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North Carolina Department of PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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State Board of Education Approves Measures to Cope with COVID-19 Fallout

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The State Board of Education took steps on three different fronts today to support schools across North Carolina coping with the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The board approved a grading policy to enable high school seniors to graduate on time. The board also approved guidance for districts and schools to encourage remote teaching and learning while also recognizing the challenges that many students and families face without digital access.
- In response to Gov. Roy Cooper's executive action earlier this week to provide $50 million in COVID-19 related support to districts and schools, the board approved a formula for allocating those funds based on a combination of student enrollment and poverty levels.
- The Board also approved an emergency paid-leave policy for public school employees for the month of April that addresses COVID-19 and related issues.

Under the policy adjustments related to this year's seniors, local schools and districts cannot require students to earn any more than the state's minimum of 22 credits in order to graduate. Many school districts have set graduation requirements that exceed the state minimum.

Seniors will receive grades for fall courses – yearlong and semester – and fall grades will count in students' grade point averages. For spring courses, students will receive a designation of pass or withdraw, if they were failing, as of their performance on March 13, the last day students were in school. For students who had a failing grade, districts and schools are being directed to provide remote learning opportunities to help them to pass.

The guidance outlines several different approaches for providing opportunities to students meet graduation requirements, including remote learning from the student's district or school or through the NC Virtual Public School, from a credit recovery program, or by passing a locally developed assessment based on material covered through March 13.

In general, the board's guidance on remote learning stresses student engagement over evaluation and allows schools to evaluate student performance in grades K-5 or assign grades for students in grades 6 though 11 only if a class or course meets a number of conditions, including equitable access, consistent communication between the teacher and students and evidence of student learning.

On the funding front, the board approved a $50 million allotment to districts based on both enrollment and a county's low-wealth designation: $25 million will be distributed based on a district or school's average daily membership and $25 million will be distributed based on a formula that multiplies enrollment by the county's low-wealth designation.

Gov. Cooper directed $50 million in school funding flexibility to help public schools support the greatest needs to serve students during the COVID-19 crisis. The additional funding is intended for expenditures associated with school nutrition, school and community-based childcare, cleaning and sanitizing schools and buses, protective equipment, and remote learning.

This allotment is comprised of unused funds from the current and previous year as well as the State Emergency Response and Disaster Relief Fund.

The State of Emergency Leave policy approved by the board will allow districts to continue to pay and provide benefits to eligible staff who cannot work remotely, who have child-care or elder-care needs, are at high risk of COVID-19 and others.

Up to 168 hours of paid State of Emergency Leave may be granted by districts or schools for the period between April 1 and April 30.

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