



North Carolina
Leadership Forum
2019 Report

Conversations on School Choice



Acknowledgements

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Conversations on School Choice

Introduction

The North Carolina Leadership Forum (NCLF) is a program of Duke University. Established in 2015, NCLF seeks to create constructive engagement between North Carolina policy, business, and nonprofit leaders across party lines, ideologies, professional experiences, and regional perspectives.

The Challenge

Although North Carolinians have always had significant political differences, they historically have exhibited a practical, problem-solving orientation to politics. Today, however, the tenor of the times is highly partisan, and North Carolina finds itself sharply divided. Progressive and conservative leaders often depend on different media and social media outlets, operate with different facts and beliefs, seldom engage substantively with people with whom they disagree, and too often assume the worst about the motives of others. For these reasons, our leaders are less willing and able to work together to create widely embraced solutions and opportunities for our state and its people. Our aim is to help bridge this divide.

Our Approach

The program focuses on leaders, both those engaged in state-level policymaking and those dispersed in regions throughout the state. For each cohort, we provide an opportunity for these leaders, whose views span the ideological spectrum in the government, business, and nonprofit sectors, to:

- Build authentic relationships built on trust and understanding through frank, civil, and constructive discourse, and
- Learn together about a significant issue facing North Carolina, discuss its potential solutions, find mutually acceptable ways to pursue these solutions, and build understanding of the underpinnings of disagreements about the proposed solutions for which no consensus has emerged.

The overarching goal of NCLF is to develop a critical mass of civic and political leaders who have the will, the skills, and the relationships to work constructively with others of different political parties or ideologies.

Cover: Joel Luther
Inside front cover: U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Teresa J. Cleveland

Our Method

Over the course of several months, we work to:

1. Increase participant understanding of their own and others' views;
2. Establish a shared understanding of the nature of important problems and the relevant facts;
3. More clearly articulate the essence of disagreements and identify points of acceptance of solutions to those problems;
4. Examine and seek to understand the values, perceptions, and experiences that underlie disagreements;
5. Build authentic relationships among leaders of different political parties and ideological views; and
6. Create a foundation for future collaboration among NCLF participants.

The Question Addressed

The 2019 North Carolina Leadership Forum addressed an important topic for the future of education:

What role should choice play in North Carolina elementary and secondary education, and what array of educational options should the state fund in order to provide a quality education for every child?



Cohort 3 group photo by Land D. Elliott

Across the political spectrum there is a divergence of opinion about the nature of the problem, the underlying values relevant to choice in education, the prioritization of those values, the potential options the state should pursue, and the best solutions to the challenges we face.

The Leadership

The NCLF Steering Committee is made up of Duke faculty and diverse state leaders who devoted significant time to designing the format, focus, and pacing of the 2019 program. Members of the Steering Committee also facilitated program sessions during each participant gathering.

The 2019 NCLF Steering Committee members were:

- **Frederick Mayer**, Director, NCLF: Director, Center for Political Leadership, Innovation, and Service; Professor of Public Policy, Duke University [until June 30, 2019]
- **John Hood**, Co-chair: President, John William Pope Foundation
- **Leslie Winner**, Co-chair: Former Executive Director, Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation; Former Member, N.C. Senate
- **Tamara Barringer**, Clinical Professor of Law and Ethics, UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School; Former Member, N.C. Senate
- **Anita Brown-Graham**, Professor and Director of NC Impact, UNC School of Government
- **Maurice “Mo” Green**, Executive Director, Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation
- **Charles B. Neely**, Partner, Williams Mullen; Former Member, N.C. House of Representatives
- **Robert T. Reives, II**, Member, N.C. House of Representatives
- **Donald L. Taylor**, Director, Social Science Research Institute, Professor of Public Policy, Duke University

The Participants

The 2019 NCLF cohort consisted of 39 participants, seven of whom served on the NCLF steering committee. Participants included members of the General Assembly, state and local officials, leaders of nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, education practitioners, and business leaders from across the political spectrum and from across North Carolina. Some of the participants are deeply engaged in education delivery and policy, and some are more generally engaged in the development of public policy in North Carolina. For a complete list of the 2019 NCLF participants, see Appendix A.

The Process

Overview

The group gathered for four day-and-a-half-long meetings between January and August 2019. The first and last meetings were held at Duke University, and the second and third meetings were held, respectively, in High Point and Wilmington, N.C. All meetings operated under the Chatham House Rule:

When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.

The program progressed as follows:

- Establish ground rules for constructive engagement.
- Begin to build relationships and trust among members of the cohort.
- Identify the broad array of concerns related to choice in education in North Carolina, and the core values participants hold in regards to choice in education.
- Develop a shared knowledge base by establishing basic facts and a greater understanding of where the complexities lie.
- Establish the overarching concerns related to the topic. Identify and discuss potential options to address each of these concerns, including benefits and drawbacks of each option.
- Determine the extent of agreement and disagreement about the proposed options and the levels of tolerance for their downsides.
- Identify the actions about which there is a consensus. For those actions that have substantial but not complete support, determine how they could be modified to broaden support. Dig deeper into the options that generated the greatest amount of disagreement to allow participants to articulate deeply held views, further understand others' viewpoints, and to practice skills in constructive engagement.

Relationship and Trust-Building as a Primary and Ongoing Goal

Opportunities for participants to build relationships with people of different perspectives were woven throughout the program. During the first meeting, the first afternoon was devoted to a relationship- and trust-building exercise during which members of the cohort were asked to talk about a person or event that had been significant in their becoming the persons they are. Participants approached the exercise with vulnerability and open-mindedness and remained engaged with each other for the whole afternoon. It was a remarkable experience that created a foundation for conversations to come.

Other examples included pairing "buddies" of differing ideologies to meet outside of sessions, creating diverse "home room" groups which were used at some point in each meeting, and assigning intentional groupings for

small-group discussions, jigsaw sessions, and dyads. Each of these tools encouraged and enabled connections among individuals who may not otherwise have interacted in a meaningful way.

Session 1: Identifying Areas of Concern, Values Held, and Basic Facts

The discussion of school choice began with identifying the range of concerns related to the topic and a conversation about values held in education. This session was an opportunity for participants to present as many perspectives as possible.

We finished Session 1 with an overview of basic school-choice facts concerning demographics, funding, school-type distribution, and enrollment.

During dinner between the two days, the group heard remarks from N.C. Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger, Senate Majority Leader Dan Blue, and Duke University Provost Sally Kornbluth.

Session 2: Prioritizing Values, Defining Chief Concerns, and Beginning to Identify Solutions

At the second meeting, held in Wilmington, N.C., the group revisited the core values identified in Session 1, using live-polling software to determine relative priority of values for the group. Please see pages 12-13 for the results of this polling (What the Group Values).

Panel Discussions: From Theory to Practice in Wilmington and High Point

During our meetings in Wilmington and High Point, participants heard from local practitioners who work daily to address the challenges and embrace the opportunities created by school choice in their communities. These sessions were valuable in providing real-world, on-the-ground context to the general and theoretical conversations unfolding during NCLF sessions.



In Wilmington, representatives from a charter school, the YWCA, New Hanover County Schools, and a private Catholic school speak to the cohort aboard the USS North Carolina.

Land D. Elliott

The agenda then turned to a discussion of facts pertinent to the relationship between school choice and education quality. Presentations were given by representatives of the North Carolina Justice Center and the John Locke Foundation. Participants broke into dyads to discuss the relevant facts, where there was agreement, and how they understood the issue differently. This meeting also included in-depth discussion, in large and small groups, on each of the primary areas of concern.

Session 3: Benefits and Tradeoffs

The third meeting, held in High Point, N.C., focused on specific policy options to address the identified concerns. Participants discussed the benefits and inherent downsides of each policy option and then voted on their degree of support and extent of their ability to tolerate the downsides for each one. The resulting “polarity charts” show the degree of agreement and disagreement among the group and are included in pages 16-36 (Concerns Overview).

Before discussing concerns about funding and segregation, participants heard presentations on the state’s public school funding model and on the impacts of school choice on segregation given by faculty from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

Session 4: Understanding our Agreements and Disagreements

For the final meeting, hosted at Duke, the goals were to determine the policy areas with the highest levels of agreement; to discover what, if any, modifications could be made to increase agreement in areas where there was significant agreement but not a consensus; and to dig deeper into the issues and ideas that produced the most polarized responses.

To facilitate this process, the cohort used the polarity-chart results from the previous meeting, which provided a visual representation of the group’s attitudes towards each policy option. In addition, before launching the discussion of areas with the greatest disagreement (parental choice vs. preventing segregation), NCLF moderators modeled how to respectfully convey the deeply emotional content of a topic while also clearly articulating a particular view. The resulting conversation was candid and respectful, and participants engaged with each other on sensitive topics such as race with conviction and understanding. At the end of this meeting, time was reserved for participants to reflect on what they were taking away from the experience.

School Choice in NC:

Basic Facts

The facts related to school choice in North Carolina are complex, and, as with most issues, they are subject to interpretation. We endeavored to provide factual materials that reflected basic, undisputed data as a common point of understanding. Some factual topics addressed during our sessions were too complex for the scope of this report. An example would be school-funding mechanisms, about which the group did not reach agreement in their analysis of the issue. In other cases, the available facts were not sufficient to enable the group to reach a conclusion, such as the quality of various school choice options. As such, the following information should be considered only as a brief overview of some of the basic facts relevant to school choice discussions.

Note: unless otherwise indicated, all data in this section taken from the N.C. Department of Public Instruction.

Enrollment Data

Table 1: Enrollment by School Type:
Where do students go to school? (2017-18)

LEAs	1,433,281	80.9%
Homeschool	135,749	7.7%
Charter	100,986	5.7%
Private	101,775	5.7%
All Students	1,771,756	

Table 2: Enrollment and Number of Schools
by School Type 2017-18 School Year

	Enrollment	Number of schools	Number Religious
LEAs	1,433,281	2,462	N/A
Homeschools**	135,749	86,753	50,773 (58.5%)
Charter Schools	100,986	184 (2 virtual)	N/A
Private Schools*	101,775	767	506 (66%)
Magnet Schools	81,598	123	N/A

* Private religious schools accounted for 2/3 of private schools and 2/3 of private school enrollment.

** More than half of homeschool students attended religious homeschools.

Key Terms

LEA: Local Education Agency. Synonymous with a local school system or a local school district, indicating that a public board of education or other public authority maintains administrative control of the public schools in a city or county.

Charter: Charters are public schools of choice that are authorized by the State Board of Education and run by nonprofit boards of directors without supervision by the local board of education.

Private School: Private schools do not receive state funding unless they accept opportunity scholarships. They may be independent or religious. Private schools may participate in some state programs on a voluntary basis, including in state curricula, but are not required to participate. Private schools are required to administer nationally standardized tests to students every year.

Homeschool: Homeschools are defined as nonpublic schools consisting of the children of not more than two families or households, where the parents or legal guardians or members of either household determine the scope and sequence of academic instruction, provide academic instruction, and determine additional sources of academic instruction. Must also annually administer nationally standardized tests.

Geographic Distribution

The types of schools available for students to attend depend somewhat on where in the state families are located. For example, charter schools are not evenly distributed across the state. Many counties have no charters, while three counties (Durham, Mecklenburg, and Wake) are together home to one-third of all charters in the state. Private schools are concentrated in large population centers, though they are more evenly distributed than are charter schools. Magnets are also concentrated in urban population centers, particularly in Mecklenburg, Guilford, and Wake Counties.

Figure 1: Geographic Distribution of Total Student Enrollment 2017-18

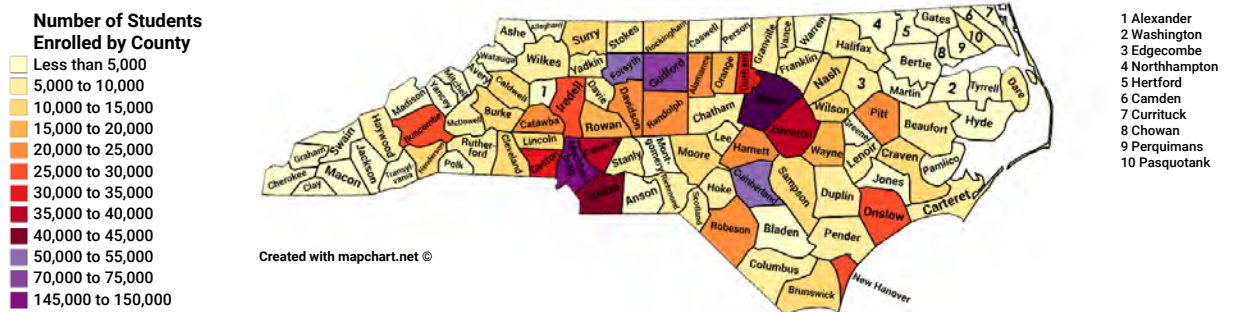
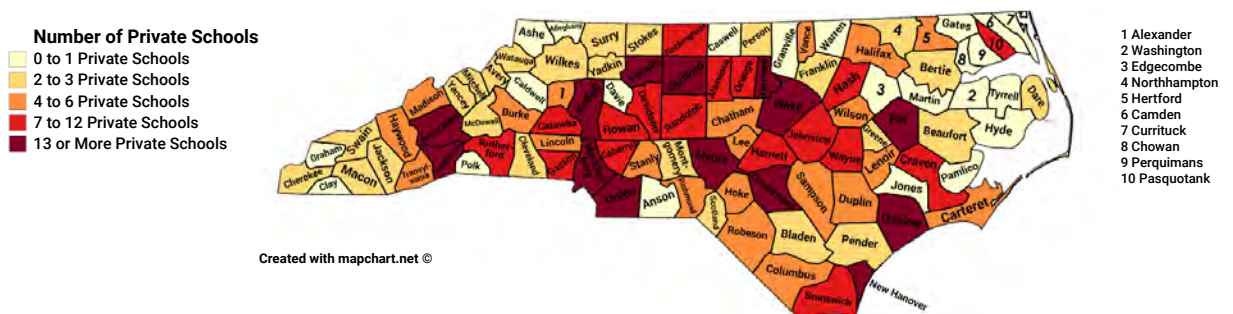


Figure 2: Geographic Distribution of Charter Schools 2017-18



Figure 3: Geographic Distribution of Private Schools 2017-18



Demographic Information

What types of students are enrolled in which schools? Here we present raw data on race, gender, and socio-economic status pulled from publicly available data from the N.C. Department of Public Instruction. *While these percentages reflect the students enrolled in schools statewide, it is important to note that they are not evenly distributed across the state. Percentages vary among geographic regions, counties, LEAs, and individual schools.*

Note: These data are not publicly available for private schools.

