

Governor Cooper, State Education Leaders: Remote Learning To Continue Through End of 2019-2020 School Year

Cooper also proposes \$1.4 billion COVID-19 relief package using federal funds

Raleigh
Apr 24, 2020

Governor Roy Cooper today announced that North Carolina K-12 public schools will continue remote learning through the end of the 2019-2020 school year. Cooper was joined by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction Mark Johnson and the Chair of the State Board of Education Eric Davis for the announcement.

“School buildings will stay closed to students for this school year, but school isn’t over,” said Governor Cooper. “The decision to finish the year by remote learning was not made lightly, but it is the right thing to do to protect our students, teachers and communities. This is a difficult time for many children and parents, and I am grateful for all the educators, administrators, support staff and parents who have gone the extra mile to keep children learning.”

Cooper underscored the needs for schools to continue to provide school nutrition programs now and into the summer, and to be looking ahead and planning for when it is safe to re-convene schools in person. This includes how to get students back on track, especially those who have not been able to access remote learning or were already behind when schools closed to in-person instruction.

To help students without home internet access online learning opportunities, Cooper today announced a partnership to equip more school buses with Wi-Fi. School buses with Wi-Fi will travel to areas that lack internet so students can turn in assignments, download materials, and connect with teachers. AT&T is providing 100 hot spots, Duke Energy Foundation is providing 80, and additional partners are expected to join the effort.

State public health officials are developing safety guidelines for schools to follow when classes are able to convene in person, as well as guidance for summer camps and other groups that use school facilities.

BUDGET

Cooper also released a recommended budget plan to invest \$1.4 billion in emergency funds to help North Carolina respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding for this proposal would come predominantly from the state’s share of the federal CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) and would be appropriated by the North Carolina General Assembly in its upcoming session.

The budget package is intended to fund immediate needs in three main areas:

- Public health and safety
- Continuity of operations for education and other state government services
- Assistance to small businesses and local governments.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every North Carolinian. This emergency funding proposal makes strong investments in public health, schools, local governments and small businesses to respond to this unprecedented crisis,” said Cooper.

Governor Cooper and State Budget Director Charlie Perusse worked with state agencies, local governments, and other stakeholders to identify what immediate COVID-related needs were unmet by existing federal and commercial assistance to build a budget proposal that is responsive and responsible.

Key investments from this proposal include:

- \$75 million to support testing, tracing and trends analysis as well as have the Personal Protective Equipment needed to help North Carolina move into Phase 1 of easing restrictions;
- \$78 million for school nutrition to continue to serve as many as 500,000 meals a day to children who depend on these meals to meet basic nutrition needs typically met in school;
- \$75 million for rural and underserved communities and health care providers that are particularly hard hit by COVID-19;
- \$243 million for public schools to enhance remote learning and get ready for the next school year in a “new normal.” Funds are a joint request from DPI and the State Board of Education.
- \$52 million to the UNC system and private colleges to help with remote learning and COVID-19 impacts;
- \$300 million to assist local governments, distributed based partially on population and partially on acute need.

“We know that people are hurting, businesses are struggling, and local governments are facing severe shortages. That’s why we have to act now to get resources in the hands of people and organizations that provide vital support,” said Cooper.

Governor Cooper and State Budget Director Charlie Perusse have been in discussions with leaders of the North Carolina General Assembly for several weeks to develop a consensus COVID-19 budget package that can be approved swiftly when the legislature returns next week. Elements of this package have already been announced as having consensus support, including a significant investment in an already operating bridge loan program for small businesses through the Golden L.E.A.F. Foundation.

“This plan is a first step, and while it may not have all that North Carolina needs moving forward I present it in the spirit of compromise and consensus so that we can get relief to families fast,” said Cooper.