



## Invest in NC's Future: Support Public Schools in the State Budget

*By Ella Ridgway, education major at Western Carolina University*

I am writing to urge lawmakers to increase funding for North Carolina schools as they prepare the next state budget. My name is Ella Ridgway and I am an education major at Western Carolina University. As someone who attended an underfunded North Carolina public high school, I have seen firsthand the effects of insufficient investment in public education. Schools are not just places where children learn academic subjects; they are the foundations for the next generation of leaders, professionals and well-functioning citizens. I want to highlight three key reasons why schools must receive more funding: they shape children, they serve as mechanisms for social mobility and they contribute to society's well-being.

First, schools provide more than just education; they shape children's social development. Schools offer a safe environment where children are cared for while their parents work. For many families, schools are the only place where they can leave their children with peace of mind. Beyond safety, schools teach essential social skills such as cooperation, sharing and conflict resolution. Children's

understanding of race, gender and socioeconomic status is formed in school, and these experiences shape how they view the world. If schools are underfunded, the safety and social development of future generations could be compromised, affecting their ability to contribute meaningfully to society as adults.

Additionally, funding disparities create a divide in educational opportunities based on socioeconomic status. Students from lower-income areas often attend schools with fewer resources, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate support systems. Increased investment in public education can help bridge this gap and provide all children, regardless of their background, with the same opportunities for growth and development.

The second reason funding is essential is that schools serve as critical mechanisms for social mobility, particularly for marginalized groups such as women, people of color and others. Education has historically been a means for individuals to rise above their circumstances. The Civil Rights Movement, for example, was deeply connected to the fight for equal access to education. Landmark events such as the desegregation of schools after *Brown v. Board of Education* and Ruby Bridges integrating a New Orleans elementary school highlight the role education has played in the struggle for equality. Despite progress, disparities persist, especially for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students, as racial segregation in schools continues due to inequitable resource distribution.

Education not only provides academic knowledge but also opens paths for individuals to overcome systemic barriers. When we fail to invest in schools, we deny children the opportunity to break free from the constraints imposed by their circumstances. Lawmakers must prioritize funding for public schools to ensure that all students have the chance to succeed.

The third reason schools are vital is that they contribute to the public good. A well-educated society is a healthier, more productive society. Schools equip individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to contribute meaningfully to the economy and engage in civic life. Education fosters an understanding of democracy, freedom and justice, essential values for a thriving society. Without education, democracy cannot function properly. As George Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Education allows individuals to challenge inequality, create positive change and build a better world.

In conclusion, schools are not only essential for individual success but are also critical to the well-being of society. North Carolina's public schools need more funding to provide the necessary tools for children to succeed, support social mobility, and contribute to the public good. Lawmakers have an opportunity, as they prepare next year's budget, to make a meaningful investment in the future of the state by ensuring schools are adequately funded.

By increasing funding for public education, North Carolina can ensure that every student has access to high-quality resources, effective teachers, and a safe learning environment. This investment will benefit not only today's students but future generations of North Carolinians who will shape the state. Increased funding will allow for better teaching materials, up-to-date resources and safer school environments. These elements are essential for creating an education system that leads to success. It will also ensure that children from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to reach their potential, regardless of their family's income or neighborhood.

North Carolina's future depends on the quality of its education system. If we want the state to thrive, we must be willing to invest in the education of our children. The time to act is now.

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*Public Schools First NC*

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