

***Achieving Educational Excellence:***  
**2025-2030 Strategic Plan for North Carolina Public Schools**  
**INITIAL WORKING DRAFT 5-30-2025**

*This is an initial working draft of the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) and State Board of Education (SBE) 2025-2030 Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan or the Plan). NCDPI staff will further refine and revise this initial working draft based on feedback from the SBE and other key partners. The goal is to have the SBE approve the Plan during its August 2025 Board meeting.*

*Baselines and targets for each measure, as well as launch dates for each action, will be established and included in the final version of the Plan. Other information, including a cover letter from the Chair of the SBE and the NC Superintendent of Public Instruction, facts about North Carolina public schools and a glossary of terms will also be added.*

*A key part of implementing the Plan will be collaborating with various education networks to implement Plan actions. Networks will include NCDPI staff, Public School Units (PSUs), and various state and national education partners. The final Plan will include specific network partners for actions.*

*This Plan includes dozens of measures and actions across eight pillars. The final version of the Plan will highlight specific actions and measures for their significance and potential impact. Actions and measures that are likely to be highlighted in the final version of the Plan are bolded in this version of the Plan.*

### **Strategic Plan Executive Summary**

North Carolina's public schools are the foundation of our state's future—where students are prepared for life, educators are revered, communities are engaged and excellence is operationalized at every level. This strategic plan lays out a bold framework built around eight transformative pillars. These pillars reflect our commitment to creating a responsive, inclusive and forward-thinking public education system that supports the success of every student.

### **Strategic Pillars and Focus Areas**

#### **Pillar 1: Prepare Each Student for Their Next Phase in Life**

We will be committed to ensure that every student is inspired, supported and prepared to succeed beyond high school — academically, socially and professionally.

Focus Areas:

- Ignite early learning
- Elevate teaching and learning
- Promote excellence for all
- Reimagine the student experience
- Launch life-ready graduates

## **Pillar 2: Revere Public School Educators**

We will elevate the profession by improving working conditions, expanding career pathways, increasing compensation and restoring the pride and prestige of being an educator in North Carolina.

### **Focus Areas:**

- Improve educator recruitment and retention
- Expand career pathways for education professionals
- Increase educator compensation
- Elevate and restore pride in the education profession

## **Pillar 3: Enhance Parent, Caregiver and Community Support**

We will aim to build deep, trusting relationships between schools, parents and community organizations, because families and communities are essential partners in student success.

### **Focus Areas:**

- Engage and empower families
- Strengthen community partnerships

## **Pillar 4: Ensure Healthy, Safe and Secure Learning Environments**

We will support holistic well-being and emotional and physical safety, because every student and educator deserves to learn and work in a safe, healthy, and inclusive environment.

### **Focus Areas:**

- Ensure safe school environments
- Improve student and staff health and well-being
- Strengthen school climate and belonging

## **Pillar 5: Optimize Operational Excellence**

We will modernize systems, strengthen service delivery, and streamline internal and external operations to better serve PSUs and remove barriers to student success.

### **Focus Areas:**

- Improve NCDPI's services to stakeholders
- Improve collaboration and communication across NCDPI offices
- Modernize NCDPI and PSU operations

### **Pillar 6: Lead Transformative Change**

We will create and scale bold innovations across districts, schools, and classrooms to better meet student needs and system-wide goals—driving meaningful change at every level.

#### **Focus Areas:**

- Transform schools through research and development
- Connect NC public schools through education networks
- Promote integrated support systems
- Explore funding reform
- Ensure accountability

### **Pillar 7: Celebrate Why Public Education is the Best Choice**

We will celebrate the success stories of public education and share the value it brings to families, communities, and the state. Public schools are—and will continue to be—the best choice for North Carolina families.

#### **Focus Areas:**

- Engage education partners
- Build capacity within NCDPI and PSU communications
- Develop comprehensive public education messaging
- Share “best choice” messaging and stories

### **Pillar 8: Galvanize Champions to Fully Invest In and Support Public Education**

We will build a statewide movement of champions who advocate for and invest in public schools—transforming support into action and driving lasting impact.

#### **Focus Areas:**

- Align non-education partners
- Build community voices
- Engage local and statewide partners/families
- Move champions to action and advocacy

### **Strategic Plan Monitoring and Accountability**

The goal of this strategic plan is ambitious and clear: to make North Carolina’s public schools the best in the nation. As we ask our students to embrace growth and progress, we hold ourselves to the same standard. Excellence is not a fixed destination, but a continuous journey. Accordingly, this plan is designed to evolve through a continuous improvement process that strengthens and refines our efforts over time.

To ensure faithful and effective implementation, NCDPI will establish an **Office of Strategic Planning** tasked with overseeing the execution and evolution of the plan. In support of this work, NCDPI will also convene a **Strategic Plan Monitoring and Accountability Committee** (Committee) composed of senior leaders from across the agency.

This Committee will be responsible for:

- Identifying implementation and network leads for each pillar;
- Establishing working groups composed of NCDPI staff and strategic partners to carry out assigned actions;
- Providing direction, support, and resources to these working groups;
- Managing timelines, milestones, and deliverables;
- Identifying implementation challenges and addressing barriers;
- Developing an Excellence Report Card that relates to the pillars of the NCDPI/SBE strategic plan;
- Monitoring progress toward strategic goals; and
- Reporting quarterly on plan implementation to the State Superintendent and the SBE.

Each working group will be charged with developing a detailed implementation plan for the actions assigned to them. These plans will be reviewed and approved by the Committee, which will also oversee their execution. The Committee's quarterly reports will serve as a transparent mechanism for tracking progress and ensuring accountability as we collectively pursue a stronger, more effective public education system for all North Carolinians.

### **North Carolina State Board of Education Mission**

The mission of the North Carolina State Board of Education is to use its constitutional authority to guard and maintain the right of a sound, basic education for every child in North Carolina Public Schools.

