowed more than 850 teachers to complete their education and internship in public school classrooms in or near their home communities (<https://education.ecu.edu/partnership>).

- i. Goal:** Each high need school district will have access to high quality teacher recruitment and development programs, including Grow-Your-Own and 2+2 programs to attract and prepare high school students, teacher assistants, and career professionals.
- ii. Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  - 1.** Expand Partnership TEACH hub sites, staffing, fellowship support, mentoring, and the recruitment capacity of Partnership TEACH. Provide support for similarly successful, research-based Grow-Your-Own and 2+2 programs in all regions of the State. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, University of North Carolina, NC Independent Colleges and Universities

**F. Significantly increase the racial and ethnic diversity of North Carolina’s qualified and well-prepared teacher workforce and ensure all teachers employ culturally responsive practices.**

“Teachers of color now comprise about 30 percent of teacher preparation enrollments, which is an increase, many of these teachers – particularly African American and Native American teachers – are entering through alternative routes, which have much higher attrition rates. One reason for this is the steep decline – more than 60 percent between 2011 and 2016 – in teacher education enrollments in minority-serving institutions, including historically Black colleges and universities” (WestEd, 2019, p. 59).

Research has confirmed the positive impact of having a same-race teacher on the long-term education achievement and attainment of students of color, particularly for African American students. North Carolina’s current teacher workforce, however, has only 21 percent teachers of color, while more than half of the State’s students are students of color. Based on data from the 2018-19 school year, 47 percent of the public school student population in North Carolina was white, 25 percent was black, 18 percent was Hispanic/Latino, 3 percent was Asian, 4 percent was multiracial, and 1 percent was American Indian (DRIVE Task Force, 2021).

A diverse educator pool is essential to improving student learning, assessment outcomes, attrition rates, and quality of life, particularly in schools and school districts with majority-minority student populations.

- i. Goal:** North Carolina’s teacher workforce will better match the diversity of the State's student population.
- ii. Action Steps Initiated in Fiscal Year 2021:**

1. Develop a plan of actions by January 2021 that the State will take to increase the racial and ethnic diversity of qualified and well-prepared teachers through the work of Governor Cooper’s DRIVE Task Force. There are no costs associated with this action step.
  - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
- iii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  1. Implement the plan of actions recommended by Governor Cooper’s DRIVE Task Force. Cost estimates for this action step will be determined on the basis of the Task Force recommendations.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, University of North Carolina, NC Community College System
  2. Establish the Office of Equity Affairs at NCDPI to direct the recruitment and retention of a diverse educator workforce. This action step requires a recurring appropriation to achieve the stated goal beginning in this fiscal year.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  3. The NC State Board of Education will monitor, review, coordinate, and implement programs and efforts to increase teacher diversity. There are no costs associated with this action step.
    - a. **Responsible Party:** NC State Board of Education

**G. Provide high-quality comprehensive mentoring and induction support for novice teachers in their first three years of teaching to increase both their effectiveness and their retention.**

Teachers who are better prepared and better mentored stay in teaching at much higher rates and are more successful, especially in low wealth and high-need environments. In addition to the efforts that address teacher recruitment and preparation, it is essential that the State expand its efforts to coach and support novice teachers.

The North Carolina New Teacher Support Program (NC NTSP) is a comprehensive induction program providing research-based curriculum and multiple services to increase teacher effectiveness, enhance skills, and reduce attrition among beginning teachers. The NC NTSP provides each teacher: (1) intensive Institute “boot camps”; (2) intensive, individualized, content-specific classroom coaching; and (3) aligned professional development sessions.

NC NTSP coaching model considers the contextual factors of the community, school, teacher, classroom environment, and students, using edTPA constructs to determine the sophistication of evidences produced by the novice teacher and describe support provided by an assigned Instructional Coach. Coaches provide coaching support to help the teacher improve along the effectiveness continuum. Using constructs associated with the edTPA and Coaching Evidence Progressions, coaches collect and compare evidences emerging from teaching and learning environments, provide targeted feedback to teachers, and identify next coaching steps. Coaches track teacher progress over time through an online data system to capture coaching activities, sophistication of evidences produced in learning environments aligned with edTPA constructs, length of visit, instructional approach, and next steps.

NC NTSP is a program of the University of North Carolina System and administratively coordinated by East Carolina University. NC NTSP services are administered through the State's public universities in collaboration with public schools and school districts. Teachers are supported by experienced Instructional Coaches who understand their local community, the needs of beginning teachers, and quality instructional practice.

- i. **Goal:** All teachers with fewer than three years of teaching experience will be provided evidence-based, comprehensive induction services.
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  - 1. In partnership with school districts, provide comprehensive induction services through the NC New Teacher Support Program to beginning teachers in low-performing, high-poverty schools. The State will provide funding for the full cost of the program for beginning teachers. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, University of North Carolina, NC New Teacher Support Program, NC school districts

**H. Implement differentiated staffing models that include advanced teaching roles and additional compensation to retain and extend the reach of high performing teachers.**

Recent research suggests that effective advanced roles can increase instructional capacity within schools, thereby giving substantially more students access to effective teachers. In addition, principals benefit from a distributed leadership structure wherein they provide regular support to a team of teacher-leaders instead of an entire teaching staff.

Research indicates that advanced teacher-leader roles, wherein great teachers provide their building colleagues consistent instructional support and foster a collaborative culture of improvement, can also be an effective means of retaining beginning teachers. In addition, these leadership roles create new opportunities for teachers to remain in the classroom, which can improve retention among more experienced educators.

However, often only advanced teacher-leader positions provide guaranteed higher pay. Instructional coaches are paid according to the State teacher salary schedule. WestEd noted that many teachers found the idea of higher compensation particularly appealing and were deterred from pursuing leadership opportunities because they are not associated with greater pay. In fact, this lack of compensation for teacher-leader roles was mentioned much more often by participants from *Leandro* plaintiff districts than non-*Leandro* districts. Approximately 69 percent of respondents from *Leandro* districts mentioned “no extra compensation for additional responsibilities” as a concern (WestEd 2019, p. 61),

Through 2019, North Carolina had provided two rounds of funding, to a total of 10 districts, for the Teacher Compensation and Advanced Roles pilot, which gives districts funding to pay teachers more for advanced teaching roles. Most teachers, however, continue to work in schools that do not have advanced teaching roles like those in the pilot districts.

- i. **Goal:** All school districts will implement differentiated staffing models that include advanced teaching roles and additional compensation.
- ii. **Action Steps Initiated in Fiscal Year 2021:**
  - 1. Create a permanent advanced teaching roles program that:
    - Allows all interested districts to apply for one-time startup funds. There are no costs associated with this action step for FY 2021.
    - Provides grants through current funding in FY 2021 to additional districts to implement an advanced teaching roles initiative. There are no costs associated with this action step for FY 2021.

- Provides class size waivers and other flexibility, as necessary, to successfully implement career pathways through an advanced teaching roles initiative. There are no costs associated with this action step.
- Enables school districts to study the effectiveness of salary supplements and other aligned compensation models that support the implementation of advanced teaching roles. There are no costs associated with this action step.
- a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**iii. Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**

1. Provide grants to additional districts to implement an advanced teaching roles initiative. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
  - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**I. Develop a system to ensure that all North Carolina teachers have the opportunities they need for continued professional learning to improve and update their knowledge and practices.**

The State cannot achieve the goal of a well-prepared, qualified, and effective teacher in every classroom without ensuring that teachers have high-quality, ongoing professional learning opportunities. “The once-extensive infrastructure and funding for professional learning in North Carolina has been greatly reduced, and many teachers report that what is being offered often fails to meet the standards of high-quality professional learning, which is sustained over time, features active learning and collaboration for teachers, is content-focused and job-embedded, and has opportunities for developing new practices supported by coaching and reflection” (WestEd, 2019, p. 60).

Due to cuts in funding and capacity at the State-level, there is limited availability of high-quality professional learning opportunities for teachers. Many principals and superintendents report that there is a lack of support and funding to provide high-quality professional learning opportunities for teachers. Superintendents also noted that professional development is critical to recruiting, developing, and retaining teachers. However, the State eliminated dedicated funding for professional development and mentoring (WestEd, 2019, p. 60).

- i. **Goal:** All teachers will have access and time to participate in high quality professional learning that meets their individual professional growth needs.
- ii. **Action Steps Initiated in Fiscal Year 2021:**
  1. Implement Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning to serve as guidance for the design and assessment of professional learning opportunities and to inform continuous improvement. There are no costs associated with this action step.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC school districts
- iii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  1. Increase capacity for schools and districts to provide personalized, job-embedded, collaborative professional learning opportunities and to build the capacity and infrastructure necessary to implement, support, improve, and evaluate these activities. This action steps requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC school districts, NC Institutions of Higher Education

**J. Increase teacher compensation and enable low wealth districts to offer salaries and other compensation to make them competitive with more advantaged districts.**

Providing teachers with compensation commensurate with other professionals with similar education is not simply a matter of fairness – it is also important to improving student achievement because effective teachers are the most important school-based determinant of student educational performance. To ensure a high-quality teaching workforce, schools must recruit and retain well-prepared, experienced teachers and recruit high-quality students into the profession. Pay is one critical component of retention and recruitment.

In NC and across the US, relative teacher pay – teacher pay compared to the pay for other career opportunities for potential and current teachers – has been eroding for over a half a century. In addition, local salary supplements in NC make salaries unequal across districts and exacerbate inequities in teacher recruitment and retention for low wealth districts. The public school teacher wage penalty (i.e., the difference in compensation between teachers and other college-educated workers with similar experience and training) in the United States grew from 18.7 percent to 25.3 percent from 2017 to 2019 (Allegretto and Mishel, 2020, p. 7).

To address teacher shortages, it is necessary to focus on both recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers. Providing appropriate compensation is a necessary step to address shortages. Teacher pay must be competitive with other occupations that attract talented college and university graduates. Teachers are more likely to quit when they work in districts with lower wages and when their salaries are low relative to alternative wage opportunities, especially in high-demand fields like math and science.

- i. **Goal:** Salaries will be competitive with other states and with other career options that require similar levels of preparation, certification, and experience.
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  1. Conduct a North Carolina-specific wage comparability study to determine competitive pay for educators in comparison to professions that require similar education and credentials, and to identify the level of compensation and other specific State, regional, and local salary actions required to attract, recruit, and retain high quality educators, particularly to low wealth districts and high-poverty schools. Study findings will be used to establish a benchmark for educator salary raises over the next seven years of the Plan implementation. This action step requires a non-recurring appropriation.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor
  2. In accordance with the study described above, increase salaries for teachers and instructional support staff by 5 percent in FY 2022 and incrementally after that based on study findings to improve competitiveness with other industries. This action steps requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028. Cost estimates for later fiscal years for this action step will be determined on the basis of the study described above.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor

**K. Low wealth districts and high-poverty schools will provide incentives for the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers.**

Local salary supplements make salaries unequal across districts and exacerbate inequalities in teacher recruitment and retention for low-wealth districts. Many factors make teaching attractive and affordable in different contexts, so it is useful to consider compensation, benefits, bonuses, and other options broadly and to examine the success of initiatives (WestEd, 2019, p. 69).

