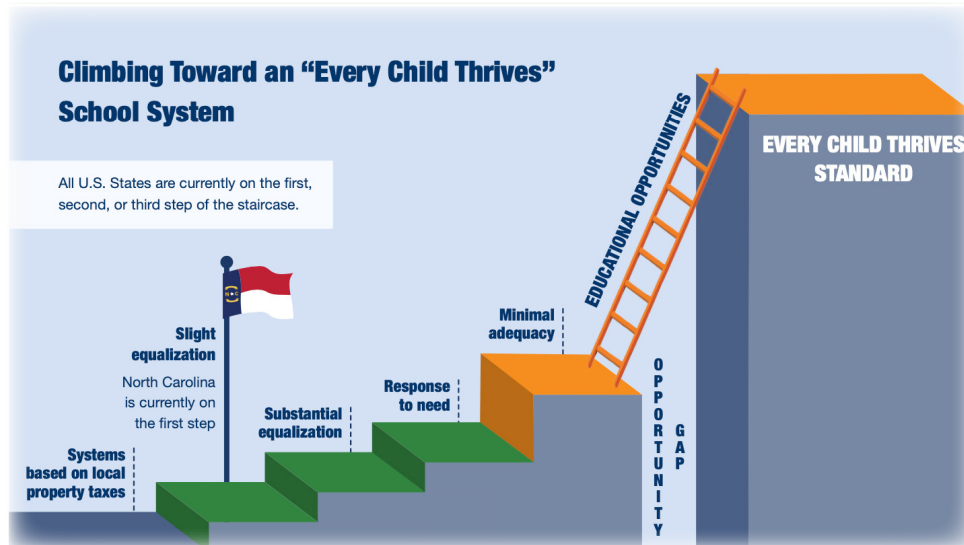




## Project Estimates Price Tag for Equal Educational Opportunity in K-12



What would it take to create a state school system where every student from any background or circumstance is provided with educational opportunities that prepare them to thrive economically and socially in college, career, and life? How much would such a system cost, if it could offer the resources and programs needed to help students overcome the challenges they face inside and outside of schools?

Politicians sometimes talk of creating such a school system, often invoking the idea that schools are the “great equalizer” for young people in our society, but they have never provided the necessary resources. Instead, they have imposed measures such as one-way accountability systems that hold schools accountable for ensuring all students reach high academic standards without holding lawmakers accountable for providing the resources required to accomplish this goal.

A new report focuses in on North Carolina to face this challenge head on with a novel approach.

First, it draws upon research and recommendations from a panel of North Carolina practitioners and other stakeholders to create *Every Child Thrives*, a set of 12 recommendations for what schools would really need to do in order to provide equal educational opportunity to all students. The report then takes those recommendations and goes a step further.

It places a price tag on them.

Spoiler alert: We cannot build a school system where *Every Child Thrives* without meaningful and sustained investment.

Starting with an analysis of North Carolina’s public schools, the report finds that the provision of true educational opportunity in the state would be \$36.6 billion to \$43.4 billion per year. This would move the per-pupil spending from one of the worst in the U.S. (approximately \$11,300), to one of the best—at roughly \$23,600 to \$28,000 per pupil.

The North Carolina study is part of a larger project called [The Price of Opportunity](#). That larger project considers the price tags for two distinct approaches for lifting all children up: (1) this school-based approach, or (2) an approach that greatly reduces larger societal stratification and thus only looks to schools to play a straightforward education role. When our politicians choose to pursue the former—when they allow racialized poverty and concentrated poverty to inflict severe harms on the nation’s children—they create a situation where school resources must be multiplied. In the case of North Carolina, the funding must be more than doubled.

The panelists who devised the *Every Child Thrives* recommendations (which align with North Carolina’s seminal school funding case, *Leandro v. North Carolina*) were asked to limit their focus to resources schools can realistically provide. They could not, for example, directly address housing insecurity. But they did their best to design schools that would help children experiencing homelessness.

“This points to a foundational problem of looking to the nation’s public schools to play the Great Equalizer role that is often assigned to them,” the report’s authors state, continuing,

But our estimates aim to offer a preliminary assessment of the costs linked to those responsibilities that are already placed on schools in our present sociopolitical environment, which is to furnish every child with roughly equal opportunities to learn and thrive in life.

The 12 recommendations for North Carolina schools are as follows:

1. A well-prepared, high-quality, and supported teacher in every classroom.
2. A well-prepared, high-quality, and supported principal in every school.
3. A finance system that provides adequate, equitable, and efficient resources.
4. A reliable and reasonable assessment and accountability system.
5. Full support to low-performing schools and districts.
6. Equitable and high-quality pre-kindergarten and early childhood learning systems.
7. Alignment of high school to postsecondary and career expectations for all students.
8. A strong system of supports for special education.
9. An empowering system of supports for linguistically diverse learners.
10. A strong system of wraparound supports and community partnerships.

11. A robust and multifaceted family engagement system.
12. A positive school climate and system of behavior supports in every school.

The work in North Carolina, exploring possible designs of an “equitable system of public education where every child can thrive,” was done in collaboration with the North Carolina Justice Center, and with the support of the W.K. Kellogg and Stuart foundations and the University of Colorado Boulder School of Education’s Place-Based Partnerships program.

*Resources associated with the report—including a slide deck and pdf version of the study—are available [here](#).*

## NEPC Resources on School Finance and Funding

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