### **North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Mission**

The mission of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction is to use its constitutional and statutory authority to guard and maintain the right to a public education for every student in North Carolina and to support Public School Units in providing every child in North Carolina an excellent education that prepares them for success in their next phase of life.

### **Strategic Plan Vision**

*Achieving Educational Excellence* is the vision for this strategic plan. This vision has three main components: high academic achievement; character development; and making North Carolina public schools the best statewide public school system in the United States of America.

## Pillar 1: Prepare Each Student For Their Next Phase In Life

**Description:** Public education unlocks the doors to the world and allows our democracy and economy to flourish. Children who have learned the skill of lifelong learning are prepared to chart their own path. Teaching and learning go beyond a focus on a single academic assessment. North Carolina public schools should be places where students build a strong foundation in early childhood, learn to think critically and have good character. Throughout their journey in public education, students will not only develop foundational skills in reading, writing, mathematics, the sciences, and civic engagement, but will also be given ample opportunities to find inspiration and growth through world languages, arts, career and technical education (CTE) courses, physical education, health, financial literacy, college-level courses, and co-curricular and extracurricular activities, such as athletics. Students will also develop work-ready skills needed to succeed in college, career and their lives beyond PreK-12 instruction. Preparing our students for the next phase of their lives means giving them the tools that all people need to function in the 21st century. It also means ensuring access to opportunities after they graduate from high school. This preparation will not be the same for every student, as each one will need different types of support based upon their needs.

### Ignite early learning

#### *Measures:*

- Increase the percentage of K–3 students meeting or exceeding end-of-year benchmarks on the state-approved K–3 formative diagnostic reading assessment.
- Increase the number of children served by coordinated PSU early learning programs.
- Increase the number of PSUs using progress monitoring systems to strengthen early literacy and math instruction and drive instructional improvement.
- Meet targets for Assessment and Preschool Outcomes as measured by the State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report for students with disabilities.

#### *Actions:*

- **Expand high-quality Pre-K and bolster kindergarten readiness by partnering with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) to align standards, streamline systems and improve transition supports.**
- Coordinate systems in collaboration with NCDHHS to connect and serve students with special needs to inclusive early learning programs.
- Sustain and scale current models for supporting social skills in kindergarten to set the foundation for literacy and mathematics learning.
- **Build on the success of North Carolina’s Science of Reading implementation to expand high-impact literacy practices and launch a parallel focus on foundational mathematics to support early learning.**
- Work with PSUs on progress monitoring and the use of Pre-K and kindergarten formative assessment data as vital levers for early literacy.

## Elevate teaching and learning

### *Measures:*

- Increase the percentage of students achieving proficiency in reading and mathematics on End-of-Grade and End-of-Course assessments overall and for all subgroups.
- Increase the percentage of students making expected or above-expected academic growth, with faster gains for those below grade level, overall and for all subgroups.
- Increase in the average reading and math scale scores in 4th and 8th grade as measured by National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) overall and for all subgroups.
- Meet targets for Assessment and Preschool Outcomes as measured by the State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report for students with disabilities.

### *Actions:*

- **Design a PreK–12 Instructional Excellence Framework with PSUs to set shared expectations for standards-aligned instruction, integrated supports and access to high-quality learning for all students.**
- **Champion the use of high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials and digital tools by supporting PSUs with curated resources, embedded professional learning and strategic implementation guidance.**
- Investigate and provide formative assessment tools that inform daily instruction, guide timely interventions and support collaborative, student-centered planning.
- Provide NCDPI staff with professional learning to equip district staff with professional development using high quality content and evidenced-based strategies.
- Implement the Golden LEAF Foundation school improvement initiative with fidelity.

## Promote excellence for all

### *Measures:*

- Decrease disproportionality in identification for Exceptional Children (EC) and Academically/Intellectually Gifted (AIG) programs.
- Increase the percentage of multilingual learners demonstrating academic growth and proficiency.
- Increase enrollment of underrepresented students in specialized academic enrichment opportunities, including advanced coursework and Governor's School in non-discriminatory ways.
- Increase athletic program offerings in traditional sports, Esports, Unified Sports and Special Olympics.
- Meet targets for Education and Preschool Environments, and targets for reducing Disproportionate Representation as measured by the State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report for students with disabilities.

### *Actions:*

- Promote inclusive screening tools, training and policy shifts to reduce disproportionality in EC and AIG identification.
- Develop and launch a statewide plan to strengthen instructional support for multilingual learners, with attention to migrant, immigrant and newcomer students.
- Expand access to specialized academic enrichment opportunities, including Governor's School, advanced coursework and K-8 talent development models aligned to career pathways and student strengths. A "talent development" model identifies students' strengths and nurtures unique talents.
- Increase district capacity to use data to identify barriers, close access gaps and drive continuous improvement for all students in instructional systems.
- Encourage the expansion of athletic program offerings in traditional sports, Esports, Unified Sports, and Special Olympics.

### **Reimagine the student experience**



#### *Measures:*

- **Every student will take and pass a college level course (Advanced Placement with a score of 3+/**IB** with a score of 4+ or an actual college course); a Career and Technical Education (CTE) or a Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) course; and earn a service-learning award by graduation.**
- Increase the overall four-year cohort graduation rate and the rates for all subgroups.
- Increase the percentage of students meeting the University of North Carolina system minimum admission requirement on the ACT overall and for all subgroups.
- Increase the percentage of students scoring at Level 4 or 5 on End-of-Course assessments, indicating college and career readiness overall and for all subgroups.
- Increase the percentage of students who meet the minimum NC College Connect criteria with a grade point average (GPA) of at least a 2.8 and fourth level math completion overall and for all subgroups.
- Increase the percentage of students graduating with a documented career development plan aligned to employment, enlistment, enrollment or entrepreneurship.
- Meet targets established in the State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report for students with disabilities, including measures for Graduation, Early Childhood Transition, Secondary Transition and Post School Outcomes.

