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Short Title: Schools for the Deaf and Blind Transition.

(Public)

Sponsors:

Referred to:

February 13, 2023

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT TO MAKE ADDITIONAL CHANGES TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF
THE SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND TO GOVERNANCE BY BOARDS OF
TRUSTEES.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

CLARIFY INDEPENDENCE OF SCHOOLS

SECTION 1.(a) G.S. 115C-150.11 reads as rewritten:

"§ 115C-150.11. ~~General supervision over~~ Establishment of the schools for the deaf and blind.

(a) Establishment. – The following are created as separate State agencies governed respectively by boards of trustees:

(1) The Governor Morehead School for the Blind of the Department of Public Instruction, for the function, purpose, and duty of serving students who are blind or visually impaired from birth to age 22. The Governor Morehead School for the Blind shall include the Governor Morehead Preschool.

(2) The Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf of the Department of Public Instruction, for the function, purpose, and duty of serving students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

(3) The North Carolina School for the Deaf of the Department of Public Instruction, for the function, purpose, and duty of serving students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

(a1) State Board of Education Supervision. – The State Board of Education shall have general supervision over the schools for the deaf and blind in accordance with G.S. 115C-12 and shall establish approximately equivalent service areas for each school for the deaf that cover the entire State. In establishing the service area for each school for the deaf, the State Board shall consider both the geographic proximity to the school for the deaf and the population of the service area. The State Board shall evaluate the effectiveness of the schools for the deaf and blind and shall, through the application of the accountability system developed under G.S. 115C-83.15 and G.S. 115C-105.35, measure the educational performance and growth of students placed in each school. If appropriate, the Board may modify this system to adapt to the specific characteristics of these schools. The boards of trustees for the schools for the deaf and blind shall be subject to



rules adopted by the State Board of Education in accordance with Chapter 150B of the General Statutes. Statutes for public school units.

(b) Independent Operation. — ~~Except as otherwise provided for in this Article, the schools for the deaf and blind shall be housed administratively within the Department of Public Instruction for purposes of distribution of State funds, but each school for the deaf and blind shall operate independently with a board of trustees as the governing body.~~ Department of Public Instruction Support. — The Department of Public Instruction shall include ~~employees of the schools for the deaf and blind and employees of those schools~~ in coverage for professional ~~liability~~ liability, worker's compensation, property, and liability policies purchased by the Department for ~~the Department or its employees~~ employees, and shall enter into a memorandum of understanding with the schools to facilitate the purchase of other insurance policies for those schools. In all other matters, the Department of Public Instruction shall provide services, support, and assistance to schools for the deaf and blind in the same manner and degree as for a local school administrative unit.

(c) Administrative Support. — The Department of Administration shall provide support to each school in matters related to finance, human resources, and procurement, including for information technology. Each school shall enter into a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Administration with regard to this support. No civil liability shall attach to the Department of Administration, or to any of its employees, individually or collectively, for any acts or omissions of a school.

(d) Immunity. — In addition to all other immunities provided to them by applicable State law, a school, its board of trustees, and the school's members, employees, and agents shall be entitled to the specific immunities provided for this Chapter applying to the State Board of Education, Superintendent of Public Instruction, a local board of education, a local school administrative unit, and their members and employees. Immunity established by this subsection shall be deemed to be waived to the extent of indemnification under Article 31A and Article 31B of Chapter 143 of the General Statutes and to the extent sovereign immunity is waived under the State Tort Claims Act, as set forth in Article 31 of Chapter 143 of the General Statutes.

(e) Funding. — In addition to appropriations directed solely to the schools for the deaf and blind, the schools shall be eligible to (i) receive the benefit of any regional or statewide systems of support provided by the Department of Public Instruction to all public school units and (ii) apply for any grants available to all public school units. The schools for the deaf and blind shall not be eligible to receive funding allotments for local school administrative units unless otherwise directed by the General Assembly."

SECTION 1.(b) G.S. 115C-150.16 reads as rewritten:

"§ 115C-150.16. Applicability of Chapter.

Except as otherwise provided in this Article and Article 7B of this Chapter, the requirements of this Chapter shall not apply to the schools for the deaf and blind. Schools for the deaf and blind shall ~~be considered a State agency, as defined in G.S. 143C-1-1, and shall comply with all requirements for State agencies in State law unless otherwise specified in this Article.~~ Schools for the deaf and blind shall not be considered local school administrative units."

