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# K-12 EDUCATION LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Friday, January 16, 2026

## Highlights

### [NC likely won't have a new budget until at least April, as tax cut impasse continues](#)

WUNC News - Colin Campbell | January 12, 2026

North Carolina could remain ***without a new budget until at least April***. Any hopes of a quick resolution this month were dashed when the legislature held a no-vote session Monday. North Carolina is the ***only legislature in the country*** that didn't pass a budget bill last year. That's because House and Senate Republicans continue to disagree on whether to delay scheduled income tax cuts. Another session is on the calendar for February, but a spokeswoman for Berger told WUNC News that ***no votes are expected*** in the Senate until April.

Berger told PBS North Carolina a full budget agreement isn't likely before then. "I think comprehensive budget talk is not going to result in a comprehensive budget until maybe the short session," he said during [a recent interview on the show "State Lines."](#) "We'll see when we get back in April whether or not it does. The Senate is really determined that we promised people a tax cut, and that tax cut ought to take place."

### **[NC House Speaker Destin Hall \(R-District 87\) discusses the state budget, Medicaid and taxes \(Video\)](#)**

**PBS State Lines** - Host: Kelly McCullen | January 2, 2026: North Carolina House Speaker Destin Hall (R-District 87) discusses the status of state budget negotiations, NC's financial position and Medicaid funding. He also speaks on firearm laws and congressional redistricting.

### **['A local issue': US education secretary rules out federal relief for NC school district deficits](#)**

**WRAL News** - Heidi Kirk | January 14, 2026: U.S. Education Secretary Linda McMahon visited Fayetteville to launch a nationwide civics tour. The event was met with concerns regarding partisan sponsorship and a lack of federal support for local funding gaps.

### **[For years, some rural N.C. schools have operated without psychologists](#)**

#### ***Rural district leaders cite workforce shortage, lack of funding***

**NC Newsline** - Ahmed Jallow | January 12, 2026

Between the 2020–21 and mid-2024–25 school years, *14 North Carolina districts have operated without a staff psychologist*, according to data provided by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. A 2025 School-Based Mental Health Plan report found that more than half of school leaders cited insufficient staffing as the biggest barrier to student safety. The report described mental health services in many districts as "reactive rather than systematic," with schools responding to crises instead of preventing them. School psychologists are the only school-based professionals trained to conduct legally required special-education evaluations while also providing preventive mental health services. They are part of a broader support network that includes counselors, social workers and nurses.

National guidelines recommend one school psychologist for every 500 students. In North Carolina, the ratio is closer to one for every 1,928 students. Even in districts that have psychologists on staff, many are split across multiple schools.

### **[What SCOTUS decision on girls' sports might mean for NC](#)**

**The Carolina Journal** - Jeanette Doran | January 15, 2026

The US Supreme Court appears poised to uphold state laws that bar transgender women and girls from competing on female school sports teams. The Court heard [oral arguments](#) on Jan. 13, 2026, in *Little v. Hecox* and *West Virginia v. B.P.J.* If the Supreme Court ultimately upholds the Idaho and West Virginia laws, the decision would have direct relevance for North Carolina, which has already taken steps to define eligibility for school sports based on biological sex. In 2023, North Carolina enacted the [Fairness in Women's Sports Act](#), requiring that participation on middle school, high school, and collegiate athletic teams be determined by sex at birth, with separate teams designated for males and females (expressly co-ed). A final ruling is expected later this term, likely in early summer.

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## NCDPI Press Releases

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### State Board of Education

#### February State Board Meeting

- Wednesday, February 4, 2026 at 10 a.m.
- Thursday, February 5, 2026 at 9 a.m.

#### State Board of Education in the News:

##### School districts struggle to replace student digital devices due to funding, report says

**EdNC** - Sergio Osnaya-Prieto | January 12, 2026: A new Department of Public Instruction (DPI) [report](#) says that 100% of traditional public school districts currently have a 1-to-1 digital device-to-student ratio, though many districts are struggling to replace old or damaged devices due to a lack of funding.

**Access all YouTube recordings of SBE meetings [here](#).**

- [2025-2030 Strategic Plan](#)
- [K-12 Public Education Districts](#)
- [State Board Members for each District](#)
- [2026 State Board of Education Meetings](#)
- [NCSBE Rulemaking Information](#)



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### Celebrate the Good in Public Education

#### From Classroom to Community: A National History Teacher's Journey

NCDPI Celebrate the Good Blog | January 14, 2026



*Valencia Abbott, the North Carolina and National History Teacher of the Year for 2025*

*In this reflective essay, Valencia Abbott, the North Carolina and [National History Teacher of the Year for 2025](#), explores how place-based, inquiry-driven history instruction empowers students to see themselves as historians. Centered on local civil rights history, her work demonstrates how community-rooted learning builds critical thinking, empathy and civic readiness.*

We live in a moment where information is abundant. Yet understanding is fragile. Students are surrounded by narratives, some credible, some distorted, many designed to provoke rather than inform. In this context, history is not about nostalgia or celebration. It is about critical thinking. Teaching students how to analyze sources, evaluate claims and understand context equips them with tools that extend far beyond the classroom. History teaches discernment.