*Actions:*

- Support PSUs availability of transportation for students wishing to enroll in AP/IB courses.
- Boost college and career readiness by expanding access to ACT preparation and other aligned assessment supports.
- Expand access to rigorous pathways, such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Cambridge International, dual enrollment, credentialed CTE and JROTC, so that each high school student graduates having completed at least one course and credential in a rigorous pathway.
- Strengthen partnerships with colleges and universities to simplify and increase access to higher education for eligible North Carolina residents, in partnership with College Advising Corps, North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority, myFutureNC and others.
- Identify strategies for Public School Units to strengthen grade level transitions through coordinated planning, advising and personalized pathways between Pre-K, elementary, middle and high school.
- Provide PSUs with technical assistance to implement Career Development Plans so that students graduate with a purposeful plan for their future.
- Develop a system for tracking students' post-secondary transitions, including to postsecondary education, employment or military service within twelve months of graduation.
- Support PSUs in integrating digital learning into daily instruction by developing high-quality, standards-aligned online content for K-8 students.
- Formalize the NCDPI approach to supporting districts in creating and sustaining digital learning environments to include goals, a data-driven framework for digital and personalized learning
- Continue the support to PSUs in the responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI).
- **Promote awareness of NC College Connect and NextNC to provide direct admissions to and financial support for NC colleges and universities.**

**Launch life-ready graduates**

*Measures:*

- Increase the percentage of students earning durable skills or Portrait of a Graduate endorsements.
- Increase the number of students engaging in high-quality character education and service learning experiences.

*Actions:*

- Create and award durable skills endorsements for graduating students who demonstrate mastery of critical competencies aligned to the Portrait of a Graduate.

- Develop a statewide toolkit to support schools in implementing high-quality character education, service learning and civic engagement.
- **Create and award service learning recognitions.**
- Promote whole-child development and student engagement by expanding access to co-curricular and extracurricular programs in the arts, athletics and student-led leadership aligned to academic standards.

## **Pillar 2: Revere Public School Educators**

**Description:** To fully prepare each student for their next phase of life, we must first honor and uplift those who make that preparation possible: the dedicated professionals who serve in our public schools. *Every adult* in a school building plays a vital role in shaping the student experience and contributing to student success.

North Carolina's public school professionals are the single most important in-school factor influencing student learning. Yet today, they are not compensated adequately, and too often, their working conditions fail to reflect the deep respect they deserve. Reversing this trend is not just a moral imperative—it is essential to the future of our students and our state.

To truly revere our educators and school staff, we must ensure competitive pay, supportive and respectful working environments, and the resources necessary for every professional to thrive. We must also elevate all educational roles, and recognize the profession as an aspirational career that attracts and retains talented individuals committed to public service. Education must be a profession of choice, pride and purpose.

### **Improve educator recruitment and retention**

#### *Measures:*

- Increase enrollment in Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) in North Carolina (public/private)
- Decrease overall teacher attrition, specifically among beginning teachers.
- Ensure zero teacher vacancies by the first day of school.
- Increase the number of “Grow Your Own” programs.
- Increase teacher perceptions of supports as reported on the Teacher Working Conditions survey.
- Increase educator engagement and participation in NCDPI professional learning opportunities.

#### *Actions:*

- Identify and scale effective models for “Grow Your Own” teacher recruitment programs, including apprenticeships and statewide pathways for teacher assistants and military veterans to become licensed teachers.

- **Expand student recruitment programs starting no later than middle school, including career academy programs, the NC Teacher Cadet Program and CTE pathways for teaching as a profession, to encourage more students to engage in the education profession.**
- Advocate for the continued expansion of the NC Teaching Fellows Program to additional educator preparation programs and educator certification areas through legislative priorities and partnerships.
- **Advocate for NC Promise to be expanded to all aspiring teachers at all University of North Carolina campuses.**
- Highlight and share best practices for EPPs to encourage more college students to add a teaching certification to their degree.
- Explore the creation of a position tracking system that allows NCDPI and PSUs to better track teachers' years of experience and licensure status.
- Revise and strengthen Beginning Teacher (BT) supports based on regional needs and teacher background in collaboration with PSUs, the Beginning Teacher Advisory Council, the Beginning Teacher Coordinator Advisory Council and the NC Center for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Revise SBE policy for BT supports, including the adoption of a uniform definition of beginning teachers as teachers in their first three years of service and those who do not have a continuing license.
- Identify and include key teacher support metrics from the Teacher Working Conditions survey in NCDPI's School Improvement Plan template so schools using it address teacher support needs in their School Improvement Plan.
- Adopt statewide standards for high-quality professional learning to serve as guidance for the design and evaluation of professional learning opportunities, including microcredentials.
- Pilot the statewide standards for high-quality professional learning with a PSU network.
- Increase the number and quality of NCDPI professional learning opportunities aligned with statewide standards for high-quality professional learning for all education professionals.
- Establish an agency wide professional learning evaluation/educator satisfaction survey focused on NCDPI professional learning opportunities.
- Require service component (mentor, coaching, etc.) to receive National Board Certification Teacher (NBCT) salary differential.

## **Expand career pathways for education professionals**

### *Measures:*

- Deliver report from the SBE Task Force to the General Assembly on how to improve educator licensure and pathways for professional advancement.
- Increase the number of Local Education Agencies (LEAs) implementing an Advanced Teaching Roles program.
- Increase the percentage of principals in low-performing schools who complete state-approved leadership training programs.

