



New Bill From Senate Education Leaders Proposes Accountability Waivers, School Calendar Changes

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A bi-partisan bill introduced this week by Senate education leaders holds a comprehensive set of COVID-19 relief provisions for K-12 schools, including some important and time-sensitive waivers for school performance grades and other accountability measures for the current year and adjustments to school calendar requirements for 2021-22.

[Senate Bill 654](#) from Sens. Deanna Ballard (R-Watauga), Don Davis (D-Greene) and Michael Lee (R-New Hanover) lays out additional COVID-19 relief measures needed for K-12 schools for the 2020-21 year, as requested by the State Board of Education and Department of Public Instruction. The measures also align with many of the relief recommendations from the NC Association of School Administrators (NCASA) on behalf of our member school leaders.

The bill proposes state action to align with the federal accountability system waivers issued for the 2020-21 school year, which require testing of students but allow states to forego punitive accountability measures for their schools due to this year's impact by COVID-19. S654 calls for issuing no school performance grades or annual report card based on this year's performance of NC schools, similar to the waiver issued for 2019-20 when COVID-19 first hit the state. The bill also prevents the State Board of Education from identifying additional low-performing schools or districts and prohibits adding schools to the list of continually low-performing schools based on data from 2020-21.

With regard to launching the 2021-22 year, the bill proposes a new permanent addition to the school calendar law to define "remote instruction" and allow all school districts to use up to 5 days or 30 hours of remote instruction when schools are unable to open due to inclement weather or other emergencies. That time would count in meeting the minimum requirements of either 185 days or 1,025 hours of instruction for the year. School districts that choose to utilize these remote instruction days or hours would need to submit an annual remote instruction plan to the State Board of Education by July 1 offering a detailed framework on the quality of instruction to be offered when students are not receiving in-person instruction.

The bill also would provide these COVID-19 relief measures for 2020-21:

- Allows schools eligible for the principal recruitment supplement for 2019-20 and 2020-21 to remain eligible for that supplement for 2021-22.
- Adjusts the teacher performance data notification requirements for 2021-22 to indicate that to the extent that EVAAS data is from more than one school year, the teacher must be given additional context on which years the data covers and the extent to which his or her students were taught by another teacher. Similarly, statewide teacher effectiveness reporting for the 2021-22 school year would be aligned to reflect this change.

S654 is subject to the May 13 deadline for crossing from the Senate to the House to remain viable, and NCASA hopes that means the Senate will take action to move this legislation forward in the next few weeks.

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