



PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION | Mark Johnson, *Superintendent of Public Instruction*

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Testimony of Superintendent Mark Johnson

June 15, 2020

Before the Committee on Education and Labor, United States House of Representatives

Good afternoon Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Foxx, and members of the Committee. I am State Superintendent Mark Johnson, and it is my honor and privilege to serve the students, educators, and citizens of North Carolina.

Thank you for the opportunity to take part in this hearing today, and thank all of you for your swift, bipartisan efforts to enact the CARES Act in order to use federal taxpayer dollars to support our citizens, our communities, and our schools during this unprecedented pandemic.

Together, we have faced the unbelievable challenges of COVID-19. This virus has threatened our health, our economy, our students' education, and even our way of life.

Students, educators, parents, and caretakers across North Carolina and the nation have made difficult sacrifices to confront this crisis, and our nation has shown that we have the resilience to overcome it.

States ensured that child nutrition services continued, which meant keeping our meal services available no matter the obstacles. Schools kept cafeterias open, created grab and go locations, and even delivered meals using school buses and the mail. In North Carolina, we have served over 30,000,000 meals during this crisis.

States also led the switch to remote learning practically overnight. North Carolina is a leader in digital education strategies, but even as advanced and fortunate as we are, no state was ready for the switch from 0% remote learning to 100% remote learning over a weekend.

Teachers and school leaders connected students where they could and if they couldn't, assignments were delivered by school bus, over the phone, and even through the United States Postal Service.

Now, we are able to switch from being reactive to being proactive, and the challenges we will face going into next school year will actually put on full display the resilience of students, parents, and educators.

We should all be focused not just on coming back strong, but coming out of this pandemic stronger.

Thank you for helping the students of North Carolina with federal taxpayer funds. We will use these funds to protect the health and safety of students and educators, and we will also use the funds to innovate and spread the strategies and tools that will truly help every child work hard in school and reach their American Dream.

For example, we are investing in technology, strong digital curriculum options, and professional development for teachers. Even before this unparalleled moment in our history, North Carolina was making the monumental shift in education to empower teachers with tools that support personalized learning for all students.

Now, this innovation is more important than ever. We are going to see a significant loss of learning as a result of this crisis.

When students return in the fall, we will need to help all students catch up, but we don't have to do that with one-size-fits all strategies. The technology and curriculum options we are purchasing can also help teachers more easily meet students at their ability levels and help students catch up at their own pace.

Make no mistake – teachers have been working hard for decades to individualize education for students. And, this is not the remote learning we have endured for the past few months.

The technology we are purchasing for North Carolina will be another tool for teachers to help students. Our youngest students can use this technology to catch up on the reading skills they need to be successful through the rest of school and in life. Our older students can use this technology to discover the pathways to success that they decide works best for them after school – whether that is a high-valued credential, military service, or a degree from a community college or four-year institution.

The challenges facing us next school year are enormous, but we also must use this moment to reach every single student with resources and strategies that help them work hard in school and succeed.

In North Carolina, we have a state toast. We say that our state is where the weak grow strong and the strong grow great. Our nation is enduring and rising above unprecedented challenges. We are strong, let's grow great.