

NORTH CAROLINA

Faced with an unprecedented set of challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, public education is at a crossroads. To be sure, much has changed since 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic swept the nation, but pre-pandemic trends provide policymakers with a critical anchor for navigating post-pandemic decisions. This section provides a snapshot of North Carolina's K-12 public education resources and outcomes so that policymakers are better equipped to make critical choices that will shape generations to come. Looking forward, they should use this information to ask important questions like what their goals are for students and whether resources are being deployed toward those aims.

SPENDING TRENDS

North Carolina's inflation-adjusted education revenue grew from \$10,806 per student in 2002 to \$10,790 per student in 2020, a -0.1% growth rate that ranked 50th in the U.S. During this time, real spending on employee benefits grew by 79.2%—ranking 20th in the country—going from \$1,306 per student to \$2,340 per student. In 2020, North Carolina had \$8,085,329,000 in total education debt, up \$777 per student in real terms since 2002.

TABLE 1: SPENDING TRENDS (2002-2020)

Category (Per Student)	2002	2020	Growth Rate	Growth Rank	2020 Rank
Revenue	\$10,806	\$10,790	-0.1%	50	47
Support Services	\$2,925	\$3,190	9.1%	46	48
Instruction	\$5,948	\$6,270	5.4%	43	37
Benefits	\$1,306	\$2,340	79.2%	20	36
Capital	\$1,263	\$1,049	-16.9%	37	42
Total Debt	\$4,832	\$5,609	16.1%	33	37

FIGURE 1: REVENUE PER STUDENT BY FUNDING SOURCE (2002-2020)

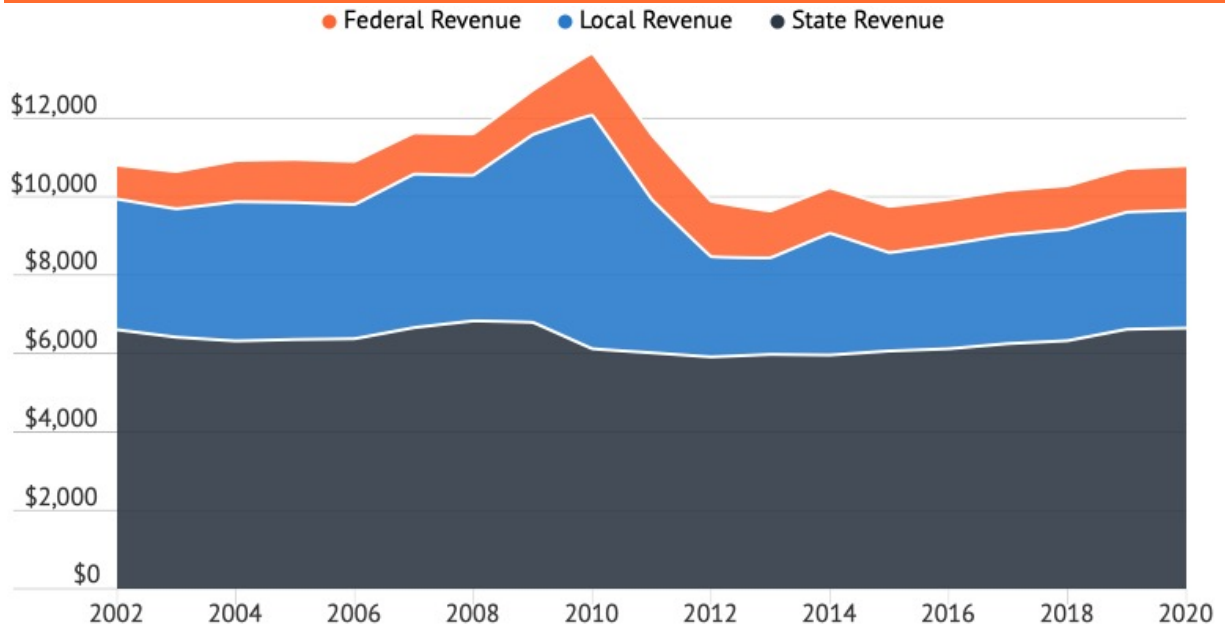
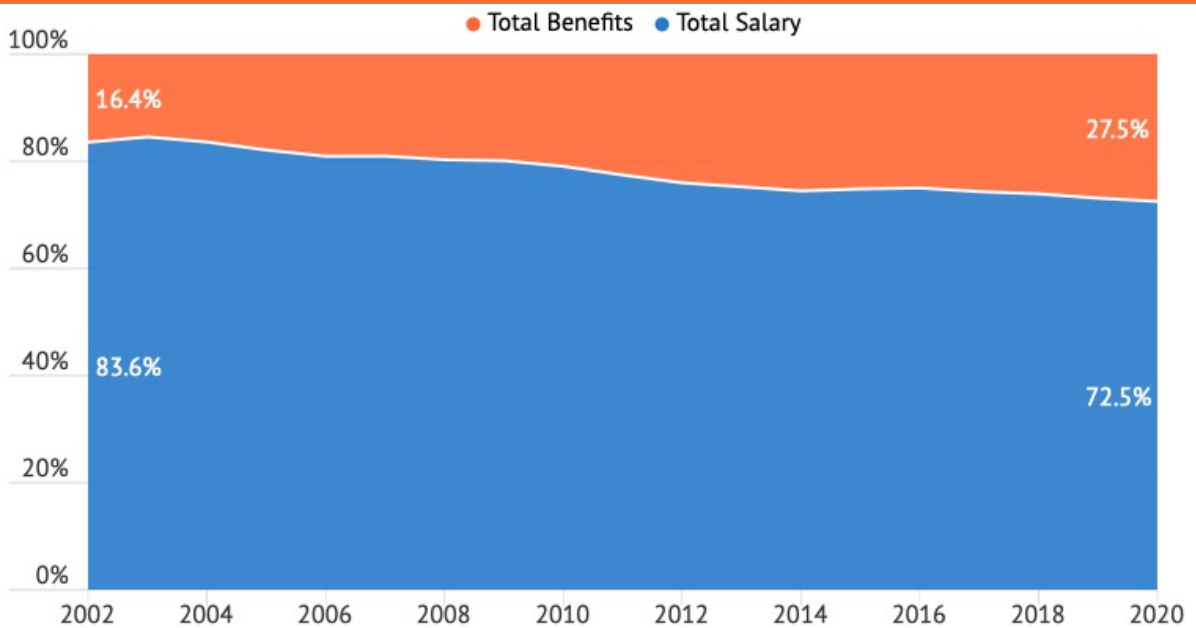