SECTION 1.(c) G.S. 115C-150.11(a), (b), and (c) apply beginning July 1, 2025.

CLARIFY QUORUM REQUIREMENTS AND QUALIFICATIONS OF BOARD MEMBERS

SECTION 2.(a) G.S. 115C-150.12A(b) reads as rewritten:

"(b) Qualifications. — No employee of the school may be a member of the board of trustees of that school. A board member that becomes an employee of that school shall be deemed to resign from his or her membership on the board of trustees. Appointing entities are strongly encouraged to fill the appointments to each board of trustees with persons with expertise or experience in the areas of education for those who are deaf or hard of hearing or who are blind

1 or visually impaired, administration and governance, finance and budgeting, or who otherwise
2 have demonstrated concern for quality of education for those who are deaf or hard of hearing or
3 who are blind or visually impaired."

4 **SECTION 2.(b)** G.S. 115C-150.12A(f) reads as rewritten:

5 "(f) Meetings. – A board of trustees shall meet at least four times a year and also at such
6 other times as it may deem necessary. A majority of the voting members of the board shall
7 constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. All meetings shall be subject to Article 33C
8 of Chapter 143 of the General Statutes. The members shall receive per diem compensation and
9 necessary travel and subsistence expenses while engaged in the discharge of their official duties,
10 in accordance with the provisions of G.S. 138-5."

11 12 **CLARIFY AUTHORITY OF SCHOOL LEADERS**

13 **SECTION 3.(a)** G.S. 115C-150.10(5) is repealed.

14 **SECTION 3.(b)** G.S. 115C-150.10 is amended by adding a new subdivision to read:

15 "(10) Superintendent. – The chief administrator of a school for the deaf or the school
16 for the blind."

17 **SECTION 3.(c)** G.S. 115C-150.12B reads as rewritten:

18 **"§ 115C-150.12B. Employees of schools for the deaf and blind.**

19 (a) ~~Director. Superintendent.~~ – Each board of trustees of a school shall appoint a ~~director~~
20 superintendent for that ~~school, who~~ school who meets the requirements of G.S. 115C-271 for
21 employment. The superintendent shall act as secretary to the board of trustees in accordance with
22 G.S. 115C-150.12A and shall manage day to day operations of the school G.S. 115C-150.12A.
23 All acts of the boards of trustees, not in conflict with State law, shall be binding on the
24 superintendent, and the superintendent shall carry out all rules and regulations of the board and
25 other duties as prescribed by the board of trustees. For purposes of application to other statutes
26 in this Chapter, the ~~director~~ superintendent shall be the equivalent of a superintendent of schools
27 a local school administrative unit and shall fulfill the duties of a superintendent as provided in
28 Article 18 of this Chapter.

29 (b) ~~Director. Superintendent~~ Duties. – The ~~director~~ superintendent shall recommend
30 school personnel to the board of trustees. The ~~director~~ superintendent shall supervise the
31 administrative staff of the school, including the principal, director of human resources, and
32 director of business and finance.

33 ...

34 (e) Human Resources. – The board of trustees is responsible for providing human
35 resources and employment-related services for the school. The board of trustees may delegate
36 some or all of this responsibility to the ~~director~~ superintendent for the school or to the director of
37 human resources, in its discretion."

38 **SECTION 3.(d)** G.S. 115C-150.12C(14) reads as rewritten:

39 "(14) Conduct and duties of personnel. – The board of trustees, upon the
40 recommendation of the ~~director~~ superintendent, shall have full power to make
41 rules governing the conduct of teachers, principals, and supervisors; the kind
42 of reports they shall make; and their duties in the care of school property. Prior
43 to the beginning of each school year, the board of trustees shall identify all
44 reports that are required for the school year and shall, to the maximum extent
45 possible, eliminate any duplicate or obsolete reporting requirements and
46 consolidate remaining reporting requirements. Prior to the beginning of each
47 school year, the board of trustees shall also identify software protocols that
48 could be used to minimize repetitious data entry and shall make them available
49 to teachers and other employees."

50 **SECTION 3.(e)** G.S. 115C-150.13A(c)(2)a. reads as rewritten:

51 "a. A chair designated by the ~~director~~ superintendent of the school."

