

Pilot Program to Raise the High School Dropout Age

*Presented by
Center for Safer Schools
Executive Director
Karen W. Fairley*

Statutory Requirements

- N.C. Session Law 2016-94, Section 8.21(g)
 - The local school administrative units, in collaboration with the State Board of Education, shall report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education, and the Senate Appropriations Committee on Education/Higher Education by January 15, 2018, and by January 15 of each even-numbered year thereafter until the end of the operation of the pilot programs.

Statutory Requirements

- The report shall include at least all of the following information:
 - (1) An analysis of the graduation rate in each local school administrative unit and the impact of the pilot program on the graduation rate.
 - (2) The teen crime statistics for Catawba County and for Rutherford County.
 - (3) The number of reported cases of violations of compulsory attendance laws in Catawba County and Rutherford County and the disposition of those cases.
 - (4) Implementation of enforcement mechanisms for violations of the compulsory attendance requirements of the pilot program, including the imposition of criminal penalties.
 - (5) The number of at-risk students served in any night programs established as part of the pilot program and student graduation and performance outcomes for those students.
 - (6) All relevant data to assist in determining the effectiveness of the program and specific legislative recommendations, including the continuation, modification, or expansion of the program statewide.

SBE Strategic Priorities

- Goal 1 – Eliminate opportunity gaps by 2025
- Objective 4 – Decrease the high school dropout rate for each subgroup

Pilot Program

- The “Pilot Program to Raise the High School Dropout Age from Sixteen to Eighteen” began with the pilot counties as Hickory Public Schools and Newton-Conover City Schools.
- The first year (2014-15) was used primarily for planning. The first full year of implementation was 2015-16.
- Rutherford County Schools entered the pilot in 2017-18
- In 2017, McDowell County Schools was added to the pilot program.

Important Note

- While the data reported covers the full 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years, caution should be taken when making comparisons to previous years.
- After the March 16, 2020, school closures – which were mandated by Executive Order in response to the COVID-19 pandemic – there were significant reductions in the number of incidents of Crime and Violence, Suspensions, Alternative Learning Placements and withdrawal dates for verified dropouts when compared to the same time frame in prior school years.

Updates

- The state dropout rate increased from 1.94 in 2020-21 to 2.25 in 2021-22.
- Newton-Conover (1.06) and Rutherford (2.79) experienced declines in dropout rates from 2020-21 to 2021-22.
- Hickory (2.55) and McDowell (3.73) posted increases in dropout rates from 2020-21 to 2021-22.

Updates

- The state graduation rate declined from 87.0 in 2020-21 to 86.4 in 2021-22.
- Hickory (85.2), McDowell (79.9), Newton-Conover (87.2) and Rutherford (87.2) posted declines in graduation rates from 2020-21 to 2021-22.
- Short-Term Suspension Rates Per 100 – All Students increased for Hickory (26.23), McDowell (6.47), Newton-Conover (16.61) and Rutherford (17.72) from 2020-21 to 2021-22.

Crime and Violence Acts at the High School Level

	2014-15			2015-16			2016-17		
	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 1000)	High School State Crime Rate (per 1000)	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 1000)	High School State Crime Rate (per 1000)	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 1000)	High School State Crime Rate (per 1000)
Catawba County	95	18.03	13.19	63	11.92	12.75	59	11.02	12.12
Hickory	21	17.09	13.19	37	30.71	12.75	4	3.29	12.12
Newton-Conover	11	10.81	13.19	11	10.68	12.75	19	19.15	12.12
McDowell	42	22.35	13.19	19	9.97	12.75	45	23.38	12.12
Rutherford	36	14.06	13.19	33	12.83	12.75	38	14.97	12.12

Crime and Violence Acts at the High School Level

	2017-18			2018-19			2019-20*		
	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 1000)	High School State Crime Rate (per 1000)	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 1000)	High School State Crime Rate (per 1000)	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 1000)	High School State Crime Rate (per 1000)
Catawba County	72	13.79	11.88	56	11.41	10.73	49	10.12	8.08
Hickory	11	9.22	11.88	9	7.77	10.73	4	3.42	8.08
Newton-Conover	11	11.2	11.88	10	10.73	10.73	16	17.17	8.08
McDowell	26	13.80	11.88	53	30.53	10.73	28	16.20	8.08
Rutherford	18	7.20	11.88	16	6.56	10.73	6	2.56	8.08

