

NEW GRADUATION REQUIREMENT, STUDENT PROTECTIONS, & PRINCIPAL LICENSURE CHANGES SENT TO GOVERNOR



Posted on September 28, 2023 by Elizabeth Yelverton

While the biggest news at the state legislature last week was certainly the long-awaited passage of the 2023-2025 state budget package, which is set to become law on October 2 without the Governor's signature, state lawmakers also sent a handful of other education-related bills to the Governor's desk last week for final consideration.

Categories: [Advocacy](#), [Budget and Financial Operations](#), [Governance](#), [Legislative Priorities](#)

Tags: [2023-2025 state budget package](#), [hb432 principal licensure changes](#), [nc house bill 8](#), [Protect Our Students Act](#)



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[Changes](#) (formerly "Computer Science Graduation Requirement"), [H142: Protect Our Students Act.-AB](#), and [H432: Principal Licensure Changes](#) were all passed by

lawmakers last week amid final budget votes and are also set to become law early next week, absent unexpected vetoes by the Governor. As the legislature now has its focus set on [redistricting](#), many believe these bills will be some of the last standalone education-related bills to be considered by state lawmakers in 2023. The following outlines new changes set forth in these bills that could affect K-12 public education:

[House Bill 8: Various Statutory Changes \(formerly "Computer Science Graduation Requirement"\)](#)

H8 was passed in both chambers on Thursday, September 21, following two successful amendments in the Senate that significantly broadened the scope of the bill to include changes to laws regarding higher education accreditation, as well as the distribution of material harmful to minors. While the final version of the bill includes its initial requirement that students must pass a qualifying computer science course in order to graduate from high school (beginning with students entering the ninth grade in the 2024-2025 school year), Sen. Michael Lee (R-New Hanover) introduced an [amendment](#) in the Senate extending the deadline from July 1, 2023 to November 1, 2023 for the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to post an adopted list of approved computer science courses, as well as renaming the bill to reflect its broadened scope.

Sen. Lee's amendment also included the following changes to the higher education accreditation process: requiring public institutions of higher education to be accredited by a *regional* accrediting agency and prohibiting those institutions from using the same agency for consecutive accreditation cycles; creating a new cause of action that institutions may use when someone makes a false statement about the institution to its accrediting agency; and requiring the UNC Board of Governors to establish a commission to study alternatives to the current accreditation process. Lastly, Sen. Lee's amendment included a new provision requiring all faculty hired by or appointed to the School of Civic Life and Leadership (School) at UNC Chapel Hill to be approved by the dean of the School.

Following the successful passage of Sen. Lee's amendment, Sen. Amy Galey (R-Alamance) introduced an additional [amendment](#) further broadening the scope of the bill to include the "Pornography Age Verification Enforcement Act," or "PAVE" Act, which creates new civil penalties for publishers and distributors of material deemed harmful to minors for failure to perform proper age verifications. Sen. Galey's

amendment, effective January 1, 2024, received universal support in the Senate, and the House concurred with both Senate amendments the same day. The bill was sent to the Governor for final consideration the following day and is set to become law on October 2.

[House Bill 142: Protect Our Students Act.-AB](#)

H142, which increases penalties for both sex offenses against students and for failure of school administrators to report certain misconduct to the State Board of Education, underwent a similar legislative process as H8, as it was also successfully amended on the Senate floor to include unrelated education issues before being approved by both chambers. Sen. Warren Daniel (R-Buncombe) [amended](#) the bill to include provisions specific to his district that would extend the deadline until June 30, 2024 for the Buncombe County Board of Education (Board) to establish electoral districts for the 2024 elections, as well as require the Board to jointly study with the Asheville City Board of Education the feasibility of a merger of the two school units, with findings and recommendations to be shared with the NC General Assembly by February 15, 2025. Senate members unanimously approved the amendment, which House members concurred with in a 106-1 vote later that day in the bill's last step before being sent to the Governor. It is also set to become law on October 2, absent additional action from the Governor.

[House Bill 432: Principal Licensure Changes](#)

Also presented to the Governor last week, H432 includes new requirements for principal licensure applicants, set to take effect July 1, 2024, if the bill becomes law. The bill, as previously [summarized by NCASA](#), retains certain existing requirements for principal licensure, such as the need for a bachelor's degree, but changes other requirements, such as replacing the requirement for applicants to pass a licensure exam with a new applicant "portfolio." Senate lawmakers approved the bill without amendments in mid-September and House members concurred with the bill without further changes on September 19. H432 was presented to the Governor for final consideration on September 21, and is set to become law October 1.