



NCACTE Legislative Newsletter
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The following is an overview of recent North Carolina General Assembly activity of interest to stakeholders of public education in North Carolina.

Although the North Carolina General Assembly has been in recess, I have been meeting with key legislators and other leaders in public education. I met earlier with Governor Cooper and his education advisor, Geoff Coltrane. We have received their support and continued commitment to our public schools.

In addition, I will be meeting with key legislators in April to continue conversations that have been ongoing. I have meetings scheduled with Rep. Jeffrey Elmore, Rep. Craig Horne, Rep. Linda Johnson, Rep. John Fraley, and Rep. Pat Hurley. Each of these representatives has been open to our ideas and outreach and have been accessible when I have needed to meet with them.

In addition, in the Senate, I have previously met with Sen. Barefoot, Sen. Lee, Sen. Curtis, and Sen. Tillman. I will also continue to meet with these lawmakers during the upcoming Short Session. Each of these senators has also been available and open to dialogue. Lastly, I will also continue to be meet with the education staff of Speaker of the House Tim Moore and the President Pro Tempore of Senate, Phil Berger. Having access to these powerful leaders in the NC General Assembly will assure that our needs and concerns are heard within our state's governing body.

The Short Session will begin on May 16th. This is an opportunity for lawmakers to make changes to the biennium budget that was passed last year. Bills that affect policy in public education are not allowed to be filed. The only bills that may be filed are those that appropriate new money in the budget. Any policy changes would have to take place in the special provisions of the bill that amends their current biennium budget.

At the bottom of this report, you will see the document I am sending to legislators on your behalf to garner their support for your agenda as we approach the May short session.

The most recent activity from the NC General Assembly has come from the following 4 committee meetings:

Joint Legislative Study Committee on the Division of Local School Administrative Units

This committee met for the second time last week to explore the legal and practical issues that would need to be addressed should the NC General Assembly deconsolidate school districts. NC General Assembly Staff Attorneys Kara McGraw and Brian Gwyn presented the committee with a structural and legal overview of the process of dividing schools districts. McGraw shared an example of a Nevada school district that kept central services mostly intact from the original unit but created local school precincts that were quite autonomous. However, the process was



described as administratively slow and that assessing the long-term impacts (positive or negative) has not yet been fully understood.

Gwyn explained to the Committee the Constitutional issues that could arise from the process of splitting existing school districts. Since the action could overlap into settled Federal Law regarding school segregation, Gwyn advised the Committee to approach the process aware of potential legal hurdles.

Kara Millonzi, Professor of Public Law and Government at the UNC School of Government addressed the committee on the complexities of budgeting and creating funding formulas for counties and local boards of education. Gregory Gaskins, Deputy State Treasurer, noted that no bond or debt issues would be of concern should the NC General Assembly move forward with dividing school districts.

Finally, staff members from NCDPI presented the committee with 6 items that would need careful consideration from lawmakers if they do pursue the division of LEAs. Those challenges included facilities, transportation, school nutrition programs, insurance, contracts, and information technology.

Rep. Brawley (R- Mecklenburg) and Rep. Curtis (R-Lincoln) recognized that the purpose of the presentation and the work of the Committee was to learn from the challenges faced by others and look for a path forward that would be clear of those obstacles.

Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee

This committee met last week for an update on the ISD (Innovative School District), changes to the Cooperative Innovative High School funding formula, and funding for the Career and College Promise program.

Superintendent of the NC Innovative School District, Dr. Eric Hall, provided an overview of the ISD. Developed to assist schools with a history of low academic performance, the ISD was created and at present has entered into an agreement with Robeson County Schools to administer Ashpole Elementary school. Dr. Hall is in the process of selecting a private operator by April 15th and that the chosen Operator would have a history of improving lower performing schools.

In addition, Dr. Hall noted that there are currently over 500 low-performing schools in the state and that his team has developed a process for recommending schools for the ISD. The process includes Consideration, Evaluation, Selection, Engagement, Partnership, and Transition. Committee Members engaged in a hearty question and answer session with Dr. Hall.

Representatives from the Career and College Promise (CCP) program and the Cooperative Innovative High School (CIHS) provide lawmakers with a financial and funding update as requested from lawmakers last year.

The Funding Formula for the Career and College Promise program has proved sustainable. However, a recommendation was made for supplemental funding of the Cooperative Innovative High School program to ensure its continued success.



