

Expanding Educational Opportunity in North Carolina

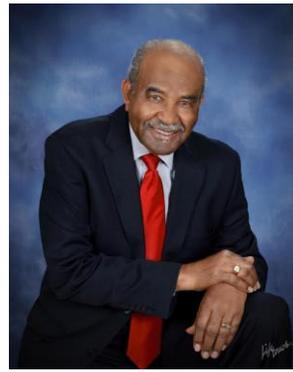
The Public School Forum's Study Group XVI
2016

Action Plan and Recommendations

Our efforts to date to confront the vast gaps in educational outcomes separating different groups of young Americans have yet to include a serious and sustained commitment to ending the appalling inequities—in school funding, in early education, in teacher quality, in resources for teachers and students and in governance—that contribute so mightily to these gaps. For all of our initiatives and good intentions, our nation has been unable to ensure that each and every American child can attend a quality public school. Instead, both political parties, and all levels of government, have advanced reforms that, while well intentioned, have not risen to the level necessary to address the depth and breadth of the daunting challenges of equity and excellence facing American public education at the beginning of the 21st century.

- U.S. Department of Education (2013). *For Each and Every Child—A Strategy for Education Equity and Excellence*. Washington, DC: Author.

From the Study Group XVI Co-Chairs:



Too many students suffer traumatic events in childhood. For the lucky ones, family and social supports help them to successfully navigate those difficult life struggles. But for many—particularly those who suffer the plight of poverty—the supports may not be enough. For these children, schools have critical roles to play, to recognize the potential of each student while addressing his or her unique, individual challenges.

The Public School Forum has a long history of tackling the thorniest problems facing public education in North Carolina. The current work embodied in Study Group XVI asks the toughest question of the past 50 years: “*What would it take to give every child in North Carolina the opportunity to receive a sound basic education*”? Part of that question was spoken to in earlier study group reports, as well as by the *Leandro* court decision. But we know that the challenges of poverty, racial isolation, and trauma are huge hurdles that require broad, systemic action. The meetings of our three study group committees, and their resulting Action Plans and Recommendations, contained in this publication, aim to pave the way for just such a set of profound commitments.

This document brings renewed attention to issues that must be attacked with deep passion and unrelenting resolve. During the past half-century, North Carolinians have repeatedly demonstrated our collective strengths in science, medicine, business, agriculture, and higher education. We can certainly create public schools that prepare all students to succeed.

We have witnessed academic success in challenged schools in our State. How many examples must we see before we are convinced that dramatic improvement is possible in every school? When will we be ready to make the investments required to effect that change on a broad scale? It will be an ambitious undertaking, but Study Group XVI’s premise has been to ask both “what may happen if we do what is needed?” and “what will surely happen if we do not?” Answering these questions has shed light on the stakes and given committee members an incredible sense of urgency.

North Carolina’s children are truly our future, individually and collectively. Let’s focus our resources and attention on creating learning spaces that will enrich their learning and enhance all our citizens’ lives.

Dudley Flood and Michael Priddy

Executive Summary

In October 2015, the Public School Forum embarked on its sixteenth biennial “study group,” continuing the organization’s practice of bringing together leaders from education, business, government, and academia to distill collective knowledge on major, timely education issues. Together, participants in Forum study groups have marshaled strong thought leadership and discussion of promising and innovative practices in service of the development of practical, implementable solutions to profound educational challenges. This year has been no exception.

Ten years ago, Study Group XI offered a response to the state supreme court’s seminal ruling in *Leandro v. State*, which defined the state’s constitutional obligation to provide every North Carolina child with an “opportunity to obtain a sound basic education.” The resulting publication, *Responding to the Leandro Ruling*, grounded the lofty constitutional guarantee in the realities of the day. The state was in the midst of a struggle to attract and retain the best and the brightest to teaching and school leadership, and labored under a school funding system that arguably gave these education professionals too few resources to do their jobs.

Fast forward to today: North Carolina faces even more acute teacher and school leader shortages, and school funding has been depleted by the economic downturn and years of dwindling investment in public education. Although these crises loom large, with Study Group XVI we decided to step back from the factors cited in *Leandro* to develop an even broader perspective on the case’s core question: *What would it take to give every child in North Carolina the opportunity to receive a sound basic education?*

Our approach began, as every discussion of education policy should, with students. We thought about the many layers of crisis that students may confront in their lives and carry with them into our classrooms. Some are deeply personal—tragic events or recurring traumas: the death of a loved one; an abusive parent; hunger or homelessness. For some students, these problems are compounded by structural racism—policies, practices, and other systemic norms that perpetuate racial inequity. In addition, while some students are well-served by schools that achieve herculean results amidst the most challenging circumstances, too many languish year after year in struggling schools.

Considering these factors together—the personal, the cultural, and the systemic—led us to conceive of an archetypal disadvantaged student. This student, described in the narrative below, has served as our touchstone as we have considered the topic of educational opportunity and how North Carolina can provide it, equitably, to all students, even those who are most challenging to teach or most at risk of failure.

Antonio's Story

Antonio is an energetic, imaginative and rambunctious eight year-old African-American boy from rural Eastern North Carolina. He is naturally inquisitive and loves learning new things. Like most little boys, he struggles at times to stay composed and on task. His need for physical activity and incessant questioning could easily be misinterpreted as acting out. Such is often the case. Not even halfway through the 3rd grade, Antonio has already been suspended twice, both times for disruptive behavior. The first incident was the result of a heated argument with another student that got Antonio worked up to the point he emotionally shut down. He folded his arms, ignored several commands from his teacher, and would not speak to any of the faculty as tears streamed down his face. The second was a result of "playing too roughly" with fellow students during recess. The suspension came after he had been warned several times by his teacher. This overly punitive response is not surprising, as there are racial gaps in discipline throughout the district and state.

These sorts of incidents are not uncommon at Antonio's elementary school. His school district has been labeled one of the state's "low-performing"-- with most of its schools earning D or F "school performance grades," which are based in large part on student scores on end-of-grade tests. Antonio's school happens to be included in that number. It received an F grade and failed to meet expected growth during 2015-16. Suspensions are high, while achievement remains low. It is a high-poverty school, overwhelmingly non-white, full of mostly young and inexperienced teachers that struggle to manage the workload and population. It is increasingly hard to keep teachers, as they frequently opt for larger districts offering higher pay and more resources or leave the profession altogether.

Despite the tensions that exist there, school is a safe place for Antonio--a pillar of stability where he knows he will see his friends and be around many caring adults. He is one of four children being raised by a loving and hard-working single mother. His father, though around, is not a reliable fixture in his life. Like so many of his peers, his housing situation is rarely permanent or even long-lasting. His family moves around frequently, often landing them in the midst of extreme poverty and community violence. Though he idolizes his older siblings, they often expose him to inappropriate behavior. His mother cannot always be present as she works two jobs -- one in second shift. Consequently, even at his young age he has witnessed sexual activity, drug use and fighting. He is not alone, as this is the case with many of his peers. No one at his school knows the details of Antonio's life outside of school or understands the connections to his in-school behavior.

Antonio and so many other students all over North Carolina represent the most vulnerable students in our state: students of color who have experienced trauma and attend low-performing schools. As you review this publication, we urge you to pause often and ask yourself, "What would it take to provide a child like Antonio with the opportunity to receive a sound basic education?"

We lift this narrative not to perpetuate a stereotype or attempt to pathologize certain communities. We hope to humanize the very real challenges faced in a way the data don't always do justice. It becomes far too easy to slip into a deficit mentality that focuses on everything the student does not possess. We invite the reader to instead focus on what all students could accomplish with the same educational opportunity. We submit that every student is endowed with the capacity to thrive given the necessary resources and supports. The ability to maximize their full potential is a matter of educational justice. While acknowledging the disadvantages faced by students such as Antonio, it becomes equally important to recognize the inherent advantages experienced by others. Students fortunate enough to not have experienced traumatic events are consequently in better position to excel academically with their emotional needs met. In contrast with students of color, white students in North Carolina Public Schools are afforded a level of relative privilege at every point of the educational experience from discipline to enrollment. Lastly, it cannot be denied that attending a school that meets or exceeds growth provides children with preference in regard to the quality of their academics.

The primary driver of our work in Study Group XVI has been a sense that if we design schools and education policies and programs for Antonio and others like him, *all* students will be well served. Creating trauma-sensitive schools and addressing the needs of those students most impacted by abuse or household dysfunction will make schools safer and more learner-centric environments, benefitting everyone. Increasing racial equity doesn't just improve the educational experiences of minority students. It helps all students and educators work together more compassionately, and it moves everyone in the school and the community toward our strongest ideals of fairness and justice. And finally, turning around struggling schools holds promise not just for students in those schools, but also for students underserved in higher-performing schools.

To focus our efforts, we divided the Study Group into three committees, each examining one of the three "levers" we have identified to expand educational opportunity. In doing so, we did not intend to suggest that other topics, such as the *Leandro* factors, are not important. In fact, many of these topics are interwoven into our discussion of our three chosen levers, and some—including teacher and school leader recruitment and retention, and school finance—have been the explicit focus of several other recent Forum study groups.¹ Each committee met several times over a five-month period, from December 2015 through April 2016, reviewing the literature on their topic and meeting with subject-matter experts and practitioners to better understand the current state of the field on the topic, and to generate practical recommendations.

¹ See past Public School Forum Studies at <https://www.ncforum.org/forum-biannual-studies/>.

Study Group XVI: Expanding Educational Opportunity in North Carolina

Committees and Summary Recommendations

Committee on Trauma & Learning. Research has documented the high prevalence of traumatic experiences in childhood, particularly among students living in poverty. This Committee studied the prevalence and impact of these experiences on student learning, and learned from state and national experts about strategies for addressing these impacts within educational settings. The Committee recommends the following:

- ◆ Maximize the impact of opportunities under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to support practices that recognize the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on learning.
- ◆ Design “on-ramps” for educators to increase awareness of ACEs, their impact on learning, and appropriate interventions.
- ◆ Implement and evaluate pilot programs, and share data and related resources produced through those programs.
- ◆ Create statewide policy to guide schools’ work addressing the impacts of ACEs on learning.

Committee on Racial Equity. With North Carolina’s increasingly diverse student population, intentionally and systemically promoting racial equity will be essential if the state hopes to dismantle historical racial and structural inequities to better serve its most vulnerable students. This Committee subdivided its work into seven domains: resegregation; discipline disparities; the opportunity gap; overrepresentation of students of color in special education; access to rigorous courses and programs; diversity in teaching; and culturally responsive pedagogy. The Committee’s recommendations include the following:

- ◆ Prevent resegregation by using socioeconomic integration models to diversify schools and citywide student assignment policies to curb residential segregation.
- ◆ Implement Restorative Justice and Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS) as alternative and preventative measures of discipline.
- ◆ Develop Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and Response to Intervention (RTI) processes that take cultural differences into account when assessing students with disabilities.
- ◆ Address racial disparities in access to academically gifted programs and honors, AP, and other rigorous courses, by adopting universal screening processes and auditing course enrollments.
- ◆ Develop a fellowship program that incentivizes people of color to become teachers and offers them support to stay in the profession long-term.
- ◆ Create teacher preparation pathways for communities of color that begin recruiting prospective teachers in high school, and that expand lateral entry opportunities for professionals from minority groups who show interest and promise as potential educators.

- ◆ Develop a set of standards for culturally relevant teaching to assist teachers in understanding what competencies are needed to effectively instruct students of color.
- ◆ Provide implicit racial bias training for teachers and administrators to help break habits of prejudice and lead to more balanced treatment of students of color.

Committee on Supporting Low-Performing Schools. The issues discussed above affect students in all schools, but concentrated disadvantage has led to the categorization of certain schools as “low-performing.” The work of this Committee focused on interventions that show particular promise to support the rapid educational improvement of high numbers of students by targeting supports to these schools. The Committee recommends the following:

- ◆ Increase investment in high-quality early childhood education programs and interventions specifically serving grades K-3 in low-performing schools and districts.
- ◆ Adopt area-wide school improvement strategies that connect multiple schools in a defined geographic area with community assets and external partners, and that provide flexibility to schools in the chosen area to innovate in key areas of school operations.
- ◆ Improve allocation of vital resources to support interventions that will attract and retain excellent teachers and school leaders in high-need schools, including 11-month teacher contracts; extended contracts with incentives for proven turnaround principals; teacher scholarships; and opportunities for teachers to advance in their careers without leaving the classroom.
- ◆ Establish strong partnerships between teacher preparation programs and high-need schools and districts.
- ◆ Require low-performing schools to implement turnaround interventions based on empirical evidence or strong theories.
- ◆ Broaden the state’s accountability system to incorporate multiple measures of student outcomes.

The report that follows introduces our perspective on the topic of educational opportunity, including a new approach to the impact of poverty on learning. It then describes the Study Group’s process and theory of action. And finally, we offer an “Action Plan and Recommendations” for each of the three Study Group Committees. Each Action Plan moves beyond statements of principle or broad policy prescriptions to suggest specific steps that school systems and partner organizations can take, immediately, to help expand educational opportunity in North Carolina. The Public School Forum of North Carolina has created a new Center for Educational Opportunity to help carry the work forward alongside other partner institutions, through state and local policy proposals and new, innovative programs.

Introduction

In 2005, the Public School Forum published the results of its eleventh biennial study group, offering detailed strategies to provide every child in the state with an **equal opportunity to obtain a sound basic education**, as guaranteed under the North Carolina Constitution.¹ The publication served as a response to the state supreme court’s seminal ruling in *Leandro v. State*, which explained that, at a minimum, the state constitution required a competent, certified, well-trained teacher in every classroom; a well-trained, competent principal leading every school; and adequate resources to support an effective instructional program.² The study group attempted to ground our lofty constitutional guarantee in the realities of the day, discussing an ongoing statewide struggle to attract and retain great teachers and school leaders, and a school funding system that arguably failed to provide enough resources for these education professionals to do their jobs.

In July 2015, at the beginning of a hearing in the ongoing *Leandro* case, Judge Howard Manning read a portion of the 2005 Forum study group report and lamented that ten years after the report’s release, much remains unchanged. Now, as then, research decisively demonstrates the paramount importance of excellent teaching and strong school leadership in improving student outcomes. Yet it is still the case today, as in 2005, that, “the students who most need the state’s very best teachers are least likely to have them.”³ Even significant investments of time, energy, and funding, including the state’s efforts under its federal Race to the Top grant, have left too many failing schools, too many classrooms without an excellent teacher, and too many students reading below grade level or failing to meet college and career readiness standards.



Against this backdrop of frustration, in October 2015, the Forum convened Study Group XVI to revisit the question: What would it take to provide every child in North Carolina with the opportunity to receive a sound basic education?

The 2015 passage of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, with its inclusion of the “whole-child perspective,” brought the impact of poverty on learning to the center of the national education policy discussion, and set the stage for a new era of understanding how poverty impacts student learning. Within this expanded context, Study Group XVI aim to

¹ Public School Forum (2005). *Responding to the Leandro Ruling*. Raleigh, NC: Author.

² *Leandro v. State*, 488 S.E.2d 249 (N.C. 1997).

³ Public School Forum. *Responding to the Leandro Ruling*.

develop new strategies to help educators act as agents in addressing the manifestations of poverty and disadvantage on student learning. For us, poverty is not an “excuse,” but part of an honest assessment of the challenges our schools face. Addressing poverty will be an integral component of the design of solutions, at the classroom and systems level, to address those challenges and finally make good on our constitution’s promise to provide a sound basic education to every child.

A New Approach to the Impact of Poverty on Learning

It has been 50 years since the publication of the field-shaping report, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (popularly referred to as “the Coleman Report” after lead author James S. Coleman). The Coleman Report, mandated by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, was commissioned to shine a light on unequal educational opportunity across the country, and to expose differences between schools attended by black and white students, particularly in the South. Instead, its enduring legacy has been its finding that schools and resources matter little independent of student family background and social factors.

Many educators and thought leaders seized on the Coleman Report’s core finding to absolve schools of responsibility for student performance and persistent achievement gaps. Only after decades of careful research and the evolution of more nuanced methodologies did the education research community coalesce around measures of the impact of teaching and school leadership on student achievement.⁴ This research provided powerful pushback to the Coleman Report-era assertion that schools didn’t matter. However, it never called into question the importance of family, frequently noting that teachers and school leaders are the most important *school-based* factors impacting student performance.

The hard work of dedicated educators over the past decade has reinforced the idea that *schools matter*; that they have significant roles to play in addressing the impact of poverty on student learning. In short, studies of student performance at high-need schools suggest that the three factors identified in *Leandro* are no less important today than they were when the court originally defined the standard. We understand, perhaps even more acutely today, the truth of the 2005 study group report’s statement that the *Leandro* factors can help high-need students excel “regardless of parental income levels or other factors frequently cited as reasons for failure.”⁵ In short, poverty is not an excuse for low student performance, and policies and programs aimed at putting excellent teachers and school leaders in charge of student learning, and supporting their work, are as significant as ever.

