

The State of Public Education in NC: What you should know

The state of public education in North Carolina has yet to improve following rollbacks caused by the recession of 2008. Since coming to power in 2010, Republicans have made policy changes that have further eroded North Carolina's public education system:

Teacher pay in North Carolina has not increased in any meaningful way over the past several years.

- *As of 2018, North Carolina's teachers have an **average salary \$9,600 less than the national average.***
- *This puts North Carolina at **37th in the nation for average teacher pay**—16 spots lower than the 2001-2002 school year.*

Per pupil spending has remained consistently low while Republicans in the General Assembly have prioritized tax cuts for corporations.

- *According to an annual report released by the National Education Association, North Carolina ranks **39th in the nation in per-pupil spending** this year,*
- *North Carolina now spends around **\$2,400 less per-pupil** than the national average per-pupil*

Cuts to school supplies are passed on to teachers and parents:

- ***Teachers spend between \$500 and \$1,000 out-of-pocket on classroom supplies,***
- ***The average family with elementary-age children pays \$650 per child on school supplies.***
- ***The average family with middle schoolers spend \$1,000 per child on school supplies.***
- ***The average family with high school students spends \$1,500 per child.***

In North Carolina, the achievement gap between wealthy and low-income students widened more than any other state between 2011 and 2014.

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North Carolina ranked 37th in the nation for teacher pay in 2018. “North Carolina ranks 37th in the nation for average teacher pay, according to [estimates released Monday by the National Education Association](#). The estimate may be revised later based on updated data. Last year, NEA first estimated that North Carolina was 35th in the nation for teacher pay, but it [revised the numbers to show that N.C. was 39th last year](#). [NEA's report](#), which details everything from teacher pay to school enrollment and funding by state, shows North Carolina's average teacher salary is \$50,861 for the current school year. That's about \$9,600 less than the national average teacher pay of \$60,483, according to the report. Last month, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction estimated that the [state's average teacher pay has reached \\$51,214 this](#)

[year](#) – \$353 more than what NEA estimated North Carolina's average salary to be. In an email to WRAL News, an official in NEA's research department explained the discrepancy in salary figures.” (WRAL, [4/23/18](#))

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In 2017, North Carolina ranked 46th in a list of “Best and Worst States for Teachers.” “This combination of job pressures, low pay and lack of mobility forces many teachers to quit soon after they start, a pattern that has led to a perpetual attrition problem in America’s public schools. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, about a [fifth](#) of all newly minted public-school teachers leave their positions before the end of their first year, and nearly half never last more than five. Many teachers, especially novices, transfer to other schools or abandon the profession altogether “as the result of feeling overwhelmed, ineffective, and unsupported,” according to ASCD, a nonprofit focused on improving the education community. In some states, however, teachers are more fairly paid and treated than in others and therefore less likely to face a revolving door of teacher turnover.” (WalletHub, [9/25/17](#))

North Carolina has failed to adequately fund education as per pupil spending remains below the national average.

North Carolina failed to improve in per pupil spending between 2017 and 2018, remaining 39th in the nation and over \$2,400 below the national average. (NEA Rankings & Estimates, [2016-2017](#); [2017-18](#))

North Carolina consistently spends less on students than other states. “The National Education Association, a teacher’s union that has been tracking all sorts of public school funding data for 70 years, says yes. It reported North Carolina’s per-pupil spending was \$8,615 in 2007 (compared with a national average of \$9,663). It was \$8,867 in 2008 (national average \$10,259), and \$8,632 in 2014 (national average \$11,355). Those numbers show North Carolina has been falling further behind the national average. NEA’s 2015-16 report isn’t out yet, but in 2014-15 it ranked North Carolina 46th out of 51, counting all the states and Washington, D.C., in per-pupil expenditure. That backs up Cooper’s claim that ‘we have one of the lowest per pupil spending levels in the nation.’ A U.S. Census Bureau report on 2013 per-pupil funding also ranks North Carolina as one of the lowest states. However, the Census hasn’t released more up-to-date numbers.” (Politifact, [3/21/16](#))

Teachers compensate for this lack of funding out of their own pockets, spending an average of anywhere between \$500 and \$1,000 to purchase classroom supplies each

year. “Teachers across the state are stocking their classrooms for the start of the school year, and most are using their own money to do it. Recent national surveys from the National School Supply and Equipment Association show teachers spend an average of \$500 to nearly \$1,000 a year out of their own pockets to stock their classrooms. To make it work since the recession, teachers and schools have had to dig deep. Not only are families less able to afford classroom supplies on their own, but North Carolina schools are less likely to have the funding they need for classroom materials.” (WUNC, [8/16/16](#))

In 2016, families spent an average of \$650 on school supplies for elementary-age students and about \$1,000 for middle schoolers—the same as an average monthly mortgage. “This year the supply list for an elementary school student costs about \$650, up from an inflation-adjusted \$375 in 2006, [according to the annual Huntington Bank's Backpack Index](#), which tracks the change in a representative basket of goods over time. A middle-school student might run \$1,000; up from \$525. And sending a fully equipped high-schooler off to class can cost nearly \$1,500 — compared to \$800 just 10 years ago. All together that's an average of about \$1,000 — nearly the same as the average U.S. monthly mortgage payment.” (NBC, [8/31/17](#))

In 2014 lawmakers eliminated back-to-school sales tax holidays that previously offered reprieve for educators and families purchasing supplies. (N.C. Gen. Stat 105-164.13C, [7/1/14](#))

Republicans continue to prioritize tax cuts while students and teachers suffer.