- i. **Goal:** Salaries will be competitive with other states and with other career options that require similar levels of preparation, certification, and experience.
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  - 1. Provide funds for the cost of National Board certification for up to 1,000 teachers annually with priority to educators in high poverty and low performing schools. This action step requires a recurring appropriation to achieve the stated goal beginning in fiscal year 2022.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  - 2. Establish a district-level grant program focused on the implementation of multi-year recruitment bonuses and other compensation options for certified teachers who commit to teach in a low wealth or high needs district or school for multiple years. Establish research-based parameters, evaluation requirements, and reporting requirements for studying the effectiveness of the programs. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

## II. A Well Prepared, High Quality, and Supported Principal in Every School

This section of the Action Plan addresses

*A system of principal development and recruitment that ensures each school is led by a high-quality principal who is supported with early and ongoing professional learning and provided competitive pay.*

*Hoke Cty. Bd. Educ. v. State*, No. 95 CVS 1158 (Sept. 11, 2020)

ACTIONS	2030 GOALS
Update the State’s school administrator preparation and principal licensure requirements to align program approval standards with effectiveness practices.	The State’s school administrator preparation standards will be aligned with the National Education Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards from the National Policy Board for Educational Administration.
Continue to expand access to high-quality principal preparation programs to all North Carolina school districts.	Every school district will have a partnership with at least one school administrator preparation program that meets the NELP standards and provides full-time, year-long internships.
	The Transforming Principal Preparation Program (TP3) and Principal Fellows Program will prepare 300 new principals each year.
	School administrator preparation programs will recruit and prepare candidates that better match the diversity of NC’s student population.
Expand the professional learning opportunities for current principals and assistant principals.	A statewide program will provide professional learning opportunities and ongoing support for assistant principals and principals.
	Funding will be available to expand professional learning opportunities for district and school administrators through relationships with existing or new programs.
Revise the principal and assistant principal salary structures and improve working conditions to make positions in high need schools and districts more attractive to well-qualified educators.	The statewide school administrator salary structure will provide appropriate compensation and incentives to enable high need schools and districts can recruit and retain well-qualified school administrators.
	School administrators will have greater autonomy to make resource decisions to address the needs of their schools.

### A. Update the State’s school administrator preparation and principal licensure requirements to align program approval standards with effectiveness practices.

Research has led to a strong consensus that effective principal preparation programs need to incorporate eleven important elements (Wallace Foundation, 2016). The first element is to have programs that are aligned with strong standards. NELP standards from the National Policy Board for Educational Administration identify what novice leaders and preparation program graduates should know and be able to do after completing a high-quality education leadership preparation program. These standards are aligned with recent national leadership practice standards and research on school

leadership. While North Carolina has taken steps to align with the recommended standards, completing this alignment is an important step in preparing and supporting future school leaders in the State (WestEd, 2019, p. 72).

In 2015, the NC General Assembly initiated the Transforming Principal Preparation Program (TP3), a competitive state-funded grant program to support additional innovative and effective principal preparation programs. TP3 incorporates the elements of high-quality principal preparation programs, including intentional recruitment efforts, a high bar for admissions, rigorous and relevant coursework, a full-time paid residency, executive coaching, and a focus on authentic partnership with and preparation for service in high need schools and districts. Expanding access to TP3 programs will allow the State to meet its need for 300 new well-prepared principals annually.

- i. **Goal:** The State’s school administrator preparation standards will be aligned with the NELP standards from the National Policy Board for Educational Administration.
- ii. **Action Steps Initiated in Fiscal Year 2021:**
  1. Update the State’s school administrator preparation standards and principal licensure requirements to align with the NELP standards from the National Policy Board for Educational Administration and pilot the revised standards during the 2020-2021 school year. There are no costs associated with this action step.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  2. Complete expansion of the TP3 to three additional postsecondary institutions while maintaining high standards for participating programs and the paid internship requirement. There are no costs associated with this action step.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Institutions of Higher Education, NC Transforming Principal Preparation Program /Principal Fellows Commission

**B. Continue to expand access to high quality principal preparation programs to all North Carolina school districts.**

Designed to allow for multiple models and customized learning experiences, TP3-funded programs must incorporate the elements of high-quality principal preparation programs. By investing state funds to subsidize candidates’ tuition and residency, North Carolina is enabling institutions to be highly selective with new candidates and to provide the candidates with the deep, practice-based preparation that research suggests they need.

The NC Principal Fellows program was launched in 1993 to attract outstanding aspiring principals. The program provides competitive, merit-based scholarship loans to individuals seeking an MSA degree to prepare for a school administrator position in North Carolina public schools. Principal Fellows can attend any of 11 MSA programs, all within the UNC system. In their first year, Principal Fellows receive \$30,000 to assist them with tuition, books, and living expenses while they study full time. In their second year, Principal Fellows receive an amount equal to the salary of a first-year assistant principal as well as an education stipend while they undertake a full-time internship in a school where they work under the supervision of a veteran principal. Fellows’ yearlong internships provide meaningful and authentic learning opportunities that research indicates are critical in principal development. After completing their preparation program, Principal Fellows are required to maintain employment in a school or district leadership role in North Carolina for four years to repay their scholarship loan. Currently, the State invests \$3.2 million a year in the North Carolina Principal Fellows program (WestEd, 2019, p. 78).

The programs have joined forces to provide an effective approach to building a pipeline of qualified, well-prepared, diverse principals. To meet the State’s need for approximately 300 new principals each year, the partnership will need to expand.

**i. Goals:**

1. Every school district will have a partnership with at least one school administrator preparation program that meets the National Education Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards and provides full-time, year-long internships.
2. The Transforming Principal Preparation Program (TP3) and Principal Fellows Program will prepare 300 new principals each year.
3. School administrator preparation programs will recruit and prepare candidates that better match the diversity of NC’s student population.

**ii. Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**

1. Every North Carolina school district will have a partnership with at least one school administrator preparation program that meets the NELP standards and provides full-time, year-long internships. There are no costs associated with this action step.
  - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Institutions of Higher Education

**iii. Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**

1. The North Carolina Transforming Principal Preparation Program (TP3) and Principal Fellows Program will prepare 300 new principals annually. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
  - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Transforming Principal Preparation Program /Principal Fellows Commission
2. The North Carolina Principal Fellows Program and North Carolina school administrator preparation programs will recruit and prepare candidates that better match the diversity of the State’s student population. There are no costs associated with this action step.
  - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC Transforming Principal Preparation Program /Principal Fellows Commission

**C. Expand professional learning opportunities for current principals and assistant principals.**

“For principals to grow and remain in their profession, they need ongoing support and professional learning opportunities. Even the most effective administrator preparation programs cannot prepare principals with all the necessary knowledge typically obtained over time at different schools throughout their careers. Ensuring that principals have access to job-embedded, ongoing, and customized professional development, coaching, and support can increase their competence and improve retention” (WestEd, 2019, p. 79).

Principals in North Carolina receive high quality support from organizations such as the North Carolina Principal and Assistant Principal Association (NCPAPA), Friday Institute at North Carolina State University, North Carolina State University's Educational Leadership Academy, and their Regional Education Service Alliances (RESAs). Demand for many of these programs routinely exceeds capacity. Superintendents reported that many programs, such as those offered by NCPAPA, are well designed and valuable for their principals and assistant principals. However, there are insufficient opportunities for professional development available for school leaders.

Mentoring and induction programs for novice principals are another effective tool for developing and retaining leaders. Although some districts provide induction for all novice principals and North Carolina State University's Educational Leadership Academy supports its graduates for years after graduation, these are not consistent statewide practices, and state funding to support leadership mentoring is not available. Interviewees and focus group participants noted that during the Race to

the Top grant, the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) provided coaches to support principals in the turnaround of low-performing schools, but this type of valuable support is no longer available.

Other research conducted as part of WestEd's work demonstrates that North Carolina has a relatively inexperienced principal workforce, especially in high-poverty schools, as well as a principal workforce that does not feel well prepared to recruit and retain teachers or to lead school change efforts. Ensuring principals have favorable working conditions, including the professional development, coaching, and support they need to grow, and the staff resources they need is essential (WestEd, 2019, p. 80).

**i. Goals:**

1. A statewide program will provide professional learning opportunities and ongoing support for assistant principals and principals.
2. Funding will be available to expand professional learning opportunities for district and school administrators through relationships with existing or new programs.

**ii. Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**

1. Develop a plan for the creation of a School Leadership Academy to provide initial and ongoing support to the State's district and school leaders that includes:
  - Equity training for all district and school leaders,
  - Training and ongoing support for school board members focused on the needs of successful schools and turnaround schools,
  - Mentorship and individualized coaching for novice principals and for experienced principals in high needs schools on dismantling impediments to student success in their schools,
  - Peer support networks, such as facilitated partnership networks and rapid response hotlines that provide "just in time" assistance; and
  - Aligned, ongoing, research driven professional learning.

There are no costs associated with this action step.

**a. Responsible Parties:** NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Institutions of Higher Education

2. Increase capacity for districts to expand professional learning opportunities for district and school administrators through relationships with existing or new programs. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.

**a. Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**iii. Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2023:**

1. In accordance with the plan above, provide resources and support for the implementation of the School Leadership Academy. Cost estimates for this action step will be determined on the basis of the plan developed above.

**a. Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Institutions of Higher Education

**D. Revise the principal and assistant principal salary structures and improve working conditions to make positions in high need schools and districts more attractive to well-qualified educators.**

Changes made to North Carolina's principal compensation system in 2017 were intended to raise compensation for principals and reward those whose schools meet and exceed growth targets. These changes provided an average raise of about 9 percent overall. However, a consequence of the new

policy is that principals' salaries now vary on the basis of their school's size and performance from year to year. The compensation system creates a disincentive for effective principals to work in underperforming schools, which often take more than one year to improve and meet or exceed targets for growth (WestEd, 2019, p. 81).

Compensation and benefits can be used to attract and retain effective principals in hard-to-staff and low-performing schools, yet there are currently no bonuses or incentives for principals to lead these schools. Principals are also no longer eligible for advanced and doctoral degree salary supplements. In addition, principals (and other educators) hired after January 2021, will not receive health benefits in retirement. These changes in policy make leading a small and low-performing school less attractive to aspiring principals.

Results from the survey of North Carolina principals conducted by WestEd indicated that 24 percent of responding principals identified compensation as the major factor that would cause them to leave their principal roles in the next three years (WestEd, 2019, p. 82).

**i. Goals:**

1. The statewide school administrator salary structure will provide appropriate compensation and incentives to enable high need schools and districts to recruit and retain well-qualified school administrators.
2. School administrators will have greater autonomy to make resource decisions to address the needs of their schools.