Table 3: Race/Ethnicity/Gender by School Type, 2018-19

	Charters		Traditional Public LEAs	
Race/Ethnicity/Gender	Students	Percent	Students	Percent
Total White	55,453	54.84%	671,727	47.26%
Total Black	26,419	26.13%	355,201	24.99%
Total Hispanic	10,041	9.93%	262,894	18.50%
Other	9,202	9.10%	131,459	9.25%
Male	50,253	49.97%	730,619	51.41%
Female	50,592	50.03%	690,662	48.59%
Total Enrollment	101,115		1,421,281	

Source: NC Statistical Profile, Tables 10 and 37

Table 4: Percent Economically Disadvantaged (EDS) and Students with Disabilities (SWD) by School Type, 2017-18

	Charter		LEAs		Charter + LEA	
Special Categories	Students	Percent	Students	Percent	Students	Percent
FRPL*	28,199	33.2%	841,089	59.4%	869,288	57.3%
ELL*	3,607	3.6%	112,575	7.9%	116,182	7.6%
SWD*	10,154	10.3%	173,102	12.2%	183,256	12.0%

*FRPL: Free and Reduced-Price Lunch; ELL: English Language Learners; SWD: Students with Disabilities

Source: 2018 Charter Schools Annual Report to North Carolina General Assembly, p. 4 (<https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/Meetings/Attachment.aspx?S=10399&AID=164363&MID=4981>)

Growth and Market Share Trends

North Carolina's charter sector has grown rapidly since the cap on charter schools was lifted in 2011. Charter school enrollment in North Carolina has increased more than 200 percent in the past 10 years.

According to second month Average Daily Membership (ADM) figures certified in November 2018, 109,389 students are now being served by charter schools. This represents 7.3% of the total public school population (1,490,472). Contrast that with the 34 charter schools that opened in the inaugural year of 1997, and the growth in this sector is apparent.

Table 5: Charter School Membership Growth by LEA Region: 2017-18

LEA Region	2018 Charter Membership	LEA Allotted ADM*	Total LEA + Charter	% of LEA	Increase 2012-18	Increase 2017-18
1	4,551	71,636	76,187	6.0%	3,245	158
2	4,904	140,958	144,962	3.4%	2,441	759
3	31,620	353,247	384,867	8.2%	16,122	2,430
4	4,228	135,862	140,090	3.0%	2,638	431
5	14,038	239,580	253,618	5.5%	8,291	825
6	31,037	345,581	376,618	8.2%	16,274	754
7	1,002	83,319	84,321	1.2%	482	82
8	5,731	81,666	87,397	6.6%	2,825	512
Total	97,111	1,450,949	1,548,060	6.3%	55,562	9,195

*ADM: Average Daily Membership

Region 1: Beaufort Bertie Camden Chowan Currituck Dare Gates Halifax Roanoke Rapids City Weldon City Hertford Hyde Martin Northampton Pasquotank Perquimans Pitt Tyrrell Washington

Region 2: Brunswick Carteret Craven Duplin Greene Jones Lenoir New Hanover Onslow Pamlico Pender Wayne

Region 3: Chatham Durham Public Edgecombe Franklin Granville Harnett Johnston Lee Nash Orange Chapel Hill-Carrboro Person Vance Wake Warren Wilson

Region 4: Bladen Columbus Whiteville City Cumberland Hoke Montgomery Moore Richmond Robeson Sampson Clinton City Scotland

Region 5: Alamance-Burlington Caswell Davidson Lexington City Thomasville City Davie Forsyth Guilford Randolph Asheboro City Rockingham Stokes Surry Elkin City Mount Airy City Yadkin

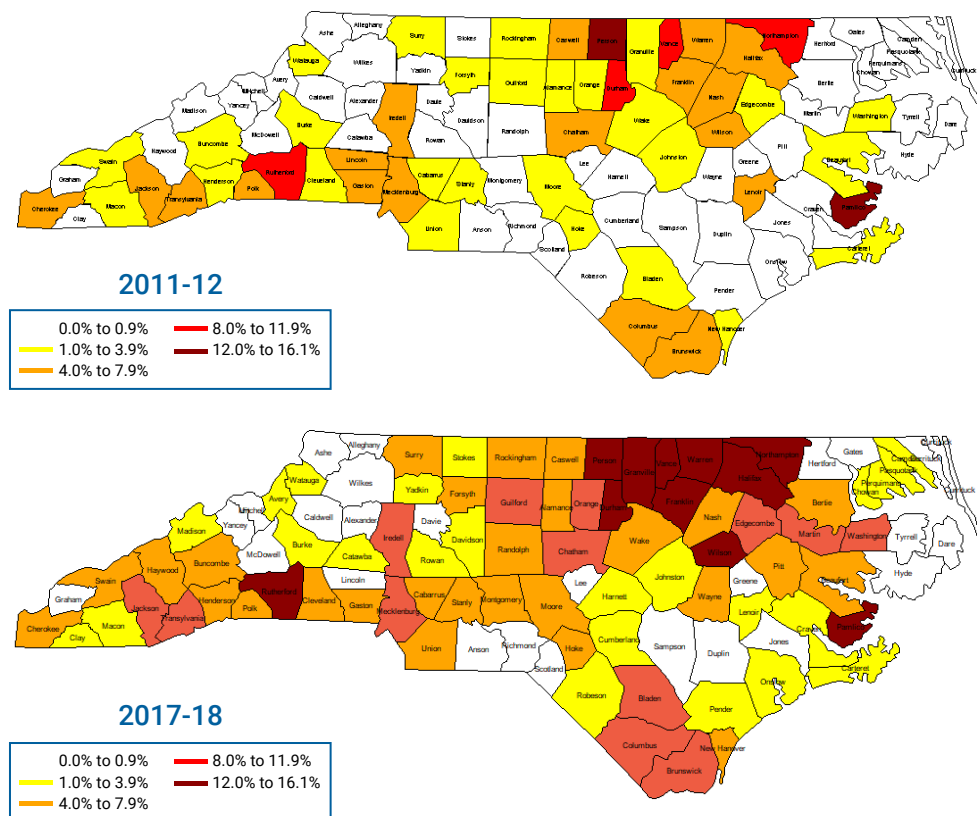
Region 6: Anson Cabarrus Kannapolis City Cleveland Gaston Iredell Mooresville City Lincoln Charlotte-Mecklenburg Rowan Stanly-Albemarle Union

Region 7: Alexander Alleghany Ashe Avery Burke Caldwell Catawba Hickory City Newton City McDowell Mitchell Watauga Wilkes Yancey

Region 8: Buncombe Asheville City Cherokee Clay Graham Haywood Henderson Jackson Macon Madison Polk Rutherford Swain Transylvania

Source: Department of Public Instruction. Charter School Membership by LEA Survey Results: 2017-18 Summary and Results by Region (<http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/fbs/resources/data/>) Data collected from LEAs via electronic survey. For information only.

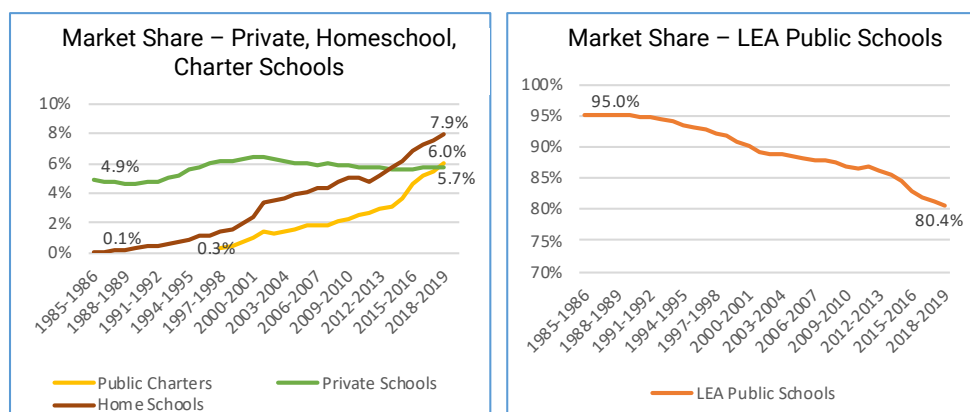
Figure 4: Percentage of Public School Students in Membership at Charter Schools 2011-12 and 2017-18



Market Share Trends by Sector

All charts in this section courtesy of data from [The Innovation Project \(TIP\)](#).

Figure 5: Market Share by Sector 1985-2019



Source Notes, courtesy of The Innovation Project, August 28, 2019

LEA Public Schools: "Best 1 of 2 Allotted ADM for 2018-2019 School Year (LEAs)" Division of School Business Services, School Allotments Section.

Public Charters: "Charter School Membership by Region, 2018-2019" NC Department of Public Instruction, Division of School Business. (Total number of students residing in the district that attend a charter school).

Private Schools: "North Carolina Private School Enrollment by Counties, 2018-2019" 2019 North Carolina Private School Statistics. State of North Carolina Department of Administration, Division of Non-Public Education.

Homeschools: "North Carolina Home School Estimated Enrollment by Counties, 2018-2019" 2019 North Carolina Home School Statistical Summary. State of North Carolina Department of Administration, Division of Non-Public Education. (All estimates are based on random 18-19 home school enrollment sampling and the actual number of home schools operating during that school term.)

Concerns, Options, Findings

Over the course of four meetings, members of the NCLF engaged in substantive conversations informed primarily by their own considerable experience, but also by presentations from speakers and experts and provided background materials. The goals were to identify the critical issues regarding school choice in North Carolina, to consider a range of possible solutions to those issues, to seek agreement where possible on those solutions, and, where agreement was not possible, to better understand opposing views.

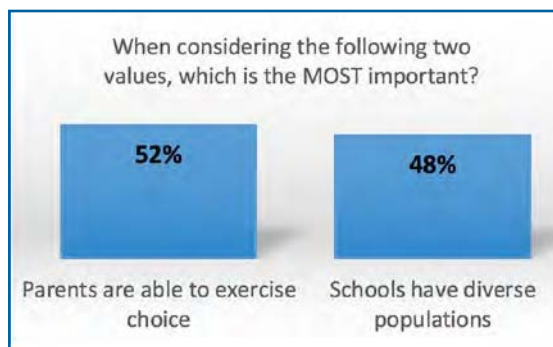
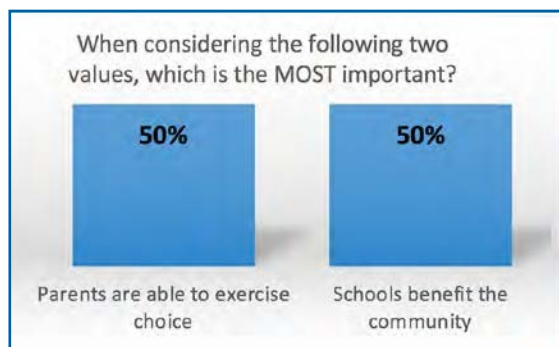
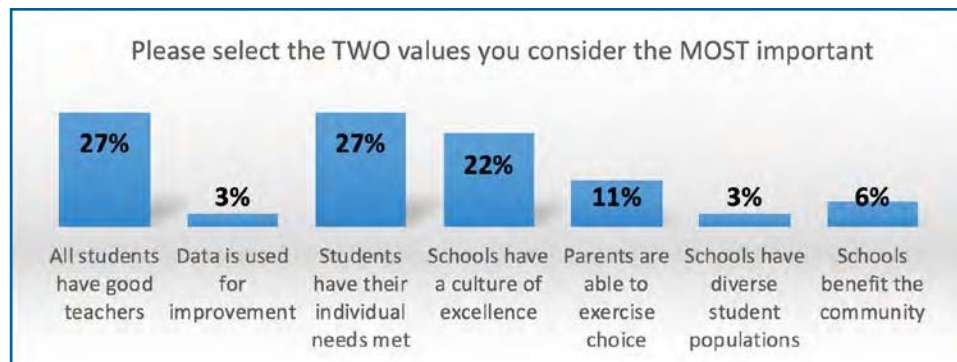
What the Group Values

The forum explored the values individuals held as foundational when considering K-12 education specifically as well as educational systems generally. Although members prioritized them differently, the group agreed upon the following list of fundamental values for education in North Carolina:

- All students should have good teachers.
- Data should be used for improvement.
- Students should have their individual needs met.
- Schools should have a culture of excellence.
- Parents should be able to exercise choice.
- Schools should benefit the community.
- Schools should have diverse populations.



We first asked the participants to express top priorities from the entire list of values. We then polled forced-choice questions, requiring participants to choose between potentially competing values. This further prioritization shed light on one of the fundamental conflicts in the school-choice debate: which do we value more, parents having choice of schools or schools producing broader social effects?



Concerns Overview

The members of the group generated an extensive list of concerns related to choice in public education. See Appendix B for the complete list of concerns. Although the starting topic was broadly defined as “school choice,” participants ultimately focused almost exclusively on charter schools.

The remainder of this report describes the deliberation of the forum with respect to how to address four areas of concern regarding school choice in North Carolina that were identified as the key concerns:

1. **Funding:** *The state’s public funding model should provide funding that is fair to students who attend district-run schools and to those who attend charter schools.*
2. **Segregation:** *We need to take into account the impact of parental choice on school segregation.*
3. **Flexibility:** *We need to offer similar flexibility for efficiency and innovation for all educational providers that are funded with public dollars.*
4. **Accountability:** *We need a system of accountability that includes alignment of expectations and metrics and is used by all educational providers that are funded with public dollars.*

It is important to note that not all forum members agreed that each of these concerns should be addressed with policy actions. Rather, among all of the issues discussed, these concerns merited substantial enough attention from a majority of the group to be considered further. In addition, even those who raised particular concerns did not necessarily support pursuing actions to address them when faced with the tradeoffs required to do so.

Concerns About Funding

Statement: "The state's public funding model should provide funding that is fair to students who attend district-run schools and to those who attend charter schools."

Background

The funding system for North Carolina public schools is complex, and even participants with considerable experience in education policy raised questions on how funding mechanisms actually operate. While a full explanation of education funding in North Carolina is outside the scope of this report, thanks to participant expertise and a presentation by an expert on school funding, forum participants were able to engage in substantive debate about funding.

North Carolina's funding model for schools operated by LEAs is primarily an enrollment-based and personnel-position-allocation model, differentiated by grade level, with categorical add-ons for items such as special education, limited English proficiency, transportation, and low-wealth districts.

Charter operations are funded by state and local governments based on their student enrollment similar to a block-grant model. Of the \$8.93 billion in state funding for public education in 2017-18, 6.6% (or \$580,772,383) was allotted to charter schools.

Some brief facts on charter-school funding¹:

- Charter schools receive operating funding from the state based on the number of students enrolled (ADM) at the rate of the per-pupil allocation of the local education agency in which the school is located, without consideration of the particular needs of the students they serve, except for children with disabilities and children with limited English proficiency.
- Charter schools are not eligible to receive state or local funding for facilities or transportation capital expenses.
- Charter schools are provided financial flexibility in the following ways:
 - Funds are allotted in a single dollar allotment which they are free to allocate as they determine is appropriate.
 - They are not required to pay personnel using the state salary schedules or salary ranges.