*Actions:*

- **Establish an SBE task force to develop:**
  - **a licensure model that is simpler, more transparent and includes multiple pathways into the profession;**
  - **apprenticeship models;**
  - **pathways for professional advancement; and**
  - **valid and reliable measures of teacher impact and effectiveness.**
- Develop a uniform NCDPI model for instructional coaching, including for literacy and numeracy coaches as well as support for low-performing schools.
- Advocate for continued expansion of the Advanced Teaching Roles program.
- Launch statewide leadership academies in collaboration with partners for aspiring leaders in high-poverty and low-performing schools.
- Provide professional learning opportunities needed to support current and aspiring financial officers, school superintendents and charter school leaders in the area of financial management, decision-making and long-term planning.

**Increase educator compensation**

*Measures:*

- **Increase North Carolina's average teacher pay so that it is the highest in the Southeast.**
- **Increase North Carolina's starting teacher pay so that it is the highest in the Southeast.**
- Improve principal and school support staff pay.

*Actions:*

- Conduct a salary comparability study to determine competitive pay for educators in comparison to professions that require similar education and credentials and identifies and addresses barriers to increasing educator pay.
- **Advocate to the NC General Assembly, in partnership with educators, business and community leaders, for competitive teacher, principal and other school staff compensation.**
- Strengthen agency collaboration to help PSUs strategically leverage various funding sources, including flexible and bonus funds, for recruitment and retention, particularly for hard-to-staff roles.
- Develop a revised principal salary model with increased base pay, additional school complexity factors, and retention components in collaboration with the NC Association of School Administrators, the NC Principal of the Year Network and other partners.

## **Elevate and restore pride in the education profession**

### *Measures:*

- Increase educator satisfaction in levels of support as reported on the Teacher Working Conditions survey.
- Increase the perception of teaching as a profession according to public opinion surveys.

### *Actions:*

- Engage with local boards of education to honor district teachers and principals of the year and encourage inclusion of teachers and principals as advisors to local boards of education.
- **Explore models for reducing burden on teachers, including eliminating or significantly reducing unpaid teacher duties, streamlining compliance processes, increasing teacher planning time and increasing flexible scheduling.**
- Launch a statewide teacher pride messaging campaign focused on storytelling and visibility, showcasing the benefits of being an educator and highlighting educators from across the state.
- Partner with local chambers of commerce to visibly celebrate teachers through discounts, recognition days and shout-outs.
- Train and utilize educators as recruiters of future educators.

## **Pillar 3: Enhance Parent, Caregiver and Community Support**

**Description:** While schools are a powerful force in a child's life, there are many important partners who support our state's students. Parents, guardians and other caregivers (hereinafter "parents") are the most important people in a child's life and they are the most important partners for schools. Important, too, are community organizations, houses of worship, non-profits, healthcare providers, philanthropies, mental health providers, social service providers, volunteers and community organizations that impact children. Study after study shows that students who have strong parent and/or community support do far better than students who do not. Parents and community also make a major difference in the life of the school itself, creating the type of environment where students learn and grow. Educators must be empowered to establish strong relationships with families and view family and community stakeholders as true partners in decision-making processes. In turn, families will feel strongly connected to their students' schools. Communities should see their public schools as the anchor.

## Engage and empower families

### *Measures:*

- Improve parent perception of the quality of education in North Carolina public schools as measured by an annual, statistically valid public opinion poll.
- Increase the total percentage of students' parents registered on Infinite Campus parent portal.
- Increase NCDPI parent resources translated into additional languages.

### *Actions:*

- **Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment of parent and community resources at NCDPI (personnel, funds, training, instruments, current activities, etc.).**
- Form an advisory board to play a role in needs identification, decision-making, and plans to enhance parent, family and community engagement.
- Promote collaboration among PSUs to share best practices on effective communication between schools and families, including digital tools, training and regular updates on student progress for educators on effective communication techniques.
- **Create a virtual NCDPI Family Academy that could be linked to PSU websites that will offer accessible, webinar-style learning sessions for families.**
- Measure family and community perceptions to support learning through an annual, statistically valid public opinion poll.
- Partner with PSUs to implement evidence-based parent engagement strategies.

## Strengthen community partnerships

### *Measures:*

- Increase the number of community schools.
- Increase the number of school-based health services for staff, students and families through Student Health Advisory Councils.
- Increase the percentage of schools that indicate that they have been adopted by community organizations/individuals.

### *Actions:*

- Broker discussions between county health departments and PSUs regarding school-based health clinics.
- **Advocate for and support the allocation of resources and support to “community schools” models or other evidence-based models that school districts can adopt to address out-of-school barriers to learning.**

- Support/encourage districts to develop partnerships with local community organizations to provide support for families, especially in underserved areas.
- Increase NCDPI supports for the educators who serve as a bridge to the local community, such as nurses, counselors, social workers, school psychologists and parent liaisons.

## **Pillar 4: Ensure Healthy, Safe and Secure Learning Environments**

**Description:** Students and staff in our public schools are not able to achieve educational excellence unless we ensure their safety and well-being. Physical safety must balance effective security measures with maintaining welcoming, nurturing spaces. Through thoughtful design, staff training and appropriate protocols, we should create environments where students and staff can focus on teaching and learning. Within these environments, proven, research-based practices that foster emotional security and physical and mental well-being should be implemented. School counselors, social workers, nurses and psychologists work collaboratively with teachers to provide appropriate support tailored to individual student needs. Overall, schools must be places where students develop resilience, build relationships and prepare for their futures in safe, secure environments that nurture their full potential.

### **Ensure safe school environments**

#### *Measures:*

- **Increase the percentage of schools reporting none to a limited number of incidents of violence annually.**
- Increase teachers' perceptions of safety in their schools as reported in the Teacher Working Conditions survey.
- Increase parents' perceptions of safety in their schools as measured by an annual, statistically valid public opinion poll.
- Increase the number of school resource officers who have appropriate training to work with school-aged children.
- Increase the number of community members who indicate that North Carolina public schools are safe as measured by an annual, statistically valid public opinion poll.
- Decrease incidents of digital safety breaches or privacy concerns.

