

Monday is Juneteenth / Legislative Updates



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Monday, June 19th is the federal holiday of Juneteenth celebrating the freedom given to African Americans in the state of Texas on June 19th, 1865.

Juneteenth, short for June 19th, commemorates the day the last remaining enslaved people in the U.S. — in Galveston, Texas — received word that the Civil War had ended and they had been liberated by the federal orders in President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

The year was 1865 — two and a half years after Lincoln's proclamation.

In the following years, the anniversary of this event was celebrated and honored in Galveston with prayer and family gatherings.

Now, Juneteenth is celebrated annually through backyard parties, community parades, memorials, delicious meals, and more.

Over time, as the descendants of the more than 250,000 enslaved individuals in Galveston began migrating to other parts of the country, the Juneteenth tradition spread.

In whatever way Juneteenth is celebrated, it has ultimately become a time of sharing stories of Black resilience, resistance, liberation, and joy.

It also provides an opportunity for all of us to deepen our understanding of the United States' history, empathize with and advocate alongside our Black neighbors, and pave the way to a brighter, more just future for all Americans.

In 2021, President Joe Biden signed legislation making Juneteenth a federal holiday. This year, there are many celebrations of Juneteenth going on in North Carolina. Charlotte, Raleigh, Cary, Concord, Burlington, and other cities are hosting artists, musicians, and dancers to celebrate the holiday with local communities.

Find out about Juneteenth events around the State and facts on the holiday and celebrations – [here](#).

[Juneteenth 2023: Events Around Charlotte](#)

Charlotte Observer

TeachNC Distributes Federal Relief to Help Teachers with Cost of Licensing

This week, TeachNC, a teacher recruitment resource within the Department of Public Instruction is reimbursing teachers for the cost of exams and licensing, which can average \$450 or above. Funding is being provided by Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER).

In order to be a licensed teacher in North Carolina's public schools, teachers must pass standardized tests specific to their grade. Many must take these test multiple times, increasing the cost barrier to becoming licensed. The TeachNC initiative hopes to minimize this barrier for NC public school teachers.

North Carolina has difficulty retaining teachers in public schools, losing many to private education or adjacent states. Keeping the cost of entry low, will help public schools have a better retention rate.

Learn more about the [reimbursement opportunity here](#).

Learn about [scholarship opportunities and resources on pursuing teaching as a profession here](#).

Facts on the Republican School Voucher Proposal

Republican legislators are focused this Session on further eroding public education in North Carolina through a massive expansion of the state's voucher program. The voucher expansion is likely to be in the State Budget

when it is approved in the next few weeks.

Officials from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, headed by Republican Superintendent Catherine Truitt, explained this week that “the overwhelming amount of funds that this goes towards is people currently at the private schools already.” Thus the voucher program will largely help bankroll -- with taxpayer money -- students who are already enrolled in private schools, and who have never been in public schools.

Here are some basic facts about the voucher program:

- Nonpublic schools receiving voucher funding DO NOT have to administer any state-level standardized tests.
- Nonpublic schools are held to different, less stringent standards than public schools.
- The State of North Carolina has fewer ways to hold nonpublic schools accountable for their performance than they do with public schools.
- Nonpublic school teachers DO NOT have to be licensed or otherwise display a formal competency to teach.
- Many nonpublic schools are able to discriminate against potential enrollees on the basis of gender, sexual orientation and religion.
- Any religious private schools that do not receive federal funding are able to discriminate on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, religion and physical or mental disability.

North Carolina used to be a leader in the Southeast in public education. Now, instead of providing the support that public schools, teachers and students need we are on the verge of directing taxpayer money to the richest North Carolinians so they can subsidize the cost of private schools. Instead, we should be addressing the urgent needs of our state’s public schools, as our state constitution instructs us to do.

Dangerous Election Bills Start to Emerge

Two bills were unveiled to the public this week that threaten our state’s elections and the ability of North Carolina voters to vote early or have their vote counted.

[SB 749](#) changes the State Board of Elections and all 100 counties’ boards of elections. Under the current board structure, elections have been administered fairly, openly – elections that have seen both parties win and lose. That’s the way democracy should work.

Legislative Republicans are trying to change the current structure in a way that has already been rejected by the courts. They want to remove the Governor’s ability to make appointments to the boards. Most significantly, they want to create deadlocked boards unable to make decisions. For example, a deadlocked board means each county would only have one Early Voting location, even large counties like Wake or Mecklenburg. We see on the national election what happens with deadlocked boards. The Federal Elections Commission has been completely ineffective in enforcing campaign finance laws.

[SB 747](#) is the second dangerous bill. Here are some of the worst parts of the bill:

- If you mail in your absentee ballot and the Post Office does not deliver it by Election Day, your vote will not count. Previously, there was a three day grace period for late-arriving ballots so long as the ballot was post-marked before Election Day.
- If you go to an in-person Early Voting location and need to update your registration, you will not get to vote a normal ballot. Instead, you will have to vote a provisional ballot AND you will have to return on a second trip to the county board of elections office to offer additional proof of your residency for your vote to count. This will impact tens of thousands of North Carolinians.
- The bill allows for public inspection of the absentee ballot you mail in.

- The bill allows any citizen in your county to challenge the validity of your absentee ballot.
- It adds new requirements a voter must follow in order to vote by absentee. Failure to follow these steps means your vote will not be counted.

Both SB 749 and SB 747 are still being considered by the General Assembly, but appear to be on a fast-track to passage by Republican leadership.

Enjoy your weekend and remember, *Juneteenth is a Time of Reflection and Rejoicing!*

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