Revenue lost from Republican tax cuts have made it much harder to adequately fund public schools. “The revenue lost to tax cuts also made it much harder for the state to fund schools adequately. Only two states do a worse job in this area than North Carolina, according to an [analysis](#) by Education Law Center and Rutgers University that adjusted for student poverty, regional wage variations, and other factors that affect costs in different areas.” (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, [5/10/18](#))

All but one of the states in the Education Law Center's list of worst funded school systems also cut income taxes. “In fact, all but one of the other states with the worst-funded school systems according to the Education Law Center report, including Arizona and Oklahoma, also cut income tax rates in recent years.”

North Carolina is unique in that it has not come close to restore any of the funding cut during the Great Recession. “Further, while most states have gradually restored the school funding they cut when the Great Recession hit in the 2007-2008 school year, North Carolina hasn't come close. State ‘formula’ funding for schools — the major form of state funding for public K-12 schools in North Carolina — is [down](#) 7.9 percent per student since the Great Recession hit, after adjusting for inflation.” (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, [5/10/18](#))

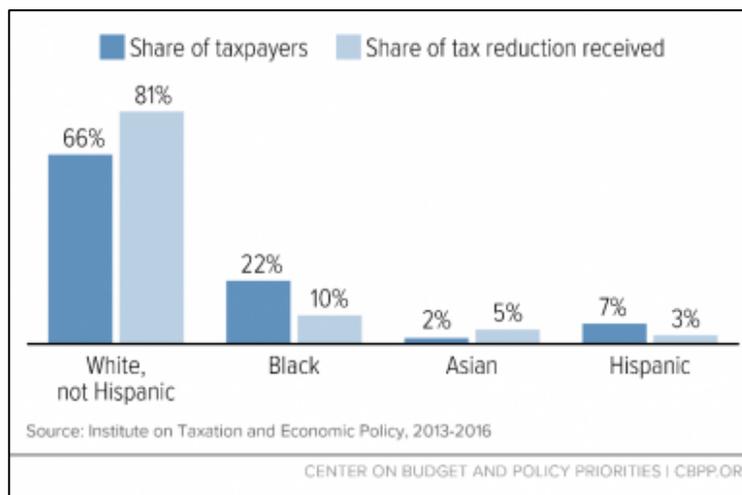
Tax cuts to the wealthy and corporations were given at the expense of lower and middle-class taxpayers of color and significantly reduced the state's revenue. “The top 1 percent of North Carolinians are getting about \$21,780 in average tax breaks per year — 59 times the average break for people in the middle fifth of the income scale and 1,361 times the average break for people in the lowest fifth, the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy found in its analysis of the 2013 tax changes.”

The tax cuts will reduce the taxes of the wealthiest North Carolinians by 1.5 percent of their income on average, but by just 0.1 percent of the income of the lowest-income North Carolinians, which is about \$16. “The top 1 percent of North Carolinians are getting about \$21,780 in average tax breaks per year — 59 times the average break for people in the middle fifth of the income scale and 1,361 times the average break for people in the lowest fifth, the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy found in its analysis of the 2013 tax changes. The tax cuts will reduce the taxes of the highest-income North Carolinians by 1.5 percent of their income on average, but by just 0.1 percent of the income of the lowest-income North Carolinians, or \$16 on average.” (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, [2/27/18](#))

Failing to prioritize public schools has widened achievement gaps between those that have and those that have less and is failing the promise of public education.

In North Carolina, the achievement gap between wealthy and low-income students widened more than any other state between 2011 and 2014. “The achievement gap - the gap between test scores of low income students and wealthier students - widened in North Carolina more than in any other state between 2011 and 2014, according to the Education Equality Index. The Education Equality Index is a national measure of the achievement gap that includes city and state information. The index measured achievement gaps at schools in six North Carolina cities, Raleigh, Durham, Winston-Salem, Greensboro, Fayetteville, and Charlotte in 2014. Five of the six were determined to have ‘massive’ achievement gaps, while Charlotte had a ‘large’ achievement gap. A massive gap is defined as students from low income families reaching proficiency at a lower rate than students from other low income families, on average. A large achievement gap is defined as low income students reaching proficiency at a higher rate than other low income students, but at a lower rate than all students, on average.” (News & Observer, [3/24/16](#))

These changes have worsened racial wealth inequities in North Carolina by shifting the burden to populations of color. “While comprising only two-thirds of taxpayers, white North Carolinians received 81 percent of the tax cuts. At the same time, black North Carolinians comprise 22 percent of state taxpayers, but they received only 10 percent of the tax cuts. As such, black people now pay a larger share of state taxes than before, while white people pay a smaller share. People of Hispanic or Latino heritage also pay a larger share than before, while people of Asian heritage pay somewhat less.” (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, [2/27/18](#))



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