



CIVITAS

2018 Legislative Agenda

**PUBLIC  
EDUCATION**



## Public Education

Education is an indispensable component of a healthy, prosperous society. That principle is enshrined in Article 9, Section I, of the North Carolina State Constitution. It reads:

*Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools, libraries and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.*

The importance of public education to all people is underscored in Section II of the same Article 9 where it states, “The General Assembly shall provide by taxation and otherwise for a general and uniform system of free public schools.”

Those free public schools are not free to the taxpayer. Educating students takes resources. Last year North Carolina spent \$13.1 billion in state, federal and local funds to deliver educational services to 1.4 million students in 2,500 public schools in 115 school districts across the state.

In hopes of bringing greater clarity regarding the state’s responsibility for public education, in 1997 the North Carolina Supreme Court ruled in [Leandro v. State \(1997\)](#) that the state has a responsibility to provide all state residents a “sound basic education.” What exactly the courts meant by a “sound basic education” and the implications of the Leandro ruling are questions that have been addressed in [subsequent court cases](#).

While North Carolina has many fine public schools, not all students have access to a proper education. The wide range of test results, achievement gaps, lack of improvement in federal and state tests verify this reality. The evidence is all around us:

- 39 percent of NC fourth graders listed as “proficient” on NAEP reading test
- 38 percent of high school students test at Level 4 in all End-of-Course subjects (Level 4 indicates students are on track to be career and college ready by the time they graduate from high school)
- 17 percent of NC ACT test-takers met benchmarks in all subjects
- Despite significant efforts, achievement gaps persist among the races for graduation and student achievement

The disappointing results suggest the promise of access to a quality education is not real for all students. The results have also helped to focus Civitas’s K-12 efforts in two main areas: 1) advocating for true education reform and 2) expanding parental choice.

## **Education Reform:**

The goal of education reform is twofold: 1) Ensure that schools provide students with a quality education that equips students with the knowledge, skills and training to either pursue college or enter the work force, and 2) ensure educational material and services are delivered in a cost efficient and effective manner.

To that end Civitas supports efforts to:

*Place Quality Teachers in the Classroom* – Research has demonstrated that [effective teachers](#) are one of the most important variables for boosting student achievement. Civitas supports the expansion of alternative teacher certification programs to get much-needed qualified teachers in the classroom. Civitas also supports efforts to boost teacher pay - including recent legislative efforts to boost average teacher pay to \$50,000; tie pay levels to performance, and efforts to align financial incentives to reward excellent teaching. Moreover, Civitas believes teacher pay can only truly be fair by eliminating the teacher salary schedule and giving local school districts more discretion over how to pay teachers.

*Modernize North Carolina's Archaic System of Financing Education* – Currently the average school district in North Carolina receives two-thirds of their funding from state government. Those funds are distributed via some thirty odd formulas that are outdated, inequitable and interact with the presence of other formulas. Civitas believes the formulas for financing public education need a full review. Funding for education should flow – not to the school or district – but to the child. In addition, new funding formulas should be structured to give local school districts maximum flexibility to adapt to changing needs.