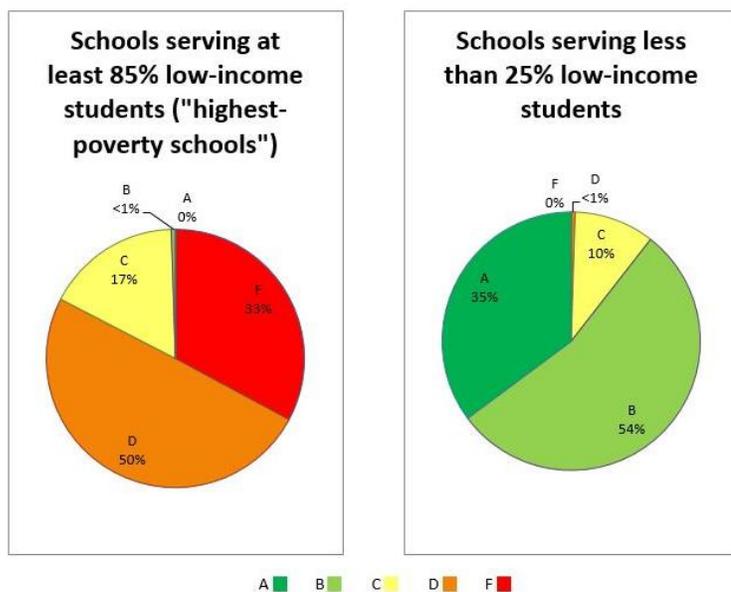
⁴ Goldhaber, D. (2016). “In Schools, Teacher Quality Matters Most.” *Education Next*, 16(2); Hanushek, E. A. (2016). “What Matters for Student Achievement.” *Education Next*, 16(2).

⁵ *Ibid.*

Nevertheless, leading scholars have powerfully refocused attention in recent years on the role of poverty as a *barrier* to teaching and learning.⁶ This crucial distinction recasts poverty-linked factors, such as hunger, chronic illness, and childhood trauma, as central to understanding the challenges students living in poverty carry with them into classrooms. Great teachers and school leaders don't throw up their hands and say that poor students can't learn. Instead, they focus on understanding each student's experience outside of school, and use it to construct an educational approach that gives that child a chance to overcome seemingly long odds.

The same metrics used to demonstrate that schools matter spawned the era of test score-based accountability. If data shows that schools matter, the logic went, then it should be able to show *which* schools matter,

and *how much*. Some education policies that typify the accountability era go all-in on test score data, neglecting the impact of poverty on student achievement. Policies such as North Carolina's current A-F school performance grades, based largely on student achievement scores, fail to capture the impact of teachers' efforts or other school-based factors on student performance. Instead, they produce methods of judging



schools that look eerily similar to what would exist if states assigned grades to schools based on the socioeconomic status of students.⁷

Only in recent years has a more nuanced view of the impact of poverty on learning emerged.⁸ This view holds that while schools cannot by themselves eliminate poverty, there is much they can do to meet the special challenges that disadvantaged students bring with them when they come to school. It acknowledges that teachers and school leaders matter, and that the right mix of school-based factors can blunt the impact of poverty and

⁶ Ladd, H., Noguera, P., Reville, P., & Starr, J. (2016, May 11). "Student Poverty Isn't an Excuse; It's a Barrier." *Education Week*.

⁷ Ableidinger, J. (2015). *A is for Affluent*. Raleigh, NC: Public School Forum of North Carolina.

⁸ See Ladd, Noguera, Reville & Starr (2016) and Weiss, E. (2016, Feb. 25). "A Broader, Bolder Education Policy Framework." *EdNC*, both describing the efforts of the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education, a "national campaign that advances evidence-based strategies to mitigate the impacts of poverty-related disadvantages on teaching and learning."

help large numbers of high-need students succeed. This view also relies on far more than test score data to analyze the contributions of school-based factors to student outcomes.

The Equity and Excellence Commission, a federal advisory committee chartered by Congress, articulated a five-part framework to reduce disparities in educational opportunity that give rise to the achievement gap. The issues covered by the framework illustrate the new approach to poverty in the context of the last several decades of efforts to reform and improve public schools:

- Equitable school finance;
- Effective teachers and principals, and the supports they need to be effective;
- High-quality early childhood education with an academic focus;
- Mitigating poverty's effects with broad access to a range of in-school support services;
- Accountability and governance reforms that attach consequences to performance.⁹

The Commission's report calls on federal education leaders to formulate a more comprehensive education agenda that recognizes and responds to the deep and troubling impacts of poverty on students and their ability to learn. It is a call that was answered in part through the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in late 2015.

ESSA marks several significant shifts in the federal role in education. Three hold particular importance for the study group's work. First, the law includes a strong focus on developing the "whole child," recognizing the potential impact of factors including race, poverty, and childhood trauma on the learning process. Second, ESSA devolves authority over key aspects of education policy to states and districts, including freedom to develop locally-tailored strategies for supporting low-performing schools. This shift has opened the door for many of the strategies we identify in our Action Plans and Recommendations to impact discussions about how North Carolina will approach struggling schools under the new policy regime. And finally, the law requires states and districts to use strategies supported by evidence. This aligns with a crucial precept of our study group's work: that all solutions be supported by sound research bases or, in the case of innovative new programs and policy proposals, by promising and well-grounded theoretical foundations.

Within the new federal framework, Study Group XVI aims to help North Carolina act boldly to develop a state plan that embodies the same whole-child spirit as the law itself, and to adopt evidence-based approaches that encompass the complex and multi-faceted vision of the Equity and Excellence Commission report to more effectively provide each child the opportunity to receive a sound basic education.

⁹ U.S. Department of Education (2013). *For Each and Every Child—A Strategy for Education Equity and Excellence*. Washington, DC: Author.

Study Group XVI: Rethinking Educational Opportunity in North Carolina

Study Group XVI continues the Public School Forum's practice of bringing together stakeholders and subject matter experts to distill collective knowledge on major, timely education issues. Throughout the Forum's history, its biennial study groups have tackled such key issues as teacher recruitment and retention, digital learning, accountability and assessments, school finance, international competitiveness, and how expanded learning and afterschool opportunities can drive academic achievement. Study groups supported the development of key education policies and programs, including the NC Teacher Enhancement Act of 1986 (which created the NC Teaching Fellows Program); the NC School Improvement & Accountability Act of 1989; Low-Wealth and Small-County Supplemental Funding; the NC School Technology Fund; and the High-Priority Schools Act.

Working sessions of study group committees are informed by sound research, best practices, and cutting-edge, "outside-the-box" thinking. Study group participants benefit from the inclusion of appropriate state and national content experts, and use their input to marshal the best educational thought and practice in service of the development of practical, implementable solutions to profound educational challenges.

This year's study group is no exception, revisiting the topic of educational opportunity through the participation of more than 300 leaders in business, education, and government in a series of working group meetings from October 2015 through April 2016. They represented diverse backgrounds and perspectives, including teachers, principals, superintendents, legislators, members of local school boards, employees of the Department of Public Instruction and local districts, business leaders, researchers, and other educational professionals and advocates.

Much like the federal Equity and Excellence Commission, we approached our challenge by taking a broad view of the evidence on what can move the needle on student achievement, particularly for students living in poverty. One observation we returned to repeatedly was that the factors mentioned in the *Leandro* case remain of paramount importance. Schools cannot hope to serve as agents in the dismantling of intergenerational poverty without excellent teachers and school leaders supported by adequate resources to do their work well. But as the Commission's report framed so well in its interrelated five-part framework, this is not the entire picture. It is the synergy between these factors and others that make it possible to envision a comprehensive approach to giving every North Carolina student the opportunity to receive a sound basic education.

The evidence gathered in preparation for Study Group XVI reaffirmed the importance of these factors. To build on this evidence and construct a plan of action, we subdivided our efforts into three committees. Much had been written and proposed in relation to the Leandro factors, including in our 2005 study group report. This left the other areas spotlighted by the Equity and Excellence Commission comparatively under-studied and in need of thoughtful analysis. We focused our committees' attention on these areas.

Committee on Trauma & Learning. Research has documented the high prevalence of traumatic experiences in childhood, particularly among students living in poverty. This committee studied the prevalence and impact of these experiences on student learning, and learned from state and national experts about strategies for addressing these impacts within educational settings.

Committee on Racial Equity. With North Carolina's increasingly diverse student population, intentionally and systemically promoting racial equity will be essential if the state hopes to dismantle historical racial and structural inequities to better serve its most vulnerable students. This committee subdivided its work into seven domains: resegregation; discipline disparities; the opportunity gap; overrepresentation of students of color in special education; access to rigorous courses and programs; diversity in teaching; and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Committee on Supporting Low-Performing Schools. The issues discussed above affect students in all schools, but concentrated disadvantage has led to the categorization of certain schools as "low-performing." The work of this committee focused on interventions that show particular promise to support the rapid educational improvement of high numbers of students by targeting supports to these schools.

Action Plans and Recommendations

We are pleased to share each Committee's Action Plan and Recommendations. Each includes a brief summary of activity from October 2015 through April 2016, followed by the committee's recommendations—specific programs and policy proposals aligned with the committee's findings. Each constitutes an "Action Plan" for North Carolina, because the suggestions go beyond statements of principle or broad policy prescriptions to specific steps that school systems and partner organizations can take, immediately, to help expand educational opportunity. The Public School Forum is creating the new North Carolina Center for Educational Opportunity to help carry the work forward, along with partner institutions, through new, innovative programs and proposed state and local policies.



Committee on Trauma & Learning

Committee on Trauma & Learning

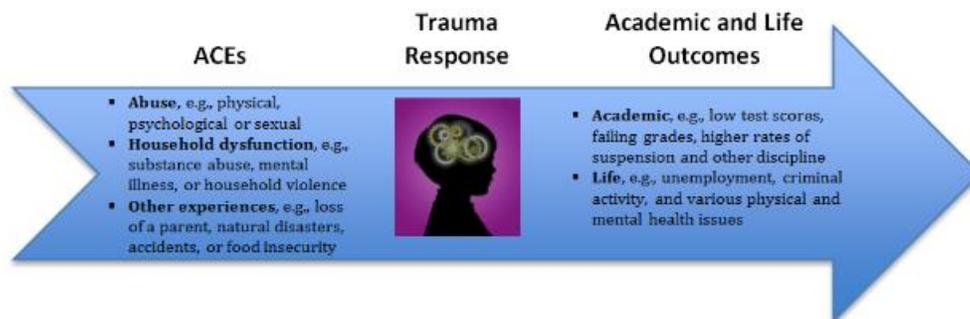
Childhood trauma is an all-too common factor in the lives of students. The CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study, conducted from 1995-1997, documented the prevalence of traumatic experiences in childhood. Among respondents, 28% were physically abused as children; 21% were sexually abused; 27% lived in households where substance abuse occurred; and 13% lived in homes where the mother was treated violently (see figure at right).¹ One in five children experienced traumatic events in three or more categories of ACEs.²

Abuse		n = 17,337	
Psychological abuse	10.7%		1,855
Physical abuse	28.3%		4,906
Sexual abuse	20.7%		3,589
Household dysfunction			
Substance abuse	26.9%		4,664
Mental illness	19.4%		3,363
Mother treated violently	12.7%		2,202
Criminal behavior in household	4.7%		815

Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, Felitti, et al. (2006)

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Responses to traumatic experiences affect whether students are able to engage productively in social contexts. Though students can display remarkable resilience in the face of adversity, experiences of trauma can also shape brain development and behavior in ways that inhibit success in school and lead to negative academic and life outcomes.



Too often, students arrive at school too overwhelmed to learn. Their neurological systems are besieged by their responses to adverse experiences, as high levels of stress hormones over prolonged periods cause chemically toxic effects on regions of their brains that deal with problem-solving and decision-making.³ Educators see ACEs manifest in negative and disruptive behavior, but often this is a result of students functioning in a constant state of

¹ Figure reprinted from Massachusetts Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative, Presentation to Study Group XVI, February 3, 2016. Data from Felitti, V. J., et al. (1998). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: The adverse childhood experiences (ACE) study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14(4), 245-258.

² Anda, R. F., et al. (2006). The enduring effects of abuse and related adverse experiences in childhood. *Eur Arch Psychiatry Clin Neurosci*, 256, 174-186.

³ De Bellis, M. D., & Zisk, A. (2014). The biological effects of childhood trauma. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 23(2), 185-222.

hypervigilance to danger or perceived threat. ACEs and their consequent effects on brain functioning may provoke a trauma response that causes students to “fight” (engage in violence or aggression), “take flight” (absenteeism; dropouts), or “freeze” (shut down; withdraw).

Schools and school systems typically focus on behavior itself, instead of scrutinizing and responding to aspects of students’ experiences that shape their behavior. Too often, teachers and school leaders respond to misbehavior by asking, “what’s wrong with you?,” when instead they should be asking, “what happened to you?” The result is to punish or disengage from students at their most vulnerable moments, when they are most in need of understanding, support, and help in building new coping skills.

Study Group XVI’s Committee on Trauma & Learning examined the incidence of traumatic childhood experiences, learned about the potential effects of those experiences on developing children’s brains, reviewed research connecting the dots between neuroscience and student learning and behavior, and considered what the links between traumatic events, brain responses, and the resulting effects on students mean for schools.⁴ Our recommendations draw on the available research to develop strategies to help educators engage more productively with traumatized students. The research portends that traumatized children will act out, withdraw, or avoid uncomfortable situations altogether (“fight, flight, or freeze”). Understanding the root causes of these reactions can help school-based professionals and partners from other fields create safe and supportive learning environments to help students manage their experiences and engage more fully and successfully in school.

Summary of Committee Activity and Relevant Research

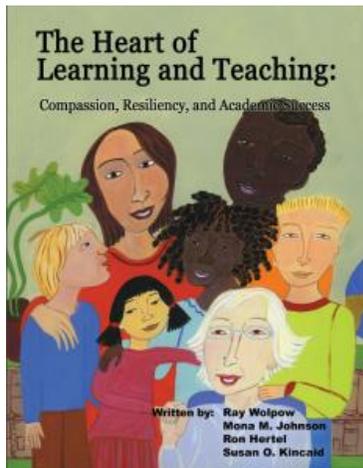
Trauma-sensitive practices in Buncombe County Schools with David Thompson, Director of Student Services for Buncombe County Schools. Mr. Thompson met with the Committee to share lessons that his district has learned as they have instituted a district-wide approach called Compassionate Schools to deal with the impact of ACEs on learning. The Buncombe County initiative uses a framework from Washington State, called [The Heart of Teaching and Learning](#).⁵ Thompson spoke of the need to shift student and teacher mindsets from trauma



⁴ This summary of committee activity includes portions of the narrative from a Public School Forum i3 Development Grant application that aims to operationalize several of the Committee’s recommendations.

⁵ Wolpov, R., Johnson, M., Hertel, R., & Kincaid, S. (2016). *The heart of learning and teaching: Compassion, resiliency, and academic success*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

to resiliency. In a related article for EdNC, Thompson wrote that based on research on changes in brain chemistry resulting from chronic stress or trauma, “[we] can conclude that many of the behaviors teachers and administrators consider most disruptive and maladaptive in the school environment are simply coping and survival strategies that are very much brain-based behaviors.”⁶



At the time of his presentation to the Committee, Buncombe County had trained staff at 13 of their 26 elementary and middle schools on trauma-sensitive practices, with the remainder to be trained in the following 18 months. Thompson emphasized the need to build resiliency through existing tiered intervention models such as PBIS, which are data-driven and already in place in many schools. The advantage of a tiered approach is that all students receive some support in building social-emotional skills, which contributes to a positive climate with a shared set of skills and expectations. Student at higher tiers—those with moderate to severe challenges—receive additional supports to address their needs, including through collaboration with providers outside the school setting.

The Buncombe County initiative emphasizes the importance of culture change in creating and advocating for trauma-sensitive schools, including through partnership with community agencies. Buncombe County created an ACEs subcommittee consisting of over 30 agencies, including health care providers, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, mental health providers, law enforcement, and numerous education groups. All of these stakeholders worked together with the district and schools to develop resources, host a regional ACEs Summit, and find opportunities to support the local schools in their Compassionate Schools work. Taken together, these approaches have resulted in a community of professionals and caregivers who understand the impacts of trauma, recognize effective approaches to building resilience, and consistent with ESSA, are working collaboratively to support the success of each child across all areas of their lives.

Trauma & Learning Policy Initiative with Michael Gregory and Joel M. Ristuccia. The Massachusetts-based Trauma & Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI) works to ensure that children traumatized by exposure to violence and other adverse childhood experiences succeed in school. Gregory (right) and Ristuccia discussed major



⁶ Thompson, D. (2016). “Building resilient children by creating Compassionate Schools.” *EdNC*. <https://www.ednc.org/2015/12/15/building-resilient-children-creating-compassionate-schools/>

strands of TLPI's activity in individual student advocacy, school-based trauma-sensitive pilot programs, and policy advocacy. They spotlighted five cornerstones of their work:

1. Many students have had traumatic experiences.
2. Trauma, which is a response to adversity, can impact learning, behavior, and relationships at school.
3. Trauma-sensitive schools help children feel safe so they can learn.
4. Trauma sensitivity requires a whole-school effort.
5. Helping traumatized children learn should be a major focus of education reform.