1. N.C. Gen. Stat. § 115C-218.105

- They are not required to participate in the State Employees Retirement System or State Employees Health Plan, purchase on state contract, or participate in e-procurement.
- Charter schools receive local operating funding based on their student enrollment as a proportion of the local funding from the school district in which their students reside. They do not receive local capital funding nor a proportion of a school district's Fund 8 account (grants, gifts, etc.).

Key Issues

One overarching concern with respect to school funding was whether charter schools get a fair share of the funding available for public education. District-school proponents felt that charter schools received a disproportionately high share of the funding when compared to the actual students served and services offered. Others raised the concern that charters are pulling needed funds from district schools.

Charter proponents felt that the current funding system is unfair to and inadequate for charter schools, particularly regarding the exclusion of funding for capital expenses.

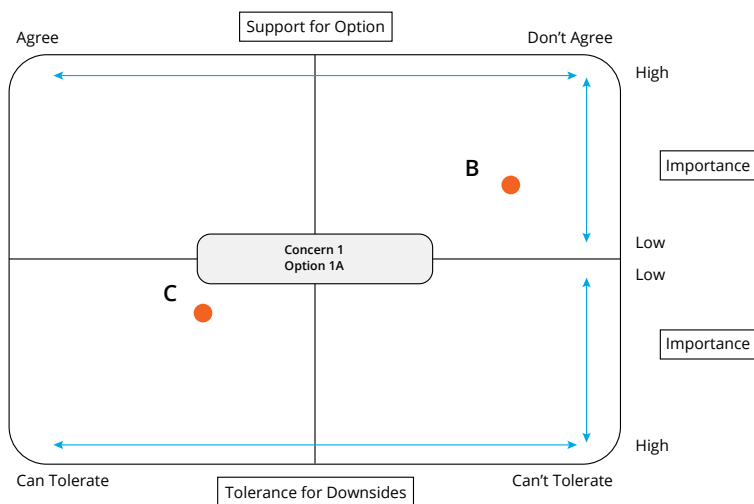
Participants also raised the idea that overlooking student population funding needs discourages charter schools from serving high-need or challenging students.

Policy Options to Address Funding Concerns

NCLF put forth four policy options to address concerns over school funding. Participants debated, in small "affinity" groups and then as a whole, the merits and drawbacks of each option before determining the level of support for each option by voting on "polarity" charts.

Polarity Charts, Explained

To determine the level of agreement among the cohort for particular policy options, we developed "polarity charts" as shown below.



After robust discussion of a policy option, we asked participants to place two “votes” on a polarity chart for that option. For the first vote, a participant indicated his or her level of support for the option by placing a sticker above the x axis, on the spectrum of “agree” to “don’t agree,” while also taking into account the intensity of that viewpoint.

For example, the letter B in the sample chart shows that a participant does not agree that Option 1A is a good option to pursue, but she does not feel strongly about whether or not it is implemented.

The second vote is to show the extent to which someone can tolerate the downsides of an option and also the intensity of that opinion. For example, letter C shows that this same participant can somewhat tolerate the downsides of Option 1A and doesn’t think they are so critical.

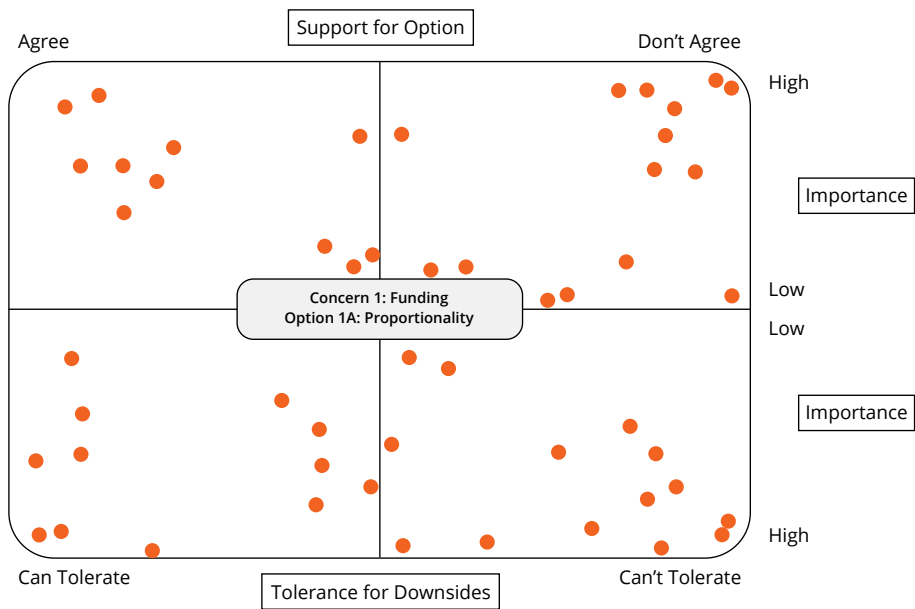
Taken in aggregate, these votes provided a visual representation for the level of agreement on particular options.

Proportionality

“Charters get a proportionate share of every funding source of the LEAs from which they enroll students, including food, Fund 8, and building and transportation capital funding; the calculations should be transparent.”

Those in support of a proportionality policy pointed to transparency, predictability, efficiency, and simplicity as key benefits to such a policy. This policy also addresses the concern held by some participants that charter schools’ not receiving money for capital expenses is unfair. Although charters would receive funding for services they may not provide, they would have the flexibility to divert these funds to actual needs.

The primary drawbacks discussed were that this option would unfairly siphon too much money from the districts: the policy would distribute funds for programs that may not even be offered at a charter when a public school may actually have need for those funds (special needs, ESL, FRPL, etc.).



Additionally, a simple objection offered was that charters would receive grant and gift funds raised by the LEAs, but the charters would not be required to share the other way, and sharing these funds might contradict donor intent.

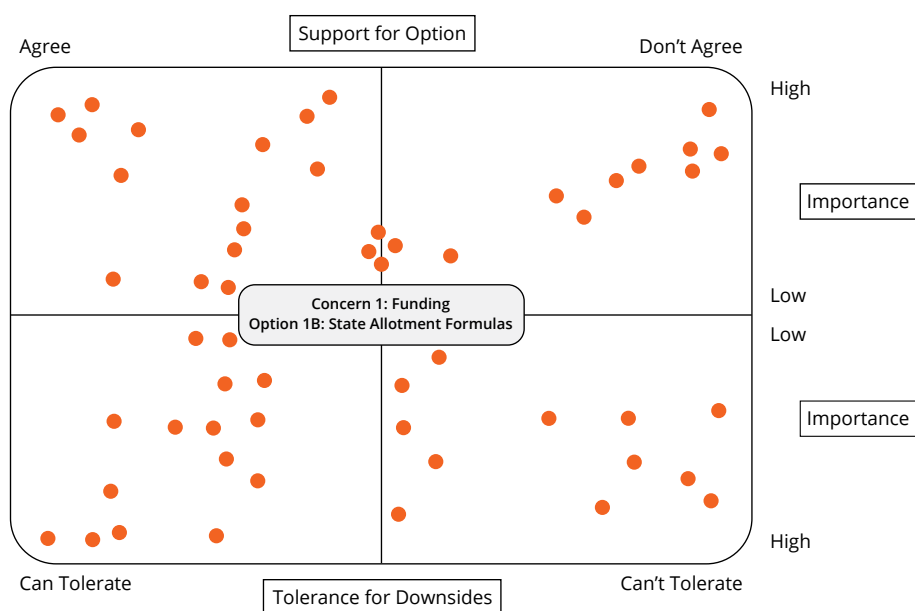
State Allotment Formulas

“Charters’ state funding is received from the LEA based on the state’s LEA allotment formulas (some based on ADM and some based on the characteristics of the students served and services provided, e.g. teacher assistants only for K-3 students, ESL only for ESL students, DSSF only for at-risk students, EC depending on the category of disability, transportation only if provided).”

Forum members mostly agreed following state allotment formulas for charter schools would be a more efficient and equitable process. This option would tie funding to the actual student population, the needs, and the offerings of charter schools. It would also incentivize charters to serve high-need students, and therefore reduce the proportion of these students concentrated in district schools.

From a charter-school perspective, this policy still doesn’t address the issue of funding for capital. Other criticisms included that this process is more complicated and lacks transparency.

As shown by the polarity chart below, forum members were divided over their support for this option and their tolerance for its downsides.



Request Local Funding

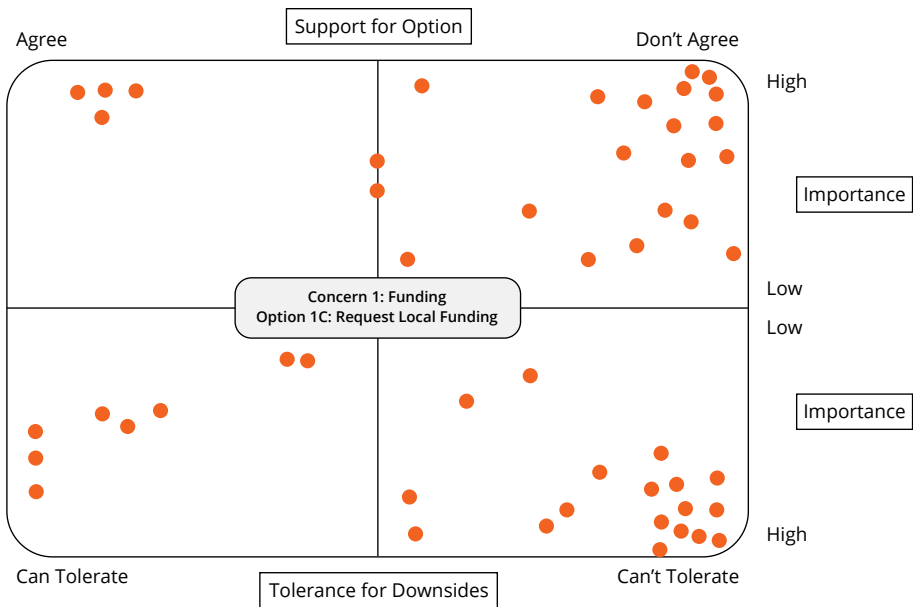
“Charters get status quo share of state funding and federal funding, depending on whether they come within the federal funding guidelines. Charters may, individually or collectively, request local funding, including capital funds, from the county commissioners for the counties in which their students reside.”

Some participants opined that requesting local funding from the county commissioners would provide charters an opportunity to receive capital

funding and may increase accountability. It would also avoid the problem of school boards’ having to share requested LEA funding with charter schools that may or may not have the needs the funding was intended to meet.

The chief drawback identified by several participants was the highly political nature of this policy. It could have the result of pitting charters against district schools and even charters against other charters.

The majority of the cohort opposed this option. As shown on the polarity chart, there was strong opposition to the proposal and a strong intolerance for its downsides.



Updated Student Count

“The charter school student count should be taken more than once a year, and charter schools should continue to receive funding based on the number of students they still enroll.”

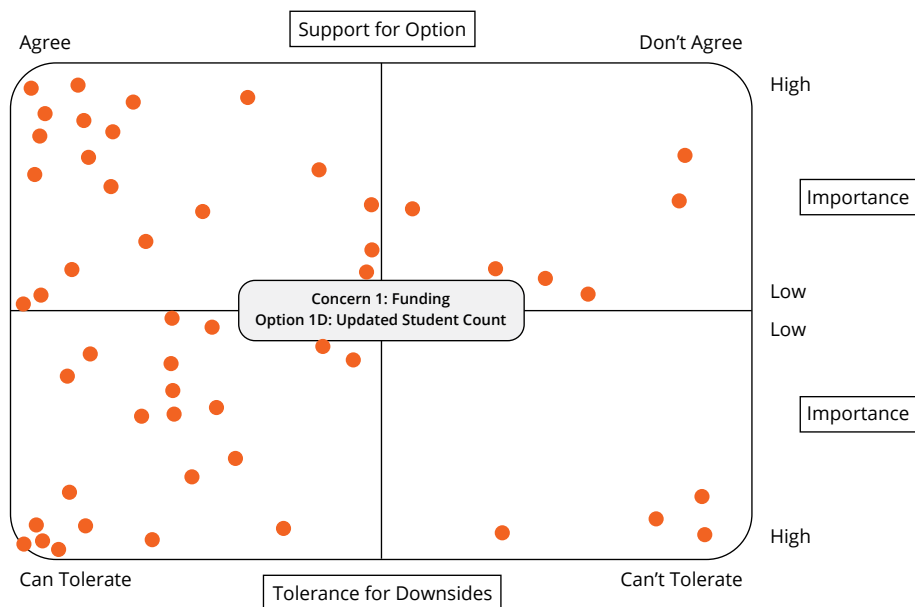
Support for counting students more than once a year was based on the potential accuracy of this policy: counting more often could provide more precise information and better alignment of funding with school needs.

Some participants expressed the opinion that charter schools boost their enrollment at the beginning of the year, and after the student count, encourage students who are challenging to teach to return to district-run public schools. In this situation, the charter school keeps the funding, and those students return to district schools with no funding provided to the district school. They believed this policy would help address this problem.

On the other hand, instability and practical logistical hurdles presented major obstacles for many in the group. For example, fixed costs (such as hiring staff on annual contracts) would be hard to address, and it would be difficult to budget for decreases in students halfway through the school year.

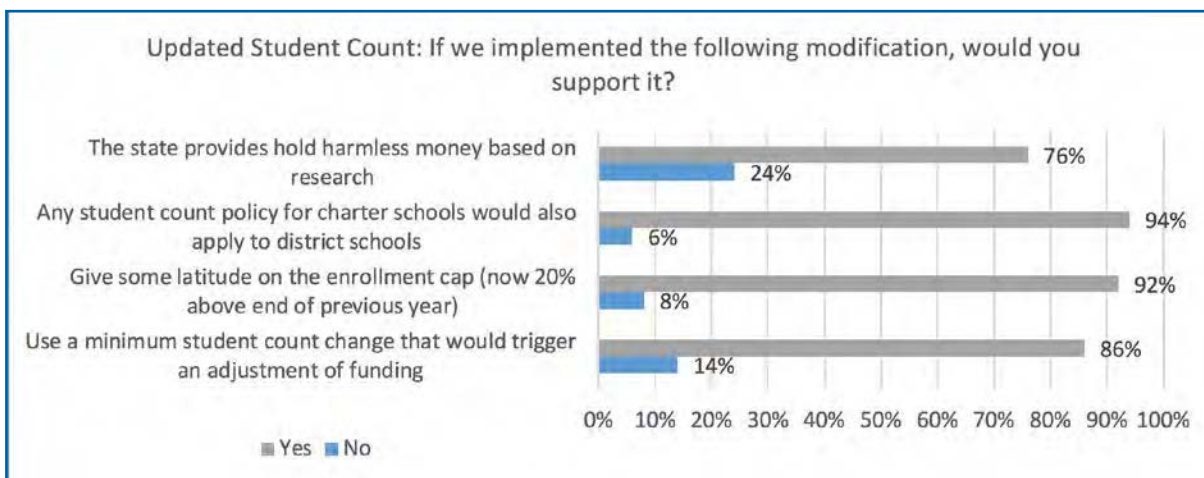
Some participants were not eager to introduce this level of perceived unpredictability to the system.