FIGURE 2: K-12 TOTAL SALARY & BENEFITS (2002-2020)



ENROLLMENT AND STAFFING TRENDS

Between 2002 and 2020, North Carolina’s student population grew by 18.6%. At the same time, the number of total public education staff grew by 17.1%, with teachers increasing by 17.6% and non-teachers increasing by 16.6%. The average inflation-adjusted teacher salary in the state went from \$61,630 in 2002 to \$54,150 in 2020, a –12.1% growth rate that ranked 47th in the U.S.

TABLE 2: ENROLLMENT AND STAFFING TRENDS (2002-2020)

Category	2002	2020	Growth Rate	Growth Rank	2020 Rank
Enrollment	1,315,363	1,560,350	18.6%	9	9
Total Staff	166,164	194,618	17.1%	19	10
Teachers	85,684	100,777	17.6%	10	10
Non-Teachers	80,480	93,841	16.6%	30	12
Average Teacher Salary	\$61,630	\$54,150	-12.1%	47	32

FIGURE 3: ENROLLMENT AND STAFFING TRENDS (2002-2020)

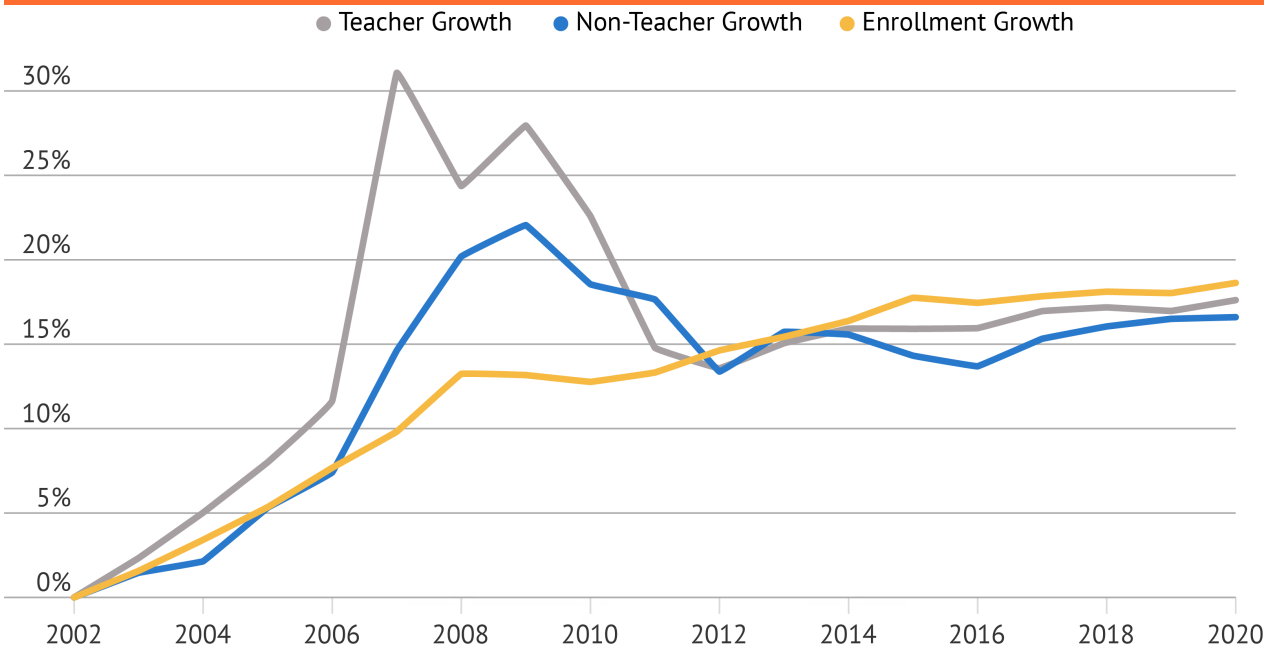
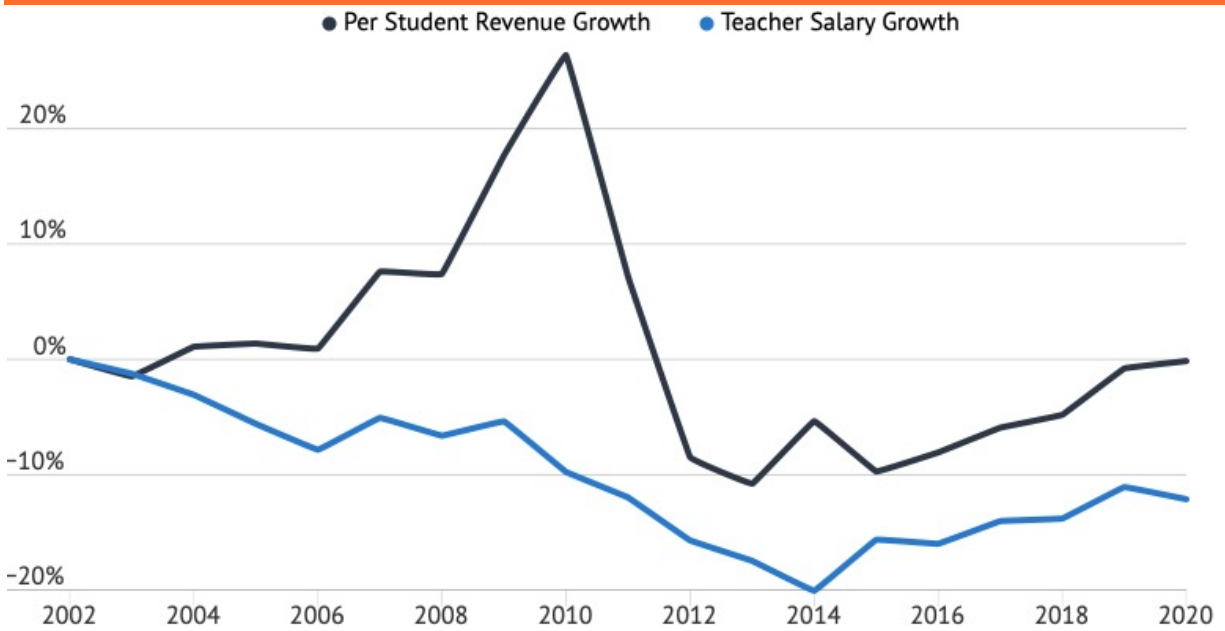


FIGURE 4: TEACHER SALARY GROWTH VS. REVENUE PER STUDENT GROWTH (2002-2020)



