



HOUSE BILL 256: Smart Sch. Bus Safety Pilot/Certain Counties.

2021-2022 General Assembly

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| Committee: | House Education - K-12. If favorable, re-refer to Rules, Calendar, and Operations of the House | Date: | April 20, 2021 |
| Introduced by: | Reps. Strickland, Bell, Lambeth, D. Hall | Prepared by: | Drupti Chauhan Committee Counsel |
| Analysis of: | PCS to First Edition H256-CSRQa-7 | | |

OVERVIEW: House Bill 256 would establish the Smart School Bus Safety Pilot Program (Program) in certain local school administrative units (LEAs).

The Proposed Committee Substitute (PCS) would authorize several more LEAs to participate in the Program and increase the appropriations to all of the participating LEAs. It would also clarify that the Program is not subject to the statutory requirement that the State Board of Education must assist local boards of education with questions that arise in connection with the organization and operation of school bus transportation systems of the LEAs.

CURRENT LAW: S.L. 2020-97 created a Smart School Bus Safety Pilot Program for Mount Airy City Schools.

BILL ANALYSIS: The PCS for House Bill 256 directs the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to establish the Smart School Bus Safety Pilot Program (Program) beginning with the 2021-2022 school year and ending on or before January 1, 2025 to modernize the transportation of public school students through technology in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participation – As a part of the Program, participating local school administrative units (LEAs) must identify and contract with qualifying vendors to provide technology and services for student transportation. The PCS specifically exempts the Program from the requirements of G.S. 115C-240(d) which require the SBE to assist local boards of education with the acquisition and maintenance of school buses or other questions that arise in connection with the organization and operation of school bus transportation systems in the LEAs.

The PCS sets forth 21 local school administrative units (LEAs) that authorized to participate in the Program but an authorized LEA may choose not to participate. For each LEA that chooses not to participate, DPI may authorize one replacement LEA with a similar population of students to participate.

Technology and Services – Participating LEAs have discretion over the specific technology and services they are provided if certain minimum requirements are met including but not limited to:

- Enabling employee time tracking, student ridership tracking, and contact tracing in the event of a COVID 19 infection.
- Enabling global positioning system (GPS) tracking of school buses and enabling turn by turn navigation along bus routes.
- Providing pre- and post-trip vehicle inspections that may be transmitted to DPI on a regular basis.

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- Communicating ridership information to the student information management system and allowing parents or legal guardians to access applicable information.
- Conforming to applicable guidance provided by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services for the transportation of students during the COVID 19 pandemic.
- Facilitating the receipt of Medicaid reimbursement for eligible student transportation services.

Requirements and Contingencies – The following apply to all participating LEAs:

- Every school bus designed for the transportation of children with disabilities must be outfitted with technology provided pursuant to the Program as long as the technology is appropriate for children with disabilities and can be provided in a cost effective manner.
- At the conclusion of the Program, all hardware provided to an LEA must become the property of the unit.
- LEAs must make use of technology or services provided pursuant to the Program at least through the conclusion of the 2023 2024 school year.

Reports – By July 1, 2022 and annually until the end of the Program, DPI, in consultation with each participating LEA, must report, at a minimum, on the following information to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee, any committee constituted by the House of Representatives or Senate to address school safety, and the Fiscal Research Division:

- An itemized breakdown of software infrastructure, hardware infrastructure, and equipment provided by qualifying vendors to the LEAs.
- A description of all services provided by qualifying vendors to the LEAs.
- A list of qualifying vendors contracting with the LEAs.
- The impact and effectiveness of the Program.
- All expenditures of State funds pursuant to the Program.

Appropriations – The PCS appropriates \$13,750,000 from the General Fund in nonrecurring funds for the 2021-2022 fiscal year to establish the Program, and also sets forth the specific amounts that each LEA would receive for the Program.

EFFECTIVE DATE: The PCS becomes effective July 1, 2021.