

Governor Cooper Directs \$95.6 Million to Support Students Impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic

Raleigh
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Today, Governor Roy Cooper directed \$95.6 million in new funding to help support K-12 and postsecondary students most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic who can benefit from support during the upcoming school year. The funding is North Carolina's share of the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund, a part of the federal CARES Act. The GEER funds are intended to provide emergency support to school districts, postsecondary institutions, or other education-related entities for addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Learning during a pandemic is an unprecedented challenge for students and staff, whether in the classroom or remotely. This funding should help protect the physical and mental health at schools, and help bridge the gap for students with unique learning needs," Governor Cooper said.

The Governor is directing the following investments to support K-12 students across North Carolina:

- \$40 million to the State Board of Education and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to hire more school nurses, counselors, social workers, and psychologists in our public schools.
- \$20 million to the State Board of Education and DPI to support the academic needs of at-risk students and students with disabilities through additional in-school supports, such as after-school programming, tutoring, or hiring more teachers or teacher assistants.

The investments in K-12 education will help students continue learning despite the pandemic and also align closely with efforts to help North Carolina meet its constitutional obligation to provide all students with access to a sound, basic education and resolve the Leandro case. In 2017, Governor Cooper helped convene the parties in the long-running Leandro case to come to a specific resolution that will benefit all North Carolina students.

In addition to funds for K-12 schools, the Governor is also directing the following investments to support students in postsecondary institutions across North Carolina:

- \$15 million to the NC Community College System to provide tuition assistance to students enrolled in short-term workforce training programs leading to a state or industry-recognized credential in a high-demand field.
- \$6 million to the UNC System for institutions to provide emergency assistance to North Carolina students whose ability to complete their degree has been impacted by the pandemic.
- \$4 million to the State Education Assistance Authority for independent colleges and universities to provide emergency assistance to North Carolina students whose ability to complete their degree has been impacted by the pandemic.
- \$566,000 to the UNC System for the NC School of Science and Mathematics and the UNC School of the Arts, each of which received limited to no federal higher education funding from the CARES Act because of the size of their high school student populations.

“To boost our economic recovery from this pandemic, we need to make sure that students are able to complete their postsecondary degrees or credentials,” Governor Cooper said. “This funding will help current students stay on track towards completing their degrees and will help more North Carolinians get access to the workforce training they need to be job ready.”

The remaining \$10 million will be held in reserve to address additional K-12 and postsecondary needs that may arise later this year or next year. The Governor has until May 2021 to allocate the funds. Recipients have until September 30, 2022 to spend the funds.

North Carolina education leaders joined in supporting the Governor’s allocation of GEER funding.

Eric Davis, Chair, NC State Board of Education: COVID-19 has exposed and increased opportunity gaps for NC students. We appreciate Governor Cooper providing a significant amount of his GEER funding for K-12 students consistent with the State Board of Education’s strategic initiatives. Increasing school-based health professionals, providing for the needs of our exceptional children, and expanding access to digital resources are critical in fulfilling our State’s constitutional responsibility to educate all of our children. As we anxiously await returning to school, these resources are important initial steps in meeting the needs of every student impacted by COVID-19.

Mark Johnson, Superintendent, NC Department of Public Instruction: We are grateful for this funding from the federal government and appreciate that so much of it will support our public school students.

Bill Carver, Interim President, NC Community College System: North Carolina Community Colleges are uniquely positioned to offer short term workforce preparation to assist in the State’s economic recovery. This funding will be used for targeted programs providing cost effective, high quality opportunities for North Carolinians wanting credentials leading to career advancement.

Peter Hans, President, UNC System: Many of North Carolina’s families are experiencing hardships right now. Supporting UNC students with additional financial aid at a critical point will allow them to complete their degree and launch their careers.

Hope Williams, President, NC Independent Colleges and Universities: On behalf of the 35,000 North Carolina students attending our 36 independent colleges and universities across the state, I want to thank Governor Cooper for allocating \$4 million in COVID-19 Relief funding to help students attend college this fall. For students whose families are facing unforeseen financial hardships due to the pandemic, this financial aid will keep the dream of a college degree alive.

BACKGROUND

This funding is the latest effort by Governor Cooper to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on our state’s students and their families. When Governor Cooper closed K-12 public schools to in-person instruction on March 14, he created the [Governor’s Education and Nutrition Working Group](#) to ensure access for frontline workers to safe, affordable child care and out-of-school-time care options; access to nutritious food for children while schools and child care programs were closed; and opportunities for structured learning while schools and child care programs were closed.

In addition, Governor Cooper provided \$50 million in flexible funding to school districts and charter schools in March to address COVID-19-related expenses and help them meet the needs of their students during remote learning.

To ensure that K-12 students are able to return to school safely for the upcoming school year, Governor Cooper, Secretary Cohen, and the state's K-12 education leaders announced in June the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit \(K-12\)](#), a comprehensive set of baseline health practices that public schools should follow to minimize the risk of exposure to COVID-19 for students, staff, and families. The Toolkit provides public health guidance to schools on developing a range of plans for in-person and remote learning, depending on the course of the pandemic.

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