**ii. Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**

1. Incrementally increase principal and assistant principal pay consistent with teacher salary increases. Cost estimates for later fiscal years for this action step will be determined on the basis of the wage comparability study described above.
  - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
2. Develop a plan for a state grant program to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of incentive programs to encourage well-qualified school leaders to work in high need schools, such as meaningful supplements for principals who take positions in chronically low-performing schools, protection against principals having a salary reduction if they work in high need or low-performing schools, and rewards for school leaders for their school's progress on indicators beyond student achievement on standardized assessments. There are no costs associated with this action step.
  - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
3. Provide district leaders and principals with more autonomy to allocate resources, including autonomy to make decisions on funding and personnel assignments to address their school's needs. There are no costs associated with this action step.
  - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**iii. Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2023:**

1. As detailed in the plan described above, implement and evaluate the effectiveness of incentive programs to encourage well-qualified school leaders to work in high need schools, such as meaningful supplements for principals who take positions in chronically low-performing schools, protection against principals having a salary reduction if they work in high need or low-performing schools, and rewards for school leaders for their school's progress on indicators beyond student achievement on standardized assessments. Cost estimates for this action step are to be determined on the basis of the plan described above.
  - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

### III. Finance System that Provides Adequate, Equitable, and Efficient Resources

This section of the Action Plan addresses

*A finance system that provides adequate, equitable, and predictable funding to school districts and, importantly, adequate resources to address the needs of all North Carolina schools and students, especially at-risk students as defined by the Leandro decisions.*

*Hoke Cty. Bd. Educ. v. State*, No. 95 CVS 1158 (Sept. 11, 2020)

ACTIONS	2030 GOALS
Increase Local Education Agency (LEA) budgetary flexibility by lifting restrictions on a number of critical allotments through the ABC transfer system.	District leaders have flexibility to make resource allocation decisions based on local needs.
Revise the State’s school funding formula so that current and additional funding is distributed to students with the greatest need.	School districts are equitably funded, based on differential costs of serving specific student populations and have funding necessary to meet the educational needs of historically underserved student populations.
Increase the investment in overall spending for public education incrementally over the next eight years to provide a sound basic education for all students.	Average per pupil expenditures will be in line with the national average per pupil expenditure. Grounded in the <i>Leandro</i> ruling: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every school in North Carolina has 90 percent of its students score at proficient levels for both English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics.</li> <li>• Students not achieving ELA and Mathematics proficiency achieve grade-level growth.</li> <li>• Every student achieves average annual growth for one year of instruction.</li> </ul>
Scale up flexible funding for Student Instructional Support Personnel.	All public schools have adequate funding to meet national guidelines for specialized instructional support personnel (SISP) at recommended ratios, including school psychologists, nurses, counselors, social workers, instructional coaches and mentors, to meet the academic, physical, and mental health needs of students.
Increase educator compensation to make it competitive with educator compensation in other states in the region and with other career options that require similar levels of preparation, certification, and levels of experience.	All schools in North Carolina will be staffed with high-quality teachers, assistant principals, and principals.
Modify the school finance system to ensure future stability in funding for public education, including predictable, anticipated funding levels that acknowledge external cost factors.	Create a finance system that is stable and predictable to facilitate long-term strategic planning at the district and school levels.

**A. Increase Local Education Agency (LEA) budgetary flexibility by lifting restrictions on a number of critical allotments through the ABC transfer system.**

Funding flexibility is important in enabling schools to invest funds in proven, effective strategies and programs to serve their specific student populations and to uncovering new promising practices. When funds are restricted to a particular use and cannot be transferred, it hinders district leaders' ability to make decisions about how to allocate resources to make the greatest impact on student outcomes given their local circumstances. Too many restrictions on funding may also result in inefficient spending by limiting the extent to which districts are able or compelled to make strategic trade-offs.

North Carolina historically provided local school districts the ability to make decisions about how to allocate funding based on their unique context. In 1989, North Carolina's General Assembly passed the School Improvement and Accountability Act, which the State Board of Education explained "was designed to give local school systems more flexibility in making decisions in exchange for greater accountability" (North Carolina State Board of Education). In 1996, the General Assembly continued to focus on flexibility in local decision-making, approving a law to enable the State Board of Education to implement ABC Transfers, which "assign more responsibility at the school building level and allow schools flexibility to use funds as they are most needed at the school" by enabling districts to transfer funds from one allotment to another (North Carolina State Board of Education & Department of Public Instruction, 2020).

Local flexibility to transfer funds among allotments has been reduced in recent years, including restrictions on Teacher Assistants, Exceptional Children, Academically or Intellectually Gifted, and Textbook allotments. In 2010-11, allotments with substantial flexibility comprised approximately 75 percent of district's state funds. By 2018-19, allotments with substantial flexibility represented only about 20 percent of K-12 state funding.

While flexibility is vital to ensure districts are able to maximize the efficiency of their resources, it is important for flexibility to be coupled with strong accountability to ensure that resources are benefiting student subgroups such as children with disabilities, English learners, students from families with low incomes, and other at-risk-students as defined by the *Leandro* decisions.

- i. **Goal:** District leaders have flexibility to make resource allocation decisions based on local needs.
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**

- 1. Allow transfers to or from the following allotment categories:

- Academically & Intellectually Gifted
- At Risk Student Services/Alternative Schools
- Children with Disabilities
- Classroom Materials, Supplies and Equipment
- Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Funding
- Cooperative Innovative High Schools
- Limited English Proficiency
- Low Wealth Supplemental Funding
- Position/MOE Allotments
- Non-Instructional Support
- Small County Supplemental Funding
- Textbooks
- Transportation

There are no costs associated with this action step.

- a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**B. Revise the State’s school funding formula so that current and additional funding is distributed to students with the greatest need.**

WestEd found that school districts lack the funding necessary to meet the educational needs of historically underserved student populations. Consistent with prior research, their analysis found that additional funding is required to produce the same outcomes as the population of students with greater needs (e.g., English learners, economically-disadvantaged students, exceptional children) increases. As the percentage of such students increases, so does the school’s per student cost. North Carolina has seen an 88 percent increase in the number of economically-disadvantaged students served by its public schools. In addition, the number of students who are English learners more than doubled over 15 years. State funding for education has not kept pace with these increased challenges. While the State has seen continued increases in high school graduation rates, these have not led to increased success rates in postsecondary education. Most important, large gaps in all achievement measures continue among racial, ethnic, and economic subgroups of students (WestEd, 2019, pg. 20-21)

***Children with Disabilities:*** Students identified as disabled have substantially worse academic outcomes than their peers. In the 2018-19 school year, 59 percent of all students scored at Level 3 or above on End-of-Grade and End-of-Course Tests, compared to just 20 percent of students with disabilities. Currently, the State provides LEAs with supplemental funding via the children with disabilities allotment. The allotment currently provides \$4,550 per student identified as having a disability, up to a maximum of 12.75 percent of the LEA’s average daily membership (ADM). The funding cap limits funding in 70 of the State’s 115 school districts. A 1994 General Assembly study determined that adequately serving the State’s population of disabled students would require supplemental funding equal to 2.3 times the cost of an average student, however current funding is the equivalent of just 1.9 times the cost of an average student. While LEAs have some limited flexibility to transfer a share of their allotment (the increase over prior year’s allotment) to other purposes, in practice, all LEAs use all of their designated funding allotment on disabled students and may also spend local funds to meet the needs these students.

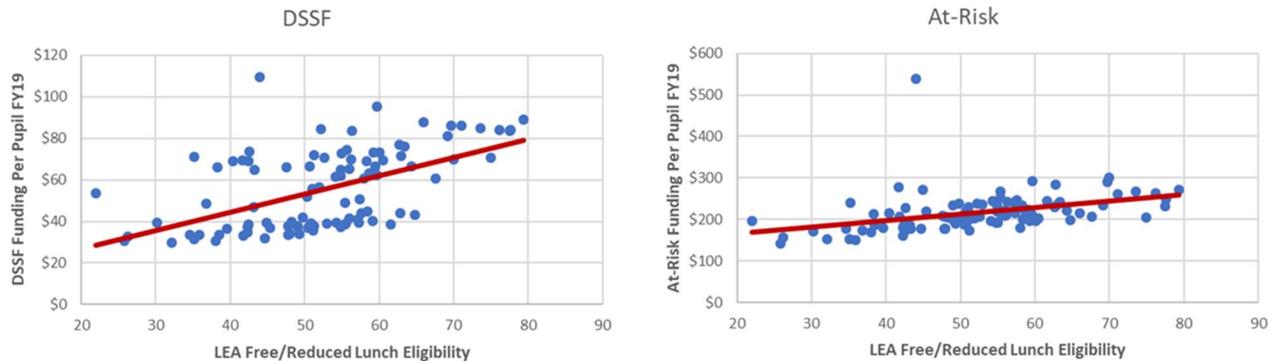
***Limited English Proficiency (LEP):*** Students identified as English learners (ELs) have substantially worse academic outcomes than their peers. In the 2018-19 school year, 59 percent of all students scored at Level 3 or above on End-of-Grade and End-of-Course Tests, compared to just 27 percent of students who are ELs. Currently, the State provides LEAs with supplemental funding via the LEP allotment. The allotment provides LEAs with supplemental funding based on each LEA and charter school’s number and concentration of ELs, up to a maximum of 10.6 percent of the LEA’s ADM.

***Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Funding (DSSF):*** The WestEd report explicitly documents the extent to which disadvantaged students have been systemically denied access to a sound basic education. The DSSF allotment was created in 2004 as a result of the *Leandro* case to provide districts with additional supports for at-risk students. DSSF funding is provided to all LEAs based on a complicated estimate of each LEAs share of “disadvantaged” students (single-parent families, children below poverty level, at least one parent with less than a high school degree) and the LEA’s estimated wealth level (local revenue capacity). DSSF funds must be used to: provide instructional positions or instructional support positions and/or professional development; provide intensive in-school and/or after school remediation; purchase diagnostic software and progress-monitoring tools; and provide funds for teacher bonuses and supplements.

**Low Wealth:** The low wealth allotment is designed to equalize the level of spending across counties. Certain counties—due to high property values and resident wealth—have greater capacity to raise local revenue for their public schools. The low wealth allotment currently provides about \$245 million of additional state funds to districts in counties with below-average capacity to generate local revenue. The WestEd report particularly notes the importance of using low wealth funding to allow qualifying districts the ability to offer teacher salary supplements that are competitive with those from other districts and to help remedy the migration of teachers from lower-paying to higher-paying districts.

**At-Risk Student Services/Alternative Schools (At-Risk):** The at-risk allotment provides funding to identify students likely to drop out and to provide special alternative instructional programs for these at-risk students. It also provides funding for summer school instruction and transportation, remediation, alcohol and drug prevention, early intervention, safe schools, and preschool screening. The \$293 million of at-risk funding is distributed to all districts; approximately 50 percent on a per-student basis and 50 percent distributed on the basis of the number of children in poverty per the Title I Low Income poverty data. Each LEA receives a minimum of the dollar equivalent of two teachers and two instructional support personnel.

There is significant overlap in the purposes and allowable uses of the at-risk and DSSF allotments. However, the distribution of funds within the DSSF allotment is more progressive, providing a higher share of funds to higher-need districts (note: charts below remove the 16 DSSF pilot LEAs that receive additional DSSF funding outside of the allotment formula).



- i. **Goal:** School districts are equitably funded, based on differential costs of serving specific student populations and have funding necessary to meet the educational needs of historically underserved student populations.
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  1. Remove funding cap on the children with disabilities allotment in FY 2022 and incrementally increase supplemental funding in subsequent years to provide funding for students with disabilities equivalent to 2.3 times the cost of an average student. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  2. Combine the DSSF and at-risk allotments and incrementally increase funding such that the combined allotment provides an equivalent supplemental weight of 0.4 on behalf of all economically-disadvantaged students. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

3. Incrementally increase low wealth funding to provide eligible counties supplemental funding equal to 110 percent of the statewide local revenue per student. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  4. Eliminate the limited English proficiency funding cap in FY 2022, incrementally increase funding in subsequent years to provide per-student support equivalent to a weight of 0.5 and simplify formula by eliminating "concentration" factor and base allotments. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
- iii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2024:**
1. Revise the formula for the children with disabilities allotment to differentiate per-student funding based on level of required student support. Modifications should consider the recommendations of NCDPI's Exceptional Children Division created with the input of multiple stakeholders in 2017. There are no costs associated with this action step.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
- iv. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2027:**
1. Fund a study to determine how to phase-in a weighted student funding formula that retains position allotments. This action step requires a nonrecurring appropriation in fiscal year 2027.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
- C. **Increase the investment in overall spending for public education incrementally over the next eight years to provide a sound basic education.**

State funding for education in North Carolina has declined in real terms over the last decade. As of fiscal year 2018, North Carolina's total per-pupil spending was 6th lowest in the nation. When adjusted for inflation, per-pupil spending in North Carolina has declined about 6 percent since 2010. The allotments below would help boost base-level funding to support all students (WestEd, 2019, p. 21).