#### *Actions:*

- Promote physical security measures such as perimeter control, access points and internal spaces in PSUs through school construction supports provided by NCDPI.
- Encourage PSUs to ensure all school resource officers have received appropriate training to work with school-aged children in collaboration with the Center for Safer Schools and law enforcement agencies.

- Increase the number of support staff that are trained by NCDPI or partners in prevention and recovery interventions.
- Continue supporting districts in ensuring safe, secure online learning environments by providing tools and training on best practices in digital safety and provide NCDPI advanced training for teachers on handling virtual classrooms and ensuring safe interactions.

## **Improve student and staff health and well-being**

### *Measures:*

- Decrease the percentages of students reporting that they engage in risky behaviors as measured by the Youth Risk Behavior Survey.
- Decrease the ratios of student to school health personnel and support staff statewide and in school districts.
- Increase the percentage of teachers who report positive health and well-being as reported on the Teacher Working Conditions Survey.
- Decrease percentage of students who are chronically absent.

### *Actions:*

- **Provide PSUs with technical assistance to implement school models that prioritize student voice, belonging, health and well-being.**
- Expand access to different models of school-based health services to staff, students and families.
- Increase access to support staff in PSUs.
- Expand access to Youth Mental Health First Aid training for school staff in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services.
- Expand training in trauma-informed practices to schools and districts designated as low-performing, in partnership with organizations.
- Identify and share best practices in limiting access to wireless communication devices during the school day.
- Identify and share best practices in training students in appropriate and safe use of social media.
- Update Whole Child NC policy to increase collaboration between the Whole Child NC advisory council, NCDPI and the SBE.
- Support PSUs in implementing the Whole Child NC Framework to promote health and well-being.
- Align and strengthen health and physical education standards and instructional practices by providing technical assistance to PSUs.
- Support PSUs in promoting employee health and well-being as a foundation for a positive school climate.
- Develop a student behavior improvement pilot to address behavior challenges in PSUs with significant discipline referrals.
- Identify and share best practices and guidance for addressing chronic absenteeism.

## **Strengthen school climate and belonging**

### *Measures:*

- Increase the percentage of staff who will feel safe and supported in their public school as measured by the Teacher Working Conditions Survey.
- Increase the percentage of students and parents that will feel safe and supported in their public school as measured by school climate surveys, as available.
- Increase the percentage of students in low-performing schools who report feeling safe and supported, based on school climate surveys, as available.
- **Decrease disparities in out-of-school suspensions between various subgroups of students for the same offenses.**

### *Actions:*

- Develop (or identify/procure) a statewide school climate survey for students as an option for PSUs to adopt.
- Identify best practices for strengthening supportive school environments in collaboration with PSUs.
- Identify and share best practices in reducing behavioral issues in public schools, including training for school staff.
- Support PSUs in implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

## **Pillar 5: Optimize Operational Excellence**

**Description:** NCDPI stands committed to reimagining its operational infrastructure to better serve schools and districts through a focus on organizational excellence. At the core of this pillar is NCDPI's unwavering dedication to support PSUs in providing a high-quality education for every student. Through modernized operations at both the state and local levels, we aim to use cutting-edge technology, streamlined processes and data-informed decision-making to eliminate unnecessary administrative burdens. This operational focus extends beyond NCDPI itself, as the agency will actively partner with PSUs across the state to model operational efficiency and share best practices. Through this pillar, NCDPI will model that careful attention to processes, systems and service delivery creates the essential foundation upon which educational innovation can flourish, ultimately ensuring that North Carolina's public schools operate with maximum effectiveness to support the success of every student.

### **Improve NCDPI's services to stakeholders**

#### *Measures:*

- Increase percentage of PSU stakeholders reporting responsiveness of NCDPI to addressing needs (as measured by a PSU customer survey to be developed).

- Increase PSU satisfaction with services provided by NCDPI (as measured by a PSU customer survey to be developed).
- Increase educator engagement and participation in NCDPI professional learning opportunities (as measured by the satisfaction survey established in Pillar 2).

*Actions:*

- Identify main “customers” for NCDPI services and explore strategies for better tailoring services to NCDPI’s PSU customers, such as Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, Public Information Officers, Chief Information Officers, Chief Academic Officers, Chief Financial Officers and Human Resource Officers.
- **Provide PSU “customers” with supports such as regular office hour sessions with NCDPI staff as identified based on identified “customers.”**
- **Develop and administer a survey to central office staff to assess customer service strengths and needs.**
- Implement a NCDPI process for receiving phone calls and emails, and directing these to appropriate staff for responding to calls and emails.
- Secure permissions to utilize a Microsoft Teams (Teams) phone call system for all NCDPI staff to ensure efficient delivery of communications to appropriate staff.
- Include Teams phone numbers on the external NCDPI staff directory.
- Develop an agency-wide language access plan that includes processes for translating external communications and other materials for key stakeholders, including parents, who use languages other than English.
- Ensure all website and communications materials adhere to accessibility standards by 2026.
- Conduct a needs analysis of the NCDPI building focused on ensuring the health and safety of staff and building visitors.
- Create a structured process for harnessing user-centered design in the development of NCDPI programs and initiatives.
- **Create NCDPI guidance focused on capacity building for PSUs, including best practices for strategic purchasing decisions and aligning budget decisions with instructional priorities.**

## **Improve collaboration and communication across NCDPI offices**

*Measures:*

- **Meet or exceed key performance indicators for all offices within NCDPI.**

*Actions:*

- Create key performance indicators for all offices within NCDPI.
- Reestablish the NCDPI Agency Roundtable to convene regional teams with cabinet and directors for discussion of needs of local public school units.
- Establish protocols for Regional Directors to work with academic program staff to understand progress monitoring best practices and work with PSUs to implement those practices.