TLPI defines a "trauma-sensitive school" as "[a school] in which all students feel safe, welcomed, and supported, and where addressing trauma's impact on learning is at the center of its educational mission." The "whole-school effort" TLPI advocates for is a framework for educators to weave trauma sensitivity into all that they do. Elements of the framework focus on leadership, professional development, access to resources, and collaboration with families. Gregory and Ristuccia provided an overview of a two-volume publication, *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*, that can assist school teams in becoming trauma-sensitive and help state and local leaders craft policies to support them.

Studies on the prevalence of ACEs and their neurological impact. Numerous studies show that a significant number of children experience ACEs.⁷ Many of these children experience multiple traumatic events during childhood, and the cumulative exposures result in the development of a trauma response, with more ACEs resulting in increasingly severe levels of harm to brain structures and functions.⁸

Literature on the impact of the trauma response on brain development, behavior, and learning. An emerging body of research is revealing important insights about how early adverse experiences and the resulting trauma response can affect brain development, behavior, and learning.⁹ Advances in scientific research shed considerable light on neurobiological consequences of violence and trauma,¹⁰ and the new field of "developmental traumatology" examines psychiatric and psychobiological effects of chronic stress on the developing child.¹¹ Studies in the social sciences demonstrate links

⁷ Anda et al. (2006); Felitti et al. (1998); Saunders, B. E., & Adams, Z. W. (2014). Epidemiology of traumatic experiences in childhood. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 23(2), 167-184.

⁸ Anda et al. (2006).

⁹ Shonkoff, J. P., et al. (2011). The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. *Pediatrics*, 129(1), e232-e246.

¹⁰ Bevans, K., Cerbone, A., & Overstreet, S. (2005). Advances and future directions in the study of children's neurobiological responses to trauma and violence exposure. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 20(4), 418-425.

¹¹ De Bellis, M. D., & Zisk, A. (2014). The biological effects of childhood trauma. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 23(2), 185-222.

between childhood trauma and behavior, showing how ACEs can underlie problematic behaviors that often manifest in classrooms.¹² Likewise, research finds direct links between ACEs and learning, including cognitive, academic, and social-emotional outcomes.¹³

Research linking ACEs to negative academic and life outcomes. Research has shown that students who experience three or more ACEs score lower than their peers on standardized tests; are 2.5 times more likely to fail a grade; are placed in special education more frequently; and are more likely to be suspended and expelled.¹⁴ Children exposed to traumatic events show more post-traumatic stress reactions that impact their ability to function effectively in schools and other social settings.¹⁵ In the long run, traumatic events and the trauma responses they elicit can lead to lower quality of life and a range of adverse mental and physical health outcomes.¹⁶ Moreover, as the breadth of a child's exposure to ACEs increases, so do multiple risk factors for several leading causes of death in adulthood.¹⁷

Research on the potential for interventions to ameliorate the negative impacts of trauma. There is considerable work on the resilience that can be built through positive classroom climate, nurturing teachers and other adult caregivers, and direct intervention and support for improving self-regulation and developing social-emotional skills.

¹² Shonk, S. M., & Cicchetti, D. (2001). Maltreatment, competency deficits, and risk for academic and behavioral maladjustment. *Developmental Psychology, 37*(1), 3-17; Greenwald O'Brien, J. P. (1999-2000). Impacts of violence in the school environment: Links between trauma and delinquency symposium: Creating a violence free school for the twenty-first century: Panel two: Family and community responses to school violence. *New England Law Review, 34*, 593-600.

¹³ Perfect, M., Turley, M., Carlson, J., Yohanna, J., & Saint Gilles, M. P. (2016). School-related outcomes of traumatic event exposure and traumatic stress symptoms of students: A systematic review of research from 1990 to 2015. *School Mental Health, 8*, 7-43; Porche, M. V., Costello, D. M., & Rosen-Reynoso, M. (2016). Adverse family experiences, child mental health, and educational outcomes for a national sample of students. *School Mental Health, 8*(1), 44-60.

¹⁴ Wolpow et al. (2016).

¹⁵ Alisic, E., Van der Schoot, T. A., Van Ginkel, J. R., & Kleber, R. (2008). Looking beyond PTSD in children: Posttraumatic stress reactions, posttraumatic growth, and quality of life. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, 69*, 1455-1461; DeBellis, M. D., & Thomas, L. A. (2003). Biologic findings of post-traumatic stress disorder and child maltreatment. *Current Psychiatry Report, 5*, 108-117.; McLaughlin, K. A., et al. (2013). Trauma exposure and posttraumatic stress disorder in a national sample of adolescents. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 52*(8), 815-830 e14.

¹⁶ Alisic et al. (2008); Kendall-Tackett, K. A., Williams, L. M., & Finkelhor, D. (1993). Impact of sexual abuse on children: A review and synthesis of recent empirical studies. *Psychol Bull, 113*, 164-180; Kendler, K.S., Bulik, C. M., Silberg, J., Hettima, J. M., Myers, J., & Prescott, C. A. (2000). Childhood sexual abuse and adult psychiatric and substance abuse disorders in women: An epidemiological and cotwin control analysis. *Arch Gen Psychiatry, 57*, 953-959; Osofsky, J. D. (1999). The impact of violence on children. *Future Child, 99*, 33-49; Putnam, F. W. (1998, Mar. 20). Developmental pathways in sexually abused girls. Presented at Psychological Trauma: Maturational Processes and Psychotherapeutic Interventions. Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA; van der Kolk, B. A., Perry, J. C., & Herman, J. L. (1991). Childhood origins of self-destructive behavior. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 148*, 1665-1671; Wolpow et al. (2016).

¹⁷ Felitti et al. (1998); Anda et al. (2006).

Pioneering programs are demonstrating the importance of creating and advocating for trauma-sensitive schools in order to help students build these assets and improve their long-term trajectories.¹⁸

Recommendations

Through meetings with experts and review of relevant resources, Committee members realized that many educators are not aware of the profound effects trauma and stress have on the brain—an understanding that is critical for responding to students’ behaviors and emotions. While educators have a strong appreciation of the importance of forming relationships with students, helping them develop a deeper knowledge of ACEs and their potential impact on brain chemistry can help create a sense of urgency around implementing trauma-sensitive practices. This heightened awareness can change their perspectives on (and increase their empathy for) their most challenged students, and can help them support these students in building skills rather than punishing them and exacerbating negative spirals.

Recommendation 1. Maximize impact of opportunities under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to support practices that recognize the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on learning.

Section 4108 of the Every Student Succeeds Act requires every district that receives funds under Title I, Part A to use a portion of its funds to foster safe and supportive school environments. Options for meeting this requirement include programs, services, supports, and staff development based on evidence-based, trauma-informed practices, and training for school personnel in effective and trauma-informed practices in classroom management. District officials should strongly consider the inclusion of these options as part of a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of their most vulnerable students. Other education-focused organizations may have roles to play in preparing guidance for districts about how to maximize the impact of these activities. Field leaders in other states—including the Compassionate Schools Initiative in Washington state and the Massachusetts Trauma & Learning Policy Initiative, as well as North Carolina pioneer Buncombe County Schools—can serve as sources of model programs and materials, as well as thought partners in new program design.

¹⁸ E.g., Wolpov et al. (2016); Cole, S., Eisner, A., Gregory, M., & Ristuccia, J. (2013). *Helping traumatized children learn: Creating and advocating for trauma-sensitive schools*. Boston, MA: Massachusetts Advocates for Children.

In addition, under Sections 2102 and 2103 of the Act (Title II, Part A), states may use federal funds provided through formula grants for supporting effective instruction to carry out in-service training for school staff to help them understand when and how to refer students affected by ACEs for appropriate treatment and intervention services. Permissible uses for these funds also include a variety of options that support education professionals in recognizing and addressing the specific needs of vulnerable students.

These sections of the federal law place identifying and addressing childhood trauma and other variables linked to poverty alongside policy options for recruiting and retaining effective teachers and school leaders, maximizing the impact of early childhood education, using data to improve student achievement, and serving students with disabilities. This inclusion parallels the recommendations of the Equity and Excellence Commission's report, signaling that children's experiences with poverty have taken their place alongside other significant variables impacting student achievement in the federal education policy framework.

Finally, maximizing the opportunity under ESSA to address the impact of adverse childhood experiences on student learning will require thoughtful development of North Carolina's state ESSA plan, which the Department of Public Instruction is now crafting and will submit by March 2017. Each state is required to develop its own plan to comply with the new federal law and address issues including school accountability, student assessment, support for struggling schools, and other issues. Expanded state authority in this new era in federal policy, and the focus on the whole child within the federal legislation, make this the perfect moment to intentionally address the issue of childhood trauma in development and implementation of a comprehensive state plan. The other recommendations below provide options for state policy and programmatic interventions that can help teachers and other school-based professionals recognize and respond to the behavioral manifestations of trauma and other impacts of ACEs on learning.

Recommendation 2. Design “on-ramps” for educators to increase awareness of ACEs, their impact on learning, and appropriate interventions.

Deep understanding of this topic is a new phenomenon, steeped in recent neuroscience research and a young body of evidence on effective school-based practices and high-impact partnerships between schools and other child-serving professionals and institutions. As a result, DPI, districts, and external partners should design and offer trainings and conferences like the 2015 Adverse Childhood Experience Southeastern Summit in Asheville. These opportunities allow education professionals to become well-versed in the

relevant research, discuss the impact of that research on teaching and learning, and collaborate to develop strategies to improve their responses to ACEs in their schools.

School systems might utilize badges or other credentials for the completion of training in this area, and might even open the trainings to other categories of professionals likely to interact with vulnerable students (e.g., juvenile defenders, nurses, judges, and law enforcement). Training might be differentiated based on teachers' levels of awareness or experience with ACEs. Statewide or regional events would be an excellent way to share experiences and resources across systems in this new and rapidly evolving area. DPI, consortia of districts, or external partners could create resource databases or clearinghouses for information about ACEs and their impact on student learning. Finally, these groups should also work closely with the state's teacher and school leader preparation programs to influence their training of future education professionals. Educator training should include a concerted focus on the impact of poverty-linked variables and ACEs on learning, along with effective strategies at the state, district, school, and classroom levels to mitigate ACEs impact and support student success.

Recommendation 3. Implement and evaluate pilot programs, and share data and related resources.

Districts should consider creating pilot programs to transform the culture at high-need schools to help them become trauma sensitive, potentially utilizing the whole-school, inquiry-based process and related tools contained in the resource, *Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools*. Such programs offer excellent opportunities for integrated approaches through partnership between schools and health care providers, law enforcement, and other institutions that together can better understand and address the impacts of ACEs on students.

Because the process of implementing such a program and related partnerships can be a time-consuming endeavor with associated planning and implementation costs (materials, teacher stipends, etc.), schools and external partners should seek state, district, or private funding to support pilot programs. Districts and funders looking at potential pilot sites should consider the readiness of school-based professionals and partners to undertake such a process. Pilot programs should involve researchers in their design and all stages of implementation to capture key data that can guide improvement and support program replication or expansion, if successful. All pilot programs should be driven by and involve significant buy-in from school-based actors, supported by coaches or other partners to support learning and planning around trauma-sensitive approaches. This approach is preferable to programs that merely regard schools as physical sites for outside actors'

service provision. Only with the intimate involvement of teachers and school leaders can schools become strong partners in the identification of ACEs, timely referral for appropriate services, and productive responses within educational settings.

Recommendation 4. Create statewide policy to guide schools' work addressing the impacts of ACEs on learning.

Oregon House Bill 4002 (2016) and Massachusetts House Bill 4376 (2014) are models for statewide frameworks addressing the impact of ACEs on student learning. The Oregon bill establishes a pilot program to use trauma-informed practices in schools, utilizing national models and coordinating school-based resources (school health centers, nurses, counselors, and administrators) with the efforts of coordinated-care organizations, public health, nonprofits, the justice system, businesses, and parents. The bill authorizes \$500,000 for the state's three-year pilot, which will be overseen by "trauma specialists" in schools and bolstered by a strong research model in place from the beginning to evaluate the pilot and help the state apply lessons learned in the future.

The Massachusetts policy requires the development of a statewide Safe and Supportive Schools Framework; provides a self-assessment tool to help schools create action plans; and encourages schools to incorporate action plans into their school improvement plans. Massachusetts also funded a grant program (\$200,000) to support pilot programs as models for creating safe and supportive schools. Finally, the law creates a commission to assist with statewide implementation of the framework and make recommendations for additional legislation.

We recommend the creation of a Task Force to examine these state laws and other, similar policies, and to consult with appropriate national experts, to determine an appropriate suite of state policy interventions for consideration by the General Assembly, the State Board of Education, DPI, and local boards of education and district officials. The Task Force should publish its recommendations to encourage the development of state and local policy that supports the movement toward creating trauma-sensitive schools across the state. The Task Force should also recommend sources of funding for this work, including state funding but also appropriate private foundations in education, health care, and other sectors who might support programmatic and policy interventions on this subject.

To carry these recommendations forward, the Public School Forum recently formulated the **North Carolina Safe and Supportive Schools Initiative**, a partnership of the Forum and six North Carolina LEAs (Asheville City Schools, Rowan-Salisbury Schools, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, Edgecombe County Schools, and Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Public Schools). The Initiative will utilize two action

strategies: 1) **educator training** to increase understanding of adverse childhood experiences, the potential trauma response in children, and the resulting impacts on student learning and behavior, and to introduce short- and long-term interventions that can restore students' sense of safety and agency, and 2) **structured pilot programs** in partner LEAs to create inclusive learning environments that build student resiliency as an alternative to removing students from classrooms.



Committee on Racial Equity

Committee on Racial Equity

Study Group XVI's second committee focused explicitly on how race affects student outcomes in North Carolina, and the equity issues implicated by the effects. Committee members sought to better understand critical areas where race correlates with educational opportunity in ways that diminish the likelihood of success for students of color, and to develop solutions that will lead to improved academic and life outcomes for these students.

The social and historical roots of race run deep in our nation and state. Within education these roots are entangled in a complex interplay with the topics taken up by the study group's other two committees: childhood trauma and low-performing schools. Racial equity is a topic many education groups have been hesitant to tackle, for fear of stirring up controversy, or worse. But the dearth of robust discussion of race, coupled with the obvious and unrelenting space it occupies in many of the persistent inequities in our state's education system, convinced us that any exploration of educational opportunity that did not address issues of race head-on would be incomplete.

Throughout the study group, the committee employed rigorous analysis of research and data on racial equity, using the best available evidence to guide its observations and recommendations. The complexities of race—in both its social construction and its legal codification—mandated the use of a multifaceted approach to developing common understanding and generating responsive policies and programs. The candid focus on race allows for honest discussion and assessment of the problem. To that end, the committee approached its task by learning from experts in education, law, and sociology, who helped committee members piece together a complex puzzle built from pieces including the following:

- A North Carolina-specific historical narrative on race
- A systems-level analysis of the racial gaps that exist across various institutions
- Insights from members of a small collective seeking racial equity in a local district
- Statewide racial data from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
- An analysis of the structural underpinnings of racialized outcomes by a renowned sociologist.

Committee members then processed these learnings together in intensive work sessions, with stakeholders from across the state working collaboratively to qualify definitions, share case studies, and contemplate solutions.

Summary of Committee Activity and Relevant Research

The History of Educational Opportunity

with Ann McColl, an attorney at Everett Gaskins Hancock, LLP practicing in the field of education law. She is the author of [Constitutional Tales](#), an intensive research effort exploring the historical foundations of the North Carolina constitution and development of public schools.¹ McColl is an unparalleled expert on the racial dimensions of early public education in our state and how a deliberate “disfranchisement” campaign influenced the formation of the institution.² She provided a historical analysis, full of rare primary sources and remarkable quotes that exposed a long sordid chronicle of [intentional inequities](#) from our collective past.³ She argued that these injustices reach into our present and hold sway over many of the forces resulting in our current educational inequities.



Measuring Racial Equity: A “Groundwater” Approach

with Deena Hayes-Greene of the Racial Equity Institute (also one of our Committee co-chairs). Pulling from a bevy of state and national studies, Hayes-Greene identified several key observations about the nature of racial inequity: 1) Racial inequity looks the same across systems (education, health care, banking, etc.), 2) Socio-economic difference does not explain racial inequity, 3) Systems contribute significantly to disparities, 4) The systems-level disparities cannot be explained by a few ‘bad apples’ or ill-intentioned gatekeepers, 5) Inequitable outcomes are concentrated in certain geographic communities, and 6) Analysis that includes race draws starkly different conclusions than analysis that does not. Hayes-Greene used these observations to liken racial inequity to “groundwater”



¹ McColl, A. (2010). *Constitutional Tales*. Retrieved August 29, 2016, from <http://constitutionaltales.org/>

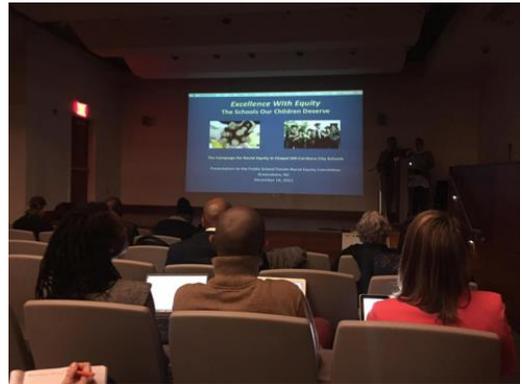
² Governor Aycock on “the negro problem” (n.d.). Retrieved August 29, 2016, from <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newsouth/4408>

³ McColl, A. (2015, October 29). Moving past intentional inequities in education – EducationNC. Retrieved August 29, 2016, from <https://www.ednc.org/2015/10/29/moving-past-intentional-inequities-in-education/>

contamination that spreads and pollutes the land and nearby bodies of water. Education is just one sector with racial disparities, but the same root causes affect outcomes in health care, criminal justice, child welfare, banking, housing, employment, and other areas of society.

