

Legislative Matters Related to Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19)

Budget

- Adopt budgets for 2019-20 and 2020-21 that include pay increases for all public-school employees.
- Continue to make teacher and principal pay and benefits more competitive with surrounding states; move North Carolina teacher and principal compensation to the top 25 percent in the nation.

Distance Learning

- Prevent learning loss K-12 through distance learning either through district-provided content and digital resources.
- Address equity issues by providing additional funding for digital devices, content, connectivity, professional learning and technology that support distance learning.
 - Requires massive expansion of WIFI and broadband access to support learning and telehealth initiatives.
 - Requires hardware 1:1 device initiative
 - Requires massive expansion of personal hotspots
- Address statewide connectivity issues by requiring telecommunications companies to provide free, high-speed internet access for K-12 students during the coronavirus pandemic.
- Prepare, plan and issue additional allocations for expenses related to anticipated virus recurrence in the fall.
- Develop permanent solutions to infrastructure concerns and gaps in access in poor and rural communities.

Student Attendance Requirements & Calendar Waivers

- Waive compulsory attendance laws and issuance of mandatory letters following 10-day absences for 2019-20 and 2020-21, given anticipated virus recurrence in the fall.

Graduating Seniors

- Ensure college acceptance letters to state university system schools and community colleges are honored.

Special Populations

Considerations for Exceptional Children and English Learners

- We recommend that teachers provide learning opportunities for all students, regardless of ability, and that considerations are made for grading, attendance, academic and behavioral performance, cognitive and physical functioning, and potential legal ramifications.
- Compensatory services may be applicable during online direct instruction for all students and in cases where students with disabilities were not provided the option or could not access it because of their disability.
- Funding for compensatory services owed should be made available in these cases. Furthermore, special education and related services should support a student's involvement and progress in general education during distance learning, as fully as possible.
- Special education and related services should be accessible or delivered comparable to the system's instructional plan and reasonable in consideration of the unique needs of each student, recognizing that distance learning is not feasible in all cases, specifically for medically fragile students and students with more profound disabilities.
- Funding should be allocated to support students who may not yet be identified as needing specially designed instruction. Funding would provide supports including remediation, online tutoring and reading intervention opportunities who may not yet be identified as Exceptional Children but are demonstrating the need for additional support.
- Regarding federal and state referral and initial eligibility determination requirements, recognize that we cannot allow anything that would compromise the health, safety, or well-being of the student, staff member, or families of either, during the coronavirus pandemic.
- Social distancing will not allow for therapists and psychologists to conduct the testing necessary to complete a referral or, possibly, the initial eligibility determination.
- Consideration should be made for any referral or initial eligibility where all testing has been completed and only the eligibility determination meeting needs to be held. In those instances, we recommend that teachers, therapists and parents collaborate to determine, on a case-by-case basis, if the initial eligibility meeting can be held through videoconferencing or conference telephone calls.

Testing and Accountability

- North Carolina's application for a waiver of federal testing accountability requirements for 2019-20 has been submitted and granted by the United States Department of Education.
- No state legislative approval is required to cancel administration of EOCs/EOGs or NC Final Exams. However, there are several state laws tied to the results of EOCs/EOGs that the legislature will need to address. These include, but may not be limited to:

3rd grade promotion decisions (2019-20)

- All current third grade students who were in good standing when school closure occurred should be promoted to fourth grade.
- Schools should use a committee to review multiple data points for students who were not meet grade level expectations when school closure occurred to make grade level placement decisions.
- Parents have the right to appeal all grade placement decisions. At the beginning of the 2020-21 school year, all fourth graders should be included in a state-wide screener to identify students with potential deficits in reading.
- Based on the beginning of year screenings, district should be provided diagnostic assessments to further identify skill gaps for intervention purposes.

Summer reading camp qualification (2019-20)

- Reading camp for rising first, second, and third graders required by current Read to Achieve legislation should not be a requirement for LEAs this summer.
- Funding should be used by LEAs to provide comprehensive professional learning for K-3 teachers in early literacy. A list of approved professional learning courses (e.g. Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling, Orton Gillingham, or Evidence-based Literacy Instruction) should be provided by the K-3 Literacy Department at NC DPI.
- Additionally, funding should be allocated to extend the school year in low performing schools and to provide extended learning supports including Saturday learning opportunities for students who are reading below grade level.

Advanced math placement (2019-20)

- For the advanced math placement, the legislation currently states that any student who scores a level 5 on the EOG/EOC be placed an advanced math course the next year.
- Since we will not be administering the EOG/EOC in 2020, GCS recommends that students who scored a 5 in 2018-19 and are currently in an advanced math class remain in an advanced math course for the 2020-21 school year.
- Multiple entry points should be used as criteria for students who are not yet in advanced math courses to ensure that enrollment in advanced courses is representative of the district. Entry points can include qualitative and quantitative measures and should include use of local norms.
- GCS does not recommend using grades as a determining factor. Districts should consider additional data points (district benchmarks, NC check-ins, standards-based assessments) when making placement decisions for under-represented student populations.

