Prioritizing Our State’s Future

Putting Students First
I believe in the limitless power of public education. My mother was a public school teacher. She and my father instilled in me that education is the key to opportunity and a better life. I attended public schools in Nash County and as an adult served public schools as a volunteer tutor. My wife and I sent our three daughters to public schools. In the North Carolina House and Senate, I fought to increase teacher pay and reduce class size. As the Senate Majority Leader, I joined with Governor Hunt to help lead the charge for Smart Start in all 100 counties. As Attorney General, I put measures in place to improve school safety and to ensure public schools provide a secure learning environment for students.

I believe that public education is one of the most critical duties of state government. As governor, I will protect it from being further undermined by politicians in Raleigh wanting to dismantle it. I will be a governor who delivers on the promise of a world-class education for every student in North Carolina. It will take time to reverse years of cuts that have diminished our public schools and hurt middle class families. Still, I know North Carolina can be a leader in education.

Our families and communities face many challenges. High among them is the decline of public education over the years. Once considered a national leader on education, North Carolina has been moving in the wrong direction.

I will make education a priority. My education plan focuses on putting students first by:

1. Starting early to prepare all children for success.
2. Involving parents to help children succeed.
3. Recruiting, retaining and respecting the best teachers for our students.
4. Helping our lowest-performing schools to turn around.
5. Keeping students safe and secure at school.
6. Ensuring our schools prepare students for a modern workforce.
7. Making college more affordable.
8. Making education a priority.

Our state’s economic future depends on the quality of its workforce. We must ensure that our public education system is world-class and our students receive the best education possible. North Carolina cannot afford to fall behind other states in education.

North Carolina’s economy benefits when children have a strong start in school, and children benefit from better academic performance and career success later in life. Early childhood education improves school readiness for all young children and helps to ease the transition into elementary school. Early childhood education is especially beneficial to at-risk children by helping to reduce the achievement gap.
Right now too many children are being left behind at a time when we should be expanding opportunity for them. Although Governor McCrory talks about the importance of investing in early childhood education, he has yet to act or deliver a plan on how to make it a reality. Funding for early childhood investment remains flat. Middle class families deserve more. They need a governor who will stand up for them.

**Increase Enrollment of Children in Pre-K**
State funding for Smart Start and NC Pre-K has stayed the same in recent years even though the population of young children has been growing. Both programs are millions below pre-recession funding levels. This despite the fact that children in counties participating in Smart Start and NC Pre-K have higher third grade reading and math scores and are less likely to require special education placements. These programs are especially important for at-risk children who benefit from early childhood education the most. Despite the proven success, only 21 percent of 4-year-olds are enrolled in NC Pre-K. As governor, I will work to increase funding for Smart Start and NC Pre-K, with a sustainable plan that gives priority to serving more at-risk children.

**More Top-Rate Childcare Facilities**
As governor, I will encourage greater partnerships within our education system to help more childcare facilities enhance programming and staffing to boost the number of 4-star and even 5-star facilities available to families. At the same time, I will ensure that the state continues to increase early childhood licensing standards so that we are always striving to create the highest quality early childcare programs possible.

**Childcare Tax Credit**
Governor McCrory took money from the pockets of working families when he eliminated the childcare tax credit. The average cost for infant care in North Carolina is $9,255 per year. That's roughly $2500 more than the cost of in-state tuition and fees at a North Carolina college. Raising children is a big responsibility, but it's also a costly one. As governor, I will look at ways we can provide this important tax break to middle class families.

**Expand the Nurse-Family Partnership**
The Nurse-Family Partnership program helps improve the educational, economic and health outcomes of poor children of first-time mothers through home visits and personal instruction. Today less than three percent of eligible families receive services. We could serve more families through Social Impact Bonds – a financing strategy where the state would pay only for successful outcomes that get results. Under this proposal, the state would engage in a three-way performance-based contract with an investor who would agree to pay for services and a private provider who would agree to administer it. The state only would be required to reimburse if the initiative met well-defined outcomes negotiated upfront. As governor, I will explore the use of Social Impact Bonds for results-based care and other intervention programs serving at-risk children.
Babies and Books
All infants born in North Carolina hospitals should receive a library card along with information about age-appropriate books and electronic learning materials. I want to encourage more parents to read to their children, and the best time for parents to start is when their children are newborns. Reading helps boost child development and promotes learning. As governor, I will be an advocate for early reading programs.