Excellence with Equity: The Schools Our Children Deserve with [The Campaign for Racial Equity in Chapel Hill-Carrboro Schools](#).

The Campaign for Racial Equity is a growing movement of community members and stakeholders in Chapel Hill-Carrboro concerned about racial inequity.⁴ Representatives from the Campaign presented to the Committee about the development of their community movement. It began as a response to several indices of a climate and culture of racial disadvantage within the district. With a leadership network of community members from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, they set about creating an action plan for how to address racial equity that included focusing on school board elections, researching and writing a [report on responding to racial inequity](#), and meeting with the administration and school board to discuss findings within the report. In producing the report, the Campaign for Racial Equity consulted critical district data, held listening sessions with community members, researched exemplar schools and practices, applied racial equity analysis to data, and produced recommendations.⁵ The report culminated in eight equity goals the Campaign hoped to see embraced by the school system.⁶



Gaps in Student Achievement in North Carolina on Selected Variables with Dr. Lou Fabrizio, Director of the Division of Data,



⁴ Schultz, M. (2015, October 28). Group wants end to Chapel Hill-Carrboro achievement gap. Retrieved August 29, 2016, from <http://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/community/chapel-hill-news/article41748738.html>

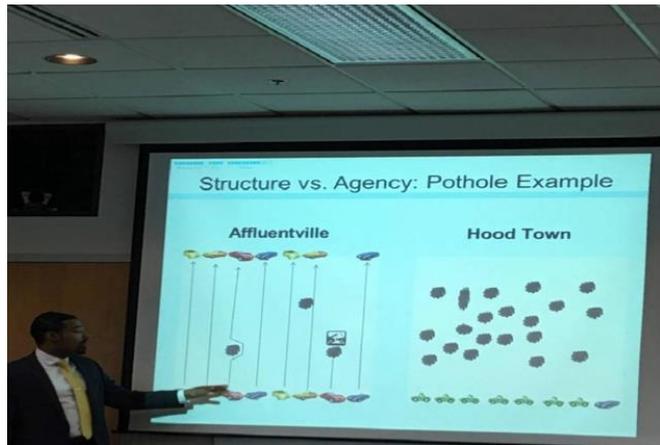
⁵ *Excellence with Equity: The Schools Our Children Deserve* (Rep.). (2015, October 23). Retrieved August 29, 2016, from The Campaign for Racial Equity in Our Schools website: <https://chapelhillcarrboronaacp.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/excellence-with-equity-report-final10-23.pdf>

⁶ Ibid

Research and Federal Policy at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Dr. Fabrizio and his team presented a comprehensive picture of the state of racial equity in NC public schools. The presentation provided extensive data disaggregated by race, gender, economic disadvantage, limited English proficiency (LEP), and disability. Areas of Dr. Fabrizio's presentation included the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), End-of-Grade (EOG) and End-of-Course (EOC) Assessment, ACT, Advanced Placement (AP), cohort graduation rates, short-term and long-term suspensions and expulsions, teacher effectiveness ratings, the State Educator Equity Plan, and selected additional references and research studies.⁷ A major, recurring theme in the data was the relatively low performance of Black, Hispanic and American Indian compared to their white and Asian counterparts, and the disproportionate representation of these groups in the area of student discipline.

Educational Disparities: Perspective from One Sociologist

with Dr. Angel Harris, Professor of Sociology at Duke University and Director of the Program for Research on Education and Development of Youth (REDY). Dr. Harris is a prominent sociologist who has written and lectured extensively on the racial achievement gap. His book *Kids Don't Want to Fail* deals with the "oppositional culture" theory of why



black students underperform, while his text *Broken Compass* challenges the notion of parental involvement as an indicator of academic performance. Dr. Harris juxtaposed the ideas of social structure and personal agency when discussing gaps in academic achievement between students of color and their white counterparts. He asserted that we have failed to appreciate the racial achievement gap for what it really is: a byproduct of a much larger gap in opportunity. This lack of understanding explains why gap convergence has stalled in recent years despite massive efforts like No Child Left Behind. He argues we are in need of a new model of education that moves beyond superficial discussions about race and addresses it systemically. Approaches should be based on empiricism and strategies proven to increase achievement, not what is convenient or comfortable.

⁷ Fabrizio, Lou. "Gaps In Student Achievement In North Carolina On Selected Variables". 2016. Presentation. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6WgyOVA1ZEhSWxKOFFERExEaXM/view?usp=sharing>

The Committee divided its work into seven domains derived from preliminary research of national trends in race and education and utilized as frames when studying North Carolina. The following section summarizes the committee's core findings in each domain:

1. Resegregation

Although substantial progress was made in the desegregation of schools in the years following the landmark Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), North Carolina has several districts that have since resegregated, and others that never fully desegregated after Brown.⁸ Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, once a national model for school integration efforts after *Swann v. CMS* (1971) has found itself with a large number of racially *and* socioeconomically isolated schools (a condition known as “double segregation”).⁹

Abandonment of desegregation efforts in favor of “neighborhood school” models has once again made schools more racially identifiable, due in part to residential segregation. For residents living in majority Hispanic and African American census blocks, the chance of their children attending racially-identifiable, high poverty, or low-performing schools is dramatically higher than for those in majority white census block.¹⁰ This backward trend can also be seen in Wake County, where racially and socioeconomically isolated schools have doubled in the past decade.¹¹ Over the past two decades, the share of Black and Hispanic students attending majority-minority and intensely-segregated schools statewide has grown significantly.¹² Resegregation has appeared in other counties as well, including Guilford, Forsyth, Pitt, Halifax, and Harnett.

The trend toward resegregation is not limited to traditional public schools. North Carolina charters are increasing the extent to which the overall system of public education in the

⁸ Ayscue, J. B., Siegal-Hawley, G., B. W., & Kucsera, J. (2014, May 14). *Segregation Again: North Carolina's Transition From Leading Desegregation to then Accepting Segregation* (Working paper No. 6). Retrieved August 31, 2016, from The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles website: <https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/segregation-again-north-carolina2019s-transition-from-leading-desegregation-then-to-accepting-segregation-now/Ayscue-Woodward-Segregation-Again-2014.pdf>

⁹ Ibid.

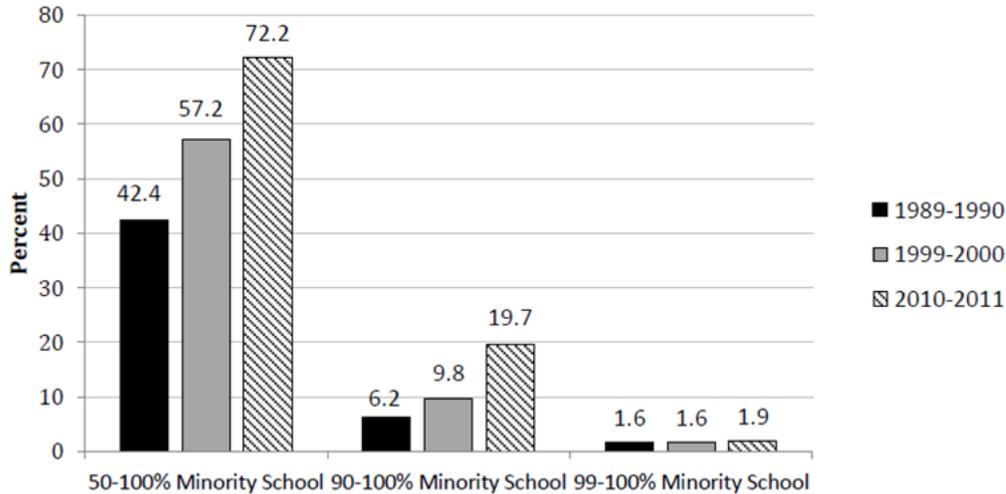
¹⁰ *The State of Exclusion: An Empirical Analysis of the Legacy of Segregated Communities in North Carolina* (Rep.). (2013). Retrieved August 31, 2016, from UNC Center for Civil Rights website: <http://www.uncinclusionproject.org/documents/stateofexclusion.pdf>

¹¹ Hui, T. K., & Raynor, D. (2015, August 15). *Wake County Busing Fewer Students for Diversity*. Retrieved August 31, 2016, from <http://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/education/article31101236.html>

¹² Ayscue et al., *Segregation Again*.

state is racially identifiable as well. Roughly two-thirds of all charter schools in the state are either disproportionately white or disproportionately students of color.¹³

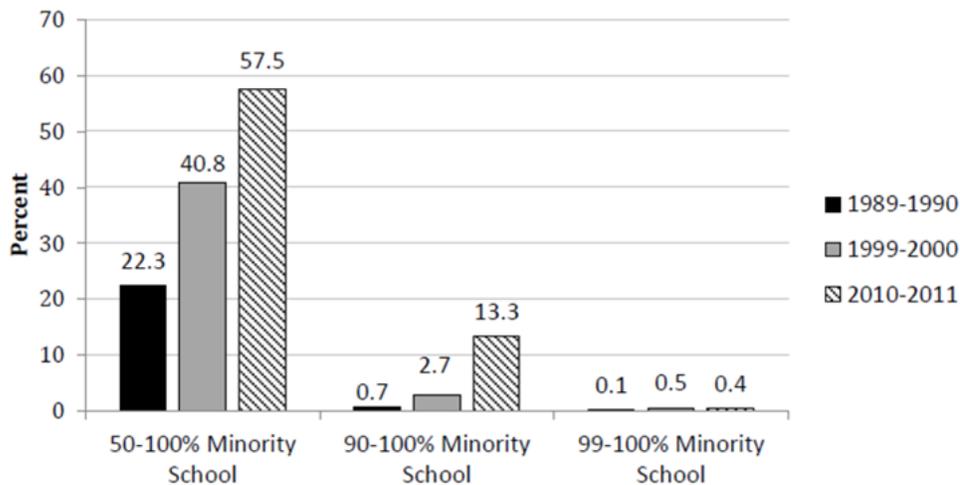
Figure 2 – *Black Students in Minority Segregated Schools, North Carolina*



Note: Minority school represents black, Latino, American Indian, and Asian students.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data

Figure 3 – *Latino Students in Minority Segregated Schools, North Carolina*



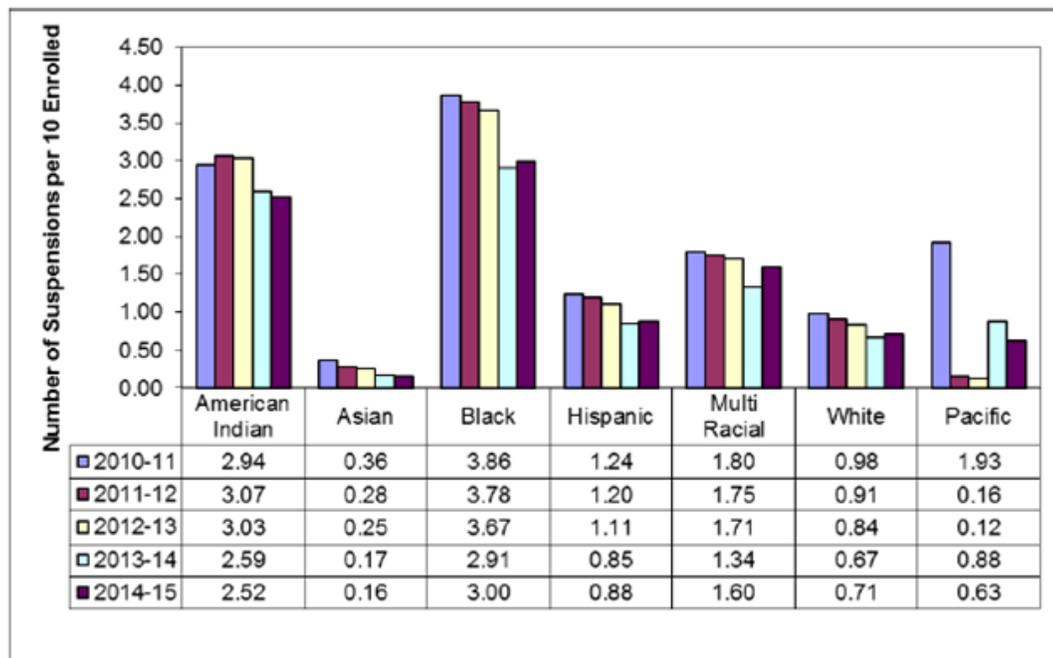
Note: Minority school represents black, Latino, American Indian, and Asian students.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data

¹³ Ladd, H. F., Clotfelter, C. T., & Holbein, J. B. (2015, April). *The Growing Segmentation of the Charter School Sector in North Carolina* (Working paper No. 133). Retrieved August 31, 2016, from National Bureau of Economic Research website: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w21078.pdf>

2. Discipline Disparities

Students of color in North Carolina schools have significantly higher rates of both short- and long-term suspensions than their white counterparts.¹⁴ The state has lowered the overall rates of suspension and expulsions over the past several years. What has not changed, however, is the disproportionate representation of students of color in disciplinary actions. Black students in particular are as much as four-times as likely to receive short-term suspensions as their white counterparts, with similar gaps in long-term suspension data. American Indians are suspended at rate three-and-a-half-times more.¹⁵ This disproportionality is appropriately labeled a “disparity” because similarly situated students of different races are treated differently. Studies suggest that students of color are judged more harshly for subjective offenses (e.g. insubordination, disrespect, aggressive behavior, etc.), while white students receive punishment more for objective offenses (e.g. weapons, drugs, vandalism, etc.).¹⁶ The use of discretion in enacting student discipline appears to give rise to racially *disparate impact*.

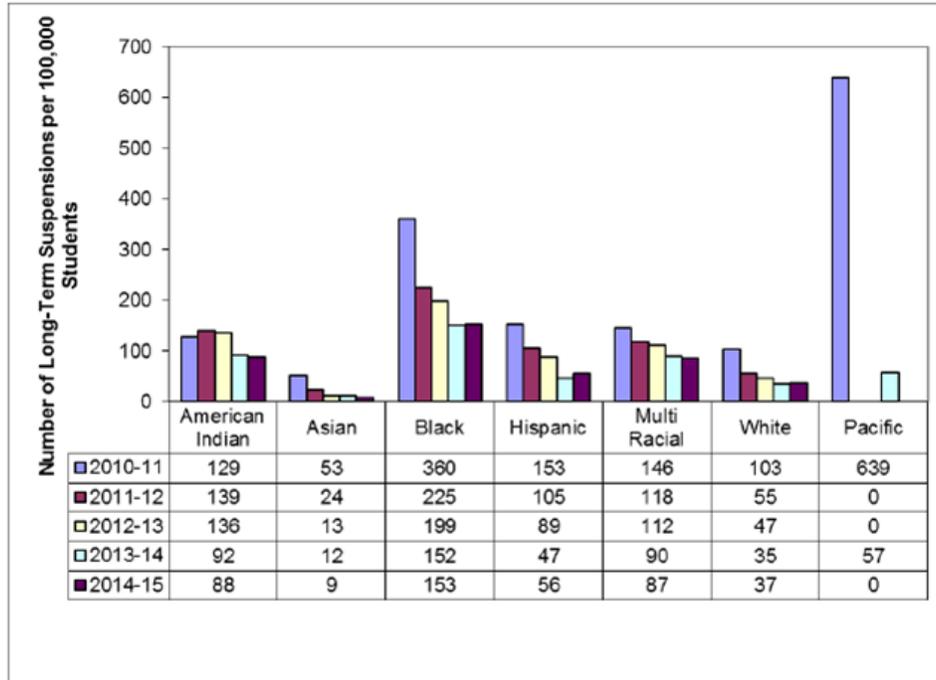


Note: Race/Ethnicity was not reported for 77 short-term suspensions in 2010-11, 110 in 2011-12, 264 in 2012-13, 756 in 2013-14, and 445 in 2014-15. Rates were calculated by dividing the number of suspensions in a race/ethnicity category by membership in that race/ethnicity category and multiplying by ten.