1 **SECTION 3.(f)** G.S. 115C-150.13A(c)(4) reads as rewritten:

2 "(4) A final admissions determination made by the ~~director~~superintendent of the
3 school or the ~~director~~superintendent of the school's designee."

4 **SECTION 3.(g)** G.S. 115C-150.13A(e) reads as rewritten:

5 "(e) Disenrollment. – A student's continued enrollment in an educational program
6 assignment status shall be subject to reevaluation by the admissions committee when determined
7 necessary by the school to assess if the student continues to meet eligibility criteria. The
8 disenrollment assessment shall follow the same procedures as the admissions process, and a final
9 determination shall be made by the ~~director~~superintendent or the ~~director's~~superintendent's
10 designee."

11 **SECTION 3.(h)** G.S. 115C-150.15 reads as rewritten:

12 "**§ 115C-150.15. Reporting to schools on deaf and blind children.**

13 (a) Request for Consent. – ~~Local superintendents~~Superintendents of local school
14 administrative units shall require that the following request for written consent, along with any
15 informational materials provided by the school for the blind or the school for the deaf in the
16 service area in which the local school administrative unit is located, be presented to parents or
17 custodians of any children who are deaf or hard of hearing or are blind or visually impaired no
18 later than October 1 of each school year: "North Carolina provides two public schools for the
19 deaf serving students who are deaf or hard of hearing: the Eastern North Carolina School for the
20 Deaf and the North Carolina School for the Deaf. North Carolina also has a public school for the
21 blind serving students who are blind or visually impaired: the Governor Morehead School for the
22 Blind. Do you consent to the release of your contact information and information regarding your
23 child and his or her hearing or vision status to these schools so that you can receive more
24 information on services offered by those campuses?"

25 (b) Annual Report to Schools for the Deaf and Blind. – ~~Local superintendents~~
26 Superintendents of local school administrative units shall report by November 30 each year the
27 names and addresses of parents or custodians of any deaf or hard of hearing or blind or visually
28 impaired children who have given written consent to the ~~directors~~superintendents of the schools
29 for the deaf and blind. The report shall include whether the hearing and visual impairments range
30 from partial to total disability, and if the child has multiple disabilities with the visual or hearing
31 impairment not identified as the primary disability of the student. The report shall also be made
32 to the Department of Public Instruction.

33 (c) Confidentiality of Records. – The ~~directors~~superintendents of the schools for the deaf
34 and blind shall treat any information reported to the schools by a ~~local~~superintendent of a local
35 school administrative unit under subsection (b) of this section as confidential, except that a
36 ~~director~~superintendent of the schools for the deaf and blind or the ~~director's~~superintendent's
37 designee may contact the parents or custodians of any hearing impaired or visually impaired
38 children whose information was included in the report. The information shall not be considered
39 a public record under G.S. 132-1.

40 (d) Transfer of Information. – Upon the written request of a parent or custodian of a
41 student who has applied to a school for the deaf or school for the blind, the ~~local~~superintendent
42 of a local school administrative unit or, if there is no superintendent, the staff member with the
43 highest decision-making authority in the public school unit shall share with the ~~director of the~~
44 ~~school~~superintendent of the schools for the deaf and blind a copy of all current evaluation data
45 and a copy of the current or proposed individualized education plan for any child enrolled in that
46 public school unit who is identified as a child with a disability who is deaf, hard of hearing, blind,
47 or visually impaired."

48
49 **AUTHORITY TO PURCHASE LIABILITY INSURANCE**

50 **SECTION 4.(a)** G.S. 115C-150.12C(2) reads as rewritten:

"(2) Exercise judicial functions. – The board of trustees shall employ or contract with private counsel to provide advice and representation for the school. The board may institute all actions, suits, or proceedings against officers, persons, or corporations, or their sureties, for the recovery, preservation, and application of all money or property which may be due to or should be applied to the support and maintenance of the school. In all actions brought in any court against a board of trustees, the order or action of the board shall be presumed to be correct, and the burden of proof shall be on the complaining party to show the contrary. G.S. 114-2.3 and G.S. 147-17 shall not apply to the schools for the deaf and blind. Upon the request of the board of trustees of a school, the Attorney General shall provide representation as required by G.S. 114-2. Each school shall be regarded as a State agency for the purposes of the State Tort Claims Act and associated representation by the Office of the Attorney General with regards to litigation defense."

