

GOVERNOR COOPER'S 2021 GEER FUND PLAN

May 24, 2021

EXPANDING POSTSECONDARY OPPORTUNITY AND ACCELERATING EQUITABLE EDUCATION RECOVERY

Background

The pandemic has exposed glaring inequities in our education pipeline and poses a serious threat to the state's goal of ensuring that [2 million North Carolinians](#) have a high-quality credential or a postsecondary degree by 2030. In short, data suggest that K-12 students are spending less time on learning activities; fewer students are planning to go to college; and college enrollments have declined. Data also suggest that students from low-income families, students of color, and students in rural communities have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

North Carolina has received a total of \$137.8 million from the Governors Emergency Education Relief (GEER) fund via two federal relief packages: The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act. In August, Governor Cooper announced plans for [\\$95.6 million from GEER I funds](#), including \$85.5 million in grants to support K-12 and postsecondary students most impacted by the pandemic and \$10.1 million in reserve to address future needs.

GEER I grants have already been used to hire student health staff and academic support personnel in more than 170 public school units (i.e., school districts, charter schools and lab schools), help more than 5,200 students pursue industry-recognized credentials, and provide emergency financial aid to more than 6,900 college students.

On May 24, 2021, Governor Cooper announced a package awarding remaining GEER funds for several initiatives designed to boost job readiness, college access, student wellbeing, and degree attainment.

Summary of GEER grants:

Funded Program	Recipient	GEER I	GEER II	Total
Student Success Grants	DPI	20,050,000	-	20,050,000
Student Wellness Grants	DPI	40,100,000	-	40,100,000
Workforce Resilience Grants	NCCCS	15,000,000	-	15,000,000
UNC Resilience Grants	UNCSSO	6,000,000	-	6,000,000
UNC High School Populations Support	UNCSSO	566,000	173,000*	739,000
NC Resilience Grants	NCSEAA	4,010,000	-	4,010,000
Longleaf Commitment (Student Grants)*	NCSEAA	9,434,675	16,089,948	25,524,623
Longleaf Commitment (Institutional Grants)*	NCCCS	-	6,000,000	6,000,000
Longleaf Complete (UNC)*	UNCSSO	-	5,000,000	5,000,000
Longleaf Complete (NCCCS)*	NCCCS	-	3,500,000	3,500,000
Longleaf Complete (Independents)*	NCSEAA	-	4,000,000	4,000,000
Student Mental Health Services Expansion*	UNCSSO	-	5,000,000	5,000,000
Jobs for NC Graduates*	Communities in Schools	-	825,000	825,000
Education Recovery Dashboard*	GDAC (NCDIT)	-	750,000	750,000
Digital Inclusion Grant (NC Student Connect)*	DNCR	-	650,000	650,000
GEER Administration (NCPRO)	N/A	478,194	210,995	689,189
	Total	95,638,869	42,198,943	137,837,812

*New grant

Launch the Longleaf Commitment program

Total funding: \$31.5 million

Recipients: NC State Assistance Authority (\$25.5 million)
NC Community College System (\$6.0 million)

Overview: Fall 2020 saw a steep decline in new students enrolling in curriculum programs at NC community colleges. Without a bold intervention, leading indicators suggest more students may fall out of the education pipeline and not pursue a postsecondary credential or degree after leaving high school, which is critical to be prepared for the workforce.

Governor Cooper will direct \$31.5 million to launch the Longleaf Commitment program to guarantee that graduating high school seniors from low-income and middle-class families have a clear, affordable path to earn a college degree. \$25 million will be directed to the NC State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA) to award grants to eligible students, and \$6 million will be directed to the NC Community College System (NCCCS) to expand student support capacity through matching grants at system colleges.

Goal(s): The program is anticipated to provide grants to 16,000+ students over two years and benefit many more students through enhanced support services. The program also aims to accomplish the following goals:

- Accelerated enrollment recovery at community colleges (benchmarked against Fall 2019 enrollment)
- Recover FAFSA completion rates to 2019 level (benefits all sectors)
- Increased rates of graduation and transfer to 4-year institutions

Student eligibility: Longleaf Commitment is intended to help students who graduated from a North Carolina high school in 2021 recover learning and persist through to degree attainment. To be eligible, a student must:

- Have graduated or be expected to graduate from a NC high school in 2021.
- Be a NC resident for tuition purposes.
- Complete the FAFSA for the 2021-22 academic year and renew the FAFSA for the 2022-23 academic year.
- Have an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) below \$15,000, which roughly equates to \$100,000 Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) for a family with two children.
- Enroll in the Fall 2021 semester and maintain enrollment in at least 6 credit hours per semester at a North Carolina Community College. Students are strongly encouraged to enroll full time to take full advantage of the program.