House Select Committee on School Safety

The House Select Committee on School Safety met to review current school safety measures and to explore additional options. The meeting began with NC Speaker of the House Tim Moore reminding lawmakers of their key role in working with education leaders to provide solutions to school safety concerns. NC Superintendent of Public Instruction, Mark Johnson, also addressed lawmakers regarding working with schools and stakeholders to ensure a safe and secure school environment.

The committee heard from agencies directly involved in implementing school safety measures and heard presentations from representatives of the Mental Health community. Special Agent Elliott Smith provided the committee with a review of the State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) and their role in working to identify threats.

Sheriff Robert Holland, representing the Task Force for Safer Schools, informed lawmakers on the process of training School Resource Officers (SROs) on their responses to threats on a school campus. Sheriff Holland also elaborated on the Critical Incident Response training provided for school faculty and staff.

Kym Martin, Director of the Center for Safer Schools, provided the committee with an overview of recent legislative action on school safety (S.L 2019-360) which offers grant funded assistance to Middle and Elementary schools to hire SROs. In addition, monies are also available for covering the cost of panic alarm systems.

Greta Metcalf, Chief Officer of Community Engagement at Meridian Health Services, addressed the committee regarding challenges faced by the mental health community, the social stigma which accompanies mental health disorders, and the Comprehensive School Based Mental Health Model which includes data suggesting that 20% of adolescents likely have a mental disorder and that the percentage increases among those living in poverty.

Dr. Jim Deni, Professor of Psychology at Appalachian State University and past President of the NC School Psychology Association (NCSPA), confirmed the alarming mental health statistics and noted that physical safety will not decrease mental health issues. Dr. Deni addressed teen suicide, bullying, and the lack of resources available to meet adolescent social and emotional health needs.

Concluding the presentation portion of the meeting, Carolina Daily, an 8th Grade English teacher from Johnston County, along with two high school students, informed the committee about *Speak Up NC*, an app in its pilot phase that would allow students to anonymously send tips and report dangerous and suspicious activities regarding schools to the appropriate response personnel



Following the presentation period, Lawmakers held an extended discussion on school facility needs, limitation, and the overall feasibility of some plans and suggestions. Lawmakers discussed raising the age limit to 21 for the purchase of long guns, increased funding for SROs, school psychologists, and counselors, and capital improvements including but not limited to fences, bullet-proof glass, and cameras.

Committee Chairmen expressed their intention for subcommittees to be formed to make recommendations for the 2018 short session to consider.

Joint Legislative Program Evaluation Oversight Committee

The Program Evaluation Committee met to discuss proposed changes to the Funding Dispute Resolution process between local boards of education and county commissioners.

Sean Hamel, Principal Program Evaluator with the NC General Assembly, addressed dispute resolution between counties and local school boards. He noted that North Carolina and Tennessee are the only states where school boards are solely reliant on county commissions for their fiscal needs. Inevitably this leads to conflict where neither side is fully satisfied, but, as Hamel noted, the new proposed resolution process is effective and economical. The findings of the Program Evaluation Division are now in draft form as a proposed bill for the 2018 short session. This bill would revise state law and remove the litigation component and establish a default funding mechanism with a mediation process as a tool of last resort. The bill would also recommend legal frameworks for fund balances to be maintained by local school boards. We will watch as this bill works through the 2018 short session.

There were concerns raised by the NC Schools Boards Association (NCSBA), who fear that fund balance requirements could impair the flexibility of local school boards to respond to urgent expenses and could have negative impacts on LEAs.



2018 Short Session Priorities

- **Increase Credentialing Funds to 2.4 million dollars.** Currently, 1.2 million is appropriated, but the additional funds are sorely needed for districts.
- **Increase Credentialing Bonus Appropriation.** Each year, far more dollars are awarded than are appropriated. Last year's award was 1.96 million dollars despite only receiving a \$600,000 appropriation.
- Currently, CTE can work in the school systems in grades 5-12. However, the appropriation is only for grades 8-12. **It would be beneficial to see the appropriation expanded to fund at least grades 6-12 while maintaining a ratio of 1:90.**
- Our CTE programs do a lot of important work with the Great Expansion Grant. Currently, we receive an appropriation of \$700,000. **It would benefit our great work to see the grant increased to an appropriation of 1 million dollars.**
- **CTE supports a school bond referendum to assist districts with capital needs, repairs, and equipment for schools.** There has not been an infusion of state funds for capital besides the lottery since 1996.

Thank you for your support!