SECTION 4.(b) G.S. 115C-150.12C(27) reads as rewritten:

"(27) Group accident and health insurance for ~~students~~, students, other liability insurance. – A board of trustees may ~~purchase group~~ purchase:

a. Group accident, group health, or group accident and health insurance for students in accordance with G.S. 58-51-81.

b. Liability insurance as provided in G.S. 115C-42 and directors and officers insurance. G.S. 115C-42 shall apply to a school that purchases liability insurance consistent with that section."

APPEALS OF ADMISSIONS ELIGIBILITY TO BOARDS OF TRUSTEES

SECTION 5.(a) G.S. 115C-150.13A(f) reads as rewritten:

"(f) Free Appropriate Public Education. – The local school administrative unit or charter school in which the student is enrolled shall have the initial responsibility of identifying and evaluating the special education needs of the student and providing a special educational program and related services in accordance with Article 9 of this Chapter. If a parent submits an application to the school for enrollment of the parent's child in the school's educational program, and if the child is determined to meet the eligibility criteria for admission to the school's educational program, the school is responsible for the provision of a free appropriate public ~~education~~, education upon enrollment. However, a subsequent determination by the school that the student no longer meets eligibility criteria immediately transfers the responsibility for the provision of a special educational program and related services to ensure a free appropriate public education back to the local school administrative unit or charter school in which the student was previously enrolled."

SECTION 5.(b) G.S. 115C-150.13A(h) reads as rewritten:

"(h) ~~Due Process Hearing~~, Eligibility Appeal. – A parent may seek an ~~impartial due process hearing appeal~~ to the board of trustees following a final determination on a student's eligibility by the director. ~~If the parent pursues a due process hearing to challenge the school's ineligibility determination, the student's "stay put" placement shall not be the school but shall be the student's local school administrative unit or charter school superintendent. Parents may not seek an impartial due process hearing regarding any eligibility determination.~~

SECTION 5.(c) G.S. 150B-1(e) is amended by adding a new subdivision to read:

"(29) The Governor Morehead School for the Blind, Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf, and the North Carolina School for the Deaf, with respect to eligibility determinations under G.S. 115C-150.13A."

TRANSITION SUPPORT

SECTION 6.(a) Section 5 of S.L. 2023-10 is repealed.

SECTION 6.(b) For the 2024-2025 school year, the Department of Public Instruction shall administratively house the Governor Morehead School for the Blind, Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf, and North Carolina School for the Deaf (Schools). The Department of Public Instruction shall include the Schools and employees of the schools in coverage for professional liability, worker's compensation, property, and liability policies purchased by the Department of Public Instruction for the Department and its employees, and shall enter into a memorandum of understanding with the Schools to facilitate the purchase of other insurance policies for those Schools. The Department of Public Instruction and the Schools shall enter into a memorandum of understanding with regards to the administrative support. At a minimum, the Department of Public Instruction shall provide administrative support in matters related to finance, human resources, and procurement, including for information technology and capital.

SECTION 6.(c) No civil liability shall attach to the State Board of Education, the Department of Public Instruction, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, or to any of their members or employees, individually or collectively, for any acts or omissions of the Governor Morehead School for the Blind, Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf, and North Carolina School for the Deaf, the boards of trustees of those schools, or their members and employees.

SECTION 6.(d) The Department of Administration, in coordination with the Schools, the Department of Public Instruction, and the Department of Information Technology, shall study the costs and positions needed for support of the Schools and shall report this information and any recommended legislation to the Fiscal Research Division and the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee no later than March 1, 2025.

SECTION 6.(e) The Office of the State Controller and Office of State Budget and Management shall ensure that the Schools are established as State agencies prior to July 1, 2025.

SECTION 6.(f) The Department of Public Instruction, the Office of the State Controller, the Office of State Budget and Management, and the Department of Administration shall each designate an individual to serve as a liaison for the Schools to assist with technical and administrative questions during the 2024-2025 school year.