As indicated by the polarity chart, support for performing an updated student count was significant but less clear-cut, with votes more dispersed throughout the grid. At the final meeting, participants had the opportunity to develop and discuss proposed modifications, then vote on these modifications to see if the cohort could reach a greater level of agreement.



Proposed Modifications for Updated Student Count

Original proposal: *Based on research of actual effect of student changes², the charter school student count should be taken more than once a year, and charter schools should continue to receive funding based on the number of students they still enroll.*



2. This introductory clause was not included in the original proposal and was suggested as an addition during the modification discussion. It was not offered as an option to be voted on but as a necessary assumption to specify.

School Funding: Where Do We Agree and Disagree?

The vast majority of forum members agreed that:

- Charters should not be able to, collectively or individually, request local funding from county commissioners

A substantial number of forum members agreed that:

- The charter school student count should be taken more than once a year, and schools should continue to receive funding based on updated enrollment IF:
 - Student count policies for charters also apply to district schools (94%),
 - Some latitude on the enrollment cap is afforded (92%)
 - A minimum student count change that would trigger an adjustment of funding is used (86%), OR
 - The state provides hold harmless money based on research (76%)

Forum members were divided over whether:

- Charters should get a proportionate share of every funding source of the LEAs from which they enroll students.
- Charters should receive state funding based on the state's LEA allotment formulas.

Concerns About Segregation

Statement: "We need to take into account the impact of parental choice on school segregation."

Background

It is difficult to have a conversation about school choice without addressing the subject of race. In this context, much discussion focused on the impact of choice on the racial diversity of our schools and the equity of access to educational choice.

Determining the racial impact charters have on local school districts is challenging. Only about 7% of children in North Carolina attend charter schools, but these schools are unevenly distributed across the state. A clear statement about local district impact is not possible from the data the group had before it³.

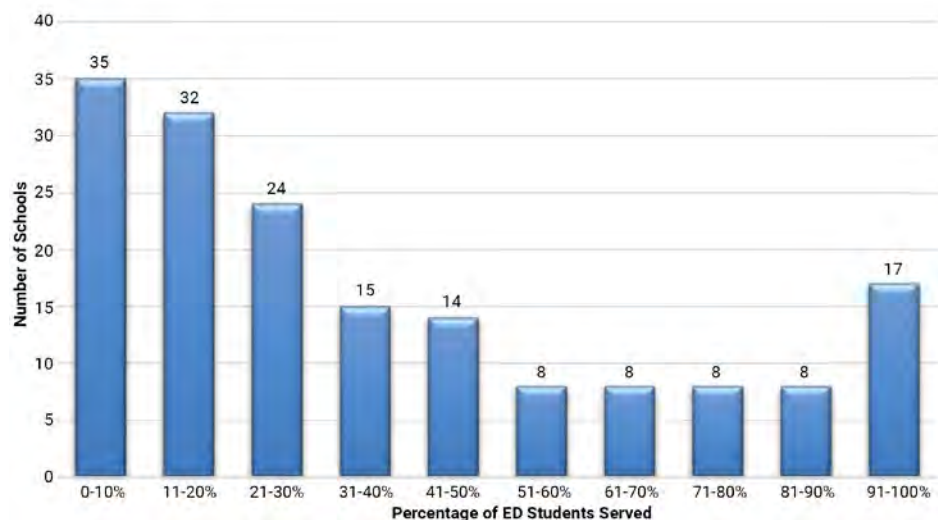
Some academics argue that school-to-school comparisons may give a more accurate picture than school-to-district comparisons, but reliable data about the impact of the movement of students into and out of individual charter schools was not available. Even if it were, there are many assumptions about causation that are difficult to test. For example, parental choice of schools could be attributed to outgroup avoidance (white flight), same group preferences

3. Presentation acknowledgements are found in at the end of the report.

among minority families, geographic realities, financial constraints, limitations of school choice policies, or some combination of all of these factors.

Currently, North Carolina's charters are statutorily directed to "make efforts" to achieve racial and ethnic parity with their local districts. However, no enforcement mechanism exists. While the group did not have school-specific racial data to consider, data on concentration of student poverty is available. The DPI data show that 59% of students in LEAs qualify for free or reduced school lunch, vs. 33% in charters.⁴ The rate varies significantly among charter schools:

Figure 6: Distribution of Charter Schools by Percentage of Economically Disadvantaged Students (2017-18)



Key Issues

For some participants, diversity of schools was a fundamental issue within the school choice debate. For others, race was important but less foundational; rather, allowing parents to choose what is best for each individual child was paramount. A primary concern voiced by participants was that diverse schools provide opportunities for children to engage with and learn from people who are different from them, and segregated schools eliminate the opportunity for this lesson in civic education.

Some participants also emphasized the need to talk about the history of segregation in North Carolina and responses to integration as an important aspect of the deliberations. These individuals pointed to charter and private schools providing avenues for white flight which can leave high concentrations of students of color remaining in the district-run schools. Others believed that re-segregation was a concern because, culturally, it reflects a decreased focus on community and an increased emphasis on the individual. Still others did not see this as a significant problem and felt that the ability of families to make choices that best meet a student's individual needs is the most important factor.

4. NCDPI Accountability Services, 2017-18. Chart includes 169 of 173 schools; 4 schools did not report ED student numbers and therefore are not included.

Policy Options to Discuss Segregation Concerns

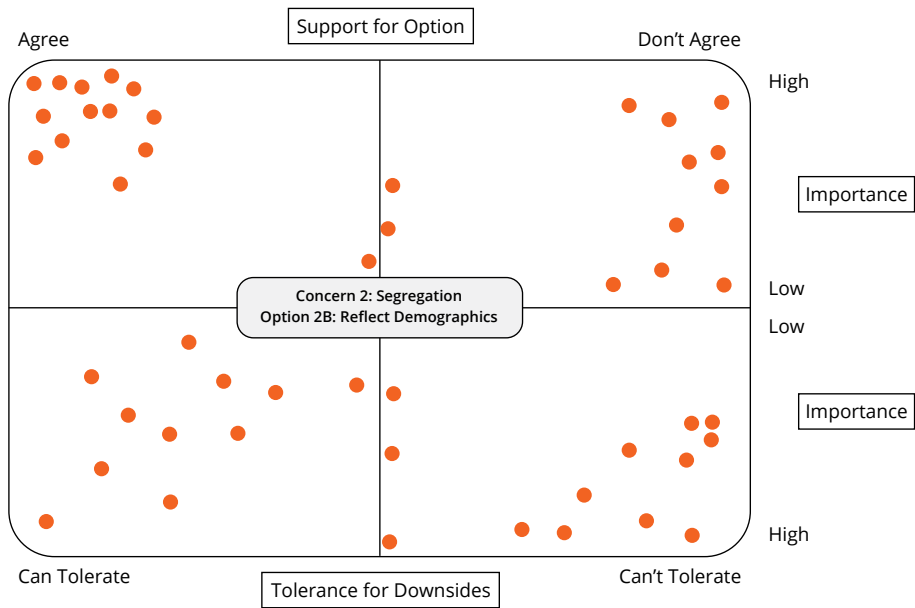
The following policy options were proposed by forum members as potential ways to address concerns about segregation in schools.⁵

Reflect Demographics

“Each charter proposal should include an outreach plan that will enable it to have a student population that reflects the racial and income demographics of the student population of the county in which it is located, each should be required to report publicly on the outcome of the implementation of its plan, and if it fails to meet its goal the school will be required to use a weighted lottery based on free or reduced lunch eligibility for admissions.”

This option names diversity as an overt goal and would require diversifying charter-school populations. It was among the most polarized in terms of participant support for it, with many people strongly in favor of it, and many strongly opposed.

Proponents, who generally value racial diversity in publicly funded schools, noted that it puts the responsibility on charter schools to attract a diverse student population. They argued that a public report would lead to transparency and could lead to more investments to make the plan successful. It also provides teeth for enforcement of the policy which the current statute lacks. In addition, peer and community pressure to diversify charter schools could result in higher integration in the overall community where a school is located. A political benefit to this policy might be that it protects charters from political



5. This does not imply that all participants believed this topic to be an important concern. Discussions also included an acknowledgement of the disadvantages of using income as a proxy for race, and of the legal realities of implementing policies that explicitly take a student’s race into account in school acceptance or assignment decisions.

risk of future caps and possible shutdown due to segregation issues. Many assumptions are made about why students do and don't attend schools, but establishing plans and accountability might prompt learning about what the barriers to diversifying schools truly are.

Opponents agreed that diversity within student populations is important, but disagreed with placing diversity above the academic goals of a school and encroaching on parental autonomy to choose whichever school is best for their child. Moreover, opponents asserted that requiring a weighted lottery moves away from the original concept for charters: autonomy and flexibility. It could also undermine the mission of schools that serve a specific population. Many questioned the efficacy of this option, as the effect is limited if the counties a school pulls from are not themselves diverse.

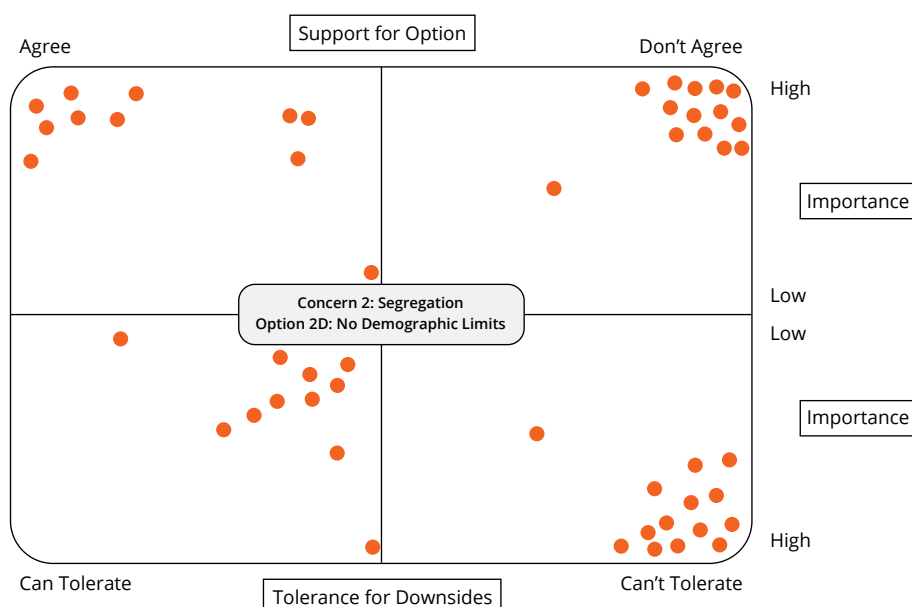
Other concerns included underlying structural concerns, putting the onus on charter schools to meet a goal that traditional public schools are not living up to, and whether an explicit racial-balance goal with consequences for non-attainment would be legally and constitutionally defensible.

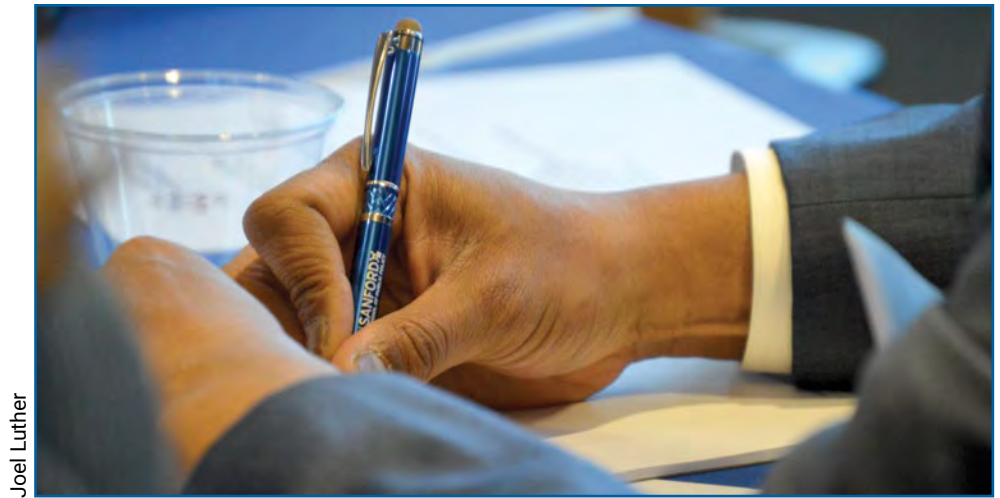
No Demographic Limits

"There should be no limits on parental choice based on racial or economic outcomes."

This also was an option with a high degree of polarization among the participants. Placing no limits based on racial or economic outcomes enables the purest form of parental choice: parents have complete freedom to decide the best fit for their children. It would reduce regulatory burdens on charter schools, aligns the law with current realities, and may lead to increased demand for options.

However, this policy could heavily advantage families who have the most resources to make good choices for their children. It may disadvantage the children who remain in district-run schools and may decrease diversity in schools overall.





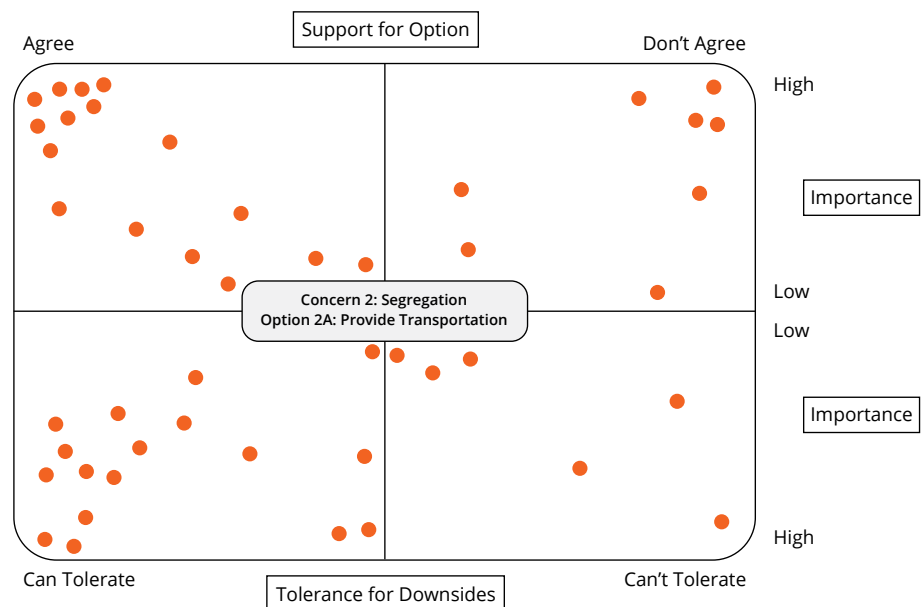
Joel Luther

Provide Transportation

"All choice options within district-run schools and all charter and voucher schools should come with a transportation option for each child."