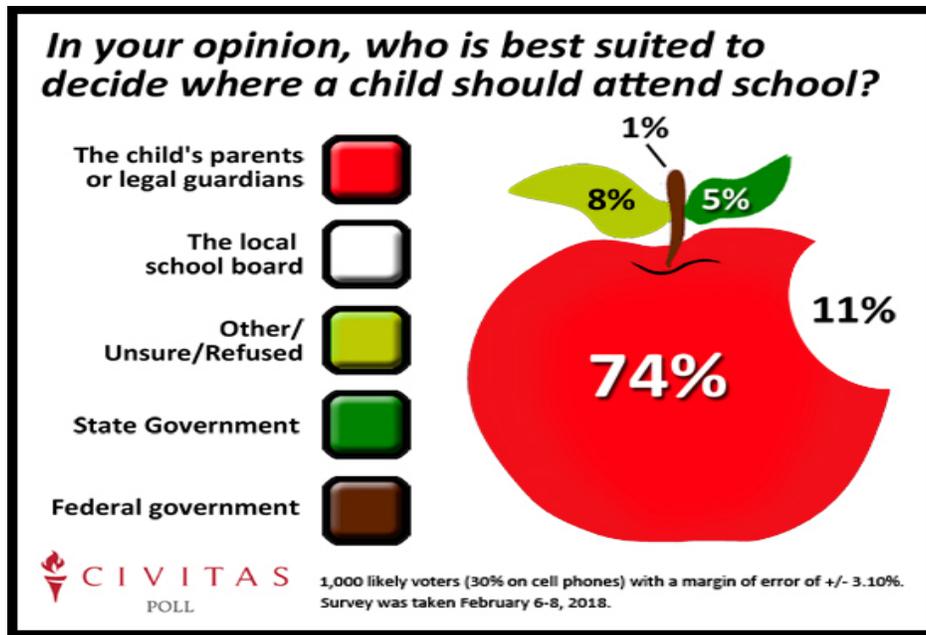
*Promote Local Authority Over Public Education* - The centralized nature of school financing in North Carolina is at odds with the reality that education is best “locally controlled.” Two mechanisms we support to strengthen local control are the development of block grants that provide districts more flexibility in spending and giving principals greater authority over pay and staffing levels within their schools.

## **Parental School Choice:**

Parents play a key role in the education of their children and state policy should reinforce that principle.

Parents are a child's first and primary educator. Because parents know their child better than anyone, they know the type of educational environment that best fits their child's needs and what type of setting will allow them to flourish. Civitas believes public policy should reflect these truths.

Civitas supports empowering parents to direct how and where their child is educated. February 2018 Civitas Poll results found strong support for those sentiments. Seventy-four percent of respondents said parents are best suited to decide where a child attends school; 11 percent said local school board, while 5 percent each chose local government and “don't know.”



*Improve Charter School Funding* - Charter schools educate over 100,000 students in North Carolina. Charter schools are public schools. By law charter schools should receive the same level of funding public schools receive. Because funding for public and charter schools derive from multiple funding streams (e.g. state, federal and local, private organizations), revenue is not always equal. On average, public charter school children in North Carolina, receive 73 cents for every dollar provided for children who attend traditional public schools.<sup>1</sup> That disparity, coupled with the fact that charters receive no funding for capital costs, puts many charter schools at a financial disadvantage and hinders their chances for success. Civitas supports legislation to correct these inequities and to create a level playing field.

*Accountability* – Civitas supports the need for public accountability for charter and parental choice programs. Accountability however comes in many different forms and should not be limited to state regulation. Parental choice programs are also subject to parental accountability, the highest form of accountability. This means parents can remove their child from school if they aren't satisfied; an option that may exist in the world of public schools but occurs less frequently and has less significance. Civitas supports regulatory mechanisms that not only respect the differences between charter, public and private schools but also preserve the institutional autonomy of each school.

*Expand School Choice Programs* - All children in North Carolina have a right to a quality education. Too many children are trapped in schools that are academically challenged or are not a good fit for a child's educational, developmental or social needs. A growing body of research suggests that parental choice can aid student academic achievement, lead to higher levels of parental and student satisfaction, improve college attendance and graduation rates. Last year, the Disabilities Scholarship Program and Opportunity Scholarship Program helped over 7,700

students access a better education. In addition, the passage of Personal Education Savings Accounts last year expands opportunities to yet more students. Civitas favors the continued and orderly expansion of all choice programs to meet the increased demand from parents and students alike.

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<sup>i</sup> This sentence was updated on 5/25/2018 for clarification. Source: Fair Funding for All NC Public Schools, <http://fairpublicfundingnc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/fair-funding-handout-APRIL2016.pdf>.