NORTH CAROLINA
State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction

Report to the North Carolina General Assembly

Pilot Program to Raise the High School Dropout Age from Sixteen to Eighteen

SL 2016-94 (HB 1030)

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NC DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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Introduction of the Pilot

North Carolina, like much of the nation, wants to reduce the number of dropouts. To address this issue, some leaders in education have called for states to raise the upper limit of their age of compulsory school attendance—hereafter referred to as the "dropout age"—to 18. About half the country already follows this policy: twenty-five states and the District of Columbia do not allow students to drop out before turning 18. The rest of the states are split between dropout ages of 16 (14 states) and 17 (11 states). In recent years, several states, including Kentucky and Maryland, have raised their dropout ages[1]; while other states, like South Carolina, have experienced failed attempts.[2]

In North Carolina, students may legally leave school at the age of 16. The State Board of Education voted to support raising the dropout age. The idea is supported by some education heavy-hitters, including the National Education Association. Advocates of this position say that this gives students a longer time to weigh their options and make an informed decision and point to the significantly higher lifetime earning potential of those who graduate high school[3]. They also emphasize the critical need for an educated workforce. Research indicates that students who drop out of school are more likely to be unemployed, earn lower salaries when they do work, and are more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system. These are legitimate arguments, and reflect goals shared by all involved. But the question remains – does raising the dropout age, in fact, create better educational outcomes?

Studies conducted by the Brookings Institute, the United States Department of Education (USED), and the John Locke Foundation question the efficacy of raising the dropout age. The John Locke Foundation, a North Carolina-based independent nonprofit think tank, comes out strenuously against the idea in their 2007 study,[4] while Brookings and USED were not able to draw a correlative or causal relationship between higher dropout ages and higher graduation rates.[5] Indeed, the state with the nation's highest graduation rate in 2017– Iowa[6] (91%) – only requires students to remain in school until age 16. And Kentucky, which raised its dropout age to 18 over a cautious multi-year process that began in 2013, has seen some unintended negative repercussions resulting from the change.[7]

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[1] Maryland: http://www.wmdt.com/top-stories/maryland-increases-high-school-drop-out-ageto17/138025324

Kentucky: http://education.ky.gov/school/pages/compattend.aspx

[2] South Carolina: https://www.southcarolinaradionetwork.com/2016/01/27/sc-house-panel-rejects-raising-statehighschool-dropout-age/

[3] National Association Secondary School Principals https://www.nassp.org/raising-the-compulsory-school-attendance-age/

[4] John Locke Foundation, *Raise the Bar, not the Age*: https://www.johnlocke.org/acrobat/spotlights/spotlight_321-compulsiveed.pdf

[5] Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings, *Compulsory School Attendance: What Research Says and What It Means for State Policy*:

https://www.brookings.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2016/06/0801_education_graduation_age_whitehurst_whitfield.pdf

U.S. Dept. of Education, *Does Raising the State Compulsory School Attendance Age Achieve the Intended Outcomes?* http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED544499.pdf

[6] https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/articles/see-high-school-graduation-rates-by-state

[7] http://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2015/06/28/dropout-law-unintendedconsequences/29328943/

In North Carolina, in recent years, emphasis has been focused on a more comprehensive approach to education with increased wraparound services to meet the needs of "The Whole Child". Also, alternative strategies to traditional education are being utilized, with virtual/online options, after hours programming, Career and Technical Education pathways, and multi-tiered systems of support. All these factors support the concept that a continuum of strategies that engage students, support at-risk students, and allow for flexible educational opportunities, must be employed to improve results.

Legislation entitled "Pilot Program to Raise the High School Dropout Age from Sixteen to Eighteen" was initiated with SL 2013-360 (SB 402), sec. 8.49. The legislation instituted the pilot counties as Hickory Public Schools, Newton-Conover City Schools, and later Rutherford County Schools.

The first year of the pilot — 2014-2015 school year — was used primarily for planning; so, the first full year of implementation was the 2015-16 school year; and, since Rutherford County Schools entered the pilot later, their first year of implementation was the 2017-18 school year. In 2017, McDowell County Schools was also added to this pilot (HB40, sec. 8.21.(a).

