



State Superintendent Shares K-12 School Priorities With Lawmakers

Katherine Joyce | NCASA Executive Director

State Superintendent Catherine Truitt on Wednesday outlined for the Senate Education/Higher Education Committee her top priorities and goals for reforming and improving North Carolina's K-12 schools. The [presentation](#) was her first official address to a legislative committee since taking office in January.

Truitt shared the focus she deems her "North Star," which is to ensure "all students have a highly qualified and excellent teacher in every classroom." She indicated "there is much to be done in education right now" and said she is dedicated and determined to work with the General Assembly, the State Board of Education and stakeholders to move public schools and students to higher levels of success.

The three priorities that Truitt said are guiding her work in leading the Department of Public Instruction include the following:

- **Literacy:** Shifting from a one-by-one approach of supporting struggling readers to a systemic plan for training teachers in the science of reading, which she says "is not a program but rather a phonics-based approach to how children learn to read." Truitt said she wants to work with lawmakers to revamp Read to Achieve with this approach, and needed supports include professional development, in-classroom training and assistance, asynchronous online training modules, and print materials. The approach ultimately can move the needle to improve student literacy, Truitt said, and this must be a priority since only 67% of 8th graders in North Carolina are now proficient in reading and math.
- **Testing and Accountability:** Reforming our state's school accountability model to reflect myriad ways in which schools are working to transform teaching and learning. "We need to do a better job of showing what a quality school looks like and change how we define a quality school," Truitt said. "School accountability is now the tail wagging the dog. We need a clear definition of what we expect our high school graduates to know and be able to do and then align our testing and accountability system with that." Truitt wants flexibility for DPI to develop this "graduate profile," but said she would involve the business community and other stakeholders and come back to the General Assembly with a plan for legislation to facilitate accountability reforms needed for aligning with that profile. She also favors multiple indicators for measuring school success and sees future changes in high school transcripts that would list student skills rather than just letter grades and grade point averages.
- **Human Capital:** Developing a human capital strategy that aims to create a robust pipeline of highly qualified teachers, principals, and school support personnel in every district. "We have an outdated way of preparing and paying our teachers," Truitt said, adding she is "excited about work already under way" by the Human Capital Roundtable (which was launched at DPI last year in collaboration with the Southern Regional Education Board) and the state's Professional Educator Preparation and Standards Commission. Those groups are working now to develop proposals for allowing advancement within the teaching profession without moving into school administration. The proposals, which ultimately will need legislative approval, are now focusing on four key areas: re-envisioning pathways into teaching, redesigning teacher licensure,

reinforcing teacher support, and revising teacher salary schedules. Truitt said she wants to pursue similar reforms for developing the principal pipeline and creating programs to support and coach turnaround principals.

Truitt also shared her interest in beefing up computer science throughout a student's K-12 experience and said she ultimately would be asking the General Assembly to make it a science rather than an elective.

She touched briefly on the need to reopen all schools in the state and expressed disappointment that [vetoed Senate Bill 37](#) has not become law. "I have been pushing the Cooper administration to lower the six-foot distancing rule to three feet," Truitt said. "I will continue to pursue that and work to get all students back in our schools safely as quickly as possible."

In concluding her remarks, Truitt called on lawmakers for support in three areas as follow:

- Providing reasonable flexibility for all school calendar decisions for at least this summer and the 2021-22 school year,
- Allowing DPI and all public school units to be innovative in addressing learning loss in a way that best meets individual district needs, and
- Communication, collaboration, and trust between lawmakers and her team at DPI.

The State Superintendent will be speaking at [NCASA's Virtual Conference on Educational Leadership](#) at 10:15 a.m. March 12th and is expected to cover some of the same focus areas shared with the Senate Education/Higher Education Committee. Conference attendees who have questions about her goals and priorities can submit those in the conference chat box, and Truitt has agreed to answer questions to conclude her NCASA segment.

###