

Wake County Public School System 2025 Federal Legislative Priorities

The Wake County Board of Education seeks to provide a relevant and engaging education for all students who graduate as collaborative, creative, and critical thinkers prepared to lead productive lives in a complex and changing world. The Federal Government plays a vital role in supporting education to ensure national security and produce citizens that contribute to a strong, thriving economy.

Department of Education

The Wake County Board of Education (WCPSS) calls on Congress to preserve and strengthen the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) as a vital agency responsible for ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students. The USDOE establishes policies that ensure eligible applicants serving early childhood, elementary, secondary & post secondary programs, individuals with disabilities, those living in poverty, migrants, and those with limited English proficiency adhere to practices that best serve these populations.

The USDOE plays an irreplaceable role in safeguarding the rights of students with disabilities through governance provided by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), while also supporting school districts in addressing the educational needs of these students. WCPSS calls on Congress to meet its original promise of funding 40% of the average cost of educating students with disabilities, where current funding has not exceeded 13%. Additionally, the USDOE continues to hold states and school districts accountable for meeting the legal requirements of IDEA. Federal oversight is essential to preventing discrimination, ensuring compliance, and promoting best practices in inclusive education.

The USDOE plays an equally important role in recommending appropriate updates to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and providing valuable support to school districts in achieving the goals of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). WCPSS urges Congress through the USDOE, to update Title funding formulas, fully fund Impact Aid for students whose parents reside or work on tax-exempt federal property, and promote the research and development of innovative educational practices available to school teachers and administrators.

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing

The US now recognizes the tremendous impact of student mental health and wellness barriers that negatively affect student academic performance, increase absenteeism, and poor social wellness, leading to poor relations and poor self esteem, ultimately diminishing a student's ability to fully engage in educational programs. WCPSS calls on Congress to prioritize funding initiatives that address poor health and wellness issues faced by economically disadvantaged families.

WCPSS urges Congress to provide funding to increase access to mental health professionals and programs. Mental health professionals aid families in accessing individual and group counseling services, managing mental crises, and reducing behavioral issues. WCPSS calls on Congress to

continue investing in mental health and wellbeing programs that provide access to students and families outside schools.

Infrastructure Funding

WCPSS calls on Congress to continue its investment in infrastructure that supports public schools. Congress should ensure that all students have access to digital content and access should not be limited due to a lack of infrastructure or a lack of resources to access digital content where infrastructure is available. Congress has historically played a pivotal role in ensuring access to resources for poor and underserved communities in which the private sector is unwilling to invest. Such efforts have provided a tremendous return on investment that serve the national security and economic interests.

WCPSS urges Congress to continue efforts to close the digital divide in rural, urban, and suburban communities that benefit from equitable access to affordable high speed internet. Additionally, Congress should continue investments that aid districts in providing access to devices. These efforts allow students greater access to personalized and innovative learning and better engagement with digital teaching and learning standards.

WCPSS also calls on Congress to provide additional funding and flexibility to the E-Rate program. Enhancements to the E-Rate program allows schools to meet the technology needs of students and teachers. Additionally, E-Rate legislation can assist schools in deploying infrastructure to protect the data privacy of students.

School Lunch Program

Nutrition is vital to the success of all children due to its effect on brain development, the ability to focus, and overall physical and mental health. WCPSS urges Congress to expand school access to the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) to alleviate the negative impacts on child physical and academic development. Over 28 million students participated in the school lunch program in 2022-23, an almost 2 million student reduction over the previous year.

WCPSS calls on Congress to take a dual approach to enhancing access to quality school meals. We ask that the USDA continue to adjust the Community Eligibility Program (CEP) qualification percentage so that more schools and school districts qualify for no cost meals. Additionally, Congress is urged to work towards fully funding a universal meal program that provides no-cost breakfast and lunch to all students.

Increasing access to the NSLP provides additional financial relief to families and reduces children's likelihood of food insecurity. North Carolina has 448,000 students that suffer from food insecurity and nearly \$241 million in school debt. WCPSS urges Congress to implement budgetary decisions that will reduce and eliminate these barriers to school readiness.