- Create a cross agency menu of options for services and resources available to public school units and cross-divisional reference from all areas within the agency.
- Establish an intra-agency working group to identify barriers to collaboration and communication across NCDPI offices and externally to monitor collaboration and communication to PSUs.
- Establish an advisory group of charter school and school district leaders to identify ways that charter schools and school districts can better collaborate and learn from each other.

## **Modernize NCDPI and PSU operations**

### *Measures:*

- Financial metric that measures student-facing key performance indicators relative to contract costs.
- Increase percentage of NCDPI offices submitting annual budget requests using standardized templates with alignment to NCDPI strategic priorities.
- Reduce end-of-year unspent funds across offices through monthly budget monitoring.
- Increase on-time contract submissions (aligned to fiscal deadlines).
- Decrease average time from contract draft to execution through liaison-prepared coordination with vendors and internal reviewers.
- Increase percentage of staff who are trained in HR, budget and procurement processes.
- Increase the percentage of NCDPI offices reporting improved clarity and responsiveness in operational support (via an annual NCDPI internal operations survey).

### *Actions:*

- **Implement Infinite Campus, the student information system, with limited challenges.**
- Improve agency contracting process, including planning, soliciting, procurement and compliance with policies and law.
- Audit district contracts and identify areas for cost-saving through statewide purchasing contracts.
- Audit statewide contracts, especially technology contracts, to determine return on investment for student learning.
- Implement modernized financial and human resource systems at NCDPI.
- Continue to support districts in implementing modernized financial and human resource systems through the school systems modernization initiative.
- Streamline receipt and reimbursement process for purchasing cards within NCDPI offices.
- Review and refine NCDPI operations processes to provide consistent, responsive service and support across the agency.

- Develop an NCDPI standardized template for annual budget requests that aligns with NCDPI strategic priorities and supports a monthly budget monitoring process.
- Identify best practices and develop models for PSU operational efficiency, such as sharing resources to complete key administrative tasks like accounts payable, payroll, IT support and/or staff hiring.
- Engage with the business community to leverage their expertise to help with operational efficiencies.
- Develop a guide and onboarding process for new NCDPI employees.
- Use data analytics tools across the Student Information System, as well as financial and business services systems, to support informed decision-making by PSUs.

## **Pillar 6: Lead Transformative Change**

**Description:** North Carolina stands ready to pioneer approaches that will position our state as a national leader in public education excellence. At the heart of this pillar is a commitment to research and development that sparks educational reimagining through thoughtful innovation. NCDPI will serve as both catalyst and convener, establishing networks that transcend traditional boundaries between traditional public schools, charter schools and lab schools, sharing promising practices and scaling effective innovations. Through community-driven school designs and different approaches to testing and accountability, we will ensure innovation remains grounded in local needs while benefiting from statewide expertise. Our commitment also extends to funding reform that prioritizes transparency, flexibility, a focus on student needs and increased investments. This pillar represents our commitment to the thoughtful, deliberate work of innovation and elevating North Carolina's public schools to new heights by strategically using research, networks and integrated systems.

### **Transform schools through research and development**

#### *Measures:*

- Increase the number of PSUs using the NCDPI process for identifying and selecting creative/innovative school models and instructional practices.
- Increase the number of PSUs testing and scaling creative/innovative school models and instructional practices.
- Increase the percentage of school districts with at least one innovative school model
- Data from the NCDPI dashboard that provides information regarding the positive deviance in North Carolina.
- Increase the number of schools identified as members of the Positive Deviance network using standardized detection criteria.

*Actions:*

- Publish an Annual Compendium of Research that compiles studies sorted by topic for use by NCDPI, PSUs and policymakers.
- Establish a definition for creativity and innovation as it relates to school and district improvement models or practices.
- Establish a process for identifying, selecting, testing and scaling creative/innovative school models and instructional practices.
- Work with the first hubs of innovation (Skills for the Future, Golden LEAF, Prism Grants) to create models that encourage innovation.
- **Create a cross-sector Innovation Leadership Council (charter + public school district leaders + lab school leaders + NCDPI staff) to guide knowledge transfer and scale-up.**
- Support the study and evaluation of innovations in charter schools, traditional public schools and lab schools and publicly share the resulting reports.
- Use research regarding Positive Deviance to leverage data and to identify individuals, schools or districts that are succeeding against the odds.
- Establish networks by recruiting diverse PSUs, schools, universities and community partners into a structured “positive deviance” network.
- Research high school programs existing within business/industry, where students would gain core knowledge, credentials, internships and/or externships in one location.
- Research PSUs in North Carolina and nationally that have effectively integrated federal, state and local resources into unified school or district improvement strategies.

## **Connect North Carolina Public Schools through education networks**

*Measures:*

- Increase the number of participating PSUs, schools, universities and partners within each network.
- Increase the percentage of PSUs represented in the networks.
- Increase the average satisfaction/utility rating from network participants in capacity-building events.

*Actions:*

- **Establish NCDPI networks, PSU networks and partner networks that will facilitate the implementation of key actions within the plan to achieve educational excellence.**
- Create shared resources and assets that can be adopted by members of statewide education networks to complete key strategic plan actions.
- Convene the statewide and interstate education networks at a conference that highlights innovative and effective PreK–12 initiatives that include immersive visits and accessible digital resources.
- Identify use cases for the 2025 North Carolina School District Typology methodology for research purposes and pilot initiatives that are under the leadership of NCDPI.

## Promote integrated support systems for schools and districts

### *Measures:*

- Decrease the number of schools designated low performing.
- Increase the number of schools designated low-performing adopting scalable innovations.
- Increase the percentage of schools designated low performing improving on identified metrics or exiting identification annually.
- Increase the percentage of PSUs implementing a common set of school transformation protocols.
- Increase the percentage of principals in schools designated low-performing who complete state-approved leadership training programs.