Crime and Violence Acts at the High School Level

	2020-21*			2021-22		
	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 1000)	High School State Crime Rate (per 1000)	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 1000)	High School State Crime Rate (per 1000)
Catawba County	23	4.86	1.46	51	10.67	13.16
Hickory	0	0.00	1.46	9	8.12	13.16
Newton-Conover	1	1.10	1.46	8	8.70	13.16
McDowell	6	3.45	1.46	34	19.73	13.16
Rutherford	9	4.01	1.46	21	9.20	13.16

Graduation Rates (4-Year Cohort)

	2013- 14	2014- 15	2015- 16	2016- 17	2017- 18
State	83.9	85.6	85.9	86.5	86.3
Catawba County	90.8	89.8	89.8	91.5	91.9
Hickory	83.9	83.9	84.7	85.0	90.6
Newton- Conover	92.5	>95	93.5	>95.0	91.3
McDowell	77.0	80.4	81.6	85.3	85.2
Rutherford	78.6	81.9	81.2	85.0	84.1

Graduation Rates (4-Year Cohort)

	2018- 19	2019- 20*	2020- 21	2021- 22
State	86.5	87.6	87.0	86.4
Catawba County	89.0	89.1	87.1	86.2
Hickory	87.0	87.5	88.4	85.2
Newton- Conover	94.4	94.8	88.2	87.2
McDowell	83.2	86.9	85.0	79.9
Rutherford	84.2	87.8	88.2	87.2

Graduation Rates Over Time

	State	Catawba County	Hickory	Newton-Conover	McDowell	Rutherford
2005-06	68.3	81.6	70.4	67.3	64.1	66.2
2006-07	69.5	80.6	70.8	79.6	68.1	69.1
2007-08	70.3	81.2	76.8	81.0	68.6	68.7
2008-09	71.8	83.8	74.3	76.3	72.3	64.0
2009-10	74.2	83.2	68.6	88.6	72.9	67.1
2010-11	77.9	86.2	76.5	83.0	75.2	69.0
2011-12	80.4	89.3	82.2	81.9	78.2	73.3
2012-13	82.5	91.3	82.8	87.4	78.2	77.7
2013-14	83.9	90.8	83.9	92.5	77.0	78.6
2014-15	85.6	89.8	83.9	95.0	80.4	81.9
2015-16	85.9	89.8	84.7	93.5	81.6	81.2
2016-17	86.5	91.5	85.0	95.0	85.3	85.0
2017-18	86.3	91.9	90.6	91.3	85.2	84.1
2018-19	86.5	89.0	87.0	94.4	83.2	84.2
2019-20*	87.6	89.1	87.5	94.8	86.9	87.8
2020-21	87.0	87.1	88.4	88.2	85.0	88.2
2021-22	86.4	86.2	85.2	87.2	79.9	87.2

Dropout Counts and Rates

	2013-14		2014-15		2015-16		2016-17		2017-18	
	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate
State	10404	2.28	11190	2.39	10889	2.29	11097	2.31	10523	2.18
Catawba County	98	1.2	110	2.01	105	1.29	64	1.45	100	1.84
Hickory	35	1.82	40	3.04	30	1.52	18	1.42	15	1.21
Newton-Conover	9	0.62	2	0.19	6	0.4	2	0.2	7	0.69
McDowell	70	3.55	86	4.20	70	3.47	55	2.71	75	3.77
Rutherford	94	3.40	87	3.16	102	3.67	95	3.46	58	2.20

	2018-19		2019-20*		2020-21*		2021-22	
	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate
State	9512	2.01	7194	1.53	9147	1.94	10841	2.25
Catawba County	96	1.87	81	1.61	155	3.07	64	1.29
Hickory	17	1.39	13	1.06	30	2.45	31	2.55
Newton-Conover	17	1.75	8	0.84	28	2.92	10	1.06
McDowell	57	3.10	28	1.56	64	3.46	70	3.73
Rutherford	47	1.82	28	1.14	77	3.21	69	2.79

Attendance Rates

	2013- 14	2014- 15	2015- 16	2016- 17	2017- 18	2018- 19	2019- 20*
Hickory Career & Arts Magnet	91.67	90.16	92.90	94.19	92.72	93.71	96.36
Hickory High School	94.71	92.99	93.16	93.40	91.17	91.54	94.33
Newton-Conover High School	96.19	93.05	93.16	92.09	92.63	91.37	94.36
Discovery High School	96.92	96.49	96.92	92.51	93.06	93.98	96.19

	2020- 21	2021- 22
Hickory Career & Arts Magnet	93.09	94.58
Hickory High School	84.17	87.27
Newton-Conover High School	88.18	89.74
Discovery High School	98.56	90.95