For me, teaching history has always been an act of coming home: to place, to people and to purpose. The past is not behind us. It is with us, shaping every choice we make. My task and my privilege are to help students see that clearly. I trust them with the truth.

Read the entire blog [here](#).

**Celebrate the Good  
Blog**

## **Ten Districts Awarded Nearly \$200,000 to Expand Homebuilding Career Programs**

**NCDPI Press Release** | January 14, 2026

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) today announced **\$197,929 in grants** to 10 public school districts to expand Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in homebuilding and residential construction.

The grants, authorized by the General Assembly, support program costs for CTE pathways that prepare students for careers in the construction trades. Districts were prioritized based on low-wealth status and

their populations of at-risk students and students with disabilities. Of the 33 applications, the following 10 districts were selected.

- Alexander County Schools — \$20,000
- Duplin County Schools — \$20,000
- Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Public Schools — \$20,000
- Harnett County Schools — \$20,000
- Lee County Schools — \$20,000
- Onslow County Schools — \$19,929
- Public Schools of Robeson County — \$20,000
- Rockingham County Schools — \$20,000
- Surry County Schools — \$20,000
- Yancey County Schools — \$18,000

Students in these programs earn industry-recognized credentials, including NCCER (National Center for Construction Education and Research) certifications and OSHA safety credentials, while gaining hands-on experience through work-based learning opportunities.

For more information about CTE programs in North Carolina, visit [www.dpi.nc.gov/cte](http://www.dpi.nc.gov/cte).  
Read the entire press release [here](#).

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## K-12 Education Bills

UPDATED 1/12/26: [2025-2026 Biennium K-12 Education Bills Tracking Link](#)

- [List of laws with an effective date of January 1, 2026](#)

### Bills To Watch

The following bills affecting K-12 education are still eligible for additional legislative action this session. All of the bills below have been placed on the [House Calendar](#) for **Monday, February 9, 2026**.

- [HB 87](#) Educational Choice for Children Act (ECCA).
- [HB 171](#) Equality in State Agencies/Prohibition on DEI.
- [SB 50](#) Freedom to Carry NC.
- [SB 153](#) North Carolina Border Protection Act.
- [SB 227](#) Eliminating "DEI" in Public Education.

### Reminder: Bills ≠ Laws

*Only a few dozen bills typically make it “across the finish line” and become law each legislative session.*

- For the current 2025 legislative session, **1,800+ total bills were introduced**.
- Of these, **108 bills have become law so far**.
- Of these 108 new laws, NCGA staff have noted [42 laws relate to education](#) in some way.

### North Carolina General Assembly in the News:

[NC joins growing list of states limiting screen time in classrooms](#)

**Carolina Journal** - David N. Bass | January 14, 2026

North Carolina students returning for the spring semester are facing a disconnected classroom environment, following a Jan. 1 state deadline that required all [public school boards](#) to enact strict bans on the use of smartphones and laptops during instructional time.

The ban under [House Bill 959](#), Protecting Students in a Digital Age, prohibits students from using, displaying, or having a wireless communication device turned on during instructional time, unless



otherwise instructed by a teacher. The bill also requires districts to prohibit students' access to social-media platforms in the classroom "except when expressly directed by a teacher solely for educational purposes."

The new law puts North Carolina on a growing list of states that have banned or limited the use of Internet-connected devices in classrooms. As of January, **26 states have enacted** such prohibitions on classroom screen time. **A total of 38** states either have an outright ban or have a statute in place that encourages school districts to adopt such policies, but stops short of an outright mandate.

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## North Carolina General Assembly

### 2026 NCGA Candidate Information

- [Unofficial Primary Election Candidates for 2027 NC House](#)
- [Unofficial - Primary Election Filing for 2027 Senate](#)
- [Home Page | NC State Board of Elections](#)

### Current Legislative Calendar

**SJR 776: Adjournment Resolution Changes**, approved by lawmakers in September, adjusted the legislative schedule for the remainder of the 2025 long session.