### *Actions:*

- Explore a new process for identifying schools designated low-performing and consider working with the North Carolina General Assembly to codify a new process for identifying low-performing schools.
- **Expand SBE and NCDPI efforts to support districts designated low-performing and districts experiencing financial challenges.**
- Expand leadership coaching and training to principals of schools designated low performing, grounded in turnaround competencies.
- Investigate the development of a real-time school performance dashboard for the PSUs to monitor progress in schools designated low performing.
- Align the School Improvement Plan approval and support process with this Strategic Plan.
- Adopt and deploy statewide school transformation protocols (e.g., diagnostics, planning, fidelity monitoring).
- Provide cross-functional support teams (academic, operational, behavioral) to each identified low-performing school/district.
- Support implementation of evidence-based literacy and numeracy practices in low-performing schools.

## Explore funding reform

### *Measures:*

- Increase the number and dollar amount of grants provided to implement innovative practices and strategies.
- Increase student outcomes for school districts with expanded funding flexibility.

### *Actions:*

- Fund and support pilot adoption and implementation grants to implement and adapt innovative strategies and practices that stem from the Positive Deviance network.

- Investigate expanding school district flexibility in funding to PSUs with higher student outcomes.
- Explore reforms to North Carolina's school funding model that would ensure the allocation of funding is more transparent, flexible and based on student needs.
- Engage with foundations, district leaders, other state education agencies and educational researchers to fund educational improvements.

## **Ensure accountability**

### *Measures:*

- Improve school performance metrics based on a new school level accountability system.
- Increase the number of schools using interim assessments, including NC Check-Ins 2.0.

### *Actions:*

- **Develop a new school level accountability system that will:**
  - **Consider the variability among high schools with respect to available opportunities and funding, such as Advanced Placement, CTE courses, etc., when determining a new school accountability system.**
  - **Reliably assess multiple measures of student performance and that includes measures of progress towards ensuring all students graduate prepared for their next phase of life with a focus on Grades 3-12 metrics.**
- Publish results from the newly developed school accountability system as School Performance Profiles.
- Enhance interim assessments aligned to North Carolina content standards, such as NC Check-Ins 2.0 and provide PSUs with the resources to increase progress monitoring using interim assessment data.
- Develop a statewide assessment system that provides teachers with actionable, timely and relevant information to improve student learning, better monitor progress and include multiple measures beyond standardized assessment to demonstrate learning (capstone, mastery, portfolio).

## Pillar 7: Celebrate Why Public Education is the Best Choice

**Description:** Families all across North Carolina send their children to their local public school - in fact, the vast majority of them do choose public education. They entrust their children to the educators whose bright faces greet them each morning. They build community around high school football games and middle school band performances. Each year, thousands of students walk across stages to cheers and tears as they are, in fact, prepared to go out and lead the life they choose. Our schools did not become bright beacons of hope all on their own. Generations of North Carolinians are proud of our public schools, share their support for schools and have made the choice to invest in them and make them strong, which is noteworthy. It is vitally important that these choices are celebrated and that more make similar choices.

### Engage education partners

#### *Measures:*

- Increase the number of education partners (North Carolina organizations and nonprofits) focused solely on education working in collaboration with NCDPI on celebrating why public education is the best choice (the campaign).
- Increase the number of education allies (North Carolina grass root organizations and nonprofits) who work adjacent to education working in collaboration with NCDPI on the campaign.
- Increase the number of influencers (trusted, trained and networked) identified.

#### *Actions:*

- **Engage and connect education partners (North Carolina organizations and nonprofits) focused solely on education to align communication campaigns and calendars for this campaign.**
- Engage and connect education allies who work adjacent to education working in collaboration with NCDPI for this campaign.
- Gather central organization directors and/or communication staff to identify their priority audiences, communication networks, media connections and ability to partner across North Carolina and in specific regions/districts.
- Connect and align education partners and allies influencers for this campaign.

### Build capacity within NCDPI and PSUs communications

#### *Measures:*

- Increase the number of Public Information Officers (PIOs) and other PSUs' communicators/influencers engaged in the campaign.
- Increase the number of NCDPI partners (e.g., Principal of the Year Network (POYs) Teacher of the Year Network (TOYs), Beginning Teachers of the Year

(BTOYs), Career and Technical Education Teachers of the Year (CTETOYs), Superintendents, etc.) engaged in this campaign.

- Increase the number of NCDPI staff (Subject matter experts, or SMEs, and connected directors) engaged in the campaign.
- Increase the number of NCDPI and PSU influencers engaged in the campaign (e.g., students).

*Actions:*

- **Engage and align PIOs and other PSU communicators/influencers for this campaign.**
- Engage and align NCDPI partners (POYs, TOYs, CTETOYs, BTOYs Superintendents, Student Advisory Council) for the campaign.
- Engage and align NCDPI staff (SMEs and connected directors) for the campaign.
- Provide training and supportive materials for PIOs and NCDPI partners per the assessment responses.

## **Develop comprehensive public education messaging**

*Measures:*

- Improve the positive response rate to tested public education messages developed (audience of parents, community leaders and policymakers).
- Increase the number of trainings provided for PIOs and NCDPI partners to use the messaging and materials.

*Actions:*

- Research and assess current NCDPI partners' campaigns and messaging for public education.
- Develop and test comprehensive public education messaging (aligned with partners and allies campaigns).
- **Create accessible and engaging materials on how public education works and is managed in North Carolina.**
- Create supportive materials and training for PIOs and NCDPI partners to adopt and adapt and coordinate communications.