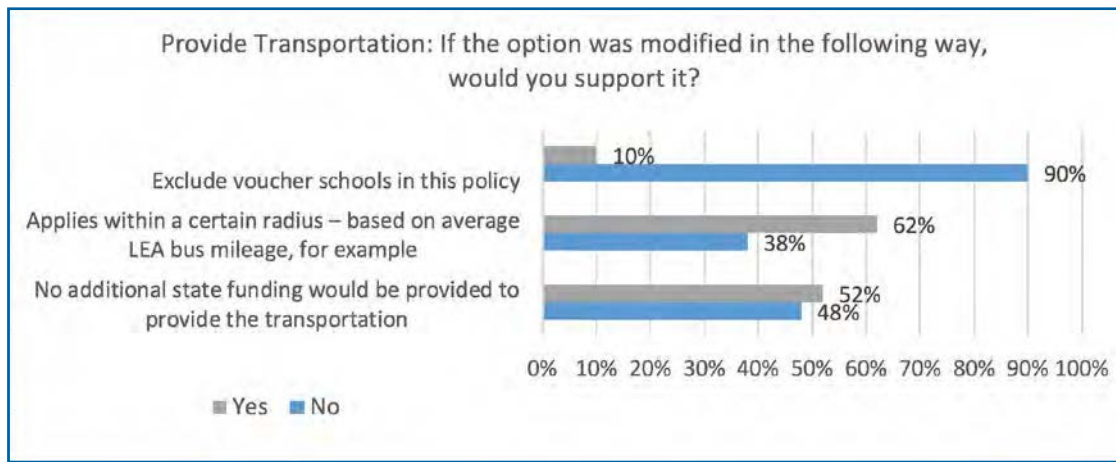
Providing transportation is one way to reduce barriers and increase access for many students to attend magnet, charter, and voucher schools, thereby diversifying schools. Other potential benefits could include spurring collaboration between district and charter schools and sparking more innovative solutions in addition to buses.

The primary downsides include increased cost, with questions regarding funding sources, and inefficiencies of providing transportation to dispersed populations and of overlapping transportation routes. Additionally, transportation alone may not be adequate to address concerns about equitable access to choice schools; the same families for whom transportation is a barrier may need free and reduced lunch, after-school care, or other services.



Proposed Modifications for Provide Transportation

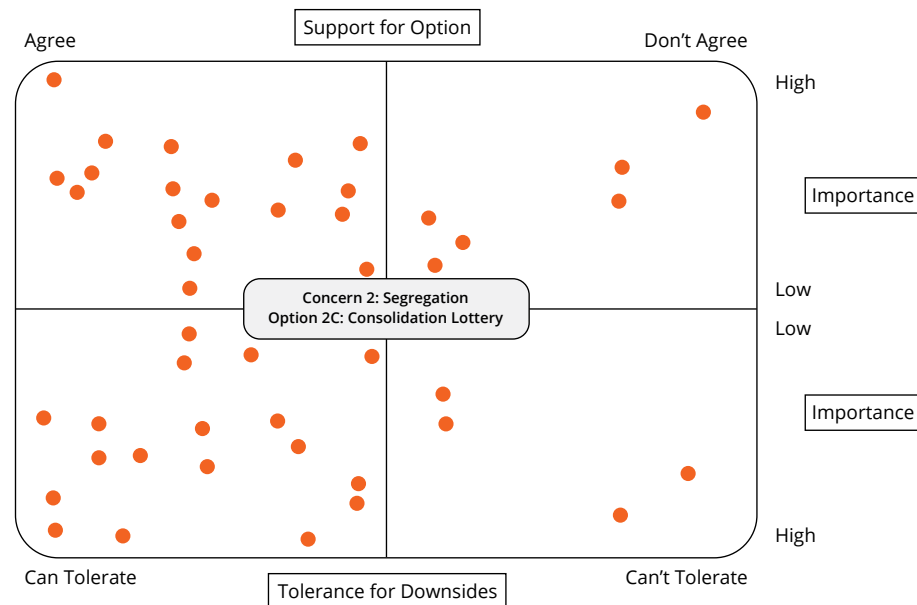
Though a majority supported requiring transportation to be provided, votes were dispersed throughout the polarity grid. To attempt to reach higher levels of agreement, the following modifications to the original proposal were offered:



Consolidated Lottery

“Each county should have a uniform application and a consolidated lottery process through which families apply to any charter schools and district-run choice schools that they choose within that county.”

A uniform application and consolidated lottery could better inform all parents of choice options in a district, simplify the application process, and provide greater access for families with limited time and resources for information gathering. This option enables charters who rely on word-of-mouth marketing to reach additional populations and brings more equity and access to information about school choice (e.g. potential translation into many languages).



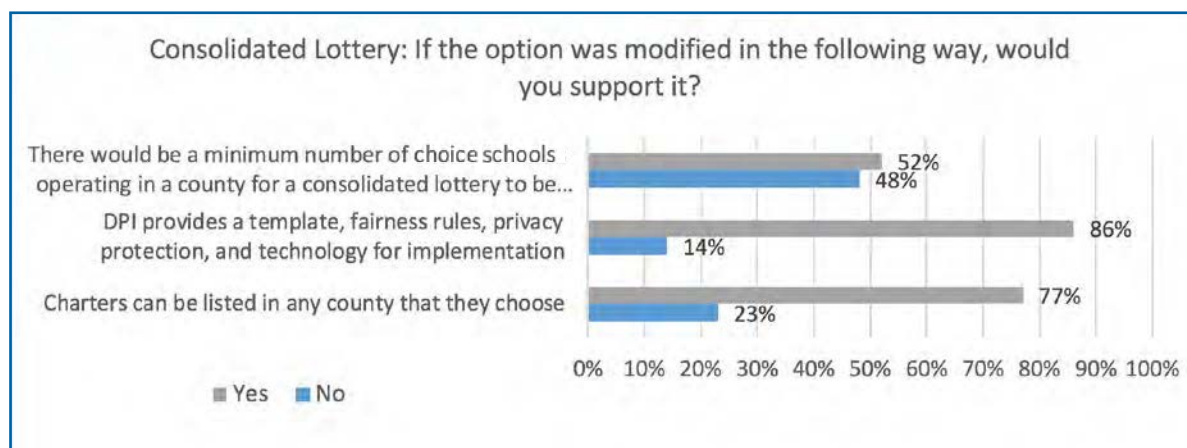
Uniform applications could foster collaboration and communication among schools and school systems and streamline application timeframes and deadlines. From an enrollment perspective, a central repository can offer predictability as to which students will actually attend which schools.

A centralized process could, however, bring about the inverse effect and move more advantaged kids into the charter system. It could also increase applications to charters overall, having a negative effect on district-run public schools. For counties where minimal choice exists in the first place, the impact will be minimal. For children with disengaged parents, this policy might not have much of an impact.

Logistical considerations included the question of whether it is really possible to hold a consolidated lottery that includes charters in multiple nearby counties. Increased bureaucracy was a concern as well. Past silos and existing tensions will make implementation difficult, and charters and districts would have to collaborate. Questions about which entity will be running the lottery and issues of trust and incentives to provide equal access to information were raised.

Proposed Modifications for Consolidated Lottery

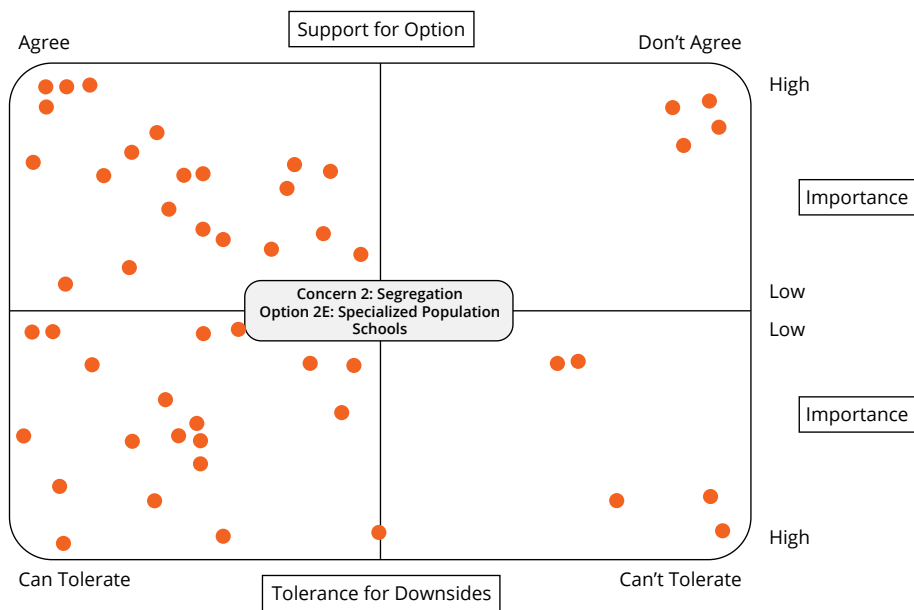
Votes for holding a consolidated lottery were somewhat dispersed throughout the polarity grid. To attempt to reach higher levels of agreement, the following modifications to the original proposal were offered:



Specialized Population Schools

“Support or expand models of charter schools that may not be integrated but serve a population of students who are not getting their needs met elsewhere.”

After additional discussion of segregation, the forum participants proposed a final option that had not originally been proposed: Specialized Population Schools. This option addresses the idea that a “segregated” school could be a positive rather than a negative, such as a school that serves the needs of African-American girls. Supporters felt this type of school is important in meeting the needs of a population not getting the right support elsewhere. However, questions arose over the legality of expressly providing an education for some special populations (e.g. race- or gender- based schools) that excludes others.



Segregation: Where We Agree and Disagree

The vast majority of forum participants agreed that:

- North Carolina should support or expand models of charter schools that may not be integrated but serve a population of students who are not getting their needs met elsewhere.

A substantial number of forum members agreed that:

- Each county should have a uniform application and consolidated lottery process IF:
 - Charters can be listed in any county they choose, OR
 - DPI provides a template, fairness rules, privacy protection, and technology for implementation.

Many participants agreed that:

- All choice options within district run schools and all charter and voucher schools should come with a transportation option for each child. However, agreement was not unanimous, and, even with proposed modifications, many participants could not be moved to support the option.

Forum participants were divided over whether:

- Charters should have an outreach plan that will enable its student population to reflect the racial and income demographics of the student population of the county in which it was located.
- There should be no limits on parental choice based on racial or economic outcomes.

The strongest debates related to segregation concerns centered on the conflict between three values: a family's right to make choices that benefit individual children, education as a collective benefit to society, and the relative benefit of having racially and ethnically integrated schools. The vast majority of forum participants held all of these values to some degree. Most recognized the benefit of diverse school populations and supported equal access to educational opportunity. However, many were unwilling to have the state enforce racial and socioeconomic balance at expense of families choosing what is best for their children. The primary issue was how strongly participants weighted these three values.

The tension between these fundamental values surfaced during the values session early in the program: Is the purpose of school primarily to benefit individual students or to benefit the community? Is unfettered parental choice or having schools with diverse populations more important? The division among the participants in the cohorts to the weighting of these values, unsurprisingly, persisted through the program. By the end, however, the two groups better understood the underpinnings of the other group's perspective.

Concerns about Flexibility

"We need to offer similar flexibility for efficiency and innovation for all educational providers that are funded with public dollars."

Background and Key Issues

The North Carolina General Assembly passed the *Charter School Act* in 1996 to allow for the establishment of schools that, among other goals, would "encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods," "create new professional opportunities for teachers," and "improve student learning." Simply put, charters were given budgetary and regulatory flexibility in order to be able to innovate.

Some school-choice proponents also say that increased competition will lead to greater quality in district-run public school because the charter schools will provide models, or the market will demand change. However, district-school advocates argue that district schools are expected to compete but with a major disadvantage: they lack the flexibility to create the desired efficiencies and innovations. Budget line items, school-calendar rules, and teacher ratios and licensing requirements are just some examples of areas where an LEA does not have the flexibility a charter enjoys. In addition, if an original motivation for creating charter schools was the flexibility to innovate and then to scale and share those innovations with district schools, many believe that this scaling and sharing should be explicitly encouraged.

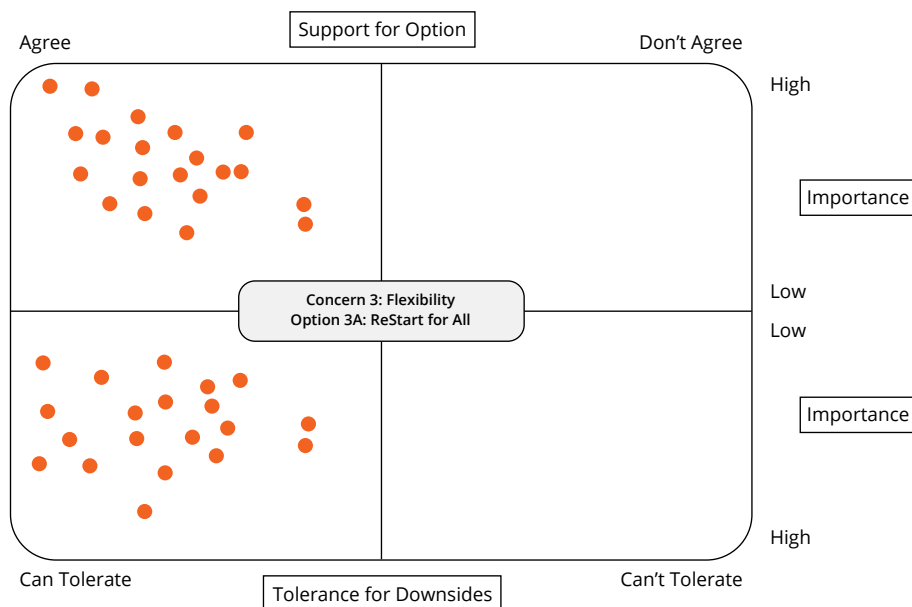
Policy Options to Address Flexibility Concerns

The following policy options were proposed by forum members as potential ways to enhance flexibility and spur innovation in charter and traditional public schools alike.

Restart for All

"Any district school should be able to apply to be a Restart school."

Being designated as a Restart school provides that school the flexibility to use resources to meet the needs of its students. It incentivizes planning for how to best use resources and allows a school to get started on improvement sooner, rather than having to wait for three years of failing results. It is currently available only to schools that have test-based grades deemed to be "failing." This proposal would enable any school to develop a school-improvement plan and apply for Restart status to have the flexibility to implement it.