¹⁴ Report to the North Carolina General Assembly: Consolidated Data Report 2014-15 (Rep.). (2016, March 15). Retrieved August 31, 2016, from North Carolina Department of Public Instruction website: <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2014-15/consolidated-report.pdf>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Skiba, R. J., Michael, R. S., Nardo, A. C., & Peterson, R. L. (2002, December). *The Color of Discipline: Sources of Racial and Gender Disproportionality in School Punishment*, 34(4), 317-342. Retrieved August 31, 2016, from <http://indiana.edu/~equity/docs/ColorofDiscipline2002.pdf>



Note: Race/Ethnicity was not reported for two long-term suspensions in 2010-11, five in 2012-13, 43 in 2013-14, and two in 2014-15. Rates were calculated by dividing the number of suspensions in a race/ethnicity category by membership in that race/ethnicity category and multiplying by 100,000.

Behaviors Cited in Incidents - from 2014-15 Discipline Data

	Total	Black	White	Hispanic	Multiracial
One or more offenses	704,308	333,164	242,698	75,593	30,431
Only one offense by offender	618,272	285,479	222,457	67,763	26,773

One or more offenses	Total	Black	White	Hispanic	Multiracial
Disruptive Behavior	151,460	83,854	43,162	14,354	6,722
Fighting or Affray	41,371	25,526	9,369	3,904	1,517
Aggressive Behavior	71,653	38,608	22,153	6,197	3,067
Insubordination	88,693	49,157	24,855	9,127	4,036
Inappropriate Language	61,289	30,591	20,594	5,701	2,911
Disrespect of staff	41,203	22,459	12,361	3,709	2,000
Bus Misbehavior	55,506	25,547	19,767	5,715	2,592
Crimes	10,347	4,009	4,059	1,486	443
Reportable Offenses, incl. Crimes	89,435	45,350	29,446	8,896	3,562

Only one offense	Total	Black	White	Hispanic	Multiracial
Disruptive Behavior	113,445	60,071	34,616	11,138	4,912
Fighting or Affray	33,294	20,104	7,968	3,078	1,207
Aggressive Behavior	55,299	28,284	18,596	4,780	2,348
Insubordination	56,542	29,022	17,921	6,120	2,511
Inappropriate Language	40,745	18,252	15,491	4,091	1,888
Disrespect of staff	22,866	11,603	7,533	2,120	1,172
Bus Misbehavior	51,489	23,417	18,465	5,380	2,424
Crimes	7,365	2,745	2,965	1,064	317
Reportable Offenses, incl. Crimes	67,309	32,580	23,656	6,656	2,627

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

Behaviors Cited in Suspensions - from 2014-15 Discipline Data

	Total	Black	White	Hispanic	Multiracial
Total STS, LTS, EXP	209,777	118,737	55,099	20,663	8,817
Only one offense by offender	165,289	91,170	45,630	16,180	6,845

Totals (One or More Offenses)	Total	Black	White	Hispanic	Multiracial
Disruptive Behavior	46,271	29,740	9,302	3,885	2,079
Fighting or Affray	34,287	21,456	7,389	3,290	1,259
Aggressive Behavior	33,058	19,874	8,107	2,763	1,433
Insubordination	29,665	18,693	6,148	2,934	1,288
Inappropriate Language	23,017	13,198	6,050	1,936	1,052
Disrespect of Staff	14,966	9,014	3,672	1,273	702
Reportable Crimes	9,434	3,664	3,677	1,369	413
Reportable Offenses, incl. Crimes	62,688	34,519	17,568	6,514	2,471

Only One Offense	Total	Black	White	Hispanic	Multiracial
Disruptive Behavior	25,977	16,296	5,597	2,084	1,125
Fighting or Affray	26,945	16,457	6,215	2,509	972
Aggressive Behavior	21,594	12,278	6,030	1,712	927
Insubordination	13,481	8,019	3,208	1,415	556
Inappropriate Language	11,617	5,992	3,605	1,026	500
Disrespect of Staff	6,429	3,564	1,824	540	326
Reportable Crimes	6,631	2,464	2,672	964	293
Reportable Offenses, incl. Crimes	44,777	23,781	13,402	4,585	1,720

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

3. Opportunity Gap

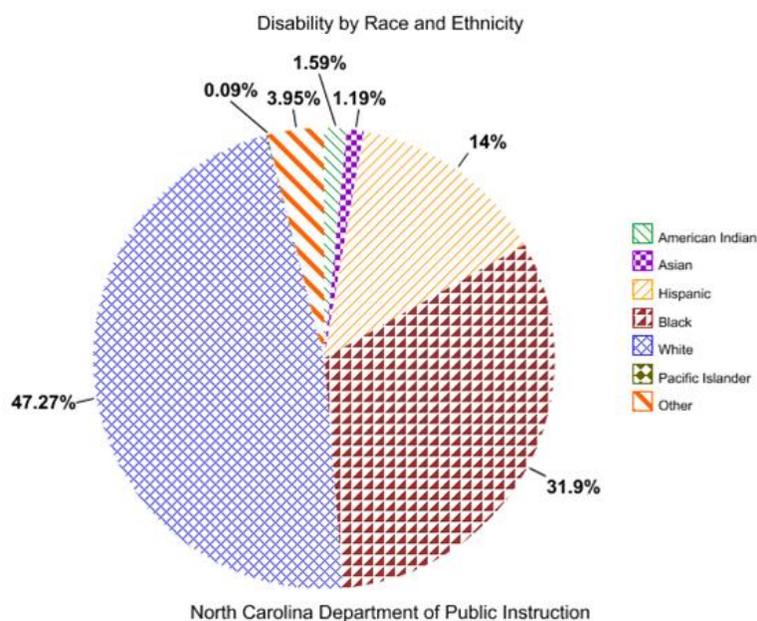
In nearly every educational metric, from cohort graduation rates to college and career readiness, the majority of students of color in North Carolina underperform their white counterparts.¹⁷ The trend holds even when one controls for economic disadvantage, exceptional children’s status, and limited English proficiency. This is commonly called the “achievement gap,” but is perhaps better termed an “opportunity gap.” Research reveals a measurable relationship between race and a slew of other social factors that limit educational opportunity. A student is at a decided disadvantage if he lives in poverty, lacks stable housing or adequate healthcare, experiences food insecurity, is exposed to adverse childhood experiences, has limited English proficiency, or is an undocumented immigrant. Students of color are overrepresented in these categories, all of which have deleterious effects on academic achievement.¹⁸ As such, it is impossible to take any of these issues fully into account without acknowledging the resulting racially disparate impact.

¹⁷ Fabrizio, “Gaps in Student Achievement in North Carolina on Selected Variables.”

¹⁸ Jiang, Y., Ekono, M., & Skinner, C. (2015, January). *Basic Facts about Low-Income Children 12 through 17 Years, 2013* (Fact Sheet). Retrieved August 31, 2016, from National Center for Children in Poverty website: http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_1099.pdf

4. Overrepresentation in Special Education

On a national scale, students of color have historically been overrepresented in special education.¹⁹ In North Carolina, all racial subgroups remain relatively proportionately represented, with the exception of African Americans, who make up 26 percent of all public schools students yet comprise 32 percent of all school-aged children with disabilities. Specific areas where they are most overrepresented are: intellectual disability (45%), emotional disturbance (44%), developmental delay (34%), and specific learning disability (32%).²⁰ These also tend to be the areas that are most stigmatizing.²¹ Research in this area suggests that overrepresentation in these categories belies misdiagnosis rooted in cultural bias and misunderstanding.²²



5. Access to Rigorous Courses and Programs

Students of color are underrepresented in the most rigorous courses and programs offered in North Carolina schools, including Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Academically or Intellectually Gifted (AIG). Deeper analysis of available data spotlights areas of concern, but also reveals some promising trends. On the one hand,

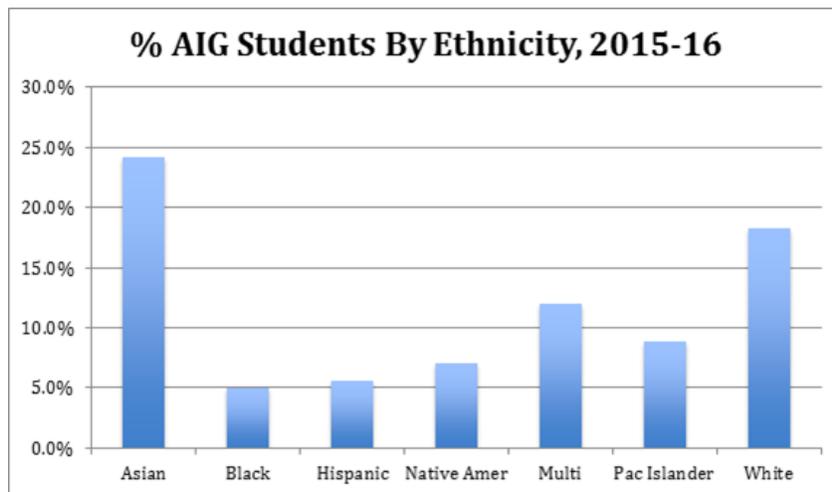
¹⁹ Rehora, A. (2011, October 12). Keeping Special Ed in Proportion [Web log post]. Retrieved August 31, 2016, from <http://www.edweek.org/tsb/articles/2011/10/13/01disproportion.h05.html>

²⁰ Report of Children with Disabilities (IDEA) Ages 6-21. (2016). Unpublished raw data. North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

²¹ Greenhouse, J. (2015, July 28). The Complicated Problem Of Race And Special Education [Web log post]. Retrieved August 31, 2016, from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/racism-inherent-in-special-education-leads-to-marginalization_us_55b63c0ae4b0224d8832b8d3

²² Kanaya, T., & Ceci, S. (2009, December 23). Misdiagnoses of Disabilities. Retrieved August 31, 2016, from <http://www.education.com/reference/article/misdiagnoses-of-disabilities/>

students of color lag behind their peers in AP course enrollment, exam-taking, and exam pass rate. But a concerted effort has been made to increase AP subgroup enrollment and test-taking in North Carolina. Student participation in AP courses among American Indian students increased by 45 percent last year. Among Black students it increased by 22.8 percent, and for Hispanic students it jumped 21.3 percent.²³ Exam pass rates have also improved. In AIG identification, disparities persist, with Black and Hispanic students the most dramatically under-identified groups, both around 5 percent.²⁴ While policy states outstanding abilities are present in all student populations, this doesn't seem to be represented proportionately.



	North Carolina - Public Schools				Total Group - Public Schools			
	# of Exam-Takers	% of Total	# of Exams Taken	# of Grades 3-5	# of Exam-Takers	% of Total	# of Exams Taken	# of Grades 3-5
All								
Total	67,678	100.0%	125,547	63,637	2,157,219	100.0%	3,858,200	2,154,772
Change from last year	+19.7%		+19.1%	+9.0%	+6.0%		+7.2%	+4.9%
Gender								
Female	38,378	56.7%	70,348	34,235	1,217,939	56.6%	2,123,525	1,130,217
Change from last year	+18.7%		+19.2%	+10.1%	+6.3%		+7.3%	+5.0%
Male	29,300	43.3%	55,199	29,602	939,280	43.5%	1,734,675	1,021,555
Change from last year	+18.8%		+19.1%	+7.7%	+5.7%		+7.1%	+4.1%
Ethnic Group								
American Indian	688	1.0%	1,080	315	11,885	0.5%	19,791	8,560
Change from last year	+45.1%		+37.1%	-0.6%	+0.3%		+2.2%	-0.4%
Asian	4,895	7.2%	11,548	7,350	264,549	12.3%	579,315	390,173
Change from last year	+14.0%		+17.5%	+12.2%	+4.4%		+6.9%	+5.9%
Black	8,610	12.7%	14,064	3,692	178,373	8.3%	284,606	82,723
Change from last year	+22.8%		+22.4%	+12.7%	+3.6%		+5.2%	+6.1%
Hispanic Overall	6,126	7.6%	9,013	3,620	412,422	19.1%	709,766	296,412
Change from last year	+21.3%		+24.7%	+14.8%	+8.2%		+10.2%	+6.5%
Mexican American	2,190	3.2%	3,645	1,238	201,726	9.4%	345,739	135,584
Change from last year	+25.2%		+30.5%	+19.0%	+8.7%		+10.4%	+6.5%
Puerto Rican	401	0.7%	772	337	22,545	1.0%	37,258	16,388
Change from last year	+22.2%		+24.7%	+24.8%	+3.6%		+5.2%	+4.6%
Other Hispanic	2,484	3.7%	4,596	2,054	188,151	8.7%	325,771	134,462
Change from last year	+17.9%		+20.4%	+11.0%	+8.2%		+10.6%	+8.7%

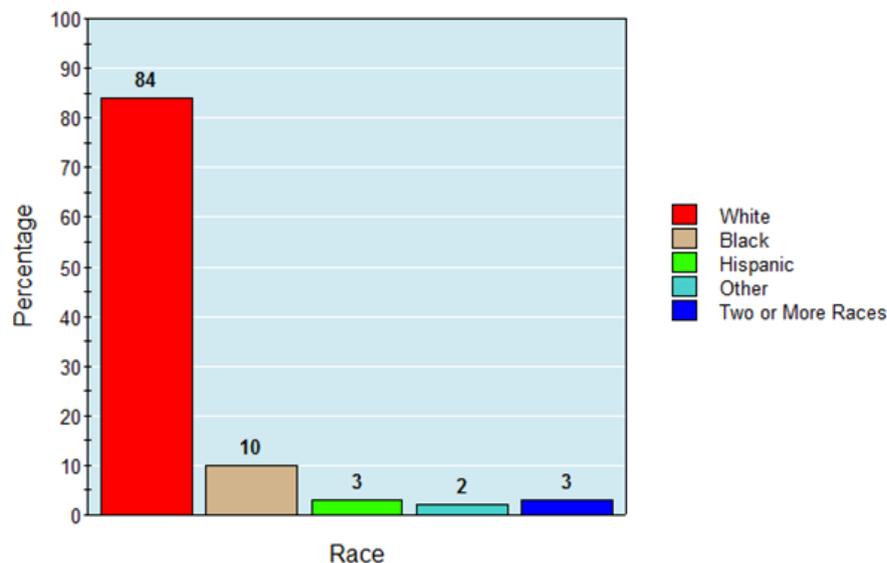
²³ NEWS RELEASES 2015-16. (2015, September 4). Retrieved October 10, 2016, from <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/newsroom/news/2015-16/20150904-01>

²⁴ [DPI AIG Child Count 2015]. (2015, July). Unpublished raw data.

6. Diversity in Teaching

In North Carolina, the vast majority of the teaching force is white (84%).²⁵ This is a tremendous mismatch with an increasingly diverse student population that is half non-white. For the majority of teachers in the state it is likely that they will teach students who do not come from the same racial or ethnic background. Consequently, students in the state will not see themselves represented in the profession. Research has indicated that having teachers of color reduces the likelihood of suspension for students of color, leads to increased achievement, and increases identification as AIG.²⁶ Additionally, it serves to decrease stereotypes for white students and promote cultural understanding. With enrollment in teacher preparation programs in decline, the challenge of filling classrooms with teachers of color and keeping them has become all the more crucial to help students of color succeed academically.

Racial Composition of North Carolina Teacher Workforce

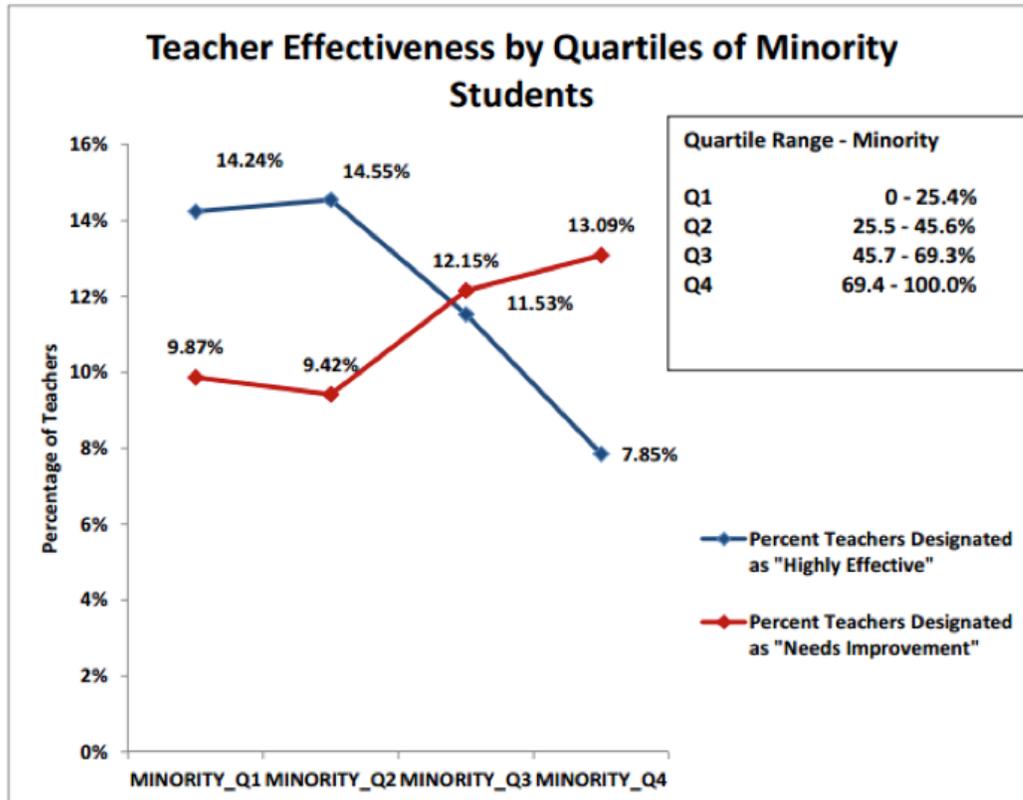


²⁵ Boser, U. (2014, May). *Teacher Diversity Revisited* (Issue brief). Retrieved July, 2016, from Center for American Progress website: <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/TeacherDiversity.pdf>

²⁶ Wright, A. C. (2015, November). *Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Disruptive Behavior: The Effect of Racial Congruence and Consequences for School Suspension* (Working paper). Retrieved August, 2016, from [https://aefpweb.org/sites/default/files/webform/41/Race Match, Disruptive Behavior, and School Suspension.pdf](https://aefpweb.org/sites/default/files/webform/41/Race%20Match,%20Disruptive%20Behavior,%20and%20School%20Suspension.pdf) & Grissom, J. A., & Redding, C. (2016). Discretion and Disproportionality: Explaining the Underrepresentation of High-Achieving Students of Color in Gifted Programs. *AERA Open*, 2(1). doi:10.1177/2332858415622175

7. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Teachers must be able to relate to the students they serve. Whatever their background, teachers need to understand their students both as individuals and as representatives of their communities. Unfortunately, recent North Carolina Teacher Effectiveness ratings for teachers instructing students of color have been dismal (see “Teacher Effectiveness by Quartiles of Minority Students”).²⁷ This effectiveness rating is determined in part through observational data and three-year average student-growth.