## **Share best choice messaging and stories**

*Measures:*

- Increase the number of aligned communication campaigns across NCDPI, partners and allies.
- Increase the number of collaborative event participation and co-hosting.
- Increase the number and reach of cross-organizational success stories and messages.

- Increase family, student and community satisfaction, knowledge and perception of public schools.
- **Increase the percentage of students who are enrolled in North Carolina public schools.**

*Actions:*

- **Increase the quantity and reach of coordinated messaging campaigns developed collaboratively with education partners that celebrate public education successes and positive narratives across multiple platforms and channels.**
- Encourage the number of joint events, forums, conferences or community engagement activities where NCDPI and education partners present unified messaging about public education excellence, including shared speaking opportunities and co-branded initiatives.
- Share and lift up authentic success stories, testimonials and positive narratives that education partners contribute to statewide communication efforts, demonstrating coordinated storytelling that highlights public education's impact across diverse communities.
- Evaluate the campaign's impact on public school satisfaction, knowledge and perception from families, students and NC citizens.

## **Pillar 8: Galvanize Champions to Fully Invest In and Support Public Education**

**Description:** North Carolina's journey toward educational excellence requires more than vision and strategy — it demands the engagement, advocacy and investment of champions across our state who recognize public education as the cornerstone of our shared prosperity and collective future. This pillar builds upon efforts to transform the narrative around public schools by converting positive perception into concrete action by aligning partners behind a unified commitment to educational excellence. We envision a powerful network of non-education partners who bring fresh perspectives, resources and influence to advocacy efforts. By developing a formal alliance of nonprofit, philanthropic and business champions, we can systematically advocate for increased public school investments, particularly for critical infrastructure needs and competitive educator compensation. By elevating authentic stories from local communities, we will showcase the remarkable achievements occurring daily in classrooms across North Carolina, creating connections that inspire deeper engagement while honestly acknowledging challenges and transparently communicating our strategies to address them. By galvanizing champions across every sector of our state — from rural communities to urban centers, from small businesses to major corporations, from parents to retirees — we create a force for educational investment and improvement that propels North Carolina's public schools to be recognized as the very best in the nation, fulfilling our obligation to provide every child the world-class education they deserve.

## **Align non-education partners**

### *Measures:*

- Increase the number of non-education partners identified and engaged in the campaign.
- Increase the number of non-education influencers (trusted, trained and networked) identified.

### *Actions:*

- Engage and connect non-education partners (North Carolina businesses, organizations and nonprofits) to find common cause in education (at state or local level).
- Gather non-education leaders and/or communication staff to identify their priority audiences, communication networks, media connections and ability to partner across North Carolina and in specific regions/districts.
- Gather and align non-education partners influencers for this campaign.

## **Build community voices**

### *Measures:*

- Increase the number of philanthropic partners and communicators identified, trained and speaking up for public education.
- Increase the number of business and non-education partners identified, trained and speaking up for public education.
- Increase the number of campaigns (at school, district and regional levels) that are funded by or led by non-education organizations.
- Increase the number of social media posts, media stories and events for the campaign (measured by hashtag).

### *Actions:*

- Engage and train philanthropic partners and communicators to speak up for public education aligned with the content calendar.
- Engage and train business and non-education partners to speak up for public education aligned with the content calendar.
- Connect and align NCDPI, education partners and allies to support local, district and regional efforts.
- Encourage and support aligned campaigns, influencers and outreach via social media, media and events.

## Engage local and statewide partners/families

### *Measures:*

- Increase the number of participants in state and local engagement initiatives (Engagement Initiatives).
- Increase the breadth and depth of press coverage of these Engagement Initiatives.
- Increase the amount of national attention/recognition/investment received from these Engagement Initiatives.

### *Actions:*

- **Develop and share state and local Engagement Initiatives for PSUs. The Engagement Initiatives will include the following:**
  - **Students will collectively read 10 million books annually (partnering with bookstores, libraries and campaign chairs)**
  - **Local schools will create engagement opportunities through gardens and beautifying schools and school grounds.**
  - **Local chambers, businesses and community organizations will work with 8th graders on their career development plans and 12th graders on their post-secondary plans.**
- Support, fund and train state and local partners to launch and manage these campaigns.
- Evaluate and promote these campaigns.
- Connect national funders and influencers to these campaigns.

## Move champions to action and advocacy

### *Measures:*

- **Increase the per pupil spending for PSUs to the highest in the Southeast.**
- Increase the amount of external funding (business, individual and philanthropy) invested in PSUs (at the local, regional and state level).
- Number of people and organizations that identify as public school champions and see it as part of their NC pride and identity.

### *Actions:*

- Develop and promote local, regional and state actions for PSUs.
  - Examples:
    - Events, fundraisers, campaigns, testimonials, videos.
    - Sharing the data from Rethink Ed—a digital learning initiative with student impact data.
    - Establish a directory of business experts willing to work with districts to mentor and guide central office staff.

- Engage local, regional and state policymakers on supporting and leading for public education.
- Support policymakers' initiatives and proposals at the local, regional and state level.
- Increase per pupil spending for PSUs.
- Facilitate advocacy efforts to increase investments in PSUs, especially for school infrastructure investments.
- Engage business, individuals and philanthropy to invest in PSUs at the local, regional and state levels.
  - Philanthropic and business support for digital learning and growth in enrollment in virtual programs.
  - Partner with local and statewide philanthropic entities to fund school improvement innovation grants.
  - Assist economic development efforts across the state by reminding potential employers of the great feats of our public education system and encouraging all to participate in it.
  - **Work with partners to create an endowment that will allow all public high school graduates, regardless of income, to attend at least two years of college completely tuition-free (something that goes beyond what currently exists).**
  - **Create a statewide foundation to fund various initiatives in this and future strategic plans.**
- **Highlight the narrative changes on public education in North Carolina and how it is part of the state's identity.**

