

For Immediate Release



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From the Office of Sen. Joyce Waddell, NC Senate
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Greetings:

At the General Assembly *For the Week*

During this first week of the new year, I am sure we all took inventory of what 2024 should bring. I know I have. By looking at some of the deficiencies plaguing our state like - more money for state retirees, better opportunities for public schools, and a healthier North Carolina. Please join me in advocating for these things, and let's make North Carolina a better place to live.

Joyce Waddell

Fatality Task Force

In 2024, North Carolina's leading child health and welfare advocates hope to build on some of last year's successes and tackle other threats to children in the state. The Child Fatality Task Force, which is made up of volunteer experts in child health and safety, state agency leaders, community leaders and state legislators, has been working since 1991 to prevent child death and promote child well-being.

Last year, task force members saw success with several of their recommendations to state legislators. The biggest success — the creation of the Office of Child Fatality Prevention — came after years of lobbying.

The group's focus areas for 2024 so far include supporting legislation to address addictive algorithms on social media and encouraging the General Assembly to provide recurring funding to increase the numbers of certain school health personnel and to continue the new N.C. SAFE campaign that is geared toward educating people about securing firearms.

The percentage of teens age 13-17 who said they are online constantly has risen from 24 percent in 2014-15 to 46 percent last year, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center. Finding ways to protect young people is important because of how much they use social media and because that use comes at a critical time in their development. It has been determined that social media has really transformed what it means to be an adolescent today. House Bill 644, bipartisan legislation also known as the Social Media Algorithmic Control in IT Act, stalled in committee last year.

As teen suicides and mental health diagnoses increase, North Carolina's schools remain woefully understaffed to address these issues with youth. Though the school nurse-to-student ratio has improved slightly since 2018, it remains a far cry from the 750 students per nurse recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The American School Counselor Association recommends one school counselor for every 250 students. With 316 counselors per student, North Carolina fares better than the national average of 408, but it still falls short.

The situation is even more dire when it comes to school psychologists. North Carolina has one psychologist for every 1,902 students. That's nowhere near the one for every 500 that the National Association of School Psychologists recommends, and staffing lags well behind the national average of one professional per 1,127 students.

The legislature included money in the budget approved this past September to hire an additional 120 people in school health positions. However, that money is from federal COVID-19 aid, which means it is temporary funding. Task force members were told that educators are worried about what some of the ratios, which are still well below recommended levels, will look like once COVID money runs out. The task force voted to support recurring funding to increase the number of school nurses, social workers, counselors and psychologists and to move the state closer to the nationally recommended ratios for those positions.

Firearms are now the leading cause of injury-related death — homicides and suicides — for the state's youth, surpassing vehicle crashes. The Child Fatality Task Force's top action item for 2023 was to get the state to launch and fund a new statewide firearm safety initiative. During the recent long session, the law ended the pistol permitting requirement and expanded the ability to carry a concealed weapon in some situations. No funding for the education initiative was included in Senate Bill 41, which became law in late March 2023 after lawmakers overrode the governor's veto and all Democrats voted to support the governor in his veto of this legislation.

The first year of the campaign is funded by state money that was not spent in the previous budget year. Federal funding is covering a

second year, so advocates worry that any gains would be short-lived.

With the monies we have in our "rainy day" fund, there should be no reason we are not able to fully fund this endeavor. My goal is to advocate for this to become permanently funded. Our children are falling behind this global society and we must provide any opportunity we can to compete in the world.

Education Recovery

North Carolina elementary schools are doing a better job than middle schools in recovering from the pandemic, according to a new state report released Wednesday. The state Department of Public Instruction report shows that most North Carolina public schools are showing progress on state exams in the past two years but are still performing below where they should be. A bright spot in the report being presented to the State Board of Education is that elementary schools are closer to full post-pandemic academic recovery, particularly in reading.

Academic performance dropped sharply statewide and nationally after schools switched to online instruction during the end of the 2019-20 school year and most of the 2020-21 school year. Proficiency rates have dropped so much that the State Board of Education could vote in March to amend its plan for complying with the federal Every Student Succeeds Act.

DPI says the report shows educators should celebrate the gains shown in early grades literacy and elementary school math. It has been reported that last year's state's third-grade reading end-of grade reading exam showed achievement was higher than it would have been if the 2013-19 achievement trend had continued.

I am more than happy to learn of the improvements in the scores for our elementary students. This encourages our teachers and gives us an indication that some of the educational goals being implemented are going in the right direction.

Senator Waddell is working tirelessly for Senate District 40, but she cannot do this alone. Her precincts have changed because of redistricting. Can she count on your help to continue working for the district?

[CLICK HERE TO](#)

**DONATE \$25; \$50; \$100; \$250
OTHER AMOUNT \$ _____**

Elections are important to communities, if you know someone who is not registered to vote, please encourage them to do so. It is also important to get our registered voters out to the polls. Please do not forget ID is now required to vote.

Vaccines

Upper respiratory viruses are on the rise. Hospitals across the area are seeing an uptick in COVID, Influenza, and RSV.

These virus increases can be mitigated by getting vaccinated. The goal is to increase vaccinations to bring the amount of those affected down to a more manageable number. We can help by getting our updates on vaccinations.

Please consider getting vaccinated.



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