Impact of the Pilot

▪ The State Dropout rate has continued to decline in the two-year period of this pilot "extension," two of the four districts in the pilot have experienced a decline in dropout rates since the 2018 report. Newton-Conover has experienced an increase and McDowell, while having a higher rate than in 2017, just joined the pilot and had a decrease in 2018-19.

▪ While there have been fluctuations in graduation rates for the four pilot districts, Hickory City has an increased rate in 2019 over the 2017 rate of the last report. Newton-Conover and Rutherford County rates remain stable and McDowell has only one year of data under the "pilot" status.

▪ Short-term suspensions have increased for all pilot districts. Rutherford and Hickory City have suspension rates below their reported numbers in the 2018 report.

▪ The most significant impact of the pilot to date is the additional "time factor" to support students in earning credits to graduation. All four districts concur that this "time" may not always yield the districts measurable decrease in dropout rate. It does create an opportunity window that is otherwise not available. This point is best illustrated by Rutherford County Schools' Superintendent Dr. David Sutton:

> *"Changing the age isn't beneficial if you're simply delaying the dropout by two years…ultimately, the ability to retain students for the two additional school years provides more opportunity for the district/school to intervene and to allow systems support to work on supporting students in their effort to reach graduation success."*

RCS Dropout Count by Age						
Age	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
15	6	1	5	8	2	0
16	34	22	33	36	7	1
17	28	33	29	28	19	20
18	24	23	28	19	25	20
19	2	7	6	4	4	5
20	0	1	1	0	1	0
Total	94	87	102	95	58	47

The positive impact in retaining 16-year-old students who would have previously departed under the old rules is a powerful indicator of this opportunity to nurture persistence.

Lessons Learned & Next Steps

Site visits were made by the Regional Case Managers to meet with the pilot LEAs (Hickory City, Newton-Conover and Rutherford County) in January and February 2020. The following information was compiled as a result of these meetings:

- Participation in the pilot has been challenging at times due to being in a very different place with school attendance and dropout prevention than other LEAs who are not, as well as community partners who do not necessarily understand the change (judicial system, social services, other support agencies). This speaks to a disconnect in systems across interested agencies and state government. Most partners, though supportive of the local district, simply have not moved with the district in how they treat students subject to the increased dropout age.

- Students and parents don't necessarily know that this age increase has happened so the districts have worked hard to communicate. However, once that knowledge gap has been dealt with on the parent/student messaging side, does the district have support from NCDPI, local social services, the courts, and other agencies who support students and families? The district has observed that the rest of the world hasn't always adapted or adjusted to these expectations of the increased dropout age.

- NCDPI needs to update guidance provided in the School Attendance and Student Accounting Manual about not withdrawing after 10 days after age 16 (in pilot districts). The processes in the manual and in PowerSchool need to allow the district to treat a 17-year old student just as any other student below age with respect to attendance. Tracking unlawful absences becomes even more problematic when a student is dropped from PowerSchool but should not be

dropped. There has been a disconnect and some conflicting guidance provided to the district by NCDPI on these processes creating confusion. There is an opportunity to improve communication from NCDPI and to align or streamline guidance in the various manuals or publications from the agency into the field.

Recommendations

- Increased communication with the judicial system, including district attorneys and judges, may help that critical support system understand this session law as well as the impact in their local community.

- Increased communication with DSS agencies would be another positive opportunity for education and outreach as a result of the changes. What are expectations for DHHS (state) and local DSS agencies for supporting compulsory school attendance?

- 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.

- Fix disconnects in NCDPI's Dropout Manual and the Student Attendance and Accounting Manual. NCDPI's reporting requirements need to be examined for consistency while processes and supports provided to districts need to be differentiated and responsive, especially for those districts participating in the pilot.

- In light of the state's recent 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 in "opting" opportunity. North Carolinas' compulsory attendance law 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 practice aligning with major elements of the State Board of Education's strategic plan.

- Identify strategies put in place by other LEA's who have experienced the largest 3-year percentage decreases 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.

- Continue the pilot and data collection with opportunities to increase the number of districts in the pilot.

