

Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee Discusses Teacher Licensure Process and Advanced Programs In High School

By Jacqueline Wyatt for NCASA

The Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee met Tuesday to discuss virtual charter schools, the teacher licensure process, and advanced programs in high school (AP/IB/AICE).

The first speaker, Joel Medley, director of N.C. Virtual Academy (NCVA), presented on the school he leads as a virtual, tuition-free public school chartered by the State Board of Education. Medley provided information on the following topics:

1. Family satisfaction results
2. Parent testimonials
3. Teacher satisfaction
4. Student demographics
5. Programs and approaches toward a family academic support team
6. Future plans, including plans of renewal and expected percentages of student success.

Committee members focused on their role in bettering the educational experiences for the children attending the school. Secondly, committee members showed concern about teacher pay within the program; typically, teachers working for NCVA are paid less than traditional teachers. Although they are eligible for supplemental compensation through recognition for outstanding work, they work from home and use online resources, which Medley explained mandates less funding.

Presentation materials and more information from the presentation can be found [here](#).

Teacher Licensure Process

Dr. Maria Pitre-Martin, Deputy State Superintendent from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, spoke on behalf of State Superintendent Mark Johnson regarding the NCDPI teacher licensure process and a 2017 audit of the program. The four key areas presented by Pitre-Martin were policy development, communication, the culture and structure of the licensure team, and technology of the licensure platform. She began the presentation by highlighting the licensure process in detail and walking committee members through the technological platform of licensure registration on the Department of Public Instruction website. According to DPI, the goal for the future is to improve the timing of the licensure process, as well as the efficiency of the platform.

Next, Steve LaFemina presented the NCDPI licensure review audit, which highlighted the fact that over the last few years, educators and their employers in NC have raised concerns about how long it takes to obtain a teaching license, saying the process can take up to 6 months to a year.

LaFemina presented the licensure audit that was discussed at the monthly State Board of Education meeting last week. Five key findings from the audit are as follow:

1. The people responsible for implementing the licensure policy are unsure what the current policy is and how to implement it.
2. There is a lack of reference information, causing problems with communication.

3. Data syncing and user log-in issues were found in the platform, which might be caused from a system flaw where duplicate entries for the same social security number can be entered.
4. There is an inconsistency in policy development to support the process.
5. There are insufficient support systems for licensure staff.

Apart from the broader issues discussed, LaFemina mentioned some of the tedious technological issues that have been found throughout the audit, which affect employers and future educators greatly due to the lack of user-friendliness of the system.

LaFemina continued the presentation by highlighting recommendations that NCDPI make to improve the licensure process. Key recommendations are: policy development, communications with the field, licensure team culture and structure, and improvements on technology and reporting. Lastly, he discussed the future timeline for DPI to implement the recommendations and generate both a better environment for the licensure staff, as well as methods to improve the proficiency of the online licensure platform.

Committee members expressed concern for the timeline of the teacher licensing. Committee Co-Chair, Senator Chad Barefoot (R-Wake), asked LaFemina about an eight-week processing time. However, LaFemina expressed that DPI has set a goal for as low as four weeks. Another concern was about the validity of an automated system online. LaFemina described the rigorous process, explaining that each line of each resume and application are scrutinized for accuracy before licensure is awarded. He also assured committee members that a person, rather than the online system, is still the only mode of information validation for each license. Lastly, committee members asked an assortment of questions regarding background checks, standardized testing prices per attempt, how many staff work toward each application, and specific application requirements.

More information, including presentation materials, can be found [here](#).

Advanced Programs In High School (AP /IB/AICE)

Sneha Shah-Coltrane, Director of the Division of Advanced Learning and Gifted Education at the Department of Public Instruction, presented an update on implementation of recent law changes intended to broaden successful participation in advanced courses.

The purpose of the legislation regarding advanced coursework is to increase student access to advanced courses. According to Shah-Coltrane, the aforementioned legislation provides NC public schools with the funding for the AP and IB programs, including exam fees. It also establishes the NC AP Partnership with The College Board, which provides technical assistance and professional development to targeted districts across the state. Lastly, it ensures a Results Report Card and provides teachers with bonus pay.

Shah-Coltrane then described the AP and IB exam coverage data from 2016-2017, the NA AP Partnership, AP student enrollment and exam statistics, AP program success highlights since its inception, AP courses through NC Virtual Public Schools, and statistics on the course enrollments and exams overview for IB students. There has been a 15% growth across the state in students enrolled in advanced courses, and 82,000 students were enrolled in one or more of the 38 offered AP courses in 2017. The number of African American AP exam takers in NC's public schools increased by 5.9% from 2016 to 2017, which is .9% higher than the national average. State funding of AP exams has also led to a 30% increase in the number of NC students who take the advanced course tests since 2013.

She then gave a brief overview of the International Baccalaureate (IB) school enrollment and exams overview. She explained that there has been consistent growth annually in student course enrollment across the state, which was up 23% in 2017. Lastly, Shah-Coltrane explained that even districts that do not offer qualified teachers for AP and IB courses have the opportunity to allow students to take these courses online.

Questions and comments from committee members after the presentation were centered around aspects of program eligibility, distribution of teacher funding for AP and IB classes, coordination with colleges, exam price for students and families, low wealth county data for students enrolled and passing exams, and exact data on how many students were enrolled in these programs across the state.

Senator Gladys A. Robinson raised concern regarding how many low wealth counties had students enrolled in the advanced courses and the percentage of African American and Hispanic students taking and passing exams. She explained that even if the percentages were up from last year, comparing them in context to more represented demographics would relay more telling data about students enrolled in the courses.

More information, including presentation materials, can be found [here](#).