Read in the Eve
We should open our elementary schools in the evenings to provide literacy workshops for the parents of young children not yet in public schools to emphasize the importance of regularly reading to children and to cultivate a lifelong interest in reading from an early age. As governor, I will provide the leadership needed at the state-level to encourage all of our 115 public school districts to voluntarily participate in a Read in the Eve program.

More Flexible Parental Leave Policies
With more families with two parents working, it's time we reevaluate our parental leave policies. Parents should get time to attend their children's school activities without being penalized by their employer. Right now North Carolina requires employers to provide up to four hours of unpaid leave per year for parents to participate in their child's school-related activities. But that's just time for one holiday lunch and a spelling bee. By comparison, parents in California are entitled to up to 40 hours of unpaid leave and parents in Massachusetts are entitled to up to 24 hours. As governor, I will work to increase the amount of hours of unpaid leave for parents, and at a minimum, to expand the current allowance to make it four hours per child.

The 2015 income tax giveaways to big corporations and the ultra-rich will cost the state about $1 billion a year once rate reductions are phased in. If we can find the money to support tax giveaways for big corporations, we can find money to raise teacher salaries. I will make it a priority.

In 2014, Republican legislative leaders claimed that their teacher pay plan would move North Carolina to 32nd nationally for teacher pay. This did not happen. According to 2014-15 national rankings, North Carolina ranked 42nd nationally for teacher pay. Governor McCrory has failed us again.

Enough is enough. Teachers are working second jobs, leaving the profession or even exiting the state because we have a governor who has turned his back on them and disregarded their valuable service.

I stood with Governor Hunt in the 1990s. We had a bipartisan plan to raise teacher pay to the national average. It's this kind of strong leadership North Carolina needs again. I will be a governor who gets results.
As governor, I will value teachers by:

- Working in a bipartisan manner to strive to raise teacher pay to at least the national average.
- Recruiting and training our best high school scholars for teaching careers through the Teacher Cadet Program and other successful programs like the NC Teaching Fellows that exchanged college tuition for a commitment to teach in North Carolina public schools.
- A teacher pay policy that rewards experience and education that leads to improved student outcomes.

Helping our lowest-performing schools teach students effectively should mean more support from the state. These schools serve a larger population of at-risk students who often have greater needs and require more educational support to ensure they receive a high-quality education.

**Support for Low-Performing Schools**

We have an obligation to provide all students a quality education. The state’s “Turning Around North Carolina’s Lowest-Achieving Schools” (TALAS) program is making good progress in professional development and school planning that have improved student outcomes. As governor, I will maximize federal dollars to help transform and turn around the bottom five percent of our schools and look for opportunities to support proven interventions customized to the unique needs of these schools and their students.

**Prepare Turnaround Principals**

Great school leaders create great schools and improve student achievement. Strong principal leadership is particularly important in high-needs schools. That is why we should be recruiting more of our outstanding teachers for careers as school administrators through Regional Leadership Academies. The program prepares qualified educators to become effective school leaders in high needs schools. The state needs to build upon this successful program, with priority given to school districts with a significant number of low-performing schools that have a problem attracting and retaining quality principals. As governor, I will look to expand Regional Leadership Academies to create a stronger pipeline of exceptionally trained and high quality principals.

**A “Freedom & Flexibility Pledge”**

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District instituted a strategic initiative to provide their principals more freedom and flexibility to promote innovation in their schools. Principals in this school district now have more decision-making power over how their school is managed and can customize education to the unique needs of their students. As governor, I will work with our state’s education leaders to create a Freedom & Flexibility Pledge for principals that outlines a certain level of flexibility and freedom that public school administrators should have. I will encourage all school districts to adopt this protocol in an effort to improve classroom instruction and student outcomes.