IMPORTANT NOTE

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

Data

Crime and Violence Acts at the High School Level

	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)
Newton-Conover	11	10.81	13.19	11	10.68	12.75	19	19.15	12.12
Hickory	21	17.09	13.19	37	30.71	12.75	4	3.29	12.12
Catawba County	95	18.03	13.19	63	11.92	12.75	59	11.02	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
	2014-15			2017-16			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)
Newton-Conover	11	11.2	11.88	10	10.73	10.73	*16*	*17.17*	8.08
Hickory	11	9.22	11.88	9	7.77	10.73	*4*	*3.42*	8.08
Catawba County	72	13.79	11.88	56	11.41	10.73	*49*	*10.12*	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
	2017-18			2018-19			*2019-20*		

Source: https://www.dpi.nc.gov/data-reports/dropout-and-discipline-data/discipline-alp-and-dropout-annual-reports

Original

	2014-2015			2015-2016			2016-2017		
	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 100)	High School State Crime Rate (per 100)	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 100)	High School State Crime Rate (per 100)	Reportable Crimes	High School Crime Rate (per 100)	High School State Crime Rate (per 100)
Newton-Conover	11	**1.39**	**1.3**	11	0.81	1.27	19	1.93	1.21
Hickory	21	**1.83**	**1.3**	37	3.32	1.27	4	0.38	1.21
Catawba County	95	**1.66**	**1.3**	63	1.16	1.27	3	1.11	1.21
			13.19						

Graduations Rates

Graduation Rates 4-year Cohort

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	*2019-20*
State	83.9	85.6	85.9	86.5	86.3	86.5	*87.6*
Newton-Conover	92.5	>95	93.5	>95.0	91.3	94.4	*94.8*
Hickory	83.9	83.9	84.7	85.0	90.6	87.0	*87.5*
Catawba County	90.8	89.8	89.8	91.5	91.9	89.0	*89.1*
McDowell	77.0	80.4	81.6	85.3	85.2	83.2	*86.9*
Rutherford	78.6	81.9	81.2	85.0	84.1	84.2	*87.8*

Grad Rate Over Time

	State	Newton Conover	Hickory	Catawba County	McDowell	Rutherford
2006	68.3	67.3	70.4	81.6	64.1	66.2
2007	69.5	79.6	70.8	80.6	68.1	69.1
2008	70.3	81.0	76.8	81.2	68.6	68.7
2009	71.8	76.3	74.3	83.8	72.3	64.0
2010	74.2	88.6	68.6	83.2	72.9	67.1
2011	77.9	83.0	76.5	86.2	75.2	69.0
2012	80.4	81.9	82.2	89.3	78.2	73.3
2013	82.5	87.4	82.8	91.3	78.2	77.7
2014	83.9	92.5	83.9	90.8	77.0	78.6
2015	85.6	95.0	83.9	89.8	80.4	81.9
2016	85.9	93.5	84.7	89.8	81.6	81.2
2017	86.5	95.0	85.0	91.5	85.3	85.0
2018	86.3	91.3	90.6	91.9	85.2	84.1
2019	86.5	94.4	87.0	89.0	83.2	84.2
2020	*87.6*	*94.8*	*87.5*	*89.1*	*86.9*	*87.8*

Source - https://accrpt.tops.ncsu.edu/app/2020/cgr/

Graduation Rates over Time
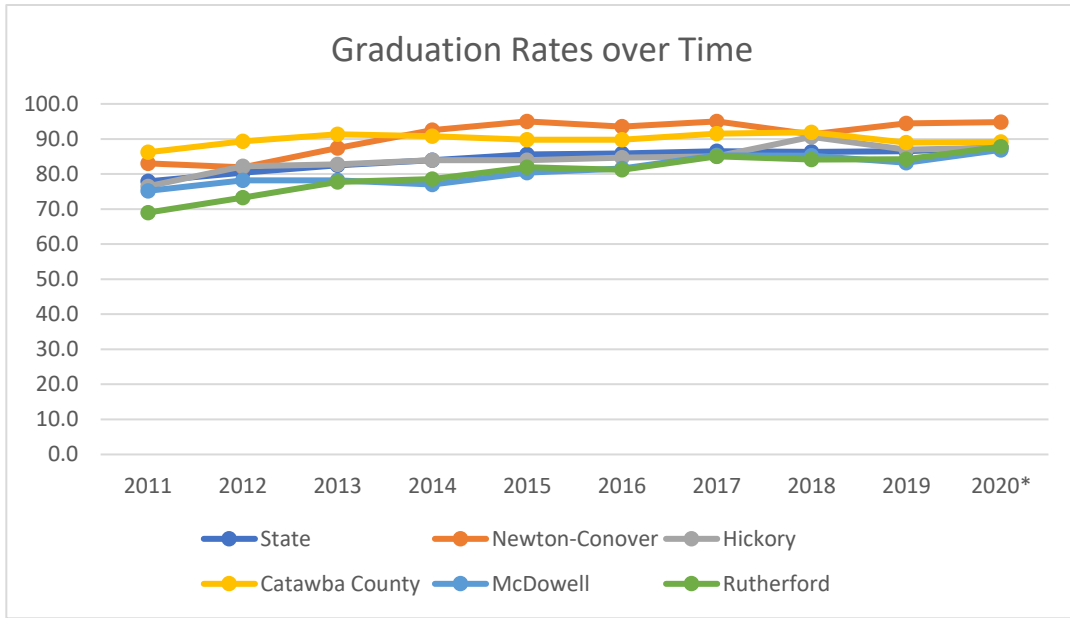
Dropout Counts and Rates