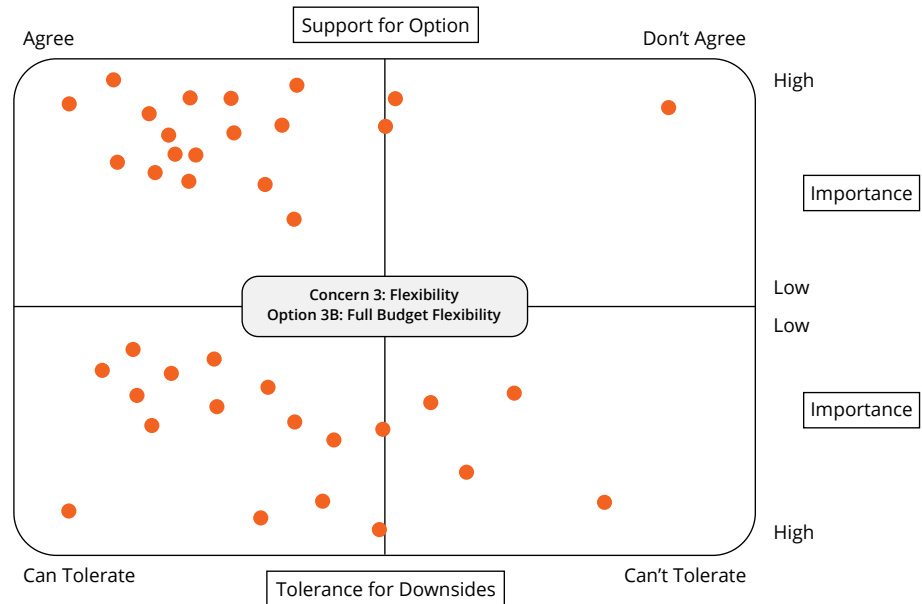


A downside is that this plan may unintentionally increase state involvement as some type of approval body would be required. Building the capacity to plan also requires resources (talent and funding). Participants pointed to the need to rename the program to avoid stigma and the fact that there is not enough data yet to prove whether these programs actually improve student performance.

Full Budget Flexibility

“Every school should get its full state budget to spend in the way it determines best meets the needs of its students, including setting teacher salaries, and the LEA should be able to set each school’s calendar and length of the instructional day as long as each school meets the constitutional minimum instructional time.”

Full flexibility with state funds would empower local boards of education, leaders, and teachers and to use funding towards actual needs of the schools, and could also enable them to be more innovative and competitive with charter schools.

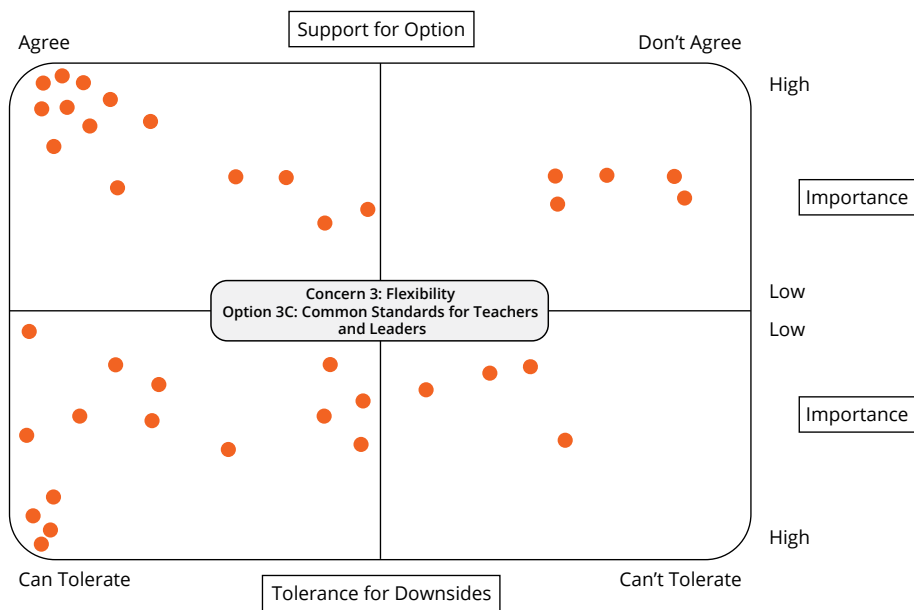


However, not all principals have training to do this, and an accountability system would be needed along with incentives for success. There’s also potential for misuse of funds and a gaming of the system. Potential for salary equity issues exist in this system.

Common Standards for Teachers and Leaders

“There should be a set of common minimum standards for teachers and leaders for all state-funded schools.”

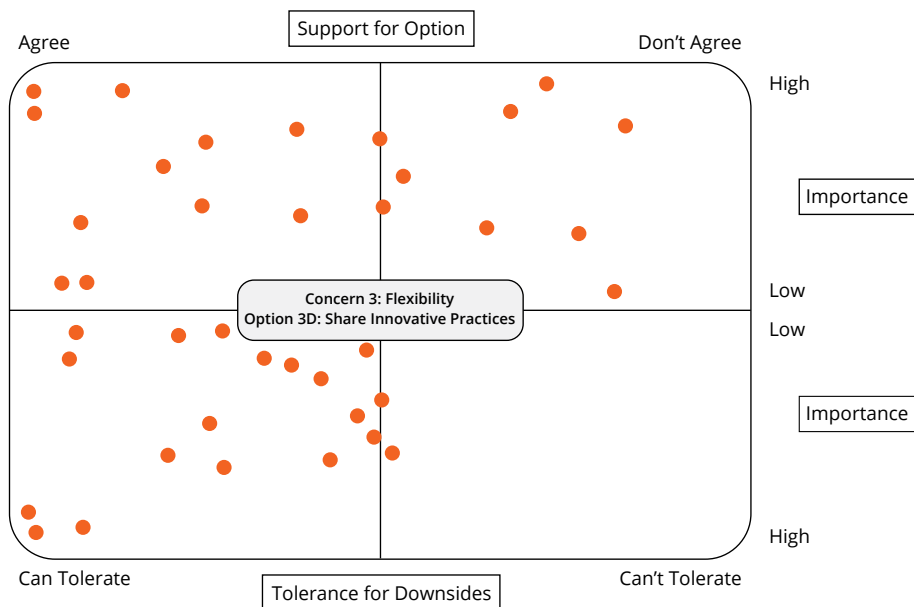
Having a set of common standards would give traditional public schools the same flexibility as charters, but only if the standards move to include the flexibility charters enjoy, not the other way. It also could address the shortage of certified teachers, but could take pressure off the state to work on increasing the number of certified teachers. It may have the effect of having more unqualified teachers in the classroom.



Share Innovative Practices

"Each charter school should be required to share the results of its innovative practices with the other schools at its grade level in the county in which it is located."

Charters sharing best practices with traditional schools is a stated justification for the existence of charters. Furthermore it could help overcome resistance to collaboration and benefit more students. A downside is that people and organizations don't generally like being *required* to share, and it might be preferable for the desired behavior to be better enabled or incentivized instead. Additionally, no platform for sharing exists and one would have to be created.



Flexibility: Where We Agree and Disagree

Overall, policy options to address flexibility issues showed the highest levels of agreement among the 2019 forum participants. The ability to operate and innovate within a school and school system was a desired outcome for a majority of participants.

Although support was not unanimous for each option, for members who opposed particular options, almost all indicated a tolerance for the stated downsides. And even when the downsides could not be tolerated, the intensity of that intolerance was mild.

All forum participants who voted agreed that:

- Any district school should be able to apply to be a Restart school. In fact, this option had the most support of any option considered by the forum, regardless of the area of concern.

Almost all forum participants agreed that:

- Every school should get its full state budget to spend in the way it determines best meets the needs of its students

A majority of forum participants agreed that:

- There should be a set of common minimum standards for teachers and leaders for all state-funded schools. For those who were opposed, the intensity of that disagreement and intolerance for downsides was not extreme.

Many forum participants agreed that:

- Each charter school should be required to share the results of its innovative practices with the other schools at its grade level in the county in which it is located. Yet even those who didn't support the option could tolerate the named downsides.

Concerns about Accountability

Statement: "We need a system of accountability that includes alignment of expectations and metrics and is used by all educational providers that are funded with public dollars."

Background and Key Issues

Many families make choices about where they send their children to school based on quality: where will their children get the best education possible? However, quality can be exceedingly difficult to measure because different

schools rely on different tests and metrics, and not all of those measures are publicly available or easy to access.

In addition, quality could refer to test scores, future earnings of students, educational attainment, growth, or the likelihood of a student becoming a flourishing adult. Private and public schools seldom share curricula or administer the same tests, and methodological concerns over comparisons of quality are also at play.

Currently, the State Board of Education *may* terminate a charter school if it is low-performing on state tests in two of the prior three years, but charters may remain open if they can show they are making measurable progress. However, measurable progress is not defined, and there are currently 28 continually low-performing charters.

Participants also raised the concern of perception vs reality: the general public often holds the view that charter schools perform better than their traditional public-school counterparts even when that is not true. All charter schools are required to administer the same tests that district schools administer and to publicly report the results. State test results consistently show wide variation in charter performance, with many high- and low-performing charters, and a similarly wide variation among district schools. Many participants agreed that some charters aren't as effective as perceived, but they aren't being held accountable for falling short.

With regard to private schools that accept opportunity scholarships, or vouchers, that subsidize students' private school tuition, comparing quality is even more difficult. Though each is required to administer some nationally standardized test or equivalent measure, they don't have to use the same one. All have to report results to the state, but the aggregate results are only public record if they accept more than 25 scholarship students per year.⁶

Additionally, an overemphasis on test-based accountability can lead to unintended consequences like "teaching to the test," at the expense of other aspects of a well-rounded education. Finally, a perceived lack of accountability in the management of *all* school types exists.

Policy Options to Address Accountability Concerns

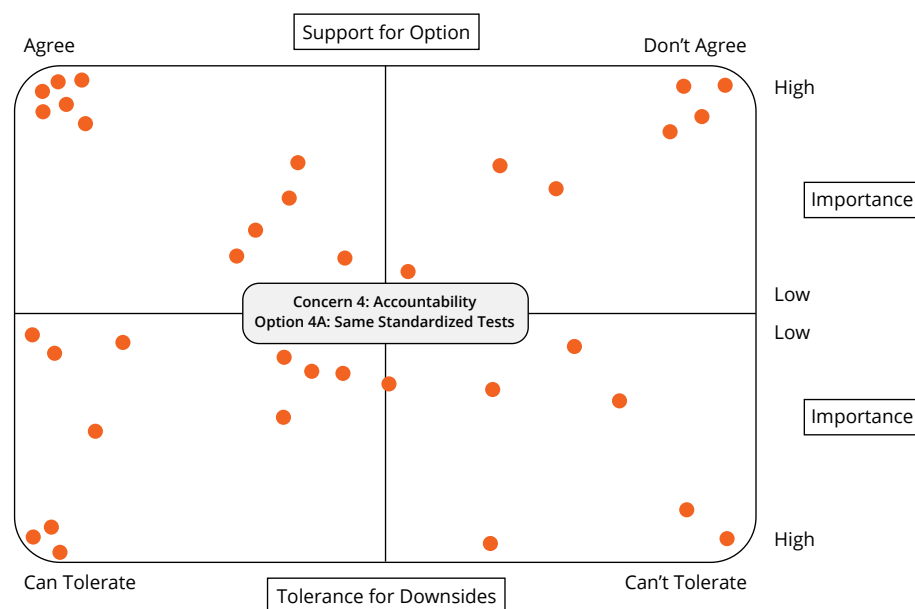
The following policy options were proposed by forum members as potential ways to address accountability questions in schools. For each possible action, much of the discussion centered on issues related to testing: what kinds of skills and attributes should be tested, how to ensure accurate comparisons, and concerns over teaching to a test. However, all agreed that metrics for accountability were critical.

6. N.C. Gen. Stat. § 115C-562.5

Same Standardized Tests

“Every school that receives state funding should be required to administer and publicly report the results of the same standardized tests.”

A uniform basic measure allows for more accurate comparisons of outcomes. Measuring all publicly-funded schools in the same way would provide useful information not only for parents but for funding decisions by policymakers as well. However, applying a standard test may not account for the specialized missions of some schools. It could also discourage some private schools from accepting vouchers. Finally, much emphasis was placed on including measurements for student growth, as opposed to emphasizing proficiency, in whatever test would be chosen.

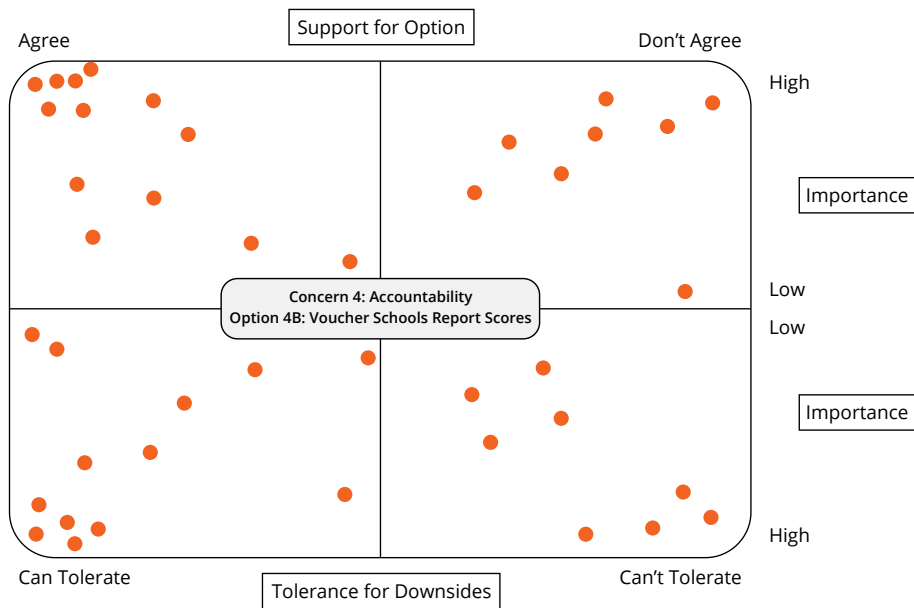


Voucher Schools Report Scores

“Every school that receives vouchers should be required to administer either the state tests or a nationally normed test, either to voucher students or to all of their students, and should be required to publicly report the outcomes.”

Advocates believed that requiring voucher schools to administer tests and report outcomes provide a desired level of transparency and accountability that is currently missing. Nationally normed tests may be seen as better tests, and they allow the opportunity for comparison to the rest of the nation or even other countries. Some members believed that using these types of tests would be less likely to deter voucher schools, since many private schools use these tests already, but others believed that having to publicly report the scores might discourage participation. Others believed that if schools are resistant to reporting scores, they shouldn't accept public money in the first place.

Some participants were concerned about the lack of uniform comparison to the other schools in the state if nationally normed tests were allowed rather than North Carolina's state tests.

