

## For Immediate Release



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From the Office of Sen. Joyce Waddell, NC Senate  
Mecklenburg County

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## Greetings:

*Meetings are still being held at the General Assembly. A committee meeting scheduled last week was the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee to discuss the Excellent Public Schools Act 2021-22 State Summary, School That Lead Presentations, NC Community Colleges Organizational Assessment & Climate Survey Summary, and the NC Promise Update.*

*Joyce Waddell*

## Education Vouchers

A legal challenge to North Carolina's taxpayer-funded scholarship program for K-12 children to attend private schools — focused on claims of bias based on religion and sexuality — must be heard by three trial judges, the state Court of Appeals ruled on Tuesday. The majority on an appeals court panel reversed last year's decision by a Wake County Superior Court Judge, who ruled the lawsuit filed by several North Carolina parents in 2020 should remain before a single judge.

The General Assembly agreed in the 2000s to start using panels of three trial judges to hear redistricting challenges so as to prevent plaintiffs from "judge shopping" by filing cases in certain counties.

Writing Tuesday's majority decision, a Court of Appeals Judge said it is plain that the lawsuit seeks to strike down the program completely and prevent students from being awarded grants. No evidence has been presented that the plaintiffs applied for scholarships or were constitutionally denied enrollment to the program.

## Respiratory Viruses

Even as the COVID-19 pandemic continues, medical teams across the state are sounding the alarm about surges in other types of respiratory illnesses, especially among children. The percentage of emergency room visits from people with influenza-like illnesses is double what is typical for this time of year, according to state data. The spike in illness has the medical community scrambling to find pediatric hospital beds, as high numbers of sick children land in hospitals. Several health systems across the state have had to divert kids to other medical centers recently because their beds have filled.

Precautions such as social distancing and wearing masks during the pandemic did not just slow the spread of COVID-19; they also prevented the spread of other respiratory illnesses. The 2020 flu season was mostly a non-event. Now that most of those measures have been dropped, those illnesses are back.

Young children are particularly susceptible because some of them have not had any exposure to viruses at all. In a typical, non-pandemic year, the average child picks up eight infections, most of them respiratory.

## Rejected Charter Schools

Recently, two charter schools managed by for-profit companies were rejected by the State Board of Education. Both schools would have been managed by for-profit companies as part of their networks of charter schools.

Members of the state board's Democratic majority raised concerns about giving funding to for-profit charter school operators, which is allowed under state law. They also raised concerns about the extensive control both management organizations would have over the charter schools.

Charter school management fees groups applying for charter schools in North Carolina have to be non-profit entities. They can contract with a for-profit organization to manage the school. Some states only allow charter schools to contract with non-profit management organizations. Management organizations are allowed to collect fee payment of up to 15% of revenues that charter schools receive. The for-profit management companies make money not just through fees, but often by providing school buildings that the local board uses.

*I am excited about the 2023 opportunities. It is a great time to set attainable goals and steps to reach them. Writing them out always helps to visibly see how well you do.*

*As you can see from the story above respiratory viruses like COVID, colds and the flu are on the rise. I know I continue to talk about vaccines, but there are serious health issues that vaccines can ward off. Vaccines really are a good way to ward off some illnesses. Please consider getting vaccinated if you have not already.*

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