- i. **Goal:** Provide a level of funding sufficient to allow:
  1. Every school in North Carolina to ensure that 90 percent of its students score at proficient levels for both ELA and Mathematics.
  2. Students not achieving ELA and Mathematics proficiency to achieve grade-level growth.
  3. Every student to achieve average annual growth for one year of instruction.
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2021:**
  1. Complete the final two years of funding of the enhancement teacher allotment. Funding for this action step is provided by a statutory allotment in G.S. 115C-301(c2).
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
- iii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  1. Incrementally increase funding to provide districts with adequate funding for professional development for all personnel and to implement mentoring programs for beginning educators. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

2. Simplify teacher assistant formula by returning to a simple dollars per K-3 student calculation and incrementally increase funding until funding will provide approximately one teacher assistant for every 27 K-3 students. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
- iv. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2024:**
1. Incrementally increase funding for non-instructional support to reverse budget cuts that have hampered districts' abilities to provide all students with a sound basic education. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  2. Incrementally increase funding for classroom supplies until combined funding for supplies and textbooks equals \$150 per student. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  3. Incrementally increase funding for textbooks until combined funding for supplies and textbooks equals \$150 per student. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  4. Incrementally increase allotted assistant principal months of employment to provide one month of employment for every 80 students. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  5. Incrementally increase funding for central office staff to restore budget reductions and ensure sufficient funding for central offices to implement the reforms necessary to provide all students with a sound basic education. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  6. Issue a \$2 billion bond to support school capital needs. This action step requires appropriations for debt service and cost estimates will be determined at a later date.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**D. Scale up flexible funding for specialized instructional support personnel (SISP) to meet the academic, physical, and mental health needs of students and to ensure that schools are safe and supportive learning environments.**

SISP are critical for meeting the academic and nonacademic needs of students. A NCDPI review of 25 years of research identified over 100 studies showing that school health programs positively affect student health and academic achievement.

- i. **Goal:** All public schools have adequate funding to meet national guidelines for SISP at recommended ratios, including school psychologists, nurses, counselors, social workers, instructional coaches and mentors, to meet the academic, physical, and mental health needs of students.
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**

1. Incrementally provide funding for specialized instructional support staff to meet the following national guidelines:
  - *Nurses*: 1 per school > 100 ADM
  - *Librarians*: 1 per school > 200 ADM
  - *Counselors*: 1:250 students
  - *School Psychologists*: 1:700 students
  - *Social Workers*: 1:400 students
 This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
  - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**E. Increase educator compensation to make it competitive with educator compensation in other states in the region and with other career options that require similar levels of preparation, certification, and levels of experience.**

Salaries for North Carolina’s educators remain below what professionals with similar educational backgrounds earn in other professions, particularly for teachers. Educator compensation goals should focus on competitiveness – the extent to which pay compares to other professions in North Carolina requiring a college degree.

- i. **Goal:** All schools in North Carolina will be staffed with high-quality teachers, assistant principals, and principals.
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  1. Conduct a North Carolina-specific wage comparability study to determine competitive pay for educators in comparison to professions that require similar education and credentials, and to identify the level of compensation and other specific State, regional, and local salary actions required to attract, recruit, and retain high quality educators, particularly to low wealth districts and high-poverty schools. Study findings will be used to establish a benchmark for educator salary raises over the next seven years of *Leandro* implementation. This action step requires a nonrecurring appropriation in fiscal year 2022.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor
  2. Increase salaries for teachers and instructional support staff by 5 percent in FY 2022 and incrementally after that based on study findings to improve competitiveness with other industries. Cost estimates for later fiscal years for this action step will be determined on the basis of the study described above.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  3. Incrementally increase principal and assistant principal pay consistent with teacher salary increases. Cost estimates for this action step will be determined on the basis of a study, analysis, or pilot implementation.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**F. Modify the school finance system to ensure future stability in funding for public education, including predictable, anticipated funding levels that acknowledge external cost factors.**

It is important for budgets to be relatively stable and predictable to permit public school units to make critical staffing and resource decisions prior to the beginning of the school year and to facilitate long-term strategic planning. North Carolina’s current school finance system fails to guarantee increased funding for enrollment and inflation and includes a large number of required budget adjustments that occur after the schools’ fiscal years have begun. This instability makes it difficult to

make strategic investments or long-term system adjustments and requires chief financial officers to spend a disproportionate amount of time ensuring that their budgets are in compliance with state regulations.

- i. **Goal:** Create a finance system that is stable and predictable to facilitate long-term strategic planning at the district and school levels.
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2024:**
  - 1. Establish a mechanism for continually updating state funding amounts to account for inflation and enrollment growth. There are no costs associated with this action step.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  - 2. Simplify position allotments by combining enhancement teacher positions into the classroom teacher allotment. There are no costs associated with this action step.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  - 3. Revise charter school funding so that funding is directly appropriated to each charter school rather than by reducing allotments to traditional public schools. There are no costs associated with this action step.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  - 4. Combine all dollar allotments that are distributed on a per-ADM basis into a single allotment. There are no costs associated with this action step.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**IV. An Assessment and Accountability System that Reliably Assesses Multiple Measures of Student Performance**

This section of the Action Plan addresses

*An assessment and accountability system that reliably assesses multiple measures of student performance against the Leandro standard and provides accountability consistent with the Leandro standard.*

*Hoke Cty. Bd. Educ. v. State*, No. 95 CVS 1158 (Sept. 11, 2020)

ACTIONS	2030 GOALS
Establish a more instructionally-focused and student-centered assessment system.	The statewide assessment system will include more formative and interim assessments, such as the NC Check-Ins, that are aligned with the State summative assessment and provide streamlined, actionable student-level information.
Clarify alignment between the assessment system and the State’s theory of action.	The State’s assessment system will support personalized learning experiences for all students, including curricular and instructional resources to support personalized learning environments and interim assessments that provide educators with meaningful data to adjust instruction within the school year.
Improve coherence among curriculum, instruction, and assessment.	The State will provide statewide and regional support to all local school boards in selecting and implementing curriculum materials that are tightly aligned with State-adopted content standards.
Amend the current accountability system to include measures of progress toward providing all students with access to a sound basic education.	The State’s accountability system will include measures of progress toward meeting the <i>Leandro</i> tenets, including indicators that provide information on students’ opportunity to access a sound basic education, in addition to student performance on State standardized assessments.
Use the data provided in the North Carolina Dashboard and School Report Cards to identify appropriate evidence-based interventions and supports.	Data from the accountability system and other school and district data indicators will be used to guide planning, budget, and instructional decisions at the school- and district-level and to assess school progress and improvement efforts to identify opportunity gaps and opportunities for school integration.

**A. Establish a more instructionally-focused and student-centered assessment system.**

Based on a recommendation from the State Board’s Task Force on Summative Assessment in 2014, the NCDPI developed the NC Check-Ins, which are optional interim assessments developed by the State that are freely available to all school districts across North Carolina. The NC Check-Ins are an example of a through-grade assessment model, which utilizes multiple interim assessments throughout the school year in lieu of a single summative assessment at the end of the year. Though all schools and districts have a summative assessment at the end of the year in specific grades and courses, the use of NC Check-Ins has been well received by educators as useful tool to inform instruction (WestEd, 2019, p. 110).

- i. **Goal:** The statewide assessment system will include more formative and interim assessments, such as the NC Check-Ins, that are aligned with the State summative assessment and provide streamlined, actionable student level information.
- ii. **Action Steps Initiated in Fiscal Year 2021:**
  - 1. Expand the use of NC Check-Ins in grades 3-8 to additional school districts and schools. Provide professional learning opportunities and resources to support the use of NC Check-Ins as formative, student-centered instructional tools. There are no costs associated with this action step.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  - 2. Better align the Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) with birth through third grade and rename the KEA the Early Learning Inventory (ELI). Aligned action steps are included in the Early Education action plan. This action step is achievable within existing funds.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**B. Clarify alignment between the assessment system and the State’s theory of action.**

North Carolina’s statewide assessment system complies with federal requirements under ESSA and meets the U.S. Department of Education’s peer review requirements; however, several improvements are being made to ensure that the state assessment system best reflects student learning and supports personalized learning for all students.

An independent alignment study concluded that the state assessments are generally well aligned to the North Carolina academic standards. College- and career-readiness standards and expectations, like those defined in the NC Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS), require students to demonstrate complex reasoning and problem-solving skills and to communicate effectively. To adequately assess the knowledge and skills defined in the NCSCOS, it is important for assessments to include opportunities for students to demonstrate their abilities to reason, solve complex problems, and communicate effectively. Currently, the State summative assessments rely heavily on multiple-choice items (WestEd, 2019, p. 108).

For this reason, North Carolina will pilot the inclusion of additional item types (i.e., constructed-response, extended-response, and/ or performance-based assessment items) on State assessments. Items that require students to demonstrate application of their knowledge and skills can provide information on students’ understanding that can be applied to personalize teaching and learning and allow progress toward a sound basic education for all students in North Carolina. Because assessments are inextricably linked to curriculum and instruction, the NCDPI will also provide additional curricular and instructional support materials to complement the inclusion of performance-based items on the assessments.

- i. **Goal:** The State’s assessment system will support personalized learning experiences for all students, including curricular and instructional resources to support personalized learning environments and interim assessments that provide educators with meaningful data to adjust instruction within the school year.
- ii. **Action Steps Initiated in Fiscal Year 2023:**
  - 1. Launch the Innovative Assessment Demonstration pilot approved by the US Department of Education beginning in 16 districts and charters to improve and personalize formative assessment and to evaluate the feasibility of utilizing through-grade results to provide summative assessment results. The pilot will include: (1) three through-grade assessments and an adaptive end of the year assessment in grades 3-8; (2) an examination of the potential

use of the three through-grade assessments as a cumulative year-end score; (3) a consideration of the integration of additional performance-based assessment items; and (4) the development of resources and professional learning opportunities on the use of appropriate, aligned formative assessment to support instruction. This action step is achievable within existing funds.

- a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

### C. Improve coherence among curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Improving educational outcomes for all students requires a collaborative effort at all levels of the system to strengthen the connection between curriculum, instruction, and assessment. It is unreasonable to expect assessment results to improve without significant investment in aligned educational resources, including high-quality curricular and instructional materials. Through District and Regional Support, NCDPI will provide high quality curricular and instructional materials and the ongoing support necessary to effectively utilize these items at the district and school level.

- i. **Goal:** The State will provide statewide and regional support to all local school boards in selecting and implementing curriculum materials that are tightly aligned with State-adopted content standards.
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2023:**
  - 1. Evaluate the curricular materials selected by school districts and report on the degree of alignment with State-adopted content standards. There are no costs associated with this action step.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

### D. Amend the current accountability system to include measures of progress toward providing all students with access to a sound basic education.

