



House Select COVID-19 Education Committee Discusses Challenges For 2020-21 School Year

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Education Working Group members of the House Select Committee on COVID-19 met on Tuesday to discuss ongoing needs and challenges for public schools during the 2020-2021 school year, as well as the availability of remaining federal coronavirus relief funds. Representatives from the State Board of Education (SBE) and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) shared their [legislative requests and priorities in response to COVID-19](#), which mirrors many of the [recommendations proposed by the NC Association of School Administrators](#) (NCASA). Both groups have urged lawmakers to use a portion of the [estimated \\$552.4M](#) remaining in non-contingent federal coronavirus relief funds to make critical investments in statewide internet access, transportation needs, and personal protective equipment. Many House Select Committee members expressed their willingness to address these concerns when legislators return to Raleigh for a limited session next Wednesday, while also acknowledging that some of the items will likely receive pushback in the Senate.

In addition to the major funding priorities listed above, the SBE also shared the following “Tier 2 Priorities” with lawmakers during Tuesday’s committee meeting:

- **Exceptional Children Funding (\$17M)** — would allocate funding to DPI for grants for applicable public school units for EC students who lost critical services due to COVID-19 related issues.
- **Training on the Science of Reading (\$3.25M)** — would provide funding for a statewide system of training on the science of reading, including high quality curriculum and evidence-based interventions for principals, teachers, reading coaches, and district curriculum and instruction leaders.
- **Cybersecurity Infrastructure (\$5M)** — would provide funds needed for statewide cybersecurity protection for school districts.
- **New Teacher Support Program (\$2.13M)** — would provide funding needed to expand the New Teacher Support Program to ensure mentors for all first-year teachers. The SBE noted future requests will focus on second-and third-year teachers; however, this request will focus on first-year teachers in state-defined low-performing schools and districts which have been particularly affected by COVID-19.
- **School Based Mental Health Policy (\$16.53M)** — would provide funds for districts to implement the new student health requirements in [Senate Bill 476 \(S.L. 2020-7\)](#). SBE noted this need has been “significantly exacerbated by the impact of COVID19 and our students’ social and emotional needs.”

- **Internet Connectivity and Broadband Services: Low Orbit Satellites (\$1M)** — While both the SBE and NCASA requested the legislature address school connectivity issues, the SBE specifically requested this funding for a Space X Pilot program “using low orbit satellite and 1000 hot spot connections, including ‘non-last mile connections’ to extend internet connectivity to our students and educators in very hard to reach locations.”

In addition to hearing presentations on [Coronavirus Relief Fund Availability](#) and [SBE/DPI legislative requests](#), committee members also heard presentations from the [NC Community College System](#), [NC Independent Colleges & Universities](#), and the [UNC System](#). Lawmakers recognized that it would be difficult to fund all of the requests from the various education groups, which totaled roughly \$325 million, but noted education “should undoubtedly remain a priority” in distributing remaining relief funds.

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