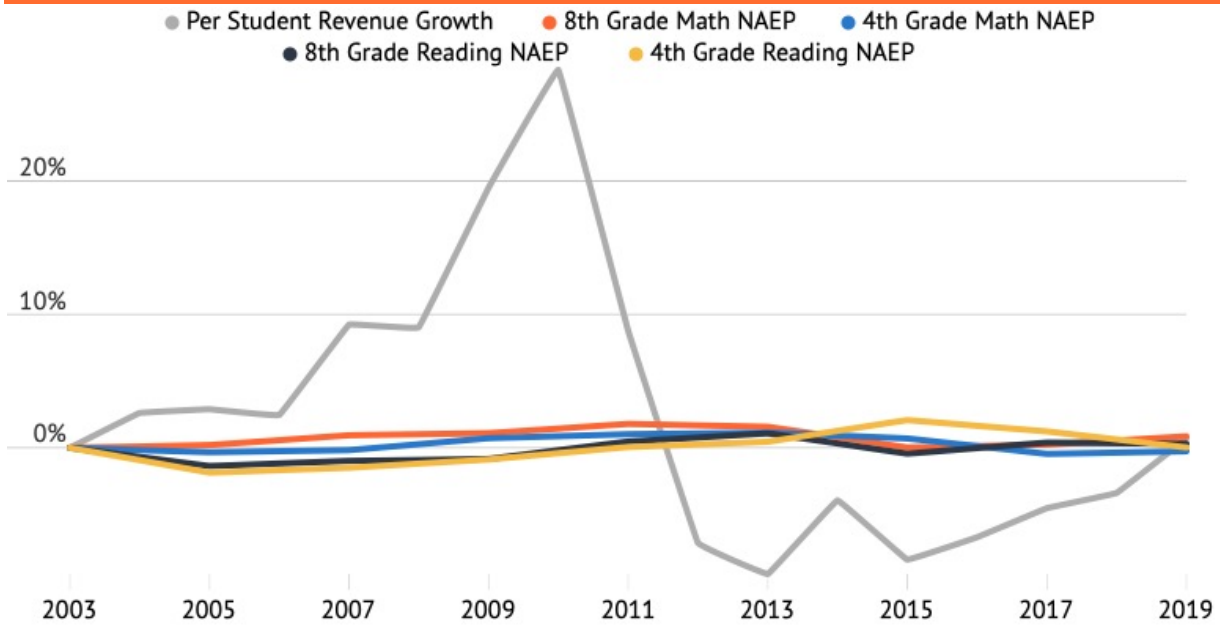
NAEP TRENDS

Between 2003 and 2019, North Carolina’s 4th grade NAEP reading scores increased by zero points (+0.0%), ranking 32nd in the U.S., while its 4th grade math scores fell by one point (-0.3%), ranking 47th. During this time, the state’s 8th grade reading scores increased by one point (+0.3%), ranking 20th in the U.S., while its 8th grade math scores grew by two points (+0.9%), ranking 33rd.

TABLE 3: NAEP SCORES (2003-2019)

Subject	4th Grade			8th Grade		
	Score Growth	Growth Rank	2019 Rank	Score Growth	Growth Rank	2019 Rank
Reading	0	32	19	1	20	29
Math	-1	47	18	2	33	21

FIGURE 5: NAEP SCORE GROWTH VS REVENUE PER STUDENT GROWTH¹



LOW-INCOME NAEP TRENDS

Between 2003 and 2019, North Carolina’s low-income 4th grade NAEP reading scores increased by two points (+1.2%), ranking 28th in the U.S., while its 4th grade math scores grew by one point (+0.4%), ranking 43rd. During this time, the state’s 8th grade reading scores increased by three points (+1.1%), ranking 18th in the U.S., while its 8th grade math scores grew by five points (+1.9%), ranking 24th.

TABLE 4: LOW-INCOME NAEP SCORES (2003-2019)

Subject	4th Grade			8th Grade		
	Score Growth	Growth Rank	2019 Rank	Growth	Growth Rank	2019 Rank
Reading	2	28	18	3	18	31
Math	1	43	17	5	24	19

¹ It should be noted that NAEP scores and revenue are inherently different in their potential for growth and shouldn’t be expected to move in perfect unison (e.g. a 10% increase in funding shouldn’t be expected to result in a 10% improvement in NAEP).

FIGURE 6: NAEP SCORE GROWTH VS REVENUE PER STUDENT GROWTH (LOW-INCOME STUDENTS)¹