A high-quality accountability system that provides useful and timely data on student growth and proficiency is an integral component for ensuring a sound basic education for all students. Results from high-quality assessments, coupled with a thoughtfully designed accountability system, can provide valuable information about the academic progress of all students, and inform stakeholders about the effectiveness of policies and practices. A high-quality accountability system must also serve multiple purposes, reflect the needs of multiple stakeholder groups, and provide crucial and accurate information to support progress toward a sound basic education for all students.

- i. **Goal:** The State's accountability system will include measures of progress toward meeting the *Leandro* tenets, including indicators that provide information on students' opportunity to access a sound basic education, in addition to student performance on State standardized assessments.
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  - 1. Adopt a coherent and singular definition of proficiency, aligning grade level expectations and college- and career-ready expectations, to provide stakeholders with consistent and actionable measures of student progress and proficiency and to maintain high expectations of all students consistent with the rulings in this case. There are no costs associated with this action step.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
- iii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2023:**

1. Revise the NC General Statutes and the State’s Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan to adjust the weighting between student proficiency and student growth in the State's School Performance Grades. There are no costs associated with this action step.
  - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
2. Include in the State’s accountability system additional measures of progress toward meeting the *Leandro* tenets, including indicators that provide information on students’ opportunity to access a sound basic education, in addition to student performance on State standardized assessments. There are no costs associated with this action step.
  - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
3. Implement a system for evaluating instructional quality, rigor, and equity at the school-level to provide feedback and support to schools and districts. There are no costs associated with this action step.
  - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**E. Use the data provided in the North Carolina Dashboard and School Report Cards to identify appropriate evidence-based interventions and supports.**

- i. **Goal:** Data from the accountability system and other school and district data indicators will be used to guide planning, budget, and instructional decisions at the school- and district-level and to assess school progress and improvement efforts to identify opportunity gaps and opportunities for school integration.
- ii. **Action Steps Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  1. Develop and implement a plan for including on annual school report cards school-level information on the race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other demographic information on all students, staff, students identified for exceptional children services, students participating in advanced learning opportunities, and other pertinent information. This action step is achievable within existing funds.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  2. Provide training and support on the use of data from the NC Dashboard, the accountability system, and school and district data to guide planning, budget, instructional decisions, and improvement efforts at the school- and district-level. This action step is achievable within existing funds.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  3. Amend the NC Dashboard to provide data on State, district, and school performance and growth on a comprehensive set of measures that indicate progress toward meeting the *Leandro* requirements and is inclusive of the reporting requirements under ESSA. This action step is achievable within existing funds.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**V. An Assistance and Turnaround Function that Provides Necessary Support to Low-Performing Schools and Districts**

This section of the Action Plan addresses

*An assistance and turnaround function that provides necessary support to low-performing schools and districts.*

*Hoke Cty. Bd. Educ. v. State*, No. 95 CVS 1158 (Sept. 11, 2020)

ACTIONS	2030 GOALS
Develop the State’s capacity to fully support the improvement of its lowest-performing schools and districts.	The NC State Board of Education and NC Department of Public Instruction will fully implement a regional support structure to support the improvement of low-performing and high-poverty schools by providing support in all needed content areas and instructional and leadership coaching.
Provide statewide and/or regional support to help schools and districts select high quality standards-aligned, culturally-responsive core curriculum resources and to prepare teachers to use those resources effectively.	The NC State Board of Education and NC Department of Public Instruction will update and strengthen the State-level process for reviewing and adopting core curriculum resources that are high quality, standards-aligned, and culturally-responsive. The core curriculum resources recommended by this State-level process will include digital and blended resources, as well as commercial and open-source resources. The NC Department of Public Instruction will also provide statewide and/or regional support to help all schools select core curriculum resources that are high quality, standards-aligned, and culturally-responsive and will assist in preparing educators to use these resources effectively by providing comprehensive professional learning opportunities and access to appropriate resources.
Provide resources, opportunities, and supports for low-performing and high-poverty schools to address out of school barriers to learning using a community schools or other evidence-based approach.	All low-performing and high-poverty schools interested in implementing a community schools’ approach will be provided a community schools coordinator and other resources to assess local needs and assets and to integrate social, academic, and health supports into the school.
Extend the supports already available to schools to help them further implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework, a school improvement plan, NC Check-Ins, or other evidence-based approaches.	All school districts will successfully implement a MTSS framework, NC Check-Ins, or similar evidence-based approaches.

**A. Develop the State’s capacity to fully support the improvement of its lowest performing schools and districts.**

Prior *Leandro* rulings have been consistent about the need for state supports for school improvement and provided very explicit specifications for the state system of supports for school improvement. The NCDPI’s District and School Transformation (DST) model of state support was developed and expanded from 2012 through 2015 with Race to the Top funding. Evaluations have shown significant improvements in student performance in North Carolina schools provided with intensive assistance for multiple years through the DST model, with increased effects when supports were also provided to the district central office. The model included leadership development and coaching for principals; intensive on-site professional development for teachers; support for the district and schools; community engagement; and attention to the whole child. These supports are all essential for the turnaround of low-performing schools.

With a decline in funding to the NCDPI, decreases in its staffing, and reduction in the school improvement roles for which it takes responsibility, low-performing schools and districts are receiving significantly less support than they did up to 2015, and they do not currently have the resources or the expertise necessary to replace what the NCDPI used to provide. Since Race to the Top ended, the transformational support from the NCDPI has been scaled back, and the coaching and professional development for leaders has ended (WestEd, 2019, p. 130).

The NCDPI has established a new District and Regional Support model that develops and aligns systems, processes, and procedures to provide a unified system of support to North Carolina public schools that result in every child having equitable access to a meaningful, sound basic education through:

- A regional structure coordinating academic supports statewide;
- Opportunities for educator recognition, advancement, and growth;
- Diagnostic services that identify areas of improvements for schools and districts;
- Strategic reform strategies that lead to innovation and student success; and
- Effective partnerships to intervene on critical areas of need.

**i. Goal:** The NC State Board of Education and NC Department of Public Instruction will fully implement a regional support structure to support the improvement of low-performing and high-poverty schools by providing support in all needed content areas and instructional and leadership coaching.

**ii. Action Steps Initiated in Fiscal Year 2021:**

**1.** Implement the NC State Board of Education's regional support model to support the improvement of low-performing and high-poverty schools by providing support in needed content areas and instructional and leadership coaching. Funds have currently been secured through the federal CARES Act to achieve the action step.

**a. Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**2.** Develop and initiate a plan to provide direct, comprehensive, and progressive turnaround assistance to the State's chronically low-performing schools and low-performing districts. Funds from the federal CARES Act have currently been allocated to achieve this action step.

**a. Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**iii. Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**

**1.** Implement the NC State Board of Education’s District and Regional Support model (i.e. the plan described above) to provide direct, comprehensive, and progressive turnaround assistance to the State's chronically low-performing schools and low-performing districts

by aligning systems, processes, and procedures in a unified system of support that results in every child having equitable access to a meaningful, sound basic education through:

- a regional structure coordinating academic supports statewide;
- opportunities for educator recognition, advancement, and growth;
- diagnostic services that identify areas of improvements for schools and districts;
- strategic reform strategies that lead to innovation and student success; and
- effective partnerships to intervene on critical areas of need.

This action step requires a recurring appropriation to achieve the stated goal beginning in fiscal year 2022.

- a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**B. Provide statewide and/or regional support to help schools and districts select high quality standards-aligned, culturally-responsive core curriculum resources and to prepare teachers to use those resources effectively.**

As a part of its research, WestEd identified schools that largely serve economically disadvantaged and other at-risk students that were demonstrating above-average success in meeting the needs and fostering the academic growth of their students. Through an iterative research, interview, and visit process, the WestEd team developed a framework outlining the success factors that enabled these schools to provide their students with a sound basic education. These success factors include:

- A sufficient staff of teachers and others who support students' learning, with all instructional staff well prepared in evidence-based instructional approaches, in content knowledge in the areas they teach, and in strategies for successfully working with students with diverse backgrounds and learning differences.
  - Effective, evidence-based systems and practices for personalizing learning that account for variability in the pace, pathway, preferences, and needs of each student.
  - Curriculum resources and digital tools to support students' learning of the NCSCOS and more advanced topics.
  - Opportunities within and beyond the school walls for students to pursue their own interests and strengths and engage in experiential learning in which they apply their knowledge, collaborate, create, engage in authentic problem solving, and become self-directed lifelong learners.
- i. **Goal:** The NC State Board of Education and NC Department of Public Instruction will update and strengthen the state-level process for reviewing and adopting core curriculum resources that are high quality, standards-aligned, and culturally-responsive. The core curriculum resources recommended by this state-level process will include digital and blended resources, as well as commercial and open-source resources. The NC Department of Public Instruction will also provide statewide and/or regional support to help all schools select core curriculum resources that are high quality, standards-aligned, and culturally-responsive and will assist in preparing educators to use these resources effectively by providing comprehensive professional learning opportunities and access to appropriate resources.
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
1. Review, update, and strengthen the state-level process for reviewing and adopting core curriculum resources that are high quality, standards-aligned, and culturally-responsive. Provide statewide and/or regional support, resources, and professional learning opportunities to assist schools and districts in selecting and successfully employing high quality, standards-aligned, culturally-responsive, evidence-based resources and practices to

assist educators in applying innovative practices that promote continuous improvement. There are no costs associated with this action step for Fiscal Year 2022. Cost estimates for this action step in future fiscal years will be determined on the basis of the review described above.

- a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**C. Provide resources, opportunities, and supports for low-performing and high-poverty schools to address out of school barriers to learning using a community schools or other evidence-based approach.**

Students from low-income backgrounds face many challenges to being successful in school. Schools that serve higher concentrations of students from low-income backgrounds – or high-poverty schools - must address these many challenges to ensure that students are receiving a sound, basic education. These challenges include:

- limited access to early childhood education;
- adverse out-of-school conditions, such as food insecurity and hunger, limited or no access to health care, high rates of childhood trauma, and unstable and unpredictable housing;
- family responsibilities, such as caring for younger siblings or older relatives, and contributing to the family income.

High-poverty schools also often have significant differences from schools serving higher concentrations of more advantaged students, such as fewer fully licensed teachers and teacher with advanced degrees, higher rates of teacher turnover, less-experienced school leaders, and fewer opportunities for advanced learning, like gifted programs and Advanced Placement courses. (WestEd, 2019, p. 130).

As WestEd noted, “without substantial supports provided by the State and by qualified school improvement experts, schools serving the highest numbers of economically disadvantaged children will continue to fall short in ensuring every child’s right to a sound basic education” (WestEd, 2019, p. 130).

Community school models and other evidence-based approaches can be used to improve low-performing schools. North Carolina is well positioned to build on the considerable local interest in whole-child approaches and integrate social supports into high-poverty schools by providing state funding, technical assistance, and a support infrastructure to systematically address out-of-school barriers to learning.