The NCGA is currently scheduled to reconvene on the following remaining dates, although legislative action on these dates, if any, is still to be determined:

- o **Feb. 9, 2026 - Feb. 12, 2026**
- o **March 9, 2026 - March 12, 2026**
- o **April 6, 2026 - April 9, 2026**
- o **April 21, 2026** — *Start of 2026 Short Session*

### State Budget Information & Resources

#### **2025 State Budget Proposal**

- [SB 257](#) - 2025 Appropriations Act
- Office of State Budget Management (OSBM) - [February 2025 Consensus General Fund Revenue Forecast](#)
- DPI Financial & Business Services - [Budget Comparison File](#) - May 22, 2025

#### **2025 Enacted "Mini Budgets"**

- [SB 449](#) - Continuing Budget Operations Part IV.
- [HB 125](#) - Continuing Budget Operations. | [Summary](#)
- [HB 358](#) - Continuing Budget Operations Part II. | [Summary](#)

#### **2023 State Budget**

- [HB 259](#) - 2023 Appropriations Act | [Committee Report](#)
- [SB 332](#) - 2023 Appropriations Act Changes | [Bill Summary](#)
- [SB 357](#) - Adjustments to the 2023 Appropriations Act

#### **Other State Budget Resources**

- [All Legislative Budget Documents](#)

- [K-12 Education Budget | NC DPI](#)
- [Highlights of NC Public School Budget - March 2025](#)

### **K-12 Education Legislation Resources**

- [Chapter 115C. Elementary and Secondary Education](#)
- 2025 education [bills](#) and [summaries](#).
- [NCSBA-2025 Legislative Session Summary - Aug. 28, 2025](#)
- [2023-2024 Legislation with Effective Dates of July 1, 2024 through January 1, 2025](#)
- [2025 Law Modifications](#)

### **Enacted Hurricane Helene Recovery Legislation**

- [HB 149](#) Disaster Recovery Act of 2024. | [Bill Summary](#)
- [SB 743](#) The Disaster Recovery Act of 2024 - Part II. | [Bill Summary](#) | [Committee Report](#)
- [SB 382](#) Disaster Relief-3/Budget/Various Law Changes. | [Bill Summary](#)
- [HB 47](#) Disaster Recovery Act of 2025 - Part I.
- [HB 1012](#) Disaster Recovery Act of 2025 - Part II.

### **Education Reports - NC DPI / SBE Reports**

### **NCGA Educational Resources**

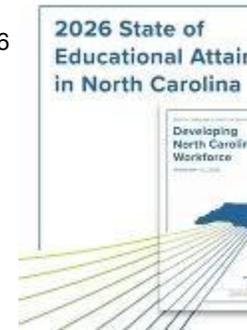
### **How an Idea Becomes a Law**

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## 2026 State of Educational Attainment in NC Regional Convenings

Join myFutureNC on **Thursday, February 12, 2026 at 3:00 p.m.** for one of eight 2026 State of Educational Attainment in North Carolina Regional Convenings. Together, we will dig into new statewide and county-level insights and the steps to strengthen local talent development in the year ahead.

- **Date:** Thursday, February 12, 2026 at 3:00 p.m.
- **Location:** Virtual
- **Register** by your region [HERE](#).



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## Purple Star Award - Deadline February 1



The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction recognizes the state's strong military presence and its support for military families through the Purple Star Award. This special designation is awarded to schools that demonstrate military-friendly practices and a commitment to military students and families.

- [NC Purple Star Award Designation Application](#)
- [Application Worksheet](#) | [2025 - 2026 Webinar](#)
- [Office Hours](#)
- Questions: Contact [Howard Lattimore](#)

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## Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. Leadership Award

Through this award, The Hunt Institute seeks to honor leaders who embody Governor Hunt's unwavering belief that every child deserves a strong start and a high-quality public education, and who lead through innovation, bipartisanship, and service.

### **Nominees must meet one or more of the following criteria:**

- Senior-level state leaders (e.g., governors, lieutenant governors, state agency heads, legislators) **or** state agencies
- Demonstrated impact at the state and/or national level, marked by bipartisan leadership and political will
- A sustained commitment to building and modernizing education systems—early childhood through postsecondary—that innovate to meet today's challenges

Complete the online nomination form and submit all required materials to share your nominee's accomplishments, impact, and why they merit this distinguished recognition. The nomination period is now open through **March 31, 2026**.

**[Submit your nomination here.](#)**

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## **Learning Happens Here Teacher Ambassadors**

**Applications open Thursday, January 15th and are due by Sunday, March 1st.**

This unique opportunity invites K-12 public school teachers from across North Carolina to partner with and experience DNCR's 100+ sites and programs across the state, including historic sites, museums, state parks, aquariums, the zoo, the symphony, and more! Selected ambassadors will enjoy exclusive behind-the-scenes experiences, as well as stipends, travel assistance, and CEU credits. Don't miss your chance to connect history, culture, nature, and education in powerful new ways.

