

## Governor, Legislature Agree To Bill Reopening All NC Classrooms

By Administrator

Wednesday, 10 March 2021 17:55 -

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The North Carolina Senate unanimously approved an agreement between legislative leaders and Gov. Roy Cooper to return North Carolina students to in-person learning. Under the agreement in Senate Bill 220, kindergarten through fifth grades will open under Plan A as defined by the latest 2021 NC Public Health Toolkit (K-12). Local districts will have the flexibility to decide between opening under Plan A, Plan B, or a combination of the two for grades 6-12. Families can still choose to continue virtual learning if that best fits their needs.

Schools choosing to open under Plan A for grades 6-12 must notify the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to describe their plan for moving to Plan A, though DHHS will not have the authority to veto a local district's decision to move to Plan A.

Parents of students in grades 6-12 with IEPs attending schools in Plan B can choose to have their child attend school under Plan A.

All of the requirements of this agreement would be effective 21 days after it becomes law. However, school districts are authorized to move to Plan A or Plan B immediately after it becomes law. Schools can add additional teacher workdays between when it becomes law and the date they begin operating under Plan A or Plan B so they have more time to prepare if needed.

This agreement also requires any school that opens any grades of 6-12 under Plan A to partner with the ABC Science Collaborative so the Collaborative can collect and analyze data related to reopening schools. The Collaborative's efforts will be funded through \$500,000 of federal COVID relief funds allocated to the Department of Public Instruction.

The Governor will have the authority to order a closure, restriction, or reduction of operations within schools, but can only do so on a district-by-district basis.

"This legislation accomplishes what we've wanted from the beginning, getting kids back into the classroom," Senate Leader Phil Berger (R-Rockingham) said. "I want to thank Sens. Ballard, Lee, and deViere for standing up for our students. Our students will be able to return to the classroom and school districts will retain the flexibility to open in a way that best fits their needs. I look forward to this bill being passed and signed into law as quickly as possible."

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Sen. Deanna Ballard (R-Watauga), the co-chair of the Senate Education Committee and primary sponsor of Senate Bill 37 said: "Reopening schools has been at the front of all of our minds since the beginning of the pandemic. This agreement signals a shared priority. I'm grateful to the parents who worked in tandem with us advocating for a return to school, my colleagues who worked around the clock to get this deal accomplished, and Superintendent Truitt who has been supportive of students and educators throughout this entire process."