Note: Teacher Effectiveness is determined using NC Educator Effectiveness guidelines. Teachers' observational data (2013-14 school year) are combined with a three year average (2011-12 through 2013-14 school years) of the teacher student-growth data. These ratings are not official teacher ratings as the 2011-12 data are not formally used for determining teacher effectiveness. These data serve as a baseline for future analyses. Please see Appendix E for more information about Educator Effectiveness including the teacher's observational data.

Approaches to teaching that honor students' cultural customs and traditions have been shown to increase achievement. On the flip side, a lack of cultural competence can have negative educational consequences. Underpinning many of the data disparities related to culturally responsive pedagogy is the presence of *implicit racial bias*. This refers to attitudes or stereotypes based on patterns and associations about racial groups that affect understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. For school leaders and teachers alike, implicit racial bias can influence responses and decision-making on the job.

²⁷ North Carolina's State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators (Publication). (2015, November 15). Retrieved March, 2016, from <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/program-monitoring/titleA/equity-plan/equity-final.pdf>. Submitted to U.S. Dept. of Education.

Much research has been conducted in recent years on implicit racial bias and how it manifests itself even in the most well-intentioned individuals. Creating awareness about biases, and responding in ways that honor the culture of the student population, hold great promise to improve racial equity.

Recommendations

The intention of this report is to offer a thorough examination of racial inequity in North Carolina Public Schools, with a focus on generating feasible and plausible solutions to the problems. Members of the committee have dedicated themselves to actively researching the issues and scouring the regional and national landscape for exemplars. They have produced several recommendations focused on some level of policymaking: school, district or school board, and state.

It should be noted that some variation of the propositions contained herein may already be in place in specific districts or schools. In this case, it is our hope to expand on these ideas to create more widespread change throughout the state. The Public School Forum identified the need to lift race as a focal point of public education in the 2016 Top 10 Education Issues, and has already been in discussion with local education agencies seeking to address racial disparities. Additionally, we are represented on the Department of Instruction's Discipline Data Working Group. But our earnest desire is to seek board-based change in the racially disparate outcomes within the state's education system. We offer the following recommendations to achieve those ends:

Resegregation

1. Utilize socioeconomic integration models to diversify schools and prevent resegregation. Race and class are strongly correlated. As a result, policies that assign students to schools according to socioeconomic variables can also increase racial diversity. The Supreme Court has rejected student assignment policies based solely on race, but it has determined that promoting diversity and avoiding racial isolation are appropriate factors to consider in developing student assignment policy.²⁸

Wake County was one of the first systems in the nation to use this approach, and has been held up as a national model. Districts including Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Kentucky, which had a racial quota in its assignment policy that was struck

²⁸ See *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, 551 U.S. 701 (2007).

down by the Supreme Court, have remained integrated even without the option of race-based policies.²⁹ Using a formula that takes into account household income, family composition, educational attainment of parents, and other factors, Jefferson County has managed to create one of the more racially diverse systems in the country, and its approach to diversity is widely credited with contributing to a thriving local economy.

According to a 2016 Century Foundation report, 91 districts and charter networks across the country have voluntarily adopted socioeconomics as a factor in the student assignment.³⁰ This represents a growing trend among school systems seeking to promote diversity in student assignment and avoid racial isolation. Whereas some more rural or homogenous areas make this unattainable it should be pursued wherever possible.

2. Create citywide (non-neighborhood based) student assignment policies to curb residential segregation and eliminate racially-isolated geographic areas. The racial composition of certain neighborhoods within America's cities is in large part an artifact of discriminatory practices. Through years of redlining, blockbusting, and steering by real estate agents, intentional residential segregation fostered racially monolithic parts of town.³¹ Against this backdrop, recent pushes for "neighborhood schools" may perpetuate or reinforce longstanding racial segregation.

School policy and housing policy are interdependent. Recent research suggests that if school systems take the lead in delinking neighborhoods from schools, the housing sector will follow and in turn become more racially diverse.³² Furthermore, organizations like OneMECK (a Charlotte-based organization that focuses on ending policies and practices that lead to highly-concentrated poverty in schools and housing) work with city and county leaders to advocate for affordable housing and inclusionary zones to help break up poverty density in city neighborhoods, leading to increased diversity in schools.

²⁹ Semeuls, A. (2015, March 27). The City That Believed in Desegregation. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved February, 2016, from <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/03/the-city-that-believed-in-desegregation/388532/>

³⁰ The Growth of Socioeconomic School Integration. (2016, February 09). Retrieved October 10, 2016, from <https://tcf.org/content/facts/the-growth-of-socioeconomic-school-integration/>

³¹ Quick, K. (2016, March 23). The Myth of the "Natural" Neighborhood. Retrieved August, 2016, from <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/11312/>

³² Siegel-Hawley, G. (2013, June). City Lines, County Lines, Color Lines: The Relationship between School and Housing Segregation in Four Southern Metro Areas. *Teachers College Record*, 115, 1-45.

Opportunity Gap

1. Adopt “community schools” models that leverage partnerships with service providers. School partnerships with providers that help meet critical needs of students and their families, can also help develop and sustain school-community connections.

In a community schools model, the school is not simply part of the community but central to it, becoming a hub for the identification of student and family needs and for the provision of services that help students engage productively in schools and family members provide needed support. For example, in Jennings, Missouri, Superintendent Tiffany Anderson successfully turned around a racially isolated, high poverty district by adopting a holistic approach that “[used] the tools of the school district to alleviate the barriers poverty creates.”³³ In partnership with a nearby university, the school opened a clinic that offered mental health counseling, case management, and wellness education. The district also ran a food pantry for families, and provided training for teachers on the issues of institutional racism and poverty. This school is just one of many examples of utilizing partnerships to provide what schools cannot offer their students and families alone.³⁴ In Rowan-Salisbury Schools, the district tackled food insecurity over the summer by delivering meals to families utilizing a renovated bus — affectionately called “the Yum-Yum Bus.”³⁵

2. Create district equity departments with executive-level leadership. There are only a few districts in North Carolina that have prioritized equity, diversity or inclusion to the extent that they have dedicated this level of specific support for it. More than merely stating a goal or mentioning equity in a mission statement, districts must begin to operationalize their stated dedication to racial equity by placing district leaders in charge of elevating the issues, providing anti-racism training, monitoring data for racial disparities, and holding schools accountable for equity outcomes. Currently, there are fewer than 5 districts out of 115 in North Carolina that have such a dedicated department or leadership role. School boards also have a critical role to play in making racial equity part of their strategic plan and putting accountability measures in place for closing the various opportunity gaps.

³³ *The Superintendent Who Turned Around A School District* [Program]. (2016, January 3). NPR.

³⁴ Welcome to the Coalition for Community Schools! (n.d.). Retrieved October 10, 2016, from <http://www.communityschools.org/> & Kolodner, M. (2015, November 4). At a school in Brooklyn’s poorest neighborhood, literacy is up and disciplinary problems are down – The Hechinger Report. Retrieved October 10, 2016, from <http://hechingerreport.org/at-a-school-in-brooklyns-poorest-neighborhood-literacy-is-up-and-disciplinary-problems-are-down/>

³⁵ Hahn, N. (2016, August 31). One district is combatting summer hunger by going on the road. Find out how. – EducationNC. Retrieved October 10, 2016, from <https://www.ednc.org/2016/08/31/one-district-combatting-summer-hunger-going-road-find/>

Discipline Disparities

1. Require all schools and districts to publish annual discipline reports disaggregated by race with cross-tabulation. The State Board of Education should convene expert stakeholders to critique the categories of discipline data currently collected. The Board should also determine categorical designations for offenses to be tracked and published as part of the annual report, with an eye toward transparency and dissemination of meaningful data to the public. North Carolina is better than many other states in the level and depth of its consolidated discipline report, but schools and districts are not obligated to provide similarly nuanced information to their constituency.

A crucial objective of student discipline reports must be to help safeguard student rights by shining a light on areas of disproportionality or disparity as well as laud successes gained. At a minimum, discipline reports should include data on all significant disciplinary actions that list types of infractions (with specific and standardized definitions), track instructional time missed, and allow cross-tabulation and analysis of data by subgroup. This entails not only comparing students of different race, but also for instance black or Hispanic economically disadvantaged students to white non-economically disadvantaged students. Reports of this nature will go a long way toward earning the trust of communities of color by ensuring that trends and patterns will be analyzed to see which schools are moving toward more equitable student discipline practices. Guilford County School's annual accountability report is an excellent template to follow.

2. Implement Restorative Justice and Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS) as alternative and preventative measures of discipline. In recent years, as data has exposed racial disparities in student discipline, schools have been experimenting with alternatives to suspensions and zero tolerance policies. But decreasing gaps takes more than just a reduction in overall disciplinary actions. Restorative Justice programs like those in Oakland Unified School District have proven to be effective in decreasing the overall incidence of student misbehavior as well as reducing racial gaps.³⁶ Restorative Justice is not an alternative for disciplinary action but rather an intervention prior to escalation. It provides whoever committed the wrong the chance to be held accountable by the community of students affected, and it allows those individuals to determine what must be done to reconcile.

³⁶ *Restorative Justice in Oakland Public Schools Implementation and Impacts* (Rep.). (2014, September). Retrieved August, 2016, from Oakland Unified Public Schools website: http://www.ousd.org/cms/lib07/CA01001176/Centricity/Domain/134/OUUSD-RJ_Report_revised_Final.pdf

PBIS is a multi-level approach to dealing with student attitudes and behavior.³⁷ Its tiers focus on collective school-wide, classroom, and individual student-level supports. Data collected on PBIS should include data on race, since the behavioral intervention alone might alter disciplinary practices but not close gaps. On a broader level, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is a process that deals with emotional intelligence and helps students develop the competencies to identify and interpret their own emotions and the emotions of others, set and pursue goals, empathize, develop positive peer relationships, and learn how to self-regulate and interact effectively in social contexts.³⁸ Combined, these two approaches give schools a range of tools to help students learn appropriate learning behaviors through methods beyond punishment and push-out.

Overrepresentation in Special Education

1. Develop referral and initial evaluation process that take cultural differences into account when assessing students for disabilities. Students of color are overrepresented in the specific categories of special education that are deemed most “stigmatizing,” including intellectual disabilities, emotionally disturbances, and specific learning disabilities. Misidentification may be reinforced by stereotypes that people of color are intellectually inferior. Both the United States Department of Education and researchers have called for greater account of cultural differences in special education evaluation processes and interventions to address students’ special needs.³⁹

Of course evaluation is only part of the process. The emphasis here should also be placed on helping students of color with disabilities and their families in a way that is not inherently oppressive by perpetuating a cycle which often misinterprets learning styles of racial minorities. Ensuring that all personnel involved with the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and Response to Intervention (RTI) process have been trained in and understand systemic racism and overrepresentation. In addition, students in overrepresented groups should be given opportunities at regular intervals to be reevaluated and potentially exit the system. Currently the frequency is once every one-to-

³⁷ Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports – OSEP. (n.d.). Retrieved July 12, 2016, from <http://www.pbis.org/>

³⁸ Jones, S. M., Bouffard, S. M., & Weissbourd, R. (2013, May 1). Educators’ Social and Emotional Skills Vital to Learning: Social and Emotional Competencies Aren’t Secondary to the Mission of Education, but Are Concrete Factors in the Success of Teachers, Students, and Schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 62-65.

³⁹ Ujifusa, A. (2016, February 23). “Rule for Identifying Racial Bias in Special Education Proposed By Ed. Department.” *Education Week*. Retrieved October 14, 2016 from http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2016/02/racial_bias_in_special_education_rule_proposed.html

three years, generally speaking.⁴⁰ This policy likely needs revision. This would serve as a way to decrease overrepresentation brought on by failure to account for cultural differences, which would in turn direct scarce resources where they are truly needed and provide incentives for students who have the capacity to work toward the goal of exiting services.

Access to Rigorous Courses and Programs

1. Adopt universal screening processes for academically gifted programs so referral systems are as objective and inclusive as feasible, and to reduce unnecessary variance in practice by district. A standardized process that sets parameters but allows flexibility for the unique nature of communities is paramount. Broward County Schools (FL) reduced racial gaps in identification of gifted programs by utilizing a universal screening process that assessed all second-graders.⁴¹ This replaced a system of parental or teacher referral. Paradise Valley (AZ) Unified School District has created a gifted identification system that responds to the needs of the community.⁴² The district uses a multifaceted identification process and embeds a gifted specialist in each of the district's elementary schools to train teachers and staff to recognize high potential. With a large Hispanic population that often gets overlooked, the schools identify students using measures and assessments free of cultural or linguistic bias. As a result, the non-white gifted population has doubled in 2007. We recommend that North Carolina districts evaluate similar approaches to AIG identification processes in order to improve racial equity and improve access to AIG offerings. Making the assessments multidimensional (not relying exclusively on test scores), focusing on potential and not just performance, and looking at subjects beyond just reading and math could all prove beneficial. Districts should adopt similar process for access to advanced coursework.

2. Train teachers and counselors on the “belief gap.” Emerging research has revealed the significance of the belief gap (also referred to as the Pygmalion Effect): frequently, the absence of students of color in rigorous courses is not the result of an objective lack of

⁴⁰ *Policies Governing Services for Children with Disabilities* (Policy Manual). (2014, July 10). Retrieved August, 2016, from NC Dept of Public Instruction: Exceptional Children's Division website:

<http://ec.ncpublicschools.gov/policies/nc-policies-governing-services-for-children-with-disabilities/policies-children-disabilities.pdf>

⁴¹ Dynarski, S. (2016, April 8). Why Talented Black and Hispanic Students Can Go Undiscovered. *New York Times*. Retrieved April, 2016, from <http://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/04/10/upshot/why-talented-black-and-hispanic-students-can-go-undiscovered.html?referer=https://t.co/QL730F1v5S& r=1>

⁴² Brulles, D. (2016, March). High-potential students thrive when school districts develop sustainable gifted services. Retrieved October 12, 2016, from <https://edexcellence.net/articles/high-potential-students-thrive-when-school-districts-develop-sustainable-gifted-services>

readiness, but is instead due to teachers and counselors subjectively determining that students are not well-suited for the courses.⁴³ This lack of belief in children of color denies them access to important stepping stones to academic excellence, with deleterious effects on their outcomes in K-12 education and beyond.⁴⁴ Training on the belief gap can help teachers and counselors understand what to look for when assessing readiness for advanced coursework.

3. Audit course enrollments to spotlight racial disparities in honors, AP, and other rigorous courses. As an accountability measure, schools should undertake regular audits of course enrollments that analyze disparities in enrollment numbers among racial subgroups and that critically examine the criteria being used by teachers and counselors to determine student readiness for advanced coursework. If racialized gaps emerge that expose differential treatment, immediate interventions should be instituted to make the numbers more equitable and give all student equal opportunity of access.

Diversity in Teaching

1. Develop a fellowship program that incentivizes people of color to become teachers and offers them support to stay in the profession long-term. The number of young people entering the teaching pipeline is decreasing in North Carolina. Policymakers and practitioners are considering a number of strategies to widen the teacher pipeline, but too few of the policies focus specifically on attracting teachers to high-need schools who share the racial and cultural backgrounds of those schools' students.

