

GOVERNOR COOPER PRIORITIZES PUBLIC EDUCATION IN STATE BUDGET PROPOSAL



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North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper (D) shared his recommendations for the 2024-2025 state budget on Wednesday, as lawmakers returned to Raleigh for the start of the 2024 legislative short session. Governor Cooper, who previously declared 2024 to be "The Year of Public Schools," proposed investing over \$1 billion in public schools while placing a moratorium on the Opportunity Scholarship Program, or private school vouchers.

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billion in public schools while placing a moratorium on the Opportunity Scholarship Program, or private school vouchers. The Governor's recommendations were shared in light of recent data forecasting a [\\$1.4 billion budget surplus](#), as well as earlier [statements](#) by legislative leadership indicating their intent to expand the taxpayer-funded private school voucher program.

In regard to employee raises and benefits, the Governor's budget proposal builds on the 3% pay increase given to most state employees in the 2023 budget ([S.L. 2023-134](#)) by providing an additional 3% for employees paid on an experience-based salary schedule or salary set in law; other state employees would receive an additional 2%. The Governor's budget would also provide qualifying state-funded local employees a \$1,500 bonus if making \$75,000 per year or less, and a \$1,000 bonus to employees making more than \$75,000.

Specifically for teachers, the budget would provide an average 8.5% total raise for 2023-2025 (rather than the average 7% already set by lawmakers), reinstate Master's Pay for obtaining higher degrees in the subjects they teach, and bring starting teacher pay to the highest in the Southeast at over \$47,500 (including state and local supplements). As the assistant principal (AP) salary schedule is tied to the teacher salary schedule, APs would receive raises accordingly, while principals would receive a 6% total increase in FY 2024-25.

Other education-related highlights of the Governor's budget include the following recurring investments:

- **Annual Leave** — Increases annual leave days for state employees earlier in their career to increase the appeal of state service and improve retention among employees with fewer years of service.
- **Read to Achieve** — Invests \$34.7 million to expand Read to Achieve to middle school students.
- **Teaching Assistants** — Provides \$30 million for 700 elementary school TAs in grades K-3.
- **Teaching Fellows Program** — Provides \$11 million to expand Teaching Fellows program eligibility to more education schools and in more subject areas.
- **Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Fund** — Combines the At-Risk and Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Fund allotments and increases funding for the combined allotment by \$70 million.
- **Children With Disabilities** — Ensures children with disabilities receive needed services by providing \$56.8 million to remove the 13% funding cap and increase funding for the Children with Disabilities Allotment.
- **Supplemental Funding for Low-Wealth Counties** — Provides \$40 million funding increase for additional support to 69 eligible low-wealth counties that have limited capacity to generate local revenue to support public schools.
- **Limited English Proficiency Allotment** — Removes the funding cap and increases funding by \$20 million for the Limited English Proficiency Allotment.
- **School Health Personnel** — Provides \$44.6 million for school counselors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers; also provides districts flexibility so they can strategically hire school health personnel to best meet student needs.
- **School Construction** — Addresses \$13 billion need for new school buildings by recommending voters approve a \$2.5 billion school construction bond on the November 2024 ballot; *to see how much your district would receive, see page 14 of the [Governor's Recommended Budget Adjustments](#).*
- **District & Regional Support** — Provides \$19 million in recurring funding to continue and enhance the THRIVE district and regional support model to provide targeted and comprehensive assistance to low-performing and high poverty schools and districts through professional learning, coaching, systems design, and capacity building.
- **Career Development Coordinators** — Provides \$10 million for a "Career and Postsecondary Planning Director" in DPI's Career and Technical Education

- Division to focus on career planning in grades 5-12; phases in funding to increase the number of school-based Career Development Coordinators for grades 6-12.
- **Classroom Materials** — Provides \$1 million recurring and \$4 million non-recurring for Classroom Materials Allotment.
 - **Reduced-Price Lunch Co-Pays** — Provides \$900,000 to offset co-pays for eligible students in schools participating in the National School Lunch Program.
 - **IT & Cybersecurity** — Provides \$17.5 million to improve the state's ability to track academic progress and tailor supports, provide cybersecurity for business servers and staff computers, identify security threats, and help schools migrate to cloud-based Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems.
 - **North Carolina Virtual Public School** — Revises the funding approach for the NC Virtual Public School (NCVPS) and offsets the costs for local school administrative units and charter schools to participate.
 - **Child Care & Early Education** — Provides \$200 million for child care stabilization grants; \$128.5 million for child care subsidies; \$197 million to fully fund NC Pre-K; \$24.4 million for summer programs for children in between NC Pre-K and Kindergarten; and a refundable child and dependent care tax credit.

For additional information on these proposals and others, see [Securing North Carolina's Future: Governor Cooper's Recommended Budget Adjustments 2024-25](#).