

Bipartisan commission calls for higher teacher pay. Will NC leaders answer?

A bipartisan commission appointed by state leaders wants North Carolina to raise teacher pay to make it more competitive with the rest of the nation.

The Blue Ribbon Commission on Public Education adopted draft recommendations on Monday about improving early literacy and strengthening the teacher pipeline. The commission found that raising teacher compensation needs to be a key part of improving public education in North Carolina.

“By 2028, establish and sustain a competitive teacher compensation system across the career continuum that positions North Carolina as a regional leader in teacher pay and supports the recruitment and retention of effective educators,” the commission adopted as one of its recommendations on Monday.

It’s largely up to state lawmakers whether to implement the commission’s recommendations.

Commission calls for action on teacher pay

The Blue Ribbon Commission on Public Edu-



People cheer on the speakers during a rally to protest for more school funding at Halifax Mall in downtown Raleigh, on Friday, May 1, 2026. A commission appointed by state leaders call for the state to make teacher compensation more competitive.

cation [was announced in March](#) by Democratic Gov. Josh Stein and Republican legislative leaders Senate President Pro Tempore Phil Berger and House Speaker Destin Hall.

The commission was charged with making recommendations on how to improve education for the state’s 1.5 million public school students. The 30-member commission includes state legislators, K-12 and higher education administrators, business members and community leaders.

Addressing teacher com-

pensation was the commission’s first recommendation for improving the teacher pipeline.

Earlier this month, WalletHub [ranked North Carolina as the eighth-worst state](#) in the nation for teachers.

Lawmakers adopted a state budget this year that included an average raise of 8% for teachers. All teachers got a raise, but the biggest ones were for beginning teachers.

A big part of the state’s low ranking on WalletHub is that it’s the third-worst state for income growth potential. Under

the state's salary schedule, base teacher pay starts at \$48,000 and tops out at \$59,000 after 25 years of experience.

The commission initially recommend addressing the teacher pay issue by 2030. But that timeline was pushed up, as well as a call to address pay for teachers at all experience levels.

"We heard feedback that 2030 would have been too long to establish and sustain the competitive teacher compensation system," said Emma Braaten, the director of digital learning at N.C. State's Friday Institute for Educational Innovation, which is the commission's research partner. "And it was also important to some of our members to specify that it would be across the career continuum."

Improving the teacher pipeline

The commission also adopted several other draft recommendations for addressing the teacher pipeline:

- Expand the N.C. Teaching Fellows Program that helps subsidize the college costs for students who agree to become teachers. The program is limited to 10 institutions and only in certain subjects such as elementary education, special education and STEM (science, technology, engineering or math).
- By 2030, phase out emergency and permit-to-teach licenses and establish clear, consistent pathways to full li-

censure.

- Revise or replace licensure requirements that create unnecessary barriers for beginning teachers.
- Provide sustainable state funding to establish or expand more ways to get people into teaching, including paid student teaching, residencies, apprenticeships and Grow Your Own programs.
- Provide sustainable state funding by 2032 to expand the Advanced Teaching Roles program and programs that pay teachers to mentor and coach beginning teachers.
- By 2027, modernize policies to make it easier for retired teachers to return to the classroom or continue serving.

More tutoring and mandating a literacy curriculum

The commission adopted several draft recommendations for strengthening early literacy:

- Establish a literacy advisory committee to vet and recommend K-3 literacy curricula and high-dosage tutoring models. The committee would also monitor the implementation and outcomes of those programs.
- By May 2028, adopt and fund up to three evidence-based developmentally appropriate K-3 literacy curricula aligned with the science of reading and the standard course of study. Require all public school units to implement one of the three new

curricula for the 2028-29 school year.

- By May 2028, establish and fund a statewide framework for high-dosage tutoring to provide targeted literacy intervention for K-3 students.
- By 2028-29, provide a state-funded literacy coach or equivalent coaching capacity in every low-performing elementary school.
- Authorize school districts to require third-grade students who aren't proficient in reading to attend a summer reading camp or receive another evidence-based literacy intervention. The recommendation also calls for providing state funding to support implementation.

Connie Book, a commission member and president of Elon University, called limiting which K-3 literacy curricula that schools can use the most powerful recommendation they had made. Historically, the State Board of Education sets the standards for each subject but leaves it up to individual schools to adopt the curricula to teach them.

"As someone who works diligently to prepare teachers for the future of North Carolina, we know that a person's capacity to be excellent in multiple pathways to develop readers in this case is just not doable," Book said. "So the power of having a decision on approving three approved curricular pathways is going to benefit the future of

North Carolinians.”

The commission discussed but didn’t include Monday recommendations for addressing improving math instruction

Can commission finish work by March?

The commission still also to make recommendations on administrative operations, educational leadership, and accountability.

The commission was supposed to present all their recommendations by Dec. 31. But its deadline was extended to March 2027.

The commission spent most of its first six months focusing on student achievement and teacher training. It now only has six months to get the final group of recommendations done.

“I took on this role — and all of you did I know — pledging to deliver actionable, clear recommendations to Mr. Stein, Mr. Berger and Mr. Hall by March of 2027,” said Anne Faircloth, the commission co-chair and president of Buffalo Investments & Lafayette Farms. “I feel certain that we can still do this. But we must all pull together and move in that direction. We’ve got a job to do, folks.”