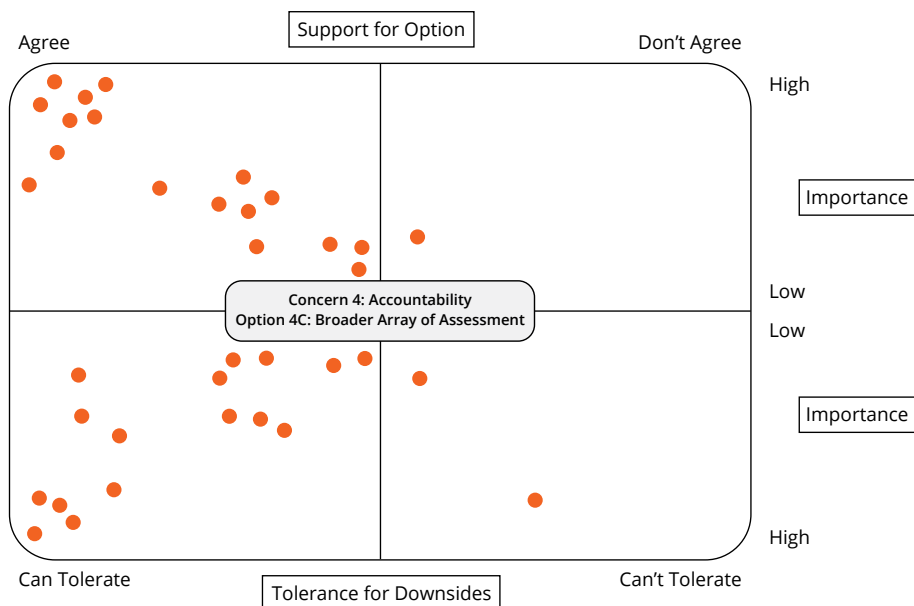


Broader Array of Assessment

["Develop a broader array of assessment tools to evaluate school quality at all state-funded schools."](#)

Assessing a broader range of stated educational goals, including soft skills and test performance over time, for example, would offer a more holistic picture of student achievement and growth. Such assessment may also alleviate too strong a focus on "teaching to the test."

However, measuring hard skills and traditional knowledge areas is critical, and opponents warned against losing too much focus on academic achievement. The problem is not necessarily that we're testing the wrong things but that the stakes are too high. Many acknowledged the difficulty in developing uniformly valid assessments of soft skills and skill characteristics as well.

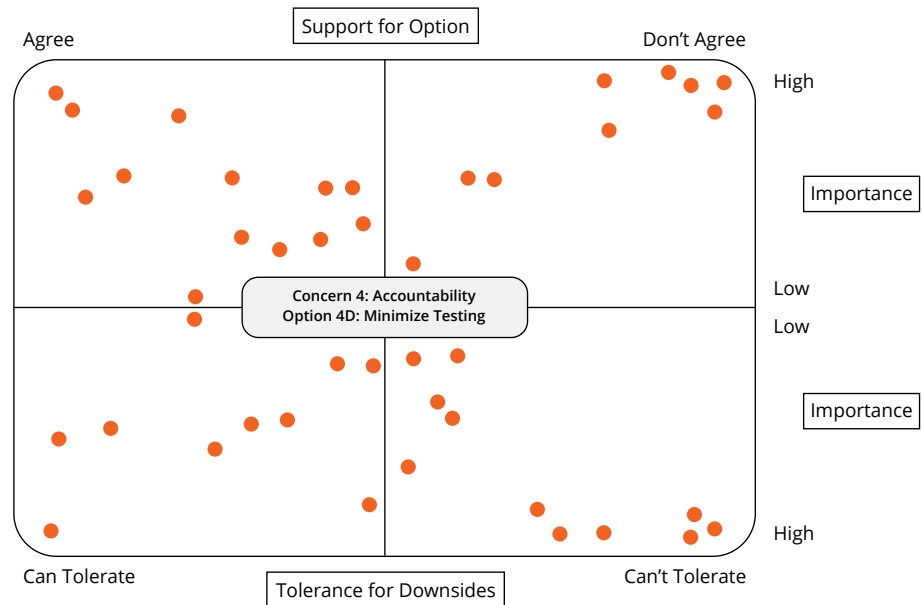


Minimize Testing

"The state should require district and charter schools to use only those standardized tests required by federal law."

Less testing provides for more instructional time and would empower teachers by giving them more control over their classrooms.

However, federal laws and tests change, and schools would be at their mercy. Many were opposed to giving more authority over our schools to the federal government, and federal requirements might not even tell us what we want to know.



Accountability: Where We Agree and Disagree

The fundamental conflict within this area of concern was between the desire for accountability and quality assurances, anxieties related to over-testing or misguided testing, and reluctance to intrude on private schools that accept vouchers. Some participants were wary of too much reliance on tests as an indicator of quality, while others were more concerned about the potential lack of accountability if testing systems are drastically dismantled. Forum members also expressed strong opinions about what kinds of skills and knowledge should be tested, e.g. soft skills and characteristics vs. academic subject matter.

Summary: Where We Agree and Disagree Overall

Because the following findings were based on participant polling and discussion in our third and fourth meetings, which not all members could attend, we do not report percentages agreeing or disagreeing with the statements but characterize the degree of agreement and disagreement more generally.

The vast majority of forum members agreed that:

- Charters should not be allowed to request local funding from county commissioners.
- Schools serving populations with unique needs should be supported.
- Applying for Restart designation should be an option for all schools.
- Every school should receive flexibility to spend its full state budget in the way that best meets the needs of its students.
- A broader array of assessment tools should be used to assess all state-funded schools.

After making specific policy modifications, a substantial majority of forum members agreed that:

- Charter school student count should be taken more than once a year IF:
 - The state provides hold harmless money based on research;
 - Any student count policy for charter schools would also apply to district schools;
 - Some latitude is given on the enrollment cap; or
 - A minimum student count change would trigger an adjustment of funding.
- Each county should have a uniform application and consolidated lottery process for charters and district run choice schools within the county IF:
 - DPI provides a template, fairness rules, privacy protection, and technology for implementation; or
 - Charters can be listed in any county that they choose.

Many forum members, but not all, agreed that:

- The state should establish a set of common minimum standards for teachers and leaders of all state-funded schools.
- All choice options within district run schools and all charter and voucher schools should come with a transportation option for each child.

There was no consensus on whether:

- Charter schools should be required to share results of their innovative practices.

Forum members were divided over whether:

Funding:

- Charters should get a proportionate share of every funding source of the LEAs from which they enroll students.
- Charters should receive state funding based on the state's LEA allotment formulas.

Segregation:

- Each charter should have an outreach plan that will enable its student population to reflect the racial and income demographics of the student population of the county in which it is located.
- There should be no limits on parental choice based on racial or economic outcomes.

Accountability:

- Every school that receives state funding should be required to administer and publicly report the results of the same standardized tests.
- Every school that receives vouchers should be required to administer either the state tests or a nationally normed test, either to voucher students or to all of their students, and should be required to publicly report the outcomes.

How We Can Improve the Policymaking Environment in NC: A Parallel Process

Overview

A simultaneous process was embedded throughout the North Carolina Leadership Forum to identify ways in which participants and the state can improve the policymaking environment in North Carolina. This portion was new to the program in 2019 in response to suggestions made by members of NCLF Cohort 2. The process included the following efforts:

- Discuss the nature of the current policymaking environment and how we want it to be different.
- Offer initial ideas for how we can move in a desired direction.
- Categorize problems and ideas into agreed-upon themes for action.
- Identify examples of desired behavior and circumstances within each theme and propose ways to enhance them.
- Agree upon top implementable actions to pursue and assign responsibility for follow through.

After robust brainstorming and discussion sessions, the cohort offered the five following desired general behaviors and circumstances that would improve the policymaking environment in North Carolina:

1. End dehumanization in politics.
2. Decrease hyper-partisanship/polarization.
3. Decrease misstatements, political spin, and sensationalism in the media.
4. Provide enough time for a collaborative, deliberative process to work.
5. Officials should behave better and with better motives.

For the next step, the cohort emphasized the need to focus on specific actions and behaviors participants could pursue to support each of these themes. Forum members divided into groups to generate ideas to support each of the above themes. Two types of ideas emerged: action-oriented solutions and behavioral aspirations.

Possible Implementable Solutions

The following is a list of concrete actions that the group agreed could be collectively pursued by people in the room. Because the list was too numerous for this group to pursue all of the listed actions, forum members

agreed to focus on the top three implementable solutions, which appear in bold as the first three items below. Cohort members then volunteered to spearhead efforts to pursue these solutions.

- 1. Assign buddies of opposite parties for freshmen legislators.**
- 2. Establish one night each week for bipartisan dinner at a local restaurant.**
- 3. Hold monthly roundtable discussions with business and nonprofit leaders, the Governor, the President Pro Tempore, and the Speaker of the House.**
4. Establish (host) a bipartisan lunch table in the legislative dining room.
5. The leadership encourages (supports) bipartisan sponsorship of bills.
6. Create a bipartisan report card.
7. Create a centrist caucus.
8. Create a bipartisan fact check group.
9. Create a “Good News Group.” Provides actual copy for media highlighting:
 - a. Good things legislators do
 - b. Legislators who are working on legislation in a bipartisan fashion

Action Proposals and Behavioral Aspirations

While tangible actions for systemic change are essential, forum members felt that personal behaviors and accountability were equally important:

1. Call out inappropriate behavior in your own party—either privately or publicly.
2. Invite a member of the opposite party for a meal or coffee.
3. Find ways to pursue a goal with someone who shares your passion for the goal but does not, at least initially, agree with your proposed solution.
4. Refrain from misstatements, sensationalism, half-truths on social media.
5. Support and elect leaders with collaborative skill sets.
6. Invite someone who disagrees with you on an issue to talk, share, and explain. Look for common ground.
7. Set a tone of respect.
8. Commit to using the “sandwich” approach with colleagues. Offer negative feedback sandwiched between two positive comments.
9. Respond to concerns in a timely manner, honestly, and respectfully.
10. Let people know they are respected and being heard, even if you disagree.
11. Be mindful that passion can be interpreted as anger.

Although the group cannot cause this list of personal behaviors to be implemented, members of the group can model them. In addition, the group agreed to provide this list of desired personal behaviors to the UNC School of Government leaders with a request that members of the group be able to share them with incoming legislators during new legislator orientation.

What We Learned

What Participants Gained from and Valued about the Process

NCLF provides policy leaders both with the opportunity to learn about a topic of importance to the state and the chance to build the capacity to work more constructively with a wide range of leaders going forward. Participants in NCLF 2019 engaged in structured, deep, and extended conversation about school choice in North Carolina as well as about how to improve the political environment in North Carolina.

In the process, they increased their understanding of their own views on the topic as well as the views of others with different perspectives. They also experienced the importance of listening to others with whom they disagree, had the opportunity to express their views to people who did not already agree with them, and built relationships with people they otherwise had not had the opportunity to know well.

Building relationships

As with previous cohorts of NCLF, this group listed having the opportunity to build relationships with people they otherwise would not have interacted with as an extremely valuable aspect of the program. They appreciated “being able to share space with people who I don’t see eye to eye with. There was a humanity to it.”

Over 95% of the participants said that through the program they “formed relationships with one or more people of differing views that I likely would not have otherwise formed.” By the end of the program in August, all who responded to the post-program survey said they had had at least one conversation outside of the forum meetings with someone they did not know before the group began, and 57% of them had had four or more of these conversations.

One participant expressed it well when he said, “I am leaving with future partners in my attempts to solve some community problems. I invite anyone to talk more about it with me. I am leaving with a lot of new friends.”

Understanding School Choice

School choice is like most challenging policy issues: people with different ideologies and experiences hold different views on the nature of the problem and its best solutions. As with many issues, all but the most basic underlying facts that inform the school choice debate are interpreted differently, based on the perspective of the person examining them. In addition, the state’s policies and funding mechanisms relevant to school choice are complex, and school choice plays out differently in different geographic areas of the state.

Notwithstanding these challenges, according to the post-program survey, 95.7% of respondents agreed: “I learned more about school choice issues facing North Carolina.”

As one participant who doesn’t work specifically in education said, “This has been a crash course on the issues. Things I need to know about but had never had the opportunity to dive into. This will make me a better [leader] and better able to work in my community.”

Even participants with significant experience working in education enhanced their understanding of the issues. As one said, “I love the fact that I can work in education for 20 years, and after a six-day process, come out with a more sophisticated and nuanced perspective on critical education issues.”

According to the post-program survey:

- 95.7% of survey respondents reported they better understand their own values, opinions, and priorities concerning school choice.
- 60.9% reported that they view some issues about school choice in North Carolina differently than they did before participating in NCLF.

Understanding the Views of Others

Many participants pointed to the opportunity to gain a better understanding about how other people view education and school choice in North Carolina as one of the most valuable aspects of the program.

Significantly, 100% of respondents said that they better understand the values, opinions or priorities about school choice held by people with different perspectives than their own, and 96% said the same about education more generally.

Participants noted:

- [NCLF] provided a humanized, easy, and open forum to help folks open up across the aisle and have urgently needed conversations.
- I can appreciate the true motivation behind many people who endorse school choice for the true educational freedom as well as the deeply held convictions of those who support it despite many legitimate drawbacks.
- The facilitated conversations, beginning with structuring the conversation around values in the first meeting, helped me understand why people held their views.
- The forum also reaffirmed for me that there are good, well-intended people on both sides of issue.

The Value of Seeking to Understand

In addition to learning more about others’ opinions and motivations, participants also gained a stronger appreciation for the value in seeking out these opposing views in the first place:

- It took me a while to appreciate that the thing that comes out of this is the cohort. Rather than solving the problem, it is learning how to understand and talk to each other.

“I love the fact that I can work in education for 20 years, and after a six-day process, come out with a more sophisticated and nuanced perspective on critical education issues.”

“The opportunity to listen to you has been life-changing for me.”

- I see the importance of validating different opinions, rather than dismissing them as wrong.
- The process deepened my feeling that we must consistently reach out to a much broader political audience if we want to make progress as a community.
- I don't know that my views have changed, but the way I perceive others' views has changed. The process helped me slow down to consider where other people are coming from.
- Scale it as a best practice across NC and the nation and maybe globally too! 'Tis the need of the hour...developing conversations and trust across bridges.

In the post-program survey, respondents were asked, “In the last two months, how often have you talked about something substantive with someone of a different political party or ideology?”

Seventy-four percent reported talking about something substantive with someone of a different political party or ideology once a week or more (21.74% every day, 26.09% twice a week, 26.09% once a week). Approximately half of respondents reported this as an increase over the frequency they had such conversations before participating in NCLF.

As one person said poignantly to another member of the class during the debrief session, “The opportunity to listen to you has been life-changing for me.”

Building Skills for Constructive Engagement

A primary goal of NCLF is to help state policy leaders build the capacity to build constructive engagement in the public policy arena moving forward. The aim is not necessarily to have everyone agree; rather, to understand differences in a way that leads to the development of widely accepted solutions. As one participant explained, “it's not how you vote, it's how you behave.”

Among responding participants, 86% reported that participating in NCLF resulted in their gaining skills “that will help me engage constructively with people of different views.”

Forum members expressed appreciation for the fundamental skills and behaviors learned and practiced during the program. Specifically, participants said they learned:

- Slowing down a decision-making process into the various elements (information; values; compromise);
- Hearing different points of view and expressing viewpoints in a way that I hoped could be heard by others;
- It is important to hear the other, to genuinely listen, and to seek to understand, whether I agree or not;
- [to] slow down and consider where other people are coming from;
- [to] expand my viewpoint and my sources of information.

