

DRAFT

Dear NCGA and to whom it may concern,

As you are aware, the State-mandated school consolidation study required by [insert local bill name] is now complete.

This comprehensive study, conducted by Prismatic Services, Inc., has provided valuable insights into the fiscal health, demographic trends, school facility capacity, and public opinion concerning both school districts. The findings have equipped the Buncombe County Commission, as well as both school boards, with essential data that will guide us in making informed decisions for the benefit of our community.

We are encouraged by the study's identification of areas for shared cooperation, improved operations, and cost savings through targeted consolidation of specific services. While these potential cost savings may be modest in the context of the total combined school district budgets, we strongly believe that implementing these recommendations will strengthen our school systems and improve efficiencies.

The study highlighted several key findings that are important to note:

- **Demographic Trends:** Both districts are experiencing shifts in student populations, with certain areas facing declining enrollment while others see growth. Understanding these trends is crucial for effective resource allocation.
- **Facility Utilization:** There is an imbalance in facility usage, with some schools operating under capacity. Addressing this can lead to better resource management and potential cost savings.
- **Public Opinion:** Community feedback indicates a strong desire to maintain the unique identities of each district while exploring collaborative opportunities to enhance educational offerings.
- **Student Performance:** Although both school systems are making significant efforts to reduce the achievement gaps, neither has yet demonstrated that it is on a certain path to success in addressing said gaps. That said, Prismatic agrees that consolidation of ACS and BCS by itself would be likely to lead to improved student outcomes.

We agree with Prismatic that the most effective and pragmatic path forward is not the full consolidation of Asheville City Schools and Buncombe County Schools but rather a strategic consolidation of shared services, optimization of facility usage, increased collaboration among all entities, and enhanced flexibility for student enrollment within district boundaries. These steps will allow us to maximize resources while maintaining the unique strengths of each district.

With the insights gained from the school consolidation study, Buncombe County aims to achieve the following system-wide improvements and financial efficiencies:

- **Shared Services:** ACS and BCS shall initiate discussions on expanding shared services, including but not limited to child nutrition, transportation, and facilities maintenance, and shall report the conclusions of these discussions to the County Commission.
- **Facility Optimization:** After closely tracking the demographic and enrollment trends identified by Prismatic, both ACS and BCS shall assess opportunities for optimizing facility usage and implement strategic school closures while ensuring appropriate class sizes and equitable access to education.
- **Collaborative Planning:** Buncombe County requests that both ACS and BCS Boards meet on a quarterly basis to discuss common areas of strategic importance and collaborate on annual budget development.
- **Long-Term Budgeting:** Buncombe County Commission, in partnership with the ACS and BCS Boards, shall develop a five-year forward-looking budget planning document, updated annually through a joint budget retreat involving all three Boards.
- **Enrollment Flexibility:** Both School Boards shall work together to revisit enrollment practices and boundary lines, particularly near the BCS and ACS boundary, to address legacy issues and provide greater flexibility for families.

We are committed to working collaboratively to ensure that our public schools remain strong, efficient, and well-supported for the benefit of all students. We appreciate your attention to these important issues and look forward to continued partnership in strengthening our education system.

Sincerely,