If you have questions regarding the program or the application, please contact Sonya Laney Davis at [sonya.laney@dcnr.nc.gov](mailto:sonya.laney@dcnr.nc.gov).

**[Apply here by March 1](#)**

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## **Applications Open for the North Carolina Holocaust Educator Seminar in Poland 2026**

The North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching (NCCAT) will sponsor five teacher spots to attend the Holocaust Educator Seminar in Poland, scheduled for July 19-27, 2026. Most expenses for the trip, including flights, lodging, some meals and activities, will be included. Selected participants would return with significant expertise in the fields of Holocaust and Genocide Education. Preference will be given to middle and high school English and social studies educators.

- **The deadline to apply is January 18, 2026, at 11:59 p.m.**
- **[Find the application here.](#)**
- **Selected teachers will be notified by February 2, 2026.**



[For additional details on programming, last year's schedule can be found here.](#) Please direct any questions to Karen Sumner at [karen.sumner@nccat.org](mailto:karen.sumner@nccat.org).

**[Find more information on this program here](#)**

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## **In Other News**

### **North Carolina's 2026 primary elections: What you need to know**

**EdNC** - Ben Humphries | January 13, 2026

The new year marks a new election season. In North Carolina, primary elections will be held on March 3 for statewide and local seats. The general election will follow on Nov. 3.

For details on the election, see the North Carolina State Board of Elections (NCSBE) [2026 elections webpage](#).

### **Notable 2026 races**

U.S. Senate - See the full list of candidates for the Democratic and Republican primaries [here](#).

### **All N.C. House and N.C. Senate seats up for election**

All 100 N.C. House and all 50 N.C. Senate seats are up for election this year.

### **Educators on the ballot**

A group called [NC Educators on the Ballot](#) (NCEOB) is running six candidates for N.C. House seats, all of whom are current or former teachers. Those House seats represent portions of eight counties: Catawba, Davidson, Granville, Henderson, Iredell, Mecklenburg, Vance, and Wake.

### **Important primary election deadlines**

- **Jan. 12, 2026:** County boards of elections begin mailing absentee ballots to eligible voters who submitted an absentee ballot request form.
- **Feb. 6, 2026:** Voter registration deadline (5 p.m.).\*
- **Feb. 12, 2026:** In-person early voting begins.
- **Feb. 17, 2026:** Absentee ballot request deadline (5 p.m.).\*
- **Feb. 28, 2026:** In-person early voting ends (3 p.m.).
- **March 3, 2026:** Primary Election Day.
- **March 3, 2026:** Absentee ballot return deadline (7:30 p.m.).\*
- See a full election calendar [here](#).
- \*Voter registration and absentee voting deadlines are different for [military and overseas citizen voters](#).

### **Registering to vote or updating your registration**

See the [NCSBE voter registration webpage](#) for more information. The deadline to register or update your registration is 25 days before election day. For the 2026 primary election, that day is Feb. 6. Individuals may also register in person if they are voting early through a process called "[same-day registration](#)."

### **Qualifications to register**

Individuals must meet certain qualifications to register to vote, including being a United States citizen, having lived and resided in the county where they're registering for at least 30 days, and being at least 18 years old by the day of the general election. 17-year-olds can vote in primary elections if they will be 18 by the general election.

## **[More than 100 NC candidates switched parties. Here's what they say about why](#)**

**News & Observer** - Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi | January 12, 2026

Control of North Carolina's General Assembly largely comes down to math: which party has enough seats to move bills and, critically, override the governor's veto.

But the numbers game could be complicated by a group of candidates running in the upcoming primary election who switched political parties last year.

In most districts, one party has a hefty advantage in the general election. That means the primary is often the most competitive stage of the race. If party-switching candidates win their primaries in those districts and ultimately take office, some may not reliably vote with their new party.

Republicans currently hold a supermajority in the state Senate, giving them the three-fifths support needed to override vetoes from Democratic Gov. Josh Stein, so long as members vote along party lines. In the House, Republicans are just one seat short of a supermajority.

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Click [here](#) to subscribe to the weekly legislative update or other NC Department of Public Instruction topics.

To view previous K-12 Education Legislative Updates, click [here](#).

**NCDPI Office of Government Affairs: [Anne Murtha](#) – Legislative Specialist**

## Helpful Resources



**NORTH CAROLINA**  
State Board of Education  
Department of Public Instruction