



PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION | Catherine Truitt, *Superintendent of Public Instruction*

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Speaker Moore, President Pro Tempore Berger, Senator Blue, and Representative Reives,

This week should be one of celebration to recognize the positive work done to advance public education through the conference budget becoming law. However, I was disappointed to receive word that the Governor had vetoed the legislation on the Blind and Deaf schools. His rationale had nothing to do with the merits of the bill but was instead about the appointments process. While I understand the Governor's reasoning when it comes to executive level appointments, this decades-long power struggle between the legislative and executive branches should never come at the expense of some of our most vulnerable student populations.

This same legislation that is now in your authority to accept as law, was passed unanimously in the House, almost unanimously in the Senate, approved by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), the three current residential school directors, as well as from stakeholders around the state who want to see these schools thrive and prosper. The State Board of Education also provided input on the bill to the General Assembly. Unfortunately, without this legislation becoming law, these schools will not be in a sustainable position to provide the sound and basic education that our blind and deaf students deserve, and their families should expect to receive.

These schools deserve round-the-clock attention and on-the-ground support. Yet our agency is hours from these schools—often working with staff remotely—and they would stand to benefit from nearby guidance and direction with additional community support in place. My team and I have continued to put thousands of hours into helping these schools, and we are proud of what we have accomplished, but systemic change is needed to truly arrive at a long-term and sustainable solution. This is only possible through legislation.

For more than a year, my office has been working on this legislation with the SBE, General Assembly staff and Members of both parties, as well as the three current residential schools, to strike a balance to ensure that we are prioritizing North Carolina's blind and deaf students. The level of detail and amount of collaborative work that has gone into this legislation was met with a resounding vote of confidence by our General Assembly just a few weeks ago. However, these children are now caught in the crosshairs of the never-ending power struggle between the General Assembly and the Governor's office.

The decision by the Governor to take a political stand on a decades-long issue was not in the best interest of these children. Because one elected official disagrees with the appointments structure, does not mean it is "blatantly unconstitutional," nor does it mean we should continue with the current structure when we know there is a better solution that has worked in other states, which is precisely what this legislation is modeled after. This is an important piece of legislation that has been properly vetted, thoroughly discussed among multiple partners, and written while keeping the blind and deaf students of our state front and center.

Please consider overriding the veto of SB593 at the end of this month. This shouldn't be about who does or doesn't get to make appointments, but instead should be about continuing to support some of our most vulnerable children in North Carolina.

All the best,

Catherine Truitt, Superintendent of Public Instruction

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