



Public Education League Action Team - Frequently Asked Questions

Why do public schools matter? The state constitution provides for a unified, public statewide system—free and open to all children. Public schools give students the tools for academic and social success. They prepare students for college and produce future leaders. Our schools also unite us, bringing people from diverse communities together to learn and work together.

How do public schools impact our local communities?

- Most students in K-12 attend public schools. Overall, it's 84% in North Carolina. In many counties, this number is higher—89% or more—especially in rural counties.
- The school systems are tied to the economic health of the county. Ranked as the largest employer in 49 counties and first or second largest employer in 80 counties.
- Local businesses need educated, skilled employees. Public schools go beyond the traditional subjects to include technical and career education, often working with community colleges or workforce development programs.
- When a corporation is considering setting up shop in North Carolina, leaders look at the public schools before criteria such as corporate taxes. In addition, the schools act as a community hub, providing opportunities for people to come together.

Who is responsible for public education policy and funding? North Carolina's state government has primary responsibility for public education. The state establishes curriculum requirements, sets many personnel policies and provides the largest share of operating funds. Counties are primarily responsible for school buildings and facilities, and also provide supplemental funding for salaries, programs, and materials. The federal government provides a smaller share of funding, including support for school nutrition programs and additional support to special populations, such as students with disabilities. The typical funding for North Carolina public schools: 65% provided by the state, 25% provided by the county, and 10% by the federal government.

Many elected public officials make decisions that affect public education. [Learn who makes those decisions](#)—and before you vote, find out where the candidates stand on public schools.

How does North Carolina measure up?

- North Carolina continues to rank near the bottom nationally on several measures of public-school investment. The Education Law Center's *Making the Grade 2025* report ranks North Carolina 50th of 51 states and D.C. in funding level—cost adjusted state and local funding per student—and last in funding effort, which measures school funding relative to the state's economic capacity.
- North Carolina's average teacher salary is \$60,323, ranking 43rd nationally, according to the NEA's latest estimates.

- Teacher recruitment and retention also remain concerns. In 2024-25, 10.1% of North Carolina Teachers—9,107 teachers—were no longer employed in the state’s public schools the following year. The attrition rate was even higher among beginning teachers, at 14.7%.
- Funding as a percentage of the state budget has steadily declined. In the 1970s, it was 55%; in 2024, it was 39%.

What are some of the current issues facing public education in our state?

Teacher recruitment and retention. North Carolina continues to lose experienced teachers while struggling to attract enough new teachers to the profession. Pay, workload, working conditions, and administrative demands all contribute to the challenge.

Adequate and equitable funding. North Carolina ranks near the bottom nationally in both per-pupil funding and funding effort. Funding gaps particularly affect students who require additional support, including students with disabilities, students from low-income families, and English learners. Early childhood education also remains underfunded.

Private-school vouchers. North Carolina has significantly expanded its Opportunity Scholarship program, which uses public funds for private-school tuition. As the program grows, public-education advocates are calling for greater transparency and accountability for how those taxpayer dollars are spent.

Tax Policy. State and local tax policies determine how much revenue is available for public schools and other public services. Proposed constitutional limits on state income taxes and local property-tax revenue could further constrain the resources available for public education.

Education policy. Decisions about curriculum, classroom requirements, testing, and other education policies can affect the time and resources schools have available for teaching and student support.