



Lawmakers Fast-Track Additional COVID Relief, Direct DPI's Spending Of Federal Aid Funds

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State lawmakers this week approved a \$1.7 billion package to spend federal COVID-19 money and make other pandemic-related policy changes. [House Bill 196](#), which was introduced Monday, quickly moved through several House committees Tuesday afternoon ahead of gaining unanimous approval on the House floor Wednesday. The Senate Appropriations Committee took the bill up this morning, and then that chamber gave final approval to the package this afternoon. The House then concurred with a few Senate changes and sent the bill to Governor Roy Cooper for his consideration.

The bill includes \$600 million for COVID testing and other related needs as well as \$390 million to help K-12 and higher education navigate reopening campuses across the state. There's \$40 million for pending [House Bill 82](#) requiring schools to offer optional summer programs for students who fell behind. Following is a full listing of H196 components affecting K-12 schools:

- Section 1.1 allocates \$42,920,546 to the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER II) and \$84,824,393 to the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund – Emergency Assistance to Nonpublic Schools (EANS). Allocation of these funds will be determined by the Governor.
- Section 1.2 directs the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to allocate \$145.3 million in federal funds set aside for statewide initiatives under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief II Fund (ESSER II) to support these 16 specific programs and entities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:
 - 1) **\$500,000** to the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources for the State Library's NC Kids Digital Library project.
 - 2) **\$500,000** to the Governor Morehead School for the Blind, Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf, and North Carolina School for the Deaf for school nutrition, cleaning and sanitizing, learning resources, compensatory services, and Extended School Year Services.
 - 3) **\$1,000,000** to the UNC System for the North Carolina New Teacher Support Program.
 - 4) **\$1,000,000** to contract with a third-party entity to collect, analyze, and report data related to the overall impacts of COVID-19 on public school units, students, and families. An interim report will be due March 15, 2022, followed by a final report due Dec. 15, 2022.
 - 5) **\$1,200,000** to the Wildlife Resources Commission for the Outdoor Heritage Advisory Council's NC Schools Go Outside grant program.
 - 6) **Up to \$10,000,000** to be allocated as needed to each public school unit, except for schools operated by the State Board of Education, to ensure each receives at least \$180 per pupil in federal grant funds from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief II (ESSER II) Fund.
 - 7) **\$10,000,000** to the Instructional Support Allotment for contracted services for school health support personnel, including school counselors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers.

- 8) **\$10,000,000** to be allocated on a needs-basis, as demonstrated by expenditure of existing COVID relief funds for this same purpose, for school nutrition services.
 - 9) **\$1,000,000** for DPI to contract with a third-party entity to conduct a statewide assessment of the cybersecurity capabilities of, and threats to, public schools.
 - 10) **\$9,000,000** for DPI to contract with a third-party entity to implement a statewide cybersecurity program to improve the cybersecurity infrastructure of the public schools.
 - 11) **\$12,000,000** to contract with Voyager Sopris Learning, Inc., to provide Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training for pre-K-5 teachers in 2021-22 and 2022-23 for improving the literacy and language development of students, building strong foundational early literacy skills by utilizing the Science of Reading, and recouping learning losses resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - 12) **\$15,000,000** for the Extended Learning and Integrated Student Supports Competitive Grant Program. Of these funds, DPI may use up to \$200,000 to administer the program.
 - 13) **\$40,000,000** to be held in reserve by DPI to allocate to public school units to support in-person instruction programs to address learning loss and provide enrichment activities in the summer, with needs-based prioritization as demonstrated by expenditure of existing federal COVID relief funding.
 - 14) **\$26,046,144** to be held in reserve by DPI to allocate to public school units to support COVID-19 related needs, including in-person instruction programs to address learning loss and provide enrichment activities in the summer. The allocation of grants shall be prioritized based on need, as demonstrated by expenditure of existing federal COVID relief funding.
 - 15) **Up to \$8,012,955** to be used by DPI for administrative costs.
 - 16) If, on August 15, 2022, there are any remaining ESSER II funds from the allocations in line items 1-11 and 13-14 above, those shall be reallocated on or after that date to meet additional emergency needs of public school units, as determined by the State Board of Education.
- Section 1.3 directs the State Board of Education to use unallocated ESSER II funds to meet the emergency needs of elementary and secondary schools.
 - Section 1.8 directs each public school unit receiving federal grant funds under this legislation, beginning April 1, 2021, and quarterly thereafter, to submit reports to DPI, and DPI, beginning May 1, 2021, and quarterly thereafter, shall collate and submit the reports into a single, consolidated report to the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations and the Fiscal Research Division. Similar quarterly reports also are required for state agencies receiving funds under this bill.
 - Section 2.1 extends the 5% Medicaid fee-for-service rate increases for all provider types that were set to expire March 31, 2021, to June 30, 2021, unless the public health emergency ends, or Executive Order No. 116 expires or is rescinded, prior to that date.

- Section 2.2 clarifies that funds provided for community and home mobile internet access points for students may be used for internet service provided as part of the purchase price of a device and at no additional or ongoing cost.
- Section 2.5 extends the provision that allowed increased enrollment for virtual charter schools for the 2020-2021 school year to have the same increased enrollment for the 2021-2022 school year.
- Section 3.3 allocates an additional \$9,000,000 to the Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) Fund for expanding internet access across the state.

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