**Innovate, Customize and Improve Learning: Stop Over-Testing**

Over-testing is overwhelming our students and teachers and jeopardizing the quality of education provided in our schools. I want to find ways to untie the hands of teachers. Charter schools should not be the only educational institutions encouraged to experiment with educational innovations. Traditional schools should be encouraged to innovate, too. As governor, I will promote a statewide education policy that encourages creativity in the classroom, with personalized education plans, flipped classrooms and student governance, among others. We need to find new ways to evaluate student performance that improves outcomes and boosts performance.
Background checks for educators: North Carolina should immediately implement the safety screens proposed in 2010 that would mandate fingerprints checks for educators so they can’t hide behind a job transfer to cover up misdeeds.

As Attorney General, I have a strong record of providing school safety and ensuring emergency responders are trained on what to do if an emergency occurs in a school. Working together with education leaders, every school was equipped with a Critical Incident Response Kit and guide instructing educators and school personnel on how to plan ahead and respond during a crisis.

Law enforcement officers throughout North Carolina are being trained in Rapid Deployment strategies so they can respond quickly and effectively in a crisis.

More children are safer at home and on the Internet because of my office’s efforts to catch and convict predators trying to lure children away from home or school. My office held social networking websites responsible for placing child safety over profit.

As governor, I will continue North Carolina’s work with alternative schools for at-risk students, and reduce the threats that drugs, such as methamphetamines and prescription drugs, pose to our schools and children.

It will be a priority of mine to make schools better by keeping students safe, and holding children and parents responsible for their behavior. This will allow educators to focus on educating children.

Children are our state’s future. We must do all we can to equip them with the education and skills to be successful in the workforce in order to meet the demands of employers and provide more people access to the middle class.

**Career Readiness Academies in Every School District**

Our state is nationally recognized for its early college high school education model, which integrates high school and college-level learning over four or five years. Upon graduation, students receive a high school diploma and an associate’s degree or up to two years of university credit. These schools are currently offered to students in 70 of our 115 school districts. As governor, I will push to expand them statewide in partnership with our local community colleges, and ensure that coursework is aligned with the needs of high-demand industries in the community.

**Expand Access to Certifications and Credential Programs**

Not all students are college bound. That is why we need more coaches working with our high schools and community colleges to let students and families know what their education and career options are if they choose not to attend a four-year institution. Vocational training programs provide an alternative for high school graduates wanting to learn valuable skills in the trades that will prepare them to enter the workforce and obtain a well-paying job. As governor, I will expand access to certifications and credential programs in partnership with our community colleges.

**Wiring Schools for the Technology Tools of Today**

Technology is playing an ever-increasing role in education by increasing productivity and improving student outcomes. It has the ability to change the way we think about teaching and learning. As governor, I will actively seek more public-private partnerships to ensure access to
technology by wiring all schools to broadband and increasing the School Technology Fund to support more one-on-one device initiatives that will enhance student learning and prepare students for the future. If we are going to provide more benefits to big corporations, we should be able to ask and receive more from them in return.

A good-paying job starts with a good education. That’s why we should be opening doors to higher education for more North Carolinians when instead Governor McCrory is slamming them shut. Each time state policymakers cut funding for public universities, the quality of education suffers, tuition goes up and the future of our workforce is jeopardized.

As governor, I will push to reverse this economically disastrous trend and rebalance our state’s priorities. I will work to ensure there are no more tax giveaways for big corporations until we renew our commitment to higher education through greater state investment.

State funding for higher education in North Carolina remains 23.4 percent below pre-recession levels (-$2,866 less per student).

North Carolina must uphold its constitutional commitment guaranteeing post-secondary education is ‘free as far as practical.’ This means working to get the Board of Governors to reverse its policy that caps financial aid and instead challenging members to address student loan debt once and for all. Research shows that 61 percent of seniors graduating from a North Carolina four-year college in 2014 had debt that averaged $25,218.20. As alarming as this is, the situation will only get worse if Governor McCrory gets his way.

The Governor’s 2015-17 budget proposal calls for no increase in financial aid for university students. Just as bad, he recommends increasing community college tuition by 5.5 percent. These proposals come despite a planned tuition increase and anticipated enrollment growth that will cause more students to compete for a smaller slice of the pie.

The bottom-line: Governor McCrory’s policies have made it even harder for middle class families to afford college.