- i. **Goal:** All low-performing and high-poverty schools interested in implementing a community schools’ approach will be provided a community schools coordinator and other resources to assess local needs and assets and to integrate social, academic, and health supports into the school.
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  1. Provide resources and support to high-poverty schools that adopt a community schools or other evidence-based model to address out of school barriers to learning, including providing funding for one full-time school-based coordinator to assess local needs and assets and to integrate social, academic, and health supports in coordination with school support personnel and access to technical assistance and professional support to effectively plan and implement the selected model. Implementation will begin on a pilot basis in FY 2022 and FY 2023, expand to elementary schools in FY 2024, middle schools in FY 2025, and to high

schools in FY 2027. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.

a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

2. Develop a plan to maximize the use of the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) funding and provide additional state funding to ensure all schools and districts that meet eligibility requirements for CEP can offer free meals to all students. This action step is achievable within existing funds.

a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

iii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2023:**

1. Provide funding to cover the reduced-price lunch co-pays for all students who qualify for reduced-price meals so that those students would receive free lunches through the National School Lunch Program. This action step requires recurring funding through fiscal year 2028.

a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

iv. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2024:**

1. Implement plan to maximize the use of the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) funding and provide additional state funding to ensure all schools and districts that meet eligibility requirements for CEP can offer free meals to all students. Cost estimates for this action step are to be determined based on the plan developed above.

a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**D. Extend the supports already available to schools to help them further implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework, a school improvement plan, and NC Check-In approaches.**

“Several approaches recommended and supported by the NCDPI are evidence-based practices that are highly valued by educators. These include the MTSS for school improvement, which is already being used in every district; the Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Intervention System for providing social, emotional, and behavior supports, which is being successfully implemented in some schools; and the NC Check-In formative assessments aligned to curriculum standards (WestEd, 2019, p. 132).” Expansion of the use of these interventions is important to assisting schools and districts in their improvement and student support efforts.

- i. **Goal:** All school districts will successfully implement a MTSS framework, NC Check-Ins, or similar evidence-based approaches.

ii. **Action Step to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**

1. Extend the supports already available to schools to help them further implement an MTSS framework, a school improvement plan, NC Check-Ins, or other evidence-based approaches. This action step is achievable within existing funds.

a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

**VI. A System of Early Education that Provides Access to High-Quality Prekindergarten and Other Early Childhood Learning Opportunities**

This section of the Action Plan addresses

*A system of early education that provides access to high-quality prekindergarten and other early childhood learning opportunities to ensure that all students at-risk of educational failure, regardless of where they live in the State, enter kindergarten on track for school success.*

*Hoke Cty. Bd. Educ. v. State*, No. 95 CVS 1158 (Sept. 11, 2020)

<b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>2030 GOALS</b>
Expand the NC Pre-K program to make high-quality, full year services available to all eligible four-year-old children and enroll at least 75 percent of eligible four-year-old children in each county.	<p>At least 75 percent of eligible four-year-old children in each county are enrolled in a NC Pre-K program that operates for 10 or 12 months.</p> <p>State funding provides the full cost per child to ensure the availability of NC Pre-K classrooms throughout the State.</p> <p>NC Pre-K enrollees have access to before- and after- school care, if needed, and children who are enrolled in a 10-month program have access to a summer care and learning program, if needed.</p> <p>NC Pre-K lead teachers hold an appropriate teaching license as specified by state policy and are paid according to the public school teacher salary schedule.</p> <p>NC Pre-K enrollees are provided transportation to the program.</p>
Increase high-quality early learning opportunities for children from birth.	<p>The State has developed and evaluated a program model for high-quality early learning for eligible children birth through age three.</p> <p>The State operates a child care subsidy program that serves all eligible families needing child care and that supports the child care sector in providing high-quality early learning, including higher compensation for the early childhood educator workforce.</p>
Expand and improve access to individualized early intervention services and support to families with eligible children birth to age three and include at-risk children in North Carolina’s definition of eligibility for the Part C Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (NC Infant Toddler Program).	The NC Infant Toddler Program (Early Intervention) is adequately staffed and scaled up to serve children birth to age three who meet expanded eligibility criteria.
Incrementally scale up the Smart Start program to increase quality, access, and support for all children birth to age five and families, especially those in under resourced communities.	Smart Start is fully funded (defined as meeting 25 percent of the statewide need for children birth to age five) to improve statewide early childhood system infrastructure and support a

ACTIONS	2030 GOALS
	cohesive continuum of services for children and families responsive to local needs.
Increase the volume and quality of the early childhood educator pipeline.	Early childhood educators statewide are provided salary supplements that recognize educational attainment.
	The State has implemented strategies that demonstrate success in attracting and retaining a qualified early childhood educator workforce.
Ensure quality transitions and alignment from early childhood programs to K-3 classrooms and strengthen elementary schools' readiness to support children to achieve early grade success.	All children transitioning from pre-kindergarten to public kindergarten classrooms have a child-centered transition plan developed collaboratively with their families, early childhood teachers and kindergarten teachers.
	Elementary schools have resources and support to provide high-quality early learning that is aligned for children birth through third grade, to engage effectively with families of young children and to collaborate with the early learning programs in the community attended by incoming students.

Judge Manning noted in his October 25, 2000 Order that “... the most common sense and practical approach to the problem of providing at-risk children with an equal opportunity to obtain a sound basic education is for them to begin their opportunity to receive that education earlier than age (5) five so that those children can reach the end of third grade able to read, do math, or achieve academic performance at or above grade level ...” *Hoke Cty. Bd. Educ. v. State*, No. 95 CVS 1158 (Oct. 25, 2000). However, today too many children in North Carolina are not reaching the end of third grade able to read or do math at grade level and there are vast differences in outcomes between racial and socioeconomic groups.

A robust early learning continuum from birth through third grade supports the academic, social-emotional, and physical development essential to the State’s obligation to provide a sound basic education. This section of the Action Plan identifies the key areas of State action and investment required to build a robust system of high-quality early learning for children, focused on children who are most in need of access to these opportunities, and to help ensure that young children remain on a positive trajectory of learning and development into the early grades in school.

Complementing this section of the Action Plan is the North Carolina Early Childhood Action Plan that was released in February 2019, and later endorsed by the NC State Board of Education, to provide a comprehensive set of goals, measures, and strategies to improve outcomes for children birth through third grade. The Early Childhood Action Plan vision is that all North Carolina children will get a healthy start and develop to their full potential in safe and nurturing families, schools, and communities. The Early Childhood Action Plan sets goals that by 2025, all North Carolina young children from birth to age eight will be:

- Healthy: Children are healthy at birth and thrive in environments that support their optimal health and well-being.
- Safe and Nurtured: Children grow confident, resilient, and independent in safe, stable, and nurturing families, schools, and communities.

- Learning and Ready to Succeed: Children experience the conditions they need to build strong brain architecture and skills that support their success in school and life.

The action steps are as follows:

**A. Expand the NC Pre-K program to make high-quality, full year services available to all eligible four-year-old children and enroll at least 75 percent of eligible four-year-old children in each county.**

High-quality pre-kindergarten programs have a sustainable positive impact on learning and can close the learning gaps among young children from economically advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds. As documented in the WestEd report, the NC Pre-K program has consistently had high standards, a strong record of quality, and extensive evidence of effectiveness. Rigorous research has demonstrated that the NC Pre-K program has produced both short- and long-term benefits through grade 8. For example, multiple years of evaluation results show that NC Pre-K student gains exceeded expected developmental benchmarks in language and literacy, math, general knowledge, and behavior skills, especially for dual language learners and low-income students. Other research found that not only does NC Pre-K raise children’s math and reading test scores, but it also reduces their rates of special education placement and grade repetition through elementary school. Further, these positive effects were shown to have either held steady or significantly increased through at least fifth grade. (West Ed, 2019, p. 88)

However, access remains out-of-reach for too many children of low-income families, with a persistent shortage of available NC Pre-K slots and barriers that exist to expanding the program while ensuring its level of quality. The fundamental barrier to NC Pre-K expansion is inadequate resources to cover costs, including rising operating costs and costs to recruit and retain qualified teachers, expand facilities, and provide transportation.

**i. Goals:**

1. At least 75 percent of eligible four-year-old children in each county are enrolled in a NC Pre-K program that operates for 10 months or 12 months.
2. State funding provides the full cost per child to ensure the availability of NC Pre-K classrooms throughout the State.
3. NC Pre-K enrollees have access to before- and after-school care, if needed, and children who are enrolled in a 10-month program have access to a summer care and learning program, if needed.
4. NC Pre-K lead teachers hold an appropriate teaching license as specified by state policy and are paid according to the public school teacher salary schedule.
5. NC Pre-K enrollees are provided transportation to the program.

**ii. Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**

1. Expand the NC Pre-K Program by:
  - Incrementally increasing State funding per NC Pre-K slot with the goal of paying 100 percent of the actual cost by FY 2028;
  - Increasing the number of children able to be served with the goal of reaching at least 75 percent of eligible children by FY 2028;
  - Increasing the rate for the county administrator to provide oversight, monitoring, enrollment, and support to 10 percent by FY 2023; and
  - Extending the NC Pre-K program year from 10 months to 12 months by FY 2028, which will be phased in based on county capacity to implement and may begin with a pilot program.



High-quality early learning environments support children in meeting critical developmental milestones. With the extensive evidence of effectiveness of NC Pre-K for at-risk four-year-olds, the State now has the opportunity to develop a comparable high-quality model for serving the most vulnerable children from birth through age three. Furthermore, the State’s child care sector provides critical early learning opportunities for young children statewide and families depend on this child care to be able to work and protect their family financial security, which strengthens the economy. Child care is often unaffordable and the child care subsidy system helps low-income families access care, but waiting lists for subsidy are persistent. Child care subsidy also supports the ability of programs to provide high-quality early learning.

- i. **Goal:**
  - 1. The State has developed and evaluated a program model for high-quality early learning for eligible children birth through age three.
  - 2. The State operates a child care subsidy program that serves all eligible families needing child care and that supports the child care sector in providing high-quality early learning, including higher compensation for the early childhood educator workforce.
- ii. **Action Steps Initiated in Fiscal Year 2021:**
  - 1. Implement a feasibility and cost study for a state model for high-quality early learning programs for eligible children birth through age three (comparable to the state model for high-quality NC Pre-K but appropriately designed for younger ages). This action step is achievable within existing funds.
    - a. **Responsible Party:** NC Department of Health and Human Services
  - 2. Implement a study to develop alternative approaches to NC’s current market rate model used to determine child care subsidy rates to support high-quality early learning. The goals are to address the true costs of high-quality child care and better compensation for the early childhood educator workforce and to support equal access to high-quality child care for families receiving subsidies across the State. This action step is achievable within existing funds.
    - a. **Responsible Party:** NC Department of Health and Human Services
- iii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  - 1. Implement a pilot of the *Family Connects* universal home visiting model for approximately 9,000 families with newborns, which provides nurse home visits to address infant and maternal health and to link families to community services. Align and connect the expansion of universal home visiting and early learning opportunities. This action step is achievable with existing funds.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC Partnership for Children/Smart Start
- iv. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2023:**
  - 1. Implement improvements to the child care subsidy rate system based on the preceding study and increase state funding for subsidy to support high-quality child care, particularly by increasing compensation for the workforce, and to ensure that eligible families can receive assistance (eliminating waiting lists). Cost estimates will be informed by the preceding study and federal funding increases, if realized, may assist in improving and expanding the availability of child care subsidy. This action step requires an incremental recurring appropriation to be determined by the study.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Health and Human Services
- v. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2024:**
  - 1. Conduct a pilot of the state model for high-quality early learning programs for eligible children birth through age three (for 1,000 children per year for two years) and then expand to additional locations. The pilot and the expansion will target high-poverty school districts. More precise cost estimates for this action step will be determined by the preceding

feasibility and cost study. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.