Hope for the Future

A final idea that emerged in debrief discussions and post-survey comments was the participants' belief that North Carolina's leaders can, in fact, work together to address challenges facing our state. Participants repeatedly referred to an increased hope for future efforts of working across differences:

- [I am] leaving with a hopeful, more realistic, and energized view of working with people to solve our problems.
- [I am] leaving with future partners in attempts to solve some community problems.
- This was the most hopeful thing I have participated in this year—it reaffirmed my commitment to developing relationships across difference.
- [The program] helped change my view that compromise is still possible.

What NCLF learned

1. Intentional programming to facilitate building relationships and trust is important.

With Cohort 3 as with Cohort 2, NCLF invited a wide array of people to participate with varying roles in providing education across school types in NC, across political parties, ideologies, geography, sector, gender, and race. The program was carefully structured to encourage the participants to build trust and form relationships across these differences. We started out giving each participant five minutes to talk about a person or place that had been instrumental to their becoming the person they are. Participants were urged to be candid and vulnerable, and the facilitators modeled this. Participants engaged fully over the course of three hours. At the end, several people said that it was the most impactful introductory session they had ever participated in, enabling them to view each of their co-participants as fully human. In addition, we had diverse home room groups that spent at least some time together each session to provide some relational ballast, people were assigned cross partisan buddies to meet with between sessions, to enable them to go deeper, and we carefully arranged seats around our tables to try to give each person exposure to as many other people as possible. All meetings were overnight so that there could be some unstructured social time each session. The aspects of the program enabled trust and relationships to be built, and they should remain intentional aspects of the program.

2. This program will not cause participants to change their basic values, and should not, but it can cause them to be more nuanced in their views.

One of the problems with our current policymaking environment is that the positions of many people are absolute, and they believe they have to be 100% right to win. If they can come to understand the validity of the views of others, and have some bit of ambiguity about the absolute rightness of their own view, or in some way be open to nuancing their position in a way to minimize the downsides for others, then there is an opening for constructive engagement that can produce policy solutions that a broad swath of people

“My view on specific school choice issue maybe hasn’t changed but my approach in how to have those one-on-one hard conversations with individuals has. [The] key is to be relational, approachable, and LISTEN.”

can support, or at least tolerate. By adding a focus on what the concerns are related to the topic, and what the inherent downsides are of favored ideas, NCLF enables participants to understand why others resist or oppose their ideas, and enables them to nuance those ideas without abandoning them.

3. Adding the step of trying to modify proposals to gain more support helps build a very useful skill for policymakers.

In Cohort 3, NCLF added the use of polarity charts to determine the degree of support for various actions that had been proposed to address the concerns and to assess the level of tolerance of their downsides. This let us see the areas of consensus and the areas of polarization. It also let us see which proposals had fairly strong support but also significant discomfort. We decided to add a session to let the group try to think of way to modify, or amend, the proposals in order to try to build support. In most cases the group was able to create modifications that increased support significantly without losing the initial base of supporters. This amendment process is a very important skill to forging broad consensus in the legislative process, and it was a worthwhile addition to the program.

4. Providing a place where people of different races can talk candidly about issues of race was important to deepening the conversation.

Our society does not provide many places where people feel safe to talk candidly about race, especially with people of other races. It was impossible to talk about school choice without talking about segregation, race-based student assignment, and other education issues that impact minority communities. These conversations began in the first session, and they continued throughout the program. In the last session, the co-chairs modeled telling their personal stories and views about school integration. The group then had an extended, deep, and candid discussion about whether having racially balanced schools was more or less important than parents' having unfettered choice about where to send their children to school. Being able to have this conversation was the result of the trust that had been built in the previous sessions and built on that trust.

5. Adding a segment on how to improve the political environment enabled participants to directly address current political divisions.

In response to suggestions from Cohort 2, NCLF added a segment to the program on how to improve our political environment. The group described what concerns them about the current environment, articulated, broadly, how it could be improved, and then proposed specific, incremental ways that it could be improved. Some of these were actionable, and the group picked three that participants volunteered to try to get implemented. Others were more aspirational personal behaviors, and the group agreed to try to have these presented at the UNC School of Government's new legislator training. It will be important to follow up to see whether the action items are implemented, and with what result, and to assess after some time whether the participants in the program feel that this segment of the program was time well spent.

6. The quality of facilitation is important, and this will be a challenge for replication.

One of the assets of the current NCLF program, according to participant feedback, is the very high quality of facilitation. Although data and feedback demonstrate that NCLF is having an impact on the policy leaders who participate, it will require a larger-scale program to create a critical mass of alumni to be able to have an impact on the state's policymaking environment. To do this, NCLF plans to replicate the statewide program regionally in North Carolina. Replicating the high quality facilitation will be an important part of this. This involves the modeling by the diverse steering committee of our working together respectfully, with forthrightness, and with humor. In addition, some members of the steering committee are exceptionally skilled group facilitators. It will be important to the success of the regional programs to learn how to replicate this high quality of group facilitation.

7. There is a need for ongoing alumni programming.

Since the Cohort 3 program ended, there have been very public examples of cross-partisan dysfunctionality in North Carolina's public policy arena. It would be beneficial if NCLF could develop the capacity to bring together our alumni to be a positive force in these situations. It will also leverage the benefits of the program to reinforce the lessons learned and to capitalize on the momentum and energy that is apparent at the end of the forum. Giving participants an opportunity to create relationships across cohorts is also a desired outcome.



Joel Luther

Conclusion

For our democracy to succeed, policy leaders must be able to work together to create broadly acceptable solutions to our state's greatest challenges. This year's group of N.C. leaders addressed important concerns related to school choice. They found some solutions they agreed on, some that were negotiable, and some about which they had very significant disagreements. In the process, participants came to understand what values, experiences and perceptions lay under their disagreements, and they came to trust, respect, and perhaps even like each other.

Even in these politically fractious times, it is possible to bring together a widely diverse group of policy leaders and provide them the opportunity to gain the will, skills, and relationships that will enable them to constructively engage with each other in the future. NCLF has provided, and should continue to provide, this opportunity to North Carolina's leaders.



Land D. Elliott

Appendix A | NCLF 2019 Participant List

1. **Jim Anthony**, Colliers International Raleigh
2. **Deanna Ballard**, N.C. Senate
3. **Jonathan Barfield, Jr.**, New Hanover County Board of Commissioners
4. **Lisa Stone Barnes**, N.C. House of Representatives
5. **Tamara Barringer***, UNC-CH Kenan-Flagler Business School; Former NCGA Member
6. **Anita Brown-Graham***, UNC School of Government
7. **Ashton Clemmons**, N.C. House of Representatives
8. **Kit Cramer**, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce
9. **Paul Cuadros**, UNC School of Media and Journalism
10. **Jeffrey Elmore**, N.C. House of Representatives
11. **James Ford**, North Carolina State Board of Education
12. **Amy Scott Galey**, Alamance County Board of Commissioners
13. **Maurice “Mo” Green***, Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation
14. **Rita Haire**, A.M. Haire Corporation
15. **John Hood***, John William Pope Foundation
16. **Ray Jeffers**, Person County Board of Commissioners
17. **Dale Jenkins**, Medical Mutual Insurance Company of North Carolina
18. **Simon Johnson**, Quality Education Academy
19. **Mike Long**, Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina
20. **Tomas Lopez**, Democracy NC
21. **Chris Lowder**, Superintendent of Cabarrus County Schools
22. **Natasha Marcus**, N.C. Senate
23. **Ann McColl**, The Innovation Project
24. **Chuck Neely***, Williams Mullen, Former NCGA Member
25. **Kate Pett**, Asheville City Schools Foundation
26. **Rodney Pitts**, Southern Elevator
27. **Keith Poston**, Public School Forum of North Carolina
28. **Robert Reives***, N.C. House of Representatives
29. **Cheryl Riley**, Victory Christian Center School
30. **Vickie Sawyer**, N.C. Senate
31. **Patrick Sims**, The Hunt Institute
32. **Erica Smith**, N.C. Senate
33. **Jule Smith**, Fred Smith Company
34. **Thomas Stith**, The Michael Thomas Group
35. **Terry Stoops**, John Locke Foundation
36. **Tammi Sutton**, KIPP Eastern N.C. Public Schools
37. **Thomas Vaidhyan**, Aten Inc.
38. **Jay Wagner**, Mayor of High Point
39. **Leslie Winner***, Former Executive Director, Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation; Former NCGA Member

*Denotes NCLF Steering Committee Member

Appendix B | Full List of School Choice Concerns, as Identified by Participants

During the first NCLF meeting, participants were asked to identify a comprehensive list of concerns regarding school choice. Each concern voiced was recorded on sticky notes and later transcribed and grouped by theme. This list appears below.

1. Accountability + Quality (Charters and non-LEA)

- Choices made based on assumptions of quality aren't always true
- Effectiveness of charter schools is widely spread—they aren't all better in equal quality
- Charter schools have evolved from focused and planned + as have grown -> less focus
- Some parents don't like magnet options. Doubt whether charters are being held accountable
- The rules of charter school admin aren't working
- Lack of accountability in the management of all kinds of schools, district or not
- Parents concerned that because charter + private teachers are typically paid less, the educational quality must be lower in those options
- Lack of quality control in the outcomes of students
- Parent concerned about charters not offering AP courses, less opportunity for higher-level courses
- Inequity in accountability system input on MWBE
- Charter student concern: Will it interfere with my social life?
- Alternative school students concerned about opportunities to play sports
- Private charter may not be better—public perception to the contrary

2. Competition

- Public schools are supposed to “compete” but at disadvantage because lack of flexibility—calendar, time of starting, etc.
- Public schools should have some flexibility of charters
- Non-parent perception: schools of choice are a response to a problem but aren't solving it
- Equity: charters don't meet needs of underserved + children crisis
- Choice is an illusion: if you make a choice to get one amenity, you will have to give up something else, limited funds
- Why don't district schools have the same flexibility as charters do?
- Competition among districts, charters, private schools, some schools will improve districts—without competition they won't get better

3. Unequal Access to Choice + Marketing

- Illusion of choice—there is no choice if no access because no free or reduced-price lunch, transportation, location

- Unequal access because e.g. transportation, online applications
- Transportation burden of charter school
- Equity—athletes have more ability to choose schools
- There is not equal access to choice options across the state, geographical distances
- Will schools of choice be around long enough, do they have the managerial expertise to stay in business
- Rural areas don't expect to get school options, will lose out to urban places
- Information not such that all parents can make the best choice for their kids
- Some parents better positioned to figure out how to better meet needs of kids
- Information is not readily accessible or understandable e.g. access to internet
- Parents have a hard time figuring out best choice
- Every child deserves a great education but depending on how choice is done, kids of privileged, savvy parents are most likely to benefit from choice
- Parents whose life is so hard, at rugged edge, no time to educate about choices—which disadvantages their kids
- Too many choices can mean no real choice
- Student lotteries limit choice. Creates winners + losers for charters + magnets
- Parents can't afford private schools but are dissatisfied with district school discipline and can't get into charters
- Choice process is not fair—one parent thought the charter was private and would have to pay tuition, Latina parent

4. Funding Concerns

- Funding system for charters is not working
- Public perception is that charters are taking needed funds from district schools
- Charter parents feel funding is not equitable, no capital funds
- Traditional public schools already underfunded, so choice options will destroy them in rural areas in particular

5. Impact of Choice on District Schools and Communities + Segregation

- If you have choice many kids get left behind
- Charters undermine public schools because funding, language used (public schools last option)
- The more choice the harder for public schools to succeed
- Some are concerned about negative perceptions of district schools being exacerbated by choice-school marketing
- Public schools let down
 - Sad, old schools will be left
 - Traditional schools left behind

- Lack of community spirit from transience motivates non-public schools
- Choices reduce community cohesion
- Is the purpose of school primarily about individual students or about society as a whole?
- Not the right approach to set up charters, should invest in community schools
- District schools are integrated into the local community, sports teams, etc.—choice threatens that community role
- Reaction to choice varies by county: in rural counties, choice leads to losing best students, best teachers, money. Can lead to school closing
- Flat-line population will affect school funding in rural areas. Tendency to blame charters or homeschooling even if they are not responsible
- Diversity loss + engagement with people who are different + civic education
- Choice can lead to lack of community support of district school
- Not maximizing potential benefits of choice

Segregation

- Resegregation because decreased focus on community and more on individual
- Choice provides avenue for white flight
- Choice programs lead to racial segregation among public schools
- Some parents embrace magnet school choice but think charters will widen racial disparities, separate whites from students of color
- Private schools in NC were sometimes created in response to integration—need to talk about history, put it on the table

6. Vouchers

- Parents are concerned that if they use a choice option, the rug will be pulled out from under them later
- Should state be funding vouchers for religious schools?
- Public dollars for private schools that are unregulated + may have specific agendas
- Dollars for vouchers to unaccountable schools

7. The way the debate plays out

- Pro-choice people are labeled as anti-education
- Political polarization
 - Dems/NCAE on one side
 - Reps/private/charter other side
 - But parents and others are caught in between, partisan politics an obstacle
- Politics shouldn't assume that there is a set of beliefs all children should learn
- Emphasis on individual child over public good is bad for society/community/country
- Antipathy between sides
- Parents feel pressure to provide a great education, driving a lot of anxiety and interest in school choice

8. Concerns about traditional/district public schools

- Current system doesn't work, which leads to alternatives or choices being demanded
- System doesn't work for some kids
- Public schools aren't working—most students are not reading proficiently at grade level
- Behavior and fights in public schools prevent learning
- One size fits all doesn't fit many
- Both ends lose out when goal is to get middle to pass the test
- For some kids none of these choices fit the kid's needs and don't give enough autonomy and flexibility, control over pacing, etc.
- Lack of innovation and responsiveness (for a variety of reasons)
- Schools not integrated into life
- Parents may feel more empowered in charters than in district schools, where they don't have as much access to administration
- Districts may not serve students with unique learning styles—so charters may address them better
- Parents concerned that districts won't serve special needs well enough, personalized enough
- Concern that it's too easy for parents to opt out of all the choices (home school)
- Charter schools with smaller class sizes can be a lifesaver for some kids—otherwise feel trapped
- Parent concerned that districts may be loosening up discipline on “black” students
- Public school unevenness is driving housing choices—because assigned school doesn't meet needs
- Public education consumes lots of state resources, does not necessarily get results, and only some parents can relocate to “choose” better schools
- Parents are looking for community but in districts that reassign frequently, stability is lacking

9. Across-the-board concerns

- Decreasing funding for arts
- Foreign languages should be taught more frequently
- Some are concerned about safety in charter schools, too
- Parents are concerned about whether you will educate our children or indoctrinate them
- Students with learning disabilities wonder what schools will be best if they do not aspire to attend college
- Socialization is important aspect for students; ability of students to stay w/ their friends
- Student concern—where do I feel safe? Where will I not be bullied?
- Not enough access to mental health care + counseling. What does that mean for post H.S. success?
- Students concerned about cultural competence and responsiveness of the teachers

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