Rising student debt is an issue that should concern all of us. With more and more students drowning in debt, less money goes back into the economy and, in turn, growth slows.
Tuition-Free Community College
A number of states either have a free community college program or are considering offering one. The program works as a last dollar scholarship program whereby the state provides a grant to cover the remaining share of tuition and fees after Pell Grants and other financial aid and scholarships are applied. Most programs also offer mentors to help students navigate the college process on their journey toward success. As governor, I will put together a team of education partners and budgetary advisors to design a proposal for North Carolina to offer free tuition for community college. This would provide more students access to college and create opportunity for students to earn better paying jobs. Additionally it will help our state to meet our employers’ demands for educated workers and address the gap that now exists for skilled labor.

Lower Monthly Loan Payments
Last year the U.S. Treasury Department granted states the authority to issue tax-exempt bonds to refinance student loans for residents or students attending college in their states and several have seized this opportunity. For example, North Dakota, Minnesota, Rhode Island and a handful of other states and municipalities are leveraging their state and municipal bonding authority to provide borrowers a way to refinance their student loans at lower interest rates. As governor, I will call for establishing a state loan refinancing authority. This will allow North Carolina to lower monthly loan repayments for thousands of borrowers with high-interest private loans and federal student loans who could benefit from lower interest rates. This will not only ease the debt burden for borrowers but also provide college graduates an incentive to stay in North Carolina.

Borrower’s Bill of Rights
Basic consumer protections should be afforded to student borrowers just as they are for homeowners in certain states holding mortgages. A Borrower’s Bill of Rights would provide greater transparency between lenders and borrowers about loan programs and ensure that borrowers receive better protection against misrepresentation of loan terms. Borrowers should have complete information about the financial impact that a student loan will have over the entire repayment period. Such information would allow them to better compare products and make more informed decisions.

Make College Debt More Manageable
As governor, I will ensure the state proactively engages with federal student loan borrowers through a social media outreach campaign about student debt relief programs. There are several federal programs available to borrowers that could help lower monthly payments and forgive student loans after a period of time. If we can make more borrowers aware of programs, we can prevent more people from defaulting on their loans.

North Carolina spends $855 less per student than it did before the Great Recession, and we have one of the lowest per pupil spending levels in the nation. Rather than use last year’s budget surplus to invest in education, Governor McCrory chose to provide more corporate giveaways and tax breaks for the wealthy. These cuts reduce the amount the state has to spend on education and other core services at a time when employers are demanding educated and skilled workers. Funding public education is a question of priorities, not resources.
As governor, I will make education a priority by:

- Committing to a budget that does not shortchange public schools and keeps pace with increases in student enrollment.
- Pushing back on action that drains public school support.
- Identifying a consistent, reliable funding source for public schools to keep funding levels adequate and predictable in the future.

Set High Standards
I believe that charter schools have a role in our education system. They were exempted from some standards to allow creativity and innovation. While we have some excellent charter schools that have demonstrated positive effects on student learning those lessons aren’t required to be shared with public schools. And unsuccessful charters are going undetected for too long due to limited oversight and accountability. Because charters are publicly funded, we must ensure they are held to the same accountability and transparency standards that we hold traditional public schools. I do not believe public dollars should go to private schools.

Free More Dollars for the Classroom
It’s not just about providing more state investment; the state should play a role in helping school districts find savings and efficiencies within their existing budgets. For example, in 2003 then-Gov. Mark Warner of Virginia provided all public school districts the option of conducting an independent efficiency review to uncover unnecessary administrative costs that could free up money to be spent in the classroom. More than 40 Virginia school districts have completed a review that identified a combined total savings of nearly $45 million. This breaks down to about $1.1 million in savings per school district. As governor, I will provide state support to help districts find savings to drive dollars to the classroom.

Reform Lottery Spending
Over the years the lottery funds have been diverted away from the original educational purpose. Furthermore, in 2012 the legislature changed the lottery formula so that a smaller percentage goes to education and has dipped into lottery funds for other state programs. I’ll work to reform lottery spending and maximize our education dollars by putting a stop to legislators raiding lottery proceeds.