Thankfully, there are a host of examples throughout the country worthy of emulation. Programs like Profound Gentlemen (Charlotte, NC) is an incentive-based program designed to retain male educators of color through peer development, community building, and career opportunities.⁴⁵ In a little over two years, the program has developed the largest network of black male teachers in the country. Other programs like Call Me MISTER (Clemson, SC) and African American Teacher Fellows (Charlottesville, VA) seek to offer financial incentives that attract teachers of colors.⁴⁶ The New York City Public Schools has launched the NYCMenTeach program, which is similarly designed to attract Black and

⁴³ *Finding America's Missing AP and IB Students* (Rep.). (2013, June). Retrieved October, 2015, from The Education Trust website: http://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Missing_Students.pdf

⁴⁴ Stephens, L. (2015). The "Belief Gap" Prevents Teachers from Seeing the True Potential of Students of Color. Retrieved October 12, 2016, from <http://www.forharriet.com/2015/05/the-belief-gap-prevents-teachers-from.html#axzz4IN20SigL>

⁴⁵ Profound Gentlemen. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2016, from <http://profoundgentlemen.org/>

⁴⁶ Welcome to Call Me MiSTER®. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2016, from <https://www.clemson.edu/education/callmemister/> & African American Teaching Fellows. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2016, from <http://www.aateachingfellows.org/>

Hispanic male teachers to the profession.⁴⁷ We recommend that school boards and district- and state-level policymakers consider supporting similar models to boost recruitment of teachers of color in North Carolina.

2. Create teacher preparation pathways for communities of color that begin recruiting prospective teachers in high school, and that expand lateral entry opportunities for professionals from minority groups who show interest and promise as potential educators. Efforts to attract students of color early in their academic careers have shown promise as a model for bringing more of these students into the profession.⁴⁸ As such, targeted efforts to recruit people of color by tailoring programs like the North Carolina Teacher Cadet program and the recently discontinued North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program to minority candidates could prove valuable in rapidly building up this important segment of the future teaching pool. Additionally, the state should make it as efficient as possible for those in other professions who would like to become teachers to do so, without sacrificing the quality of teacher preparation.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

1. Adopt a set of standards for culturally relevant teaching to assist teachers in understanding what competencies are needed to effectively instruct students of color. In the same way that there are language standards for English Language Learners with Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), there should be research-based standards for cultural relevance and responsive pedagogy. The purposes of such standards would be to help teachers learn to instruct in ways that honor the customs, norms and traditions of all students; embed the diverse perspectives and histories of communities of color within the curriculum; and utilize these perspectives to inform best practices. Identifying competencies for teachers to aspire to will give practitioners a clearer picture of what equitable instruction should look like for students of color. This must be done with the understanding standards alone don't change practice, but the level of responsiveness to students' needs is what actually lead to competence. The focus should be on the application of cultural relevance by the instructor.

Teacher preparation programs should use the standards to reassess their curriculum and to develop new course offerings, since efforts to boost racial awareness will be particularly

⁴⁷ Layton, L. (2015, December 11). Wanted in New York City: A Thousand Black, Latino and Asian Male Teachers. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved April, 2016, from http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-39071771.html?refid=easy_hf

⁴⁸ Bristol, T. J. (n.d.). *Black Men of the Classroom: A Policy Brief for How Boston Public Schools Can Recruit and Retain Black Male Teachers* (Issue brief). Retrieved September, 2016, from The Schott Foundation website: <http://schottfoundation.org/sites/default/files/TravisBristol-PolicyBrief-BlackMaleTeachers.pdf>

impactful during teacher pre-service training.⁴⁹ Creating space for students to discuss race, choosing materials that reflect the communities of the children served, and factoring in worldviews other than those of traditional westernized societies are example of strategies that standards-aligned training can provide that will improve teachers' ability to properly address cultural divides through pedagogy.⁵⁰

2. Implicit racial bias training for teachers and administrators to help break habits of prejudice and lead to more balanced treatment of students of color. Most of the racial disparities in discipline, special education, and AIG and advanced course enrollment are not the result of malicious intent as much as deep-seated, unconscious biases. But just because this type of racial bias is unintended does not mean it is harmless.⁵¹ It is crucial for local school boards and district leaders to take affirmative steps to help educators deconstruct implicit racial bias and understand the nature of systemic racism. Research has shown that undergoing such training can lead to dramatic reductions in bias.⁵² Guilford County Schools has been a leader in this area, with nearly more than 50 of their 127 schools participating in implicit racial bias training. We recommend that all other districts provide similar opportunities to their teachers and staff to help offset the impact of implicit bias on educational outcomes for minority students.

Glossary

Due to the complex nature of many of the issues discussed by the Committee, it became important to qualify definitions for the purposes of establishing shared meaning. During one of the work sessions, the Committee developing a glossary to assist the reader when working through the document.

Race – socially-constructed classification of humans according to some physical features (e.g.; skin color, hair texture, body type, etc.).

⁴⁹ Will, M. (2016, May 10). Study: Teacher-Prep Programs Need to Deepen Educators' Racial Awareness [Web log post]. Retrieved May 10, 2016, from

http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_now/2016/05/white%20teachers_diverse_classrooms.html

⁵⁰ Kim, A. (2016, February 18). A culturally rich curriculum can improve minority student achievement [Web log post]. Retrieved February 18, 2016, from <https://edexcellence.net/articles/a-culturally-rich-curriculum-can-improve-minority-student-achievement> & Klein, R. (2015, December 4). What Happened When One High School Started An Open Conversation About Race. Retrieved January, 2016, from

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/maplewood-high-school-race-relations-club_us_5660ad41e4b072e9d1c55755

⁵¹ Staats, C. (n.d.). Understanding Implicit Bias. Retrieved October 12, 2016, from <http://www.aft.org/ae/winter2015-2016/staats>

⁵² Devine, P. G., Forscher, P. S., Austin, A. J., & Cox, W. T. (2012). Long-term reduction in implicit race bias: A prejudice habit-breaking intervention. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48(6), 1267-1278. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2012.06.003

Racism – (1) any individual or systemic belief, attitude, action or inaction, which grants or denies groups access and/or opportunity based on their race. (2) a pattern of social institutions — such as governmental organizations, schools, banks, and courts of law – giving inequitable treatment to a group of people based on their race.

Implicit Racial Bias – refers to the attitudes or stereotypes based on patterns and associations about a racial group that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.

Disproportionality – disproportionate representation – over or under – of a given population. (e.g.; race, ethnicity, Socioeconomic Status, nationality, Limited English Proficiency, gender, etc.)

Racial Disparity – noticeably unjust or unfair outcomes based on race when individuals or groups are similarly situated

Disparate Impact – a facially neutral policy or practice has an unjustifiable effect of discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, or disability.



Committee on Low-Performing Schools

Committee on Low-Performing Schools

Our third committee focused on the challenges of turning around the state's lowest-performing schools. Its work complements the efforts of the other two committees; together, they offer a suite of interventions that address key factors impacting student learning at multiple levels and addressing the inequality issue. The Committee on Trauma & Learning grappled with highly individualized elements of students' experiences. The Committee on Racial Equity looked at cultural and environmental factors affecting relationships among groups of students. By comparison, the work of the Committee on Low-Performing Schools was structural, examining variables that affect all students, families, and educators in a given school community.

Currently, the state classifies as "low-performing schools" those that receive a School Performance Grade of D or F and do not "exceed expected growth." The letter grade is based 80 percent on the school's achievement score (which uses various data including student performance on end-of-grade and end-of-course standardized test scores) and 20 percent on students' academic growth (a measure of students' performance in relation to their expected performance based on the prior year's test results), resulting in a grade of A, B, C, D, or F. "Low-performing districts" are those with over 50 percent of their schools identified as low-performing. Based on 2015-16 data, there are 489 low-performing schools (20% of all schools in the state), and 10 low-performing districts out of 115. Last year, there were 581 low-performing schools (24.6%) and 16 low-performing districts.

The state's current work to support low-performing schools is run through the Department of Public Instruction's Division of District and School Transformation. This Division provides services and support to build the capacity of staff serving in low-performing schools and districts, and to "develop or improve systems and processes that will sustain a continuous improvement culture."¹ The Division's coaches work with school-based professionals and district officials to support planning and implementation of their improvement plans, informed and customized based on a Comprehensive Needs Assessment provided by the Division.

North Carolina has a long history of supporting its struggling schools. In 1999, the state's efforts earned the praise of President Clinton in his State of the Union address. In 2005, the state implemented the NC High School Turnaround Initiative, which was subsequently expanded to serve middle schools, before redesigning a new state assistance model for low-performing schools that it began implementing in 2007-08. More recently, under the state's Race to the Top grant, the state implemented an extensive effort, called Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools (TALAS).

¹ N.C. Department of Public Instruction, Division of District and School Transformation.
<http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/schooltransformation/>



History of Turnaround Efforts in NC, 1996-2016²

1995	Era of Assessment and Accountability begins after General Assembly directs the State Board of Education (SBOE) to develop a restructuring plan
1995-96	108 schools in 10 districts given pilot assessments for development of new model
1996	General Assembly approves SBOE plan and enacts as law School Based Management and Accountability Program (ABCs)
1996-97	Schools administer assessments in grades K-8; Assistance teams assist low-performing schools (deployed on request)
1997-98	SBOE officially designates low-performing schools. Statutory definition of “low-performing school” is below 50% proficient and not making expected growth. A low-performing district is a district with over 50% of its schools low-performing. Assistance teams deployed to intervene in low-performing schools.
1998-2005	SBOE continues to identify low-performing schools and deploy assistance teams. Typically 4-5 person teams spend a year in a school. Not all “low-performing schools” receive an assistance team. Districts with low-performing schools must submit plans to the state for school improvement. In 2001-03, the state began collecting data to report Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

² Based on Ashley, P. (2016). *A Brief (and Probably Imperfect) 20-year History of Turnaround Efforts in NC (1996-2016)*. Prepared for the Public School Forum of North Carolina’s Study Group XVI.

	under No Child Left Behind, with a goal of 100% proficiency by 2013-2014.
2005-06	Under state definition 51 schools are designated as low performing (2.2% of schools in NC). There are 52 full-time staff deployed as assistance team members. Under the direction of the governor's office and the court, high schools with performance composites under 60% proficient for 2 consecutive years became part of the NC High School Turnaround Initiative . AYP for state showed 1,044 schools (45.2%) met goals and 1,268 (54.8%) did not.
2006-07	Under state law, 45 schools (1.9%) are identified as low performing. SBOE deploys assistance teams for final year. The court and executive branch direct SBOE/NCDPI to expand NC Turnaround Initiative to include underperforming middle schools (37) that feed the identified high schools. A second cohort of high schools joins the NC High School Turnaround Initiative. DPI engages in redesign of state assistance model.
2007-10	The new model for state assistance is implemented in Columbus and Lexington City (starting in 2006-07), and in Richmond, Bertie, Hertford and Halifax (beginning in 2007-08). The NC High School and Middle School Turnaround Initiatives continue with the original cohorts. Low performing elementary schools become a 4th cohort under the Initiative. The Halifax County Schools enters into a consent agreement with the State Board of Education (SBOE).
2010-11	NC receives Race to the Top (RTTT) grant. Goals of the grant related to the state's new effort, Turning Around Lowest Achieving Schools (TALAS), are: (1) Improve student achievement in the bottom 5% of NC schools (118 schools), (2) Increase graduation rates of all high schools in NC to above 60%, and (3) Improve achievement in lowest 10% of NC schools districts (12 districts). NC Turnaround Initiative is phased out and replaced by Race to the Top, under which District and School Transformation Division blends federal and state resources to serve many more schools and districts.
2011-12	Year Two of TALAS. In May of 2012 USED approves NC's request for flexibility under NCLB and NC no longer designates AYP. Instead NC reports Annual Measurable Objectives (number of targets met and % of targets met). State serves one hundred and eighteen individual schools (bottom 5%) and 12 districts (bottom 10%).
2012-15	Years 3-5 of TALAS. NC begins new accountability system (READY), replacing ABCs. Using all EOG and EOC, school growth is calculated using EVAAS with 3 designations: exceeded growth, met growth and did not meet growth. High schools report multiple factors. No designation of "low-performing schools." State serves bottom 5% of schools and bottom 10% of districts. In Year 5

	(extension of TALAS), A-F school grades are added to accountability model.
2015-16	Revisions made to NC law regarding low-performing schools and districts. Definition now based on A-F letter grades. Low-performing school redefined as a D or F school not exceeding growth. Low performing district defined as a district with over 50% of its schools identified as low performing. 581 schools and 16 districts are identified as low-performing. New model for support is developed: North Carolina Transformation. This model will support NC schools through four Service Support Teams; 75 of 581 eligible schools will receive in-school support.

In the past several years, the state’s approach to low-performing schools has shifted. Today, state policy is characterized by the new A-F school performance grades, which are now linked to the “low-performing schools” label as well as various interventions, including potential inclusion of the school in the new Achievement School District (discussed below), and enrollment criteria for new University of North Carolina “lab schools.”³

Most of North Carolina’s “low-performing schools” serve high concentrations of students living in poverty. This link between poverty and school performance spotlights the intense needs these schools face and provides a strong rationale for giving them significant support. Unfortunately, decreased funding and the end of Race to the Top funding mean that last year the state was able to provide support to only 75 of 581 eligible schools.

Options created by the General Assembly that enable students to leave the low-performing schools to which they have been assigned create choices for students but do not provide the funding public schools need to serve these students well. Recent policy interventions have tended to focus on enabling students to select alternatives to their assigned schools, most prominently private schools (through vouchers) and charter schools. In 2016, the General Assembly also enacted legislation to create an Achievement School District (ASD), through which low-performing schools can be removed from their districts and turned over to private nonprofit or for-profit operators to run as charter schools. The same legislation permits each district with a school pulled into the ASD to run a small group of schools with charter-like flexibility in an “Innovation Zone.”

Some Committee Members favor doing away with A-F grades entirely. Others propose increasing the weight placed on students’ academic growth or moving to a growth-to-proficiency model or one that includes multiple additional factors in the grade calculation (e.g., growth among a school’s lowest-achieving students). Others are more circumspect about eliminating or altering the formula. Many hold out hope that the system can be

³ “Low-performing schools are those that receive a school performance grade of D or F and a school growth score of ‘met expected growth’ or ‘not met expected growth.’” N.C. Gen. Stat. § 115C-105.37(a).

helpful if it results in a call to action, to target supports to schools most in need (i.e., the highest-poverty schools, which tend to receive lower grades).

The Committee learned a great deal about alternatives for supporting low-performing schools as well as the successes and struggles of strategies that have previously been implemented in North Carolina and in other states.

Summary of Committee Activity and Relevant Research

North Carolina’s History of School Turnaround with J.B. Buxton, former Deputy State Superintendent of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Mr. Buxton discussed his time at the department, during which the state intervened in 135 low-performing schools and six low-performing districts. He also reviewed the arc and evolution of the state’s approach to turnaround from 1996-2010, major events and shifts in the state’s theory of change during that time period, and lessons learned and related recommendations.

The Current Status of North Carolina’s Turnaround Strategy with Dr. Nancy Barbour, Director, District and School Transformation, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Dr. Barbour discussed the Division’s current approach to district and school transformation; the main actions the Division is taking and expects to take in the future to turn around the lowest-achieving schools; and the state’s TALAS initiative under Race to the Top and how it has informed the Division’s work moving forward.

What’s Happening Around the Country? A National Perspective on Turnarounds. Committee members reviewed a 2015 primer from the Education Commission on the States, *Emerging State Turnaround Strategies*. They then had an opportunity to discuss strengths and weaknesses of the approaches covered in the document: 1) Innovation zones, 2) Recovery districts (like the Achievement School District), and 3) Receiverships.

Nashville’s Innovation Zone (I-Zone) with Dr. Alan Coverstone, creator of Nashville’s I-Zone. In his work with the I-Zone, Dr. Coverstone developed a corps of turnaround leaders and led the expansion of autonomy and accountability for a growing number of schools and school leaders.



School Turnaround and the “London Effect” with Drs. Helen “Sunny” Ladd and Ted Fiske. Over the past 15 years, schools in several boroughs in Inner London, which serve high proportions of disadvantaged pupils, have achieved remarkable improvement to the

point where these students are now performing above national averages. Drs. Ladd and Fiske shared key findings from their research on primary schools in two boroughs, Hackney and Tower Hamlets, and lessons for those seeking to improve the performance of low-performing schools in the United States.



School Turnaround in Tennessee and North Carolina with Dr. Gary Henry. Dr. Henry discussed his recent report, "[Evaluation of the Effect of Tennessee's Achievement School District on Student Test Scores](#)," as well as his [evaluation](#) of North Carolina's TALAS initiative. Within his discussion of Tennessee's turnaround efforts, Dr. Henry presented data on schools run by the state's Achievement School District (ASD), differentiating between ASD-run schools and those run by charter operators, as well as schools in several local Innovation Zones.⁴



Site Visits to Schools Categorized as "Low-Performing." Committee members visited two schools, Maureen Joy Charter School and Y.E. Smith Elementary School, and had an opportunity to visit classrooms and talk with teachers and school leaders about school performance and their specific efforts to turnaround their schools, both of which were categorized as "low-performing."