SECTION 6.(g) The North Carolina Collaboratory, in consultation with each of the Schools, the Department of Public Instruction, and the Department of Administration, shall study each School's administrative structure, operations, and policies, including the cost and positions needed for the support of the Schools and how to optimize operation of that School to maximize the educational outcomes for the School's students and ensure the School's success and independence. The Collaboratory shall report its findings, recommendations for each School, and any recommended legislation to the Fiscal Research Division and the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee no later than March 1, 2025.

TYPE I-LIKE TRANSFER

SECTION 7. Effective July 1, 2024, the powers, duties, and functions, records, personnel, contracts, property, unexpended balances of appropriations, allocations or other funds, including the functions of budgeting and purchasing, are transferred from the Department of Public Instruction and State Board of Education to the Governor Morehead School for the Blind and Governor Morehead Preschool, Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf, and North Carolina School for the Deaf, respectively. The respective boards of trustees of the Governor Morehead School for the Blind, Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf, and North Carolina School for the Deaf shall exercise all prescribed statutory powers, including the management functions of planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting.

REPORTING

SECTION 8. Subsection (b) of Section 7 of S.L. 2023-10 reads as rewritten:

"SECTION 7.(b) Each board of trustees of the schools for the deaf and blind shall provide interim reports to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by December 15, 2023, and March 15, 2024, and a final report by ~~July 1, 2024~~, September 1, 2024, on the plans and progress in transitioning to assumption of administration of the schools for the deaf and blind, with the support of and consultation with staff of the school for that board. The Department of Public Instruction shall provide information as requested to each board of trustees. The reports shall include the following:

...."

GOVERNOR MOREHEAD SCHOOL FACILITIES

SECTION 9.(a) The Department of Administration shall reassign all assets in Complex 1-92-9 to the Governor Morehead School.

SECTION 9.(b) The Governor Morehead School and Department of Health and Human Services shall enter into a memorandum of understanding related to use of assets in Complex 1-92-9 for shared services.

TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS

SECTION 10.(a) G.S. 14-458.2(a) reads as rewritten:

"(a) The following definitions apply in this section:

(1) School employee. – The term means any of the following:

- a. An employee of a ~~local board of education, a charter school authorized under G.S. 115C 218.5, a regional school created under G.S. 115C 238.62, a laboratory school created under G.S. 116 239.7,~~ public school unit or a nonpublic school which has filed intent to operate under Part 1 or Part 2 of Article 39 of Chapter 115C of the General Statutes.
- b. An independent contractor or an employee of ~~an independent contractor of a local board of education, a charter school authorized under G.S. 115C 218.5, a regional school created under G.S. 115C 238.62, a laboratory school created under G.S. 116 239.7,~~ a public school unit or a nonpublic school which has filed intent to operate under Part 1 or Part 2 of Article 39 of Chapter 115C of the General Statutes, if the independent contractor carries out duties customarily performed by employees of the school.

(2) Student. – A person who has been assigned to ~~a school by a local board of education as provided in G.S. 115C 366~~ or has enrolled in a ~~charter school authorized under G.S. 115C 218.5, a regional school created under G.S. 115C 238.62, a laboratory school created under G.S. 116 239.7,~~ public school unit or a nonpublic school which has filed intent to operate under Part 1 or Part 2 of Article 39 of Chapter 115C of the General Statutes, or a person who has been suspended or expelled from any of those schools within the last year."

SECTION 10.(b) G.S. 115C-102.9(b) reads as rewritten:

"(b) Each public school unit shall annually submit all categories of information included in the digital learning dashboard no later than November 15. For subdivisions (2) and (3) of subsection (a) of this section, ~~residential~~ schools for the deaf and blind shall report on access and connectivity separately for the dormitories and the student's home."

FUNDING

SECTION 11. It is the intent of the General Assembly to appropriate funds on a recurring basis to provide for costs of the Department of Administration in providing

1 administrative support for the Governor Morehead School for the Blind, Eastern North Carolina
2 School for the Deaf, and North Carolina School for the Deaf. It is also the intent of the General
3 Assembly to appropriate funds on a recurring basis to provide for insurance, legal, and
4 information technology expenses.
5

6 **EFFECTIVE DATE**

7 **SECTION 12.** Sections 1, 2, 4, and 5 of this act are effective July 1, 2024. Section
8 3 of this act is effective July 1, 2025. The remainder of this act is effective when it becomes law.