	2013-14		2014-15		2015-16		2016-17		2017-18		2018-19		2019-20	
State	10,404	2.28	1,1190	2.39	10,889	2.29	11,097	2.31	10,523	2.18	9,512	2.01	7194	1.53
Newton-Conover	9	0.62	2	0.19	6	0.4	2	0.2	7	0.69	17	1.75	8	0.84
Hickory	35	1.82	40	3.04	30	1.52	18	1.42	15	1.21	17	1.39	13	1.06
Catawba County	98	1.2	110	2.01	105	1.29	64	1.45	100	1.84	96	1.87	81	1.61
McDowell	70	3.55	86	4.20	70	3.47	55	2.71	75	3.77	57	3.10	28	1.56
Rutherford	94	3.40	87	3.16	102	3.67	95	3.46	58	2.20	47	1.82	28	1.14
	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate

*Source consolidated reports found on website

https://www.dpi.nc.gov/data-reports/dropout-and-discipline-data/discipline-alp-and-dropout-annual-reports

Attendance Rates

*Source APA/ADM Ratio Tables: https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/district-operations/financial-and-business-services/demographics-and-finances/student-accounting-data#average-daily-attendance--average-daily-membership-ratios-adaadm

	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*

ADA Rate Over Time

	Hickory Career & Arts Magnet	Hickory High School	Newton-Conover High School	Discovery High School
2006		94.91	94.07	
2007		95.04	93.67	
2008		95.79	95.69	
2009	79.61	96.07	95.03	
2010	77.11	95.38	96.04	
2011	85.48	94.14	95.62	
2012	89.94	93.83	96.41	96.30
2013	92.20	95.76	96.70	96.30
2014	91.67	94.71	96.19	96.92
2015	90.16	92.99	93.05	96.49
2016	92.90	93.16	93.16	96.92
2017	94.19	93.40	92.09	92.51
2018	92.72	91.17	92.63	93.06
2019	93.71	91.54	91.37	93.98
2020	*94.39*	*90.01*	*91.30*	*96.25*

Short-Term and Long-Term Suspensions

Source: School Report Card

Short-Term Suspension Counts - ALL Students

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Catawba County	1171	1063	1157	1170	1525	574
Hickory City	752	759	674	488	637	284
Newton-Conover	440	289	270	290	332	42
Iredell-Statesville	2435	2492	2453	2361	2041	457
McDowell	405	328	482	367	526	146
Rutherford	1192	1310	1203	1020	1074	195

Short-Term Suspension Rates Per 100 - ALL Students

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Catawba County	7.06	6.51	7.10	7.27	9.70	11.85
Hickory City	17.26	17.83	16.01	11.85	15.76	24.27
Newton-Conover	14.08	9.36	9.01	9.73	11.30	4.51
Iredell-Statesville	11.73	12.07	12.08	11.62	10.13	6.67
McDowell	6.47	5.30	7.86	6.11	8.96	8.45
Rutherford	14.36	16.04	15.01	12.83	13.81	8.30

Long-Term Suspension Counts - ALL Students

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

Long-Term Suspension Rates Per 100 - ALL Students

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