North Carolina's efforts to turn around low-performing schools before 2011 and under Race to the Top with Pat Ashley, Former Director, District and School Transformation Division, NC DPI. Dr. Ashley shared her experiences leading the state's efforts to turn around low-performing schools. She focused on the state's interventions in schools and districts under Race to the Top as well as the department's prior efforts.

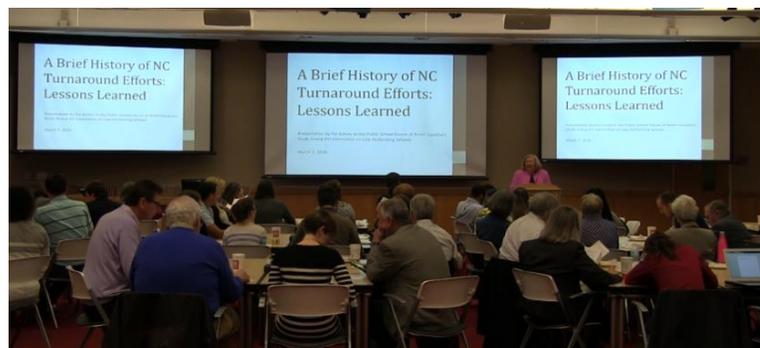


Photo Credit: Screen shot/EducationNC

⁴ Videos of Dr. Henry's presentation are available online at <https://www.ncforum.org/committee-on-low-performing-schools/>.

School and District Turnaround Leader Panel.

The Committee met with a group of distinguished leaders to discuss their experiences with low-performing schools. The panel consisted of: Erin Swanson, Principal, Martin Millenium Academy;

John Farrelly, Superintendent, Edgecombe County Schools; Catherine Edmonds, Director and Executive Coach, Northeast Leadership Academy District and School Transformation; and Pascal Mubenga, Superintendent, Franklin County Schools.



A Conversation with Leaders of Schools Designated “Low-Performing.”

A second panel of distinguished school leaders presented to the Committee about their experiences. All panelists’ schools are either now or were previously designated as low-performing. The panel consisted of:

Carrie Tulbert, Principal, Concord Middle School, and 2014 NC Wells Fargo Principal of the Year; Rusty Hall, Principal, Old Town Elementary School, and 2015-16 Winston-Salem/Forsyth Principal of the Year; Kristy Thomas, Principal, Rock Rest Elementary School; and Jacqueline Williams, Principal, Pittman Elementary School, and 2015-16 Halifax Principal of the Year.



District-led Turnaround in North Carolina – Knightdale High School of Collaborative Design.

The Committee learned about the innovative district and school-led turnaround effort in Knightdale from Principal Jim Argent, Area Superintendent Dr. Edward McFarland, and Eric Grebing from NC New Schools | Breakthrough Learning.

After their presentations, the Committee discussed the initiative with a panel including a parent, a teacher, and a student from Knightdale, along with Dr. Argent, Dr. McFarland, and De McKenzie from NC New Schools | Breakthrough Learning.



Discussion of “School Turnaround in North Carolina: A Regression Discontinuity Analysis,” with Dr. Helen “Sunny” Ladd. This report, authored by Dr. Ladd and Jennifer A. Heissel, examined results of the North Carolina TALAS initiative for elementary and middle schools. Unlike Dr. Henry’s evaluations of TALAS, which focused on high schools and found generally positive results, the report by Ladd and Heissel found that “turnaround led to a drop in average school-level math and reading passing rates and an increased concentration of low-income students in treated schools.”⁵

Recommendations

All children deserve great schools. Unfortunately, North Carolina has too many students attending schools that miss the mark. Turning around these schools would not fully address the constitution’s educational opportunity mandate (some students in higher-performing schools are also not being provided the opportunity to receive a sound basic education), but it would be a great start. The recommendations in this section pertain specifically to low-performing schools, but many could be applied more broadly, with sufficient investment, to all schools.

The state’s A-F grading system has shone a light on the reality that students living in poverty are far more likely than others to attend low-performing schools. This grading system reflects a very real disparity in inputs—particularly teachers, school leaders, and resources—between schools attended by large percentages of economically disadvantaged students and those without such concentrations. Our recommendations aim to address this disparity, improving the inputs that matter in schools that the state’s system has categorized as those most in need.⁶

Recommendation 1. Increase investment in high-quality early childhood education programs and interventions specifically serving grades K-3 in low-performing schools and districts.

All three of our study group committees reviewed information that emphasized the paramount importance of early education for high-need students. Achievement gaps begin to form before students enter kindergarten and widen rapidly during the early years of K-

⁵ Heissel, J. A., & Ladd, H. F. (2016). *School Turnaround in North Carolina: A Regression Discontinuity Analysis*. Washington, DC: National Center for the Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER) (Working Paper).

⁶ As noted above, the Committee does not support the current A-F grading system, but for purposes of these recommendations accepts it as given and focuses on using the letter grades to identify schools in acute need of additional support.

12 education. If students are not reading on grade level at the end of third grade, they have difficulty accessing the curriculum as they proceed in school, and have greatly diminished prospects for success in school and beyond.

State leaders have prioritized early reading through the Read to Achieve program, though investment in the nationally recognized NC Pre-K program still lags pre-recession levels. We recommend state leaders redouble their efforts to support early childhood education programs. The 2016 Appropriations Act envisions inter-agency collaboration to “develop a comprehensive approach to early childhood education, birth through third grade,” that focuses on a comprehensive set of data indicators, guided in part by the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading. We support these efforts and recommend additional funding and personnel be provided to carry forward the comprehensive approach in a sustained and data-driven manner.

ESSA strengthens the opportunities for alignment of programs focused on education from birth through third grade. Districts have several options for using funds and changing policies and practices to address student learning needs at younger ages. The state’s ESSA working group should include early learning recommendations in North Carolina’s plan, and districts should work closely with the early learning community to design and implement district-level plans.

We also recommend that low-performing schools use the flexibility afforded them to prioritize early childhood education within existing funding constraints. State law permits continually low-performing schools to apply to the State Board of Education for flexibility over their use of funding. We recommend that low-performing schools consider shifting a portion of their admittedly scarce resources to support innovative early childhood education programs that will help students in future years arrive at kindergarten ready to learn, and to K-3 programs that prepare students to meet crucial benchmarks on the path to grade-level reading by the end of third grade. We recognize that overall funding is inadequate to meet every need, so shifting funds to new areas will not be easy. Nevertheless, Committee members found the evidence on the impact of high-quality pre-K and third-grade reading so compelling that members recommended making difficult choices to prioritize these areas even at the potential expense of other K-12 funding priorities, such as lowering class sizes, investing in teacher professional development, and improving classroom technology, that have not been shown to correlate as strongly with improved student outcomes, particularly for high-need students. Districts should have the flexibility to make such shifts, consistent with local priorities.

Recommendation 2. Adopt area-wide school improvement strategies.

Often turnaround programs focus on schools as the locus of intervention. As an alternative, we recommend that districts, private funders, and the state consider area-wide strategies that capitalize on the assets of an entire community, including multiple schools and external partners, to help turn around struggling schools. As discussed in the recommendations of the Committee on Racial Equity, the “community schools” model and other school-community and public-private partnerships hold immense promise to meet critical needs of students and their families. In some cases, the “area” in an area-wide strategy may be coextensive with the district, but in many cases it will focus on a neighborhood or group of neighborhoods within a district, or in some cases stretching across district lines. It is not a cluster of low-performing schools, but rather a group of schools and communities that include stronger and weaker performers. Interventions within a chosen area might include the restructuring of contracts and teaching roles to enable teachers to collaborate across schools within the identified area. They will also likely include providing wraparound services and other supports to address the topics spotlighted in the recommendations of the other two committees. We recommend extending the flexibilities provided to “Innovation Zone” schools under the recently passed HB 1080 to all low-performing schools in selected areas.

Recommendation 3. Improve allocation of vital resources to support interventions that will attract and retain excellent teachers and school leaders in high-need schools.

Across the country, a host of programs and policy interventions focus on improving teacher and school leader “pipelines,” because the effectiveness of teachers and leaders matters more to student performance than any other school-based factors. Many of these programs and policies have been the focus of past Public School Forum Study Groups.⁷

After meeting with the experts listed earlier in this section and reviewing numerous reports and policy papers, including past study group reports, our initial recommendations in this area presented challenges of political will rather than the need for new ideas. Increasing teacher and school leader pay and working conditions are not novel suggestions, but they will continue to be issues without dramatic investment in these areas to support the professionals on the front lines of the public school system.

⁷ See past reports, including [Our Kids Won't Wait: They Need World-Class Schools Today](#), [Responding to the Leandro Ruling](#), [Better Identification and Preparation of School Leaders](#), [Recruiting Teachers for Hard to Staff Schools](#), and [A Profession in Jeopardy—Why Teachers Leave and What We Can Do About It](#).

We support tailored interventions to attract and retain excellent teachers and school leaders in high-need schools, including the following:

a) 11-month teacher contracts. Teachers in low-performing schools should be automatically granted 11-month contracts with additional pay for the time. Schools should use this additional time for extended school-year support for struggling students and job-embedded professional development focused on the needs of students in low-performing schools.

b) Extended contracts with incentives for proven turnaround principals. School leaders with a history of successfully turning around low-achieving schools should be given extended contracts for new positions at currently low-achieving schools (e.g., five-year contracts). The contracts should include significant compensation and other incentives, including significant authority over staffing decisions, finances, and other operational areas. The principals should be required to develop a written plan with clear goals for dramatically improving student achievement. The plan should show how the principal will empower and support teachers, how the principal and teachers' performance will be measured, and how they will be held accountable for their performance.⁸

c) Autonomy and empowerment for turnaround leaders. School leaders need support from the district office and the state to adapt turnaround strategies to the unique needs of their schools. District and state interventions mandated uniformly across all low-performing schools often miss the mark because they fail to account for contextual factors that vary from school to school. Strong leaders recognize these factors and can tailor strategies to address them. State law can help create the conditions under which leaders at low-performing schools have the flexibility they need over finances, staffing, use of time, the school calendar, and other aspects of school operations, to craft tailored, productive interventions that address the needs of their school communities.

d) Teacher scholarships. The state, districts, or education-focused nonprofit organizations should create new teacher scholarship programs that forgive student loans for teaching candidates who teach in low-performing schools and meet a minimum service requirement of a prescribed number of years after they complete their degree programs and certification requirements.

e) Redesigned teacher and principal preparation programs and licensure processes. North Carolina's teacher and school leader preparation programs should offer a range of routes into the profession for those willing to commit to serving in low-performing schools, while maintaining the rigor necessary to ensure quality. In doing so, they should provide rigorous training in areas necessary for strong teaching and turnaround leadership. Programs

⁸ A promising pilot that would have done much of what is recommended here was included as the "Principal Turnaround Model" in early versions of HB1080 (creating an Achievement School District (ASD) and Innovation Zones), but did not make the final cut.

should also provide teacher and school leader candidates the opportunity to learn through residencies under proven, successful turnaround teachers and principals.⁹ For low-performing schools, licensure processes should focus on characteristics that are associated with successful teaching and school leadership, including competencies associated with the role (e.g., for principals, mastery of adult and instructional leadership skills). For teachers and principals in low-performing schools who demonstrate these competencies, licensure and renewal processes should be redesigned and simplified, as an incentive to enter or remain in these schools.

f) Opportunities to advance without leaving the classroom. Low-performing districts and schools should use available flexibility to create new, advanced teaching roles and pay teachers in part according to these roles, not just for years of service, National Board certification, and degrees earned.¹⁰ The state and districts should develop alternative career paths to attract strong teachers and teaching candidates to low-performing schools. For example, a district might create a “fast-track” to advanced teaching roles or other leadership positions contingent on consistently strong performance in high-need schools. Schools or districts might also create part-time positions that allow teachers to teach reduced loads while taking on mentoring or other leadership roles.

Recommendation 4. Establish strong partnerships between teacher preparation programs and high-need schools and districts.
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The committee encourages higher education leaders to develop in-service and training programs in collaboration with high-need schools and districts to better prepare teachers for the unique challenges of teaching in these environments, and to bring the resources of universities to bear on those schools in direct and impactful ways. The state should put substantial funding behind these collaborations, to provide incentives and support for university teacher preparation programs to work directly with high-need schools.

Productive partnerships already exist. For example, North Carolina State University’s College of Education prepares promising candidates to serve as principals in high-need areas (through the Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA)), and supports beginning teachers in high-need areas through practice-oriented workshops delivered by excellent veteran teachers. The College is also planning to offer a redesigned lateral entry program jointly with the UNC Chapel Hill College of Education, to expand the teaching pool and

⁹ See Desravines, J., Aquino, J., Fenton, B., & New Leaders (2016). *Breakthrough Principals: A Step-By-Step Guide to Building Stronger Schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

¹⁰ The 2016 Appropriations Act includes a new three-year pilot program to develop and implement advanced teaching roles and related compensation models.

improve the preparation of lateral entry candidates entering the state’s highest-need schools and districts.

The committee hopes that efforts like these will thrive and expand, becoming more commonplace in the years ahead and helping fill burgeoning teachers shortages in many of the state’s high-need schools and districts. The 2016 Appropriations Act provides for the creation of “lab schools” affiliated with the state’s public universities to provide additional educational alternatives for students in low-performing schools. During our committee meetings, little was known about how this program would work or how it would be funded, so we left needing more information to effectively evaluate this initiative’s potential.

Recommendation 5. Require low-performing schools to implement turnaround interventions based on empirical evidence or strong theories.

While no one has “cracked the code” on turning around low-achieving schools, research has evolved considerably in recent years to the point that we can now point with confidence to several cost-effective, high-impact strategies that low-performing schools would be wise to consider. District and school leaders should implement turnaround strategies based on evidence from rigorous studies of turnaround efforts in North Carolina and other states, or well-conceived, innovative strategies with sound theoretical foundations.

In addition to research on North Carolina’s TALAS initiative by Dr. Henry and his colleagues, and Sunny Ladd and Jennifer Heissel, mentioned earlier, we recommend North Carolina educators and policymakers carefully review additional accessible research and strategies for focusing on the student, including Dr. John Hattie’s research and Dr. Roland Fryer’s study of the implementation of best practices from high-performing charter schools in low-performing, traditional public schools (increased instructional time through an extended school day and school year; more-effective teachers and administrators; high-dosage tutoring; data-driven instruction; and a culture of high expectations).¹¹ In the absence of empirical evidence linking turnaround strategies to relevant outcomes, district and school leaders should be required to demonstrate a strong theory supporting their proposed intervention. This requirement recognizes that in an evolving field the strongest approaches to turnaround might require a mix of old and new approaches, requiring innovation beyond what has been revealed in empirical evidence to date.

¹¹ Hattie, J. (2008). *Visible Learning*. New York, NY: Routledge (see <http://visible-learning.org>); Fryer, R. G. (2014). “Injecting charter school best practices into traditional public schools: Evidence from field experiments.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129(3): 1355-1407. Several members of our committee also praised the research and resources on turning around low-performing schools published by [Mass Insight Education](#).

Recommendation 6. Broaden the state’s accountability system to incorporate multiple measures of student outcomes.

The foregoing recommendations can be implemented under the current A-F grading system or an alternative system. State leaders should also consider a shift in the accountability system to introduce additional measures of student academic progress and other factors that contribute to the operation of successful schools. This should include a focus on nonacademic indicators including, for example, data on disciplinary actions (including suspensions and expulsions) and chronic absenteeism.

The current system, with its heavy focus on student achievement scores, results in predictable patterns linked to poverty rather than the contributions of schools. Potential shifts include adjusting the weights of factors used to calculate school letter grades to increase the emphasis on year-over-year performance expectations (using the current definition of “growth”), exploring a switch to a growth-to-proficiency model, adding factors to the grading formula (e.g., growth among a school’s lowest-performing students), or giving separate grades for achievement and growth. As long as test scores remain a core focus of the system, state leaders should regularly assess proficiency targets and evaluate the rigor of the expectations built into any calculation of student “growth.”

We encourage state leaders to consider these shifts but also to think more broadly about the factors that define success, particularly in low-performing schools, and to use the opportunity presented by ESSA to rethink issues of accountability and assessment and how they guide support for struggling schools. Ultimately, we hope to see North Carolina shift over time to a system where determinations of school performance are based on more than letter grades, including leadership and managerial capacity and the processes used by schools to guide their turnaround efforts. This could be accomplished through the use of teams of independent, professional inspectors to visit schools and report on school performance using a wide range of indicators of school performance.¹² This approach has been used in the past in North Carolina and in other states and other countries. There would still be low-performing schools under such a system, but the emphasis in such a system would shift to action to help struggling schools, rather than focusing so intently on letter grades and labels with little corresponding funding or support.

¹² Ladd, H. F., & Fiske, E. B. (2016). *Educational success in two Inner London boroughs: Lessons for the U.S.* Washington, DC: Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution.