



## LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER

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### What's Up Politically

**Governor Calls for Teacher Pay Hikes:** North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper announced recently that his budget proposal, not out yet, includes a 5 percent teacher raise on average for each of the next two years. Cooper said his plan, which includes a goal of raising pay to the national average in five years, would cost \$813 million over two years without raising taxes.

The governor said the pay hikes would result in teachers getting average raises of 10 percent. He also said veteran teachers wouldn't be omitted, as they have been in recent pay hikes.

**Details Forthcoming:** At a news conference at Charlotte-Mecklenburg's Collinswood Language Academy, Cooper said last week that parents entrust their children to teachers every day. "It's time to put our money where our trust is," he said. "It's time for a significant teacher pay plan."

Details reportedly will accompany the release in coming weeks of Cooper's budget plan. This year, the state Senate gets first crack at passing its budget after the governor releases his proposal, a move that will take weeks. The Senate-passed budget then will go to the House, after which House-Senate conferees will begin meeting to cut a final deal. What the Legislature approves likely will remain intact, as the GOP-led General Assembly has a veto-proof majority in the House and the Senate.

**Pay Hike Support Bipartisan:** There's wide-ranging support for teachers to get pay increases to offset stagnation and losses during the recession, but political fireworks on the details are expected. After Cooper's announcement, Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger released this statement: "After he opposed recent Republican budgets that increased average teacher pay by 15.5 percent, we are pleased Roy Cooper has finally joined legislative efforts to undo the damage of years of Democratic teacher furloughs and teacher pay freezes. We look forward to reviewing his complete budget proposal."

North Carolina teacher pay was frozen during the recession, moving the average salary to near the bottom of the list of states. Raises in the last couple of years -- last year's averaged 4.7 percent -- have pushed the average up to almost \$50,000, according to the state Department of

Public Instruction. Berger, R-Rockingham, has said he wants to bring the average to \$55,000 within two years and has emphasized performance bonuses. House Speaker Tim Moore, R-Kings Mountain, hasn't committed on a specific number.

According to news reports, Cooper's proposal would bring average salaries to more than \$52,000 in 2017-2018 and nearly \$55,000 in 2018-2019. The proposal also calls for an annual classroom supply stipend of \$150 so teachers wouldn't have to pay out of their own pockets.

The state currently reports a surplus of \$550 million. Cooper said last week his budget also will recommend increases for early childhood education and raises for other state employees, including those who work in schools. "We understand that all of our state employees have been left behind," he said, The Charlotte Observer reports.

### **Significant Developments Affecting Education**

**DPI/State Board Update:** Legislators at a joint appropriations education committee meeting last week posed many questions to state education leaders that were related to who has authority over the Department of Public Instruction and, more broadly, over all of the state's schools? Both State Board of Education Chair Bill Cobey and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Mark Johnson presented at the meeting, with Cobey discussing the Board's funding requests and Johnson outlining his goals.

Still, a pending lawsuit could decide who has top responsibility for state schools was brought up multiple times. Rep. Mickey Michaux, D-Durham, first mentioned the lawsuit, filed by the State Board of Education against the state of North Carolina in December in an attempt to block House Bill 17. That legislation would transfer many of the Board's powers to Johnson. The case is set to be heard by a three-judge panel in June.

Committee members were also curious as to why local school districts spend money allocated to reduce class sizes for other things -- and whether the State Board directed them to do so. Sen. Jerry Tillman, R-Moore, expressed frustration with how school districts use funds. He said, in the local school districts' budgets, he has seen funds that the state allocated to reduce class sizes used for classroom teachers, for program enhancement teachers, and for "others." Tillman said he wants to track abuse of the system and wants to know how much money is spent in each of those categories.

**School Age:** A bill filed in the state House last week would lower the age when children must begin attending school from 7 to 6 years old. Current state law says children between the ages of 7 and 16 must be in school. All public-school systems must offer kindergarten, though children are not required to attend. Lawmakers and education leaders say the bill is simply a way of catching up with the times since most children enroll in school before the age of 7 anyway. "

**School Bus Safety:** A Senate bill to impose civil penalties for passing a stopped school bus will need a few adjustments before it clears the Senate. The bill -- Senate Bill 55 -- would allow local boards of education to install and operate automated safety cameras -- either by purchasing them as a body or through a private vendor. It would allow fines -- \$400 for a first offense, \$750 for a second offense and \$1,000 for a third -- to be imposed on drivers via mail in the same way red light cameras are used to assess fines to drivers.

The bill sponsors -- Sens. Tom McInnis, R-Richmond, and John Alexander, R-Wake -- said the bill would address safety issues. But concerns were voiced about the language regarding criminal offenses in the bill. After a long discussion about prosecutorial oversight, Sen. Jerry Tillman, R-Randolph, had a question: "I've heard a nice, innocuous bill beat all to hell here today," he said. "Do we need a three-member committee to work out these kinks?" Chair Sen. Warren Daniel, R-Burke, took Tillman's motion, and a sub-committee was created to try to hash out differences.

### Noteworthy

**Field Trip:** Several members of the state's General Assembly and representatives from the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools Board of Education spent a half day being students again recently, experiencing what's it is like in the state's public elementary schools. Sen. Joyce Krawiec (R), and Reps. Ed Hanes (D) and Debra Conrad (R) — all representing Forsyth County — toured the school, visited classrooms, participated in small group discussions with teachers and had lunch with Jefferson's fifth-grade students. School board members Robert Barr, Lori Clark and Lida Calvert-Hayes were also on hand to take a closer look inside one of their schools. "I still have a lot to learn," said Calvert-Hayes, the board's newest member.

### Quote of the Week

*"Believe me, that is not how we want this to go."*

- Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger, on the intensifying conflict with the Cooper administration over confirmation hearings (The Associated Press, 2/23/17)

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