



Education Update – 9/8/2020

The General Assembly was in Raleigh for a quick session last week, passing the Coronavirus Relief Act 3.0 with bipartisan support. The \$1 billion bill, which Governor Cooper signed, allocates federal funds for coronavirus response. The legislation includes the Extra Credit Grant Program, which will send \$335 to households with at least one qualifying child.

Unemployment got a boost in the bill, with \$50 million set aside for the state match requirement for the federal Lost Wage Assistance program and an increase of \$50 in weekly unemployment benefits through the end of the year. The bill also includes \$30 million for broadband through a supplemental round of the Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) grant program. The State Board of Elections is allocated \$5 million to prepare for the election during the pandemic, including funds to recruit election day workers and increase their pay. Additional funds are provided for PPE, COVID-19 research and a range of state and local needs.

The bill responds to the concerns of education officials across the state by holding schools harmless for reductions in average daily membership (ADM) that are likely due to the pandemic and the shift to virtual learning. The bill adds funds to school choice programs, including \$6.5 million to the Special Education Scholarship Grants for the Children with Disabilities Program and the Education Savings Account Program, which provide funding to families who want to send their children to private school. The funding would pay for the approximately 2,500 families currently on waitlists for the programs. The bill removes the K-1 cap for the opportunity scholarship program and increases the income eligibility to 150% of free and reduced lunch threshold.

In addition to \$35 million for child care assistance, the bill also includes flexibility for certain child care licensing requirements. These changes will allow community-based organizations to provide care for school-age children to assist with virtual learning.

Other provisions of interest include:

- Adds \$17 million to the Department of Public Instruction to award as grants to public school units to provide access to services for exceptional children who have lost critical services as a result of school closures related to COVID-19;
- Provides over \$9 million in funding support to arts organizations in North Carolina; however, neither Wake County nor Mecklenburg County is eligible for the financial aid package since the legislation focused on counties with populations under 1 million;
- Provides \$5 million to the Community College System Office for allocation to various campuses for PPE or COVID-19 testing;
- Allocates \$1 million to DPI for safety management products to enhance student safety during virtual learning;

- Provides \$300,000 to establish a student health collaborative pilot program allowing a local education agency (LEA) to collaborate with the county department of social services to assist students with their mental and physical well-being in response to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Provides \$38 million to the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services to be distributed to local management entities/managed care organizations (LME/MCOs) as additional lump sum single-stream allocations for direct services associated with the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - \$5,899,330 to Alliance Behavioral Healthcare
 - \$9,166,016 to Cardinal Innovations Healthcare
 - \$4,027,152 to Eastpointe
 - \$4,375,407 to Partners Behavioral Health Management
 - \$4,631,095 to Sandhills Center
 - \$5,292,267 to Trillium Health Resources
 - \$4,608,733 to Vaya Health
- Directs the UNC Board of Governors to allocate funds for up to 100 resident full-time students enrolled in Comprehensive Transition Programs, under the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008;
- Provides \$150,000 to the Steve Smith Family Foundation for use with virtual learning support program that assists homeless students;
- Allows the North Carolina Cyber Academy to increase its enrollment by 1,000 students and the North Carolina Virtual Academy to increase its enrollment by 2,800 students for the 2020-2021 school year;
- Allocates \$1.1 million to DPI for allocation to Communities in Schools of North Carolina, Inc. for staff PPE or to assist K-12 students with remote instruction, nutrition, family support and mental health; and
- Provides \$500,000 to DPI for allocation (according to ADM) to school districts in Bertie, Camden, Chowan, Perquimans, Tyrrell and Washington counties for COVID-19 related expenses including school nutrition, transportation, technology, remote instruction materials, and PPE.

Just before session started, the General Assembly’s fiscal analysts released information on state revenue. Revenue collections for the fiscal year that ended June 30 came in \$457 million higher than the May revenue forecast anticipated, but legislators expressed caution about this “extra” money. Fiscal analysts said the higher number likely shows that fewer people than expected waited until July to pay their taxes, meaning that funds expected in July actually arrived during June and the 2020 fiscal year. An updated revenue forecast won’t be available until late September at the earliest.

As the election gets closer, make sure you are registered to vote.

Register to vote online: <https://www.ncsbe.gov/>

Deadline to register: October 9th