**a. Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Health and Human Services

2. Conduct rigorous evaluation of the pilot and expansion of the state model for high-quality early learning programs for eligible children birth through age three to determine program efficacy and inform program implementation. The initial contract will establish evaluation design and data collection needs. The final contract will analyze data to determine impact. This action step requires a recurring appropriation to achieve the stated goal beginning in this fiscal year.

**a. Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Health and Human Services

3. Expand the *Family Connects* universal home visiting model to local agencies statewide that choose to implement the program for their community (e.g. health departments or local Smart Start partnerships). This action step requires incremental increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.

**a. Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC Partnership for Children/Smart Start

**C. Expand and improve access to individualized early intervention services and supports to families with eligible children birth to age three and include at risk children in North Carolina’s definition of eligibility for the Part C Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (NC Infant Toddler Program).**

Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act legislation stipulates that states operate a comprehensive statewide program of services and supports for families with children birth through age two with developmental delays or special needs that may affect their development or impede their education. Currently, the NC Infant Toddler Program provides these early intervention services for eligible children, including family coaching on ways to support the developmental needs of their children and more intensive individualized supports for children. Investments are needed to establish a strong infrastructure, including additional staff statewide, to provide services that support children to achieve their potential and to expand eligibility to serve more children. Expanding eligibility will reach children who are “at risk” of developmental delays with these quality services. Early intervention helps prevent more severe developmental delays for children and more costly interventions later in school.

- i. **Goal:** The NC Infant Toddler Program (Early Intervention) is adequately staffed and scaled up to serve children birth to age three who meet expanded eligibility criteria.

**ii. Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**

1. Increase state and local staffing to address system fiscal, human, and organizational gaps to provide services to families with infants and toddlers with developmental delays and established medical conditions currently eligible for the NC Infant Toddler Program (Early Intervention). Expand funding for interpreter services, establish a centralized provider network system, provide professional development focused on early childhood mental health, and address salary inequities affecting retention and recruitment of necessary providers. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.

**a. Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC Interagency Coordinating Council

2. Conduct a feasibility study to examine eligibility criteria and cost implications for expansion of the NC Infant Toddler Program. This action step requires a non-recurring appropriation in fiscal year 2022.

- a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Health and Human Services
      - 3. Conduct a system and infrastructure readiness assessment to determine areas of need and system challenges to be addressed prior to expansion, including appropriate definitions of need and necessary infrastructure. Solicit public input and feedback on the comprehensive plan. This action step requires a non-recurring appropriation in fiscal year 2022.
        - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC Interagency Coordinating Council
      - 4. Provide professional development for early intervention staff and providers, including training on topics such as culturally-responsive practices, early identification of autism, trauma-informed care, and early childhood mental health. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
        - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Health and Human Services
    - iii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2023:**
      - 1. Solicit stakeholder feedback from early childhood state and local agencies, families, community stakeholders and council members to engage partners in expanded enrollment efforts (i.e. child find efforts, referrals, transitions, interagency communications and collaboration, etc.) to leverage existing resources, minimize duplication, and to ensure a seamless experience for families moving through the early childhood system. This action step is achievable within existing funds.
        - a. **Responsible Party:** NC Department of Health and Human Services
      - 2. Work with the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, (and related federal staff/programs) to change eligibility criteria and NC policy to facilitate expanded eligibility for the NC Infant Toddler Program. There are no costs associated with this action step.
        - a. **Responsible Party:** NC Department of Health and Human Services
    - iv. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2025:**
      - 1. Scale up high quality early intervention services and supports for children birth to age three who meet expanded eligibility criteria, estimating an additional 10,000 children per year and including costs related to public awareness campaign work, increased child find efforts, partnerships with family support agencies, etc. This action step is contingent on the increased state and local staffing and professional development in the previous action steps. More precise cost estimates for this action step will be determined on the basis of the preceding study. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
        - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Health and Human Services
- D. Incrementally scale up the Smart Start program to increase quality, access, and support for all children birth to age five and families, especially those in under resourced communities.**

Smart Start is a statewide network of nonprofit local partnerships, with oversight by the NC Partnership for Children, that provides local early childhood system infrastructure to improve the quality of early learning and implement evidence-based services to increase the health, well-being, and development of children birth to age five. As documented in the WestEd report, research studies have found that children who participated in Smart Start-supported programs entered elementary school with better math and language skills, as well as fewer with behavioral problems compared with their peers. Both Smart Start and NC Pre-K programs have been found to significantly reduce the likelihood of special education placement in third grade. (West Ed, 2019, p. 88)

At its inception, the goal for Smart Start funding was 25 percent of the gap in resources needed to ensure that children have access to high-quality child care and services for healthy development, but the State has never reached this level of investment.

- i. **Goal:** Smart Start is fully funded (defined as meeting 25 percent of the statewide need for children birth to age five) to improve statewide early childhood system infrastructure and support a cohesive continuum of services for children and families responsive to local needs
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  1. Incrementally increase Smart Start funding annually to reach the goal. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC Partnership for Children
  2. Study and revise Smart Start's county needs formula that determines the allocation of funding for each county. A revised needs formula will use current data to ensure that funding is directed to high need communities; that services reach the most vulnerable children and families; and that Smart Start funding is well coordinated with child care subsidy and prekindergarten funding to maximize impact. This action step is achievable within existing funds.
    - a. **Responsible Party:** NC Partnership for Children
  3. Study and make recommendations regarding readjustments that may be needed to the local partnership planning and funding requirements as State funding scales up, including: 1) the requirement to spend 30 percent of local funding on child care subsidy; 2) the requirement to provide the state TANF match; and 3) the requirement to match 19 percent of local funding with private fundraising. This action step is achievable within existing funds.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC Partnership for Children
  4. Continue an ongoing evaluation of the impacts and effectiveness of Smart Start and continue to use evaluation findings to inform program implementation. This action step is achievable within existing funds.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC Partnership for Children and local partnerships

#### E. Increase the volume and quality of the early childhood educator pipeline.

The early childhood educator workforce is essential to supporting young children's healthy development and learning, family employment and the State's economic prosperity, but it remains persistently low paid and often lacking benefits. Turnover in the early childhood workforce is quite high. According to the WestEd report, the fact that early childhood teachers have low salaries, especially compared with kindergarten teachers, serves as a major deterrent for those considering entering the field, particularly for the more highly educated candidates. Further, because of the large pay discrepancy between early childhood and kindergarten teachers, many early childhood teachers shift to teaching kindergarten after receiving a bachelor's degree. The median wage of a kindergarten teacher is nearly 2.25 times more – or more than \$17 more per hour – than that of an early childhood teacher. (West Ed, 2019, p. 242)

- i. **Goal:**
  1. Early childhood educators statewide are provided salary supplements that recognize educational attainment.
  2. The State has implemented strategies that demonstrate success in attracting and retaining a qualified early childhood educator workforce.
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  1. Increase funding for and expand participation statewide in the Child Care WAGES and Infant Toddler Educator AWARD Programs that provide educational attainment-based

salary supplements for early childhood educators. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.

**a. Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Health and Human Services

2. Promote the *NC Model Salary Scale for Early Education Teachers* to help guide the early childhood field in establishing better compensation for the early childhood workforce that is tied to educational attainment. Compensation is an integral component of attracting and retaining the early learning workforce needed to prepare children for success. A salary scale tied to education can serve as a critical tool to professionalize and grow the early childhood teaching workforce. This action step is achievable within existing funds.

**a. Responsible Parties:** NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC Partnership for Children

3. Study, develop a State plan, and monitor progress toward the goal that teachers in licensed early learning programs have an associate degree or higher in early childhood education, are paid comparable to the NC Model Salary Scale, and have access to benefits such as health insurance. Increases in funding for early learning programs will support increased workforce compensation. This action step is achievable within existing funds.

**a. Responsible Party:** NC Department of Health and Human Services

4. Implement strategies to recruit new early childhood educators to the field and provide ongoing professional development, including coaching, technical assistance, degree attainment and licensure support. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.

**a. Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Health and Human Services

**iii. Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2023:**

1. Develop a model, implementation plan and cost projections for an early childhood teacher preparation program (modeled on the NC Teaching Fellows Program) that provides full tuition to obtain an associate degree in early childhood education at a North Carolina community college and pathways to transfer to a university. This action step is achievable within existing funds.

**a. Responsible Party:** NC Community College System Office

**F. Ensure quality transitions and alignment from early childhood programs to K-3 classrooms and strengthen elementary schools' readiness to support all children to achieve early grade success.**

According to the WestEd report, the transition from early childhood education environments to K-12 environments is challenging for children and families. Very few elementary school principals have training in early childhood development. Elementary school environments are often not equipped to support the developmental transition of young children into school, including through appropriate staffing of school support staff such as nurses, social workers and counselors. Better alignment is needed between the early childhood programs and the schools that children from these programs will attend. (WestEd, 2019, p. 91)

**i. Goals:**

1. All children transitioning from pre-kindergarten to public kindergarten classrooms have a child-centered transition plan developed collaboratively with their families, early childhood teachers and kindergarten teachers.
2. Elementary schools have resources and support to provide high-quality early learning that is aligned for children birth through third grade, to engage effectively with families of young children and to collaborate with the early learning programs in the community attended by incoming students.

- ii. **Action Steps Initiated in Fiscal Year 2021:**
  - 1. Implement a Pre-K to K Transitions pilot program for prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers to learn, plan, and work together, with professional development focused on developmentally appropriate practice, observation-based formative assessment, and family engagement. The pilot will prioritize the inclusion of teachers from rural and low wealth districts and from high-poverty schools across the State. The pilot will allow families and prekindergarten teachers to systematically share information about children’s strengths and needs with kindergarten teachers through an electronic information sharing platform aligned with the NC Early Learning Inventory. This action step is achievable within existing funds.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC Department of Public Instruction
  - 2. Align the NC Early Learning Inventory (NC ELI) within the birth through third grade continuum. The NC ELI is an observation-based formative assessment. The NC ELI indicators of learning and development should align with a subset of the indicators in the NC early learning standards and the NCSCOS. This action step is achievable within existing funds. A companion action step is included in the Assessment and Accountability action plan.
    - a. **Responsible Party:** NC Department of Public Instruction
- iii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  - 1. Develop, pilot, and validate an implementation fidelity measure for the NC Early Learning Inventory (NC ELI). Evaluate the effectiveness of the NC ELI and use findings to inform implementation and make improvements. This action step is achievable within existing funds.
    - a. **Responsible Party:** NC Department of Public Instruction
  - 2. Provide ongoing support to local trainers and coaches for professional development in implementing the NC Early Learning Inventory as intended. This action step is achievable within existing funds.
    - a. **Responsible Party:** NC Department of Public Instruction
  - 3. Incrementally increase funding until funding will provide approximately one teacher assistant for every 27 K-3 students. An aligned action step is included in the Finance and Resources action plan and requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor
  - 4. Incrementally increase funding for whole-child supports through positional funding that increases the number of SISPs to begin to meet national guidelines, initially prioritizing high-poverty schools. An aligned action step is included in the Finance and Resources action plan and requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor
- iv. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2023:**
  - 1. Replace the kindergarten diagnostic with an extended version of the NC Early Learning Inventory to include additional dimensions (language, literacy, math, SEL) with full year implementation and checkpoint periods. This action step is achievable within existing funds.
    - a. **Responsible Party:** NC Department of Public Instruction
  - 2. Review the NC Early Learning Inventory and Read to Achieve legislation and policies to establish an aligned formative and summative assessment continuum. This action step is achievable within existing funds.
    - a. **Responsible Party:** NC Department of Public Instruction
  - 3. Establish an Early Childhood Education Expert Advisory Team (preschool through third grade) to review current data and identify target districts/schools for multi-tiered support aligned to gaps. Develop evaluation criteria to prioritize multi-tiered support. Develop an implementation process to be used statewide for identified target districts/schools. Costs for this action step will be determined and may require an appropriation.