ADA Rate Over Time

	Hickory Career & Arts Magnet	Hickory High School	Newton- Conover High School	Discovery High School
2005-06		94.91	94.07	
2006-07		95.04	93.67	
2007-08		95.79	95.69	
2008-09	79.61	96.07	95.03	
2009-10	77.11	95.38	96.04	
2010-11	85.48	94.14	95.62	
2011-12	89.94	93.83	96.41	96.30
2012-13	92.20	95.76	96.70	96.30
2013-14	91.67	94.71	96.19	96.92
2014-15	90.16	92.99	93.05	96.49
2015-16	92.90	93.16	93.16	96.92
2016-17	94.19	93.40	92.09	92.51
2017-18	92.72	91.17	92.63	93.06
2018-19	93.71	91.54	91.37	93.98
2019-20*	94.39	90.01	91.30	96.25
2020-21	94.39	90.01	91.30	96.25
2021-22	94.61	88.73	90.78	95.23

Short-Term/Long-Term Suspensions

Short-Term Suspension Counts – All Students

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20*	2020-21*	2021-22
Catawba County	1171	1063	1157	1170	1525	574	381	1562
Hickory City	752	759	674	488	637	284	104	968
Newton-Conover	440	289	270	290	332	42	87	465
Iredell-Statesville	2435	2492	2453	2361	2041	457	727	828
McDowell	405	328	482	367	526	146	109	170
Rutherford	1192	1310	1203	1020	1074	195	103	573

Short-Term Suspension Rates Per 100 – All Students

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20*	2020-21*	2021-22
Catawba County	7.06	6.51	7.10	7.27	9.70	11.85	2.51	10.31
Hickory City	17.26	17.83	16.01	11.85	15.76	24.27	2.78	26.23
Newton-Conover	14.08	9.36	9.01	9.73	11.30	4.51	3.14	16.61
Iredell-Statesville	11.73	12.07	12.08	11.62	10.13	6.67	3.64	14.90
McDowell	6.47	5.30	7.86	6.11	8.96	8.45	1.95	6.47
Rutherford	14.36	16.04	15.01	12.83	13.81	8.30	1.40	17.72

Short-Term/Long-Term Suspensions

Long-Term Suspension Counts – All Students

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20*	2020-21*	2021-22
Catawba County	1	0	3	1	0	1	0	0
Hickory City	16	8	4	0	2	2	0	1
Newton-Conover	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Iredell-Statesville	4	4	6	0	6	2	2	13
McDowell	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Rutherford	4	4	1	1	2	2	0	1

Long-Term Suspension Rates Per 100 – All Students

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20*	2020-21*	2021-22
Catawba County	0.006	0.000	0.018	0.006	0.000	0.006	0.000	0.000
Hickory City	0.367	0.188	0.095	0.000	0.049	0.049	0.000	0.027
Newton-Conover	0.000	0.032	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.036
Iredell-Statesville	0.019	0.019	0.030	0.000	0.030	0.010	0.010	0.064
McDowell	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.036
Rutherford	0.048	0.049	0.012	0.013	0.026	0.027	0.000	0.014

Recommendations

- Increased communication with the judicial system, including district attorneys and judges, might help that critical support system understand this session law as well as the impact in their local community.
- Increased communication with social services agencies would be another positive opportunity for education and outreach as a result of the changes. What are expectations for the state Department of Health and Human Services and local DSS agencies regarding supporting compulsory school attendance?

Recommendations

- Allow more time for communication efforts to take hold and for this to become “the way.” The community members, parents and students need to wrap their minds around new, higher compulsory attendance ages and higher expectations for student attendance.

Recommendations

- In light of the state’s Raise the Age legislation and major changes to the juvenile justice system taking place as a result, revisit moving the age for the state – even if as an “opting” opportunity. North Carolina’s compulsory attendance law should simply be rewritten to require school attendance from ages 7-18 rather than only require attendance through age 16 as currently written. This would seem to be a natural area for alignment across state agencies and a chance for the law to support best practices aligning with major elements of the State Board of Education’s strategic plan.

Recommendations

- Identify strategies put in place by other local education agencies that have experienced the largest three-year percentage decrease in the high school dropout rates and counts but not raised the dropout age.
- Further explore the ramifications of attendance issues as the main reason listed by schools for students dropping out.

Next Steps

- House Bill 206 was filed in February 2023.
- The legislation would gradually raise North Carolina's compulsory attendance age to 18:
 - 2024-25 school year: 16 years, 6 months
 - 2025-26: 17 years
 - 2026-27: 17 years, 6 months
 - 2027-28: 18 years
- HB 206 was passed on first reading and referred to the Committee on Education – K-12 in February 2023.

Contact Me



Karen W. Fairley

CFSS Executive Director

Email: cfss@dpi.nc.gov