EVASS and School Performance Grades

- Place a hold on EVAAS growth ratings for teachers, principals, schools and school districts.
- Place a hold on EVAAS ratings and school performance grades.

Personal Protective Wear

- Work with state purchasing to provide protective wear (masks, gloves, gowns/clothing for essential/mandatory workers.

Employee Compensation and Benefits

- Provide over-time pay, bonuses or other incentives for mandatory part-time and fulltime personnel needed to provide essential services such as daycare for school-aged children of hospital workers or meal preparation and distribution to hungry children.
- Ensure that all school and district part-time and fulltime personnel, including support staff and hourly workers in addition to teachers and exempt personnel, will be paid for work performed remotely or on-site.
 - Ensuring that local education agencies continue to have the flexibility to adjust staff roles as needed to perform additional duties outside of their normal scope of work.
 - Hold teacher and principal pay harmless for up to three years from potential decreases caused by the suspension of accountability and performance measures.

- Fully fund emergency leave requirements found in State Board of Education policy regarding the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Insist that federal government fully fund leaves for public school employees mandated by the \$2 trillion federal stimulus bill adopted recently by the U.S. Congress.
- Extend timelines for extended leave and more flexible unemployment benefits to ensure public school employees have access to these supports if schools remain closed longer than anticipated.

Employee Evaluations and Contract Renewals

- Under N.C.G.S. § 115C-325.3, superintendents are required to give notice of the intent to non-renew no later than June 1, 2020.
- Our principals are aware of serious performance issues and do not want to return teachers who are not performing well for another school year. We need some relief from the required evaluation and notice cycle to avoid renewing teachers who are not serving children well.

Possible Solutions:

- Allow districts to use the first two observations to create the summative evaluation, which will be important for those teachers recommended for non-renewal.
- Allow districts that have one observation completed, have provided teachers with notice of potential non-renewal in writing and have provided at least one other letter of direction/action plan in the personnel file to use that information to complete the summative evaluation.
- Waive the requirement to have the third observation this year for all teachers.
- Waive the requirement for a peer observation for the 2019-20 school year.
- Allow Email and NCEES notification of non-renewal (by June 1) to satisfy the requirement of notifying teachers (we usually hand-deliver to ensure they receive it).

Census

- Allow non-mandatory/mandatory staff to ensure census is conducted.

Extraordinary Expenses

- Provide additional funding to reimburse school districts for extraordinary expenses related to the coronavirus public health emergency. These include, but are not limited to costs associated with:

Current

- Childcare centers for hospital workers;
- Cleaning, sanitation and custodial services and supplies;

- Digital learning resources and expanded licenses, laptops and tablets for students and staff that support distance learning
- Connectivity and telecommunications for students and staff;
- Professional learning and development for staff in distance learning;
- Transportation costs related to food distribution and the potential impact of these activities on transportation efficiency ratings, which determine state funding levels;
- Crisis phone lines and call centers;
- Personnel protective equipment and supplies;
- Increased building security for closed facilities; and,
- Communications and expanded operating hours for essential and mandatory personnel.

Anticipated for 2020-21

- Surge in need for school social work case management;
- Surge in need for Employee Assistance Programs and behavioral health programs and clinicians for students and their families; and,
- Surge in need and demand for fulltime nurses at every school starting in August and/or when schools re-open for the 2020-21 academic year.

Grants

- Extend timelines and program delivery requirements on grants.

Health and Human Services

Telehealth

- Expand technology and WIFI access to support so critical health information can be shared
 - Virtual clinics for students and staff
 - staff, counseling and other services, including wellness checks, to meet students' extensive and varied health needs resulting from and exacerbated by the crisis
- Additional and flexible funding to begin planning and implementing summer school programs or other extended learning time opportunities for students who need them in the coming months.
- Coordinated services by Department of Health and Human Services to ensure students in crisis do not fall through the cracks.
- Anticipate surge in need for health and human service benefits and public aid, unemployment, Medicaid, childcare vouchers, housing, behavioral health clinicians, substance abuse programs, domestic violence programs and services, and victim's assistance, etc.

- Fully fund costs associated with the provision of childcare services for school-aged children of hospital workers.
- Increase hours of service for in-home therapy for students with significant disabilities who used to receive these services at school.
- Increase hours of service for in-home care givers and respite services for students with significant disabilities while schools are closed.

Career and Technical Education

- Students, particularly graduating seniors, may need waivers from various professional standards and licensing boards regarding professional and industry certifications requirements, and/or additional funding and time to fulfil those requirements following high school graduation (e.g. clinical hour requirements for certified nurse assistants).
- Provide \$1.5 million for two years to support GCS' signature career academies.