**G. Facilitate reliable access to high-quality data supporting early childhood education.**

Comprehensive and reliable early childhood data infrastructure is an important component of a robust system of high-quality early learning for young children. Improving North Carolina’s early childhood data infrastructure will improve data collection and quality, facilitate the ability to measure progress, improve research and evaluation, and assist policymakers and program managers in implementing effective programs and strategies. WestEd concluded that more comprehensive data systems are needed to address the variation in access to early childhood education across and within counties. (WestEd, 2019, p. 243)

- i. **Goal:** Real-time, quality data will be readily available and used to inform policy and program decision making in early childhood education
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  - 1. Develop and implement a real-time workforce data system that supports building the pipeline of early childhood educators. This action step requires a recurring appropriation to achieve the stated goal.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Health and Human Services
  - 2. Expand and improve the NC Early Childhood Integrated Data System and the NC Early Childhood Action Plan data dashboards to track child outcomes and provide access to state data for state and local users and researchers. Connect data to the NC Longitudinal Data System (NCLDS). This action step is achievable within existing funds through fiscal year 2023 and then requires a recurring appropriation through 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Health and Human Services
  - 3. Provide technical assistance to build local capacity to use quality early childhood data across child health, child welfare, and early childhood education for local planning. This action is achievable within existing funds through fiscal year 2023 and then requires a recurring appropriation through 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Health and Human Services
- iii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2024:**
  - 1. Develop and implement a real-time data collection and sharing process to identify children eligible for early childhood programs, including NC Pre-K and Early Intervention, that allows for disaggregation along multiple variables, such as race, ethnicity, and geography, and helps identify the children most vulnerable to build a more equitable early learning system. This action step requires a recurring appropriation.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Department of Information Technology

## VII. Alignment of High School to Postsecondary and Career Expectations for All Students

This section of the Action Plan addresses

*An alignment of high school to postsecondary and career expectations, as well as the provision of early postsecondary and workforce learning opportunities, to ensure student readiness to all students in the State.*

*Hoke Cty. Bd. Educ. v. State*, No. 95 CVS 1158 (Sept. 11, 2020)

ACTIONS	2030 GOALS
Strengthen alignment between career pathways and workforce demands.	K-12, community college, and workforce development career pathways will be aligned and responsive to workforce needs across the State.
Ensure all high school students have the option to complete high school courses leading to college credit, an associate degree, or a career-ready credential.	All students, especially students in high-poverty schools and low wealth districts, will have equitable access to postsecondary and career-readiness opportunities, including dual enrollment coursework and high quality, rigorous pathways leading to a career-ready credential.
Strengthen college and career advising for high school students.	All high school students will have college and/or career advisors that provide guidance that allow them to plan for, pursue, and attain their postsecondary education and career goals.

### A. Strengthen alignment between career pathways and workforce demands.

Through the work of the myFutureNC Commission, North Carolina is focused on achieving a dramatic increase in postsecondary attainment by 2030. Reaching this goal will require closer alignment across and within education sectors, as well as better alignment between those sectors and the business community. P-12, postsecondary, and business sectors must collaborate to provide guided pathways that are industry-aligned and that develop the knowledge, employability skills, and competencies students need to succeed in high-wage, high-demand jobs. Successful coordination will require development of accessible, clear, and streamlined processes for linking businesses with educators.

Only about one-quarter of the respondents to a 2018 EducationNC survey believed that their educational opportunities were very well aligned with jobs available in their communities, and about the same proportion believed that their educational opportunities provided avenues for gaining needed work skills for available jobs (myFutureNC, 2020). To position more North Carolinians for better educational and employment opportunities, the State can develop a wider array of aligned, accessible career and postsecondary pathways and expand work-based learning models that help educators, students, and businesses work together – from internships to co-ops to on-the-job training programs to apprenticeships.

- i. **Goal:** K-12, community college, and workforce development career pathways will be aligned and responsive to workforce needs across the State.
- ii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  1. Develop an updated and consistent definition of Career and College Readiness. This action step is achievable within existing funds.

- a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Department of Commerce, NC Community College System, University of North Carolina
  - 2. Develop model career pathways that align high school Career Technical Education courses with workforce demands and clearly articulate what students need to know and be able to do. This action step is achievable within existing funds.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Department of Commerce, NC Community College System, University of North Carolina
  - 3. Provide funding for an independent alignment study of all NC dual enrollment courses that satisfy basic graduation requirements to ensure that all courses meet the constitutional standard of providing students a sound basic education. This action step requires a non-recurring appropriation.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Community College System, University of North Carolina
  - 4. Ensure students graduate prepared for college-level coursework at the NC Community Colleges by providing:
    - Funding for NROC subscription;
    - Professional development for high school educators; and
    - A staff member at NCDPI to support the Career and College Ready Graduate program in collaboration with the NC Community College System.

This action step requires a recurring appropriation to achieve the stated goal beginning in this fiscal year.

    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Community College System
- iii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2023:**
  - 1. In accordance with the alignment study described above, develop NC State Board of Education policy and guidance to implement a course review and approval process for all dual enrollment courses. There are no costs associated with this action step.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Community College System, University of North Carolina

**B. Ensure all high school students have the option to complete high school courses leading to college credit, an associate degree, or a career-ready credential.**

North Carolina’s employers do not have access to enough homegrown talent with the skills needed to help the State remain competitive. Employers’ responses to the North Carolina Department of Commerce’s 2018 Employer Needs Survey indicate that half are not able to hire the workers they need. They cite a lack of employability skills (65 percent), technical skills (49 percent), and overall education (43 percent) (Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2018).

To address these requirements, every North Carolina student should receive rigorous academic and career preparation from well-prepared teachers and school leaders. In addition, schools must provide each student with opportunities to engage in college-level coursework and to explore multiple career pathways. Finally, while students need to be ready for each level of education, every institution – from pre-kindergarten to postsecondary – also needs to be student-ready. In order to ensure that every student is prepared to meet the demands of our growing economy, each individual must have access to a student-centered education that optimizes her or his academic and career preparation.

The task does not end with academic preparation and acquisition of technical skills alone. Across all education sectors, North Carolina should also help students improve social-emotional skills, like self-regulation and communication, as well as transferable skills, like problem-solving and critical thinking, alongside the more specific skills each employer needs.

- i. **Goal:** All students, especially students in high-poverty schools and low wealth districts, will have equitable access to postsecondary and career-readiness opportunities, including dual enrollment coursework and high quality, rigorous pathways leading to a career-ready credential.
- ii. **Action Steps Initiated in Fiscal Year 2021:**
  1. Provide recurring funding for Cooperative Innovative High Schools approved to open from 2018-2021. This action step requires a recurring appropriation to achieve the stated goal beginning in this fiscal year.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
- iii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  1. Revise the funding approach for the North Carolina Virtual Public School to remove barriers that prevent students in low-wealth districts from participating. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  2. Expand funds for credentials and certifications for Career and Technical Education students. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
  3. Adopt the necessary policies to allow school calendar flexibility to ensure that local schools can align with community college and university schedules. There are no costs associated with this action step.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction
- iv. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2023:**
  1. Provide funds for the NC Department of Public Instruction, in collaboration with the Office of State Budget Management, to examine barriers and supports impacting all students' ability to complete high school courses leading to college credit, an associate degree, or a career-ready credential, including an examination of access, equity, resources, fees, and personnel. This action step requires a non-recurring appropriation.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Community College System, University of North Carolina
  2. Provide recurring funding for up to three additional Cooperative Innovative High Schools annually if approved by the NC State Board of Education. The NC State Board of Education may limit approval to school districts without a Cooperative Innovative High School. Cost estimates for this action step will be determined on the basis of the number of schools approved.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Community College System, University of North Carolina
- v. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2024:**
  1. In accordance with the study above, expand funds to remove barriers to economically disadvantaged students' participation in the Career and College Promise program, dual enrollment, and advanced coursework, including by providing course fees, textbooks, and transportation costs. Cost estimates for this action step will be determined on the basis of the study.

- a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Community College System, University of North Carolina

**C. Strengthen college and career advising for high school students.**

About one-quarter of EducationNC survey respondents rated “better guidance about successfully moving between education levels” as the most helpful way to increase educational attainment among students in their community. Postsecondary students who took part in myFutureNC’s listening tour said that, of all their transitions along the continuum, they struggled most with the transition from high school to postsecondary (myFutureNC, 2020). The challenge begins in high school, when students first wrestle with the admissions and course transfer processes. Once enrolled, they identified navigating what for many of them was an entirely new school structure – from course scheduling to classroom expectations to planning a course of study to constantly managing financial aid– as a sometimes overwhelming challenge.

Parents face similar challenges when their students make the switch from high school to postsecondary. These challenges can be particularly acute for parents of first-generation college students. As one listening tour student participant put it, every student and family needs at least one go-to personal connection “who knows more about the student than a test score” (myFutureNC, 2020).

In order to choose the best path to personal attainment, each student should understand all the options available and should receive the guidance necessary to weigh various paths against each other. This broader perspective about postsecondary options from a trained advisor is the first step toward raising the aspirations of potential new and returning students who otherwise may not realize that a wider array of viable postsecondary options exists than they may have first suspected.

- i. **Goal:** All high school students will have college and/or career advisors that provide guidance that allow them to plan for, pursue, and attain their postsecondary education and career goals.
- ii. **Action Steps Initiated in Fiscal Year 2021:**
  - 1. Provide support to the NC Community College System (NCCCS) Career Coaches program, which places career coaches employed by local community colleges with partnering high schools, prioritizing at risk students. Funding previously appropriated via SL 2019-235 expands the NCCCS Career Coaches program and places Career Coaches employed by local community colleges with partnering high schools. This action step is achievable within existing funds.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC Community College System
- iii. **Action Steps to be Initiated in Fiscal Year 2022:**
  - 1. Provide matching funds to the College Advising Corps to expand the placement of college advisers in low wealth districts in North Carolina public schools. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2023.
    - a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, University of North Carolina, College Advising Corps
  - 2. Provide funds for a Career and Postsecondary Planning Director in NCDPI’s Division of Career and Technical Education to ensure a cohesive, collaborative approach to career planning in grades 5-12, and incrementally increase funds to provide one Career Development Coordinator for every 1,000 students in grades 6-8 and one Career Development Coordinator for every 500 students in grades 9-12 in the State beginning in FY 2023. Coordinators will provide adequate, appropriate, and aligned student-centered

advising that focuses on academic decision making and support, social and emotional learning, and college and career preparation and awareness. Career Development Coordinators and other student services personnel will also work with students to provide Career Development Plans for every student in grades 9-12 in the State. This action step requires incremental recurring increases in funding through fiscal year 2028.

- a. **Responsible Parties:** NC General Assembly, NC Office of the Governor, NC State Board of Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

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