

Expedited Budget Process Underway

It was an epic week in NC politics with a party switch and a supermajority declared, but it's important to note that the House passed its version of a nearly \$30 billion state budget.

The House passage happened a couple weeks after Governor Cooper submitted a budget to the General Assembly.

Next up is the Senate and they're expected to have a budget complete by the first week in May.

"This will set up what is called a conference report," said NCTIA lobbyist Skye David. "This is when the House and Senate budget writers go behind closed doors to write a compromise budget."

Senate leadership said this week they are trying to have a conference report by the middle of May, which would be an unusually quick end to a budget process that has been known to drag out through the summer.

It's also being reported inside the General Assembly that an adjournment of the long session could come as early as June 15 this year.

"While a June 15 adjournment is not unprecedented, it would be extraordinary," said David.

Remote Learning School Calendar Bill Filed

Sen. Michael Lee reached out to NCTIA when session was just beginning in January and said he wanted to work on helping school districts proctor first semester examinations prior to the December break – but preserve August for family tourism.

The New Hanover County Republican, who also chairs the Senate Education Committee, said he understands both sides of the calendar argument: Tourism needs to preserve the summer months in order to financially survive and school districts want more flexibility in their schedules.



"We appreciated Sen. Lee reaching out to us and for giving us an opportunity to give him input," said NCTIA Executive Director Vince Chelena. "Some of our input included the frustration we feel as school districts around the state are brazenly breaking the 2004 school calendar law."

A few weeks later, Sen. Lee sent over a draft bill that creates a pilot program administered by the NC Department of Public Instruction that will allow up to ten school districts to participate in a remote instruction flexibility pilot.

"Essentially, these school districts can use remote instruction on teacher workdays and inclement weather days within the confines of the school calendar law," said NCTIA lobbyist Brian Lewis, who has been in talks with Sen. Lee about the bill ([SB499](#)) filed this past Tuesday. "The bill will also allow remote learning in the days prior to the August 26 start."

Chelena said NCTIA's main priority is to disallow in-person school until August 26, and there are a few concerns about remote learning prior to that date, but he appreciates Sen. Lee's partnership with NCTIA and vows to continue talks on such an important and divisive issue.

Chelena said he was pleased to see a provision in Sen. Lee's bill that "any person residing within a local school administrative unit shall have standing to bring a declaratory judgment action against a local board of education for a violation" of the school calendar law. The plaintiff can "recover declaratory relief, injunctive relief, damages of a minimum of \$10,000, reasonable attorneys' fees and costs, and any other appropriate relief."

NCTIA invites members to review the legislation ([SB499](#)) and offer ideas and opinions to Chelena.

Note to readers: This e-newsletter will not be published on Friday, April 14 as the General Assembly is on Easter recess. Happy Easter, NCTIA!