Students may be enrolled part-time, however Longleaf Commitment funding is only guaranteed through the Spring 2023 semester.

Financial aid grants: The program will guarantee that eligible students receive at least \$2,800 in federal and state grants to cover the cost of tuition and most fees at any of the state’s 58 community colleges. Eligible students will receive a minimum grant of \$700, up to a maximum grant of \$2,800 (tuition plus a fees allowance) per year for two years. The awards will be added on top of the Pell Grant, Community College Grant, and Education Lottery Scholarship. Award amounts will be determined by NCSEAA and will adjust based on how many credits a student is enrolled in during the semester. For example, the minimum and maximum grants for students enrolled half-time (6 credits) is \$350 and \$1,400 per year. The maximum grant (\$2,800 for fulltime students) phases out after \$12k EFC by \$700 for every \$1k in EFC and ends at \$15k EFC.

	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D
EFC / Est. AGI	\$0 / \$30k	\$4K / \$60k	\$8k / \$77k	\$12k / \$90k
Pell Grant	\$6,495	\$2,445	\$0	\$0
State Grants	\$0	\$3,136	\$2,700	\$0
Longleaf Grant	\$700	\$700	\$700	\$2,800
Total Aid	\$7,195	\$6,281	\$3,400	\$2,800

Notes about table: Award levels are based on students enrolled in 15 credits per semester. “EFC” means Expected Family Contribution based on FAFSA determination. “Est. AGI” is an estimate of the general Adjusted Gross Income level associated with the specified EFC for a family with two children. “State Grants” includes the Community College Grant and Education Lottery Scholarship.

When students can use the grant: GEER funds will support grants for the Fall and Spring semesters during the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years. Students must enroll during the Fall 2021 and are only guaranteed aid through this program through the Spring 2023 semester. GEER funds may be used to cover the cost of pre- or co-requisite development courses in the first year of a student’s enrollment. Colleges are encouraged to leverage other funding sources, such as Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF), to support summer semester courses for participating students.

Applying for the grant: Details will be available at nccommunitycolleges.edu. Eligible students who complete the FAFSA and apply for enrollment at any of North Carolina’s 58 community colleges will be automatically considered for the program. Therefore, eligible students who have completed the FAFSA and enrolled in a community college prior to the announcement of the Longleaf Commitment will receive the grant.

Student support services: The Governor is committed to making sure that students are surrounded by the support systems necessary to thrive from the first day of classes through graduation. The NC Community College System Office must grant a minimum of \$5 million as matching funds to expand the colleges’ outreach and student success advising capacity. These flexible funds can be used to expand evidence-based practices, including student advising, success coaching capacity, and related investments. Further details will be provided soon.

Administration: The Governor will fund this program using a mix of GEER I funds and GEER II funds. NCCCS will partner with NCSEAA to award grants to eligible

students as part of its normal financial aid packaging process. NCCCS may retain up to \$1 million for marketing, student outreach, and administrative costs incurred by NCCCS and NCSEAA.

Launch the Longleaf Complete program

Total funding: \$12.5 million

Recipients:

- University of North Carolina System Office (\$5.0 million)
- NC State Education Assistance Authority (\$4.0 million) to award to independent colleges and universities that participate in the Need Based Scholarship program.
- NC Community College System (\$3.5 million)

Overview: Prior to the pandemic, more than a million North Carolinians had some college credits but no degree. During the pandemic, 3 in 10 adults who planned to go to college canceled their plans. To meet the state's ambitious credential attainment goals, the state needs to quickly re-engage these near-completers and ensure more students are not forced out of the pipeline.

The Governor will direct \$12.5 million in flexible funds to colleges and universities to help near-completers—current or former students who are at least 50% toward their degree or credential—complete their degree or credential. The funds may be used for student outreach, enhanced student advising, grants to address unmet financial need, or related costs of helping these “part-way home” students succeed through graduation.

Goal(s):

- Increase degree attainment among adult learners and students who have stopped out.
- Estimate that the program will directly support 3,000 – 6,000 students, depending on how institutions choose to deploy these flexible resources.

Administration:

The program will be funded through three separate awards to the UNC System Office (UNCSSO), NC Community College System Office (NCCCSO), and the NC State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA). The subawards will provide flexible funds to UNCSSO and NCCCSO to use with a portion being awarded to component institutions. NCSEAA will allocate funds to eligible independent colleges and universities using a formula consistent with the formula used to allocate the NC Resilience Grant in the first round of GEER awards.

Rapidly enhance student mental health supports

Total Funding: \$5.0 million

Recipients: University of North Carolina System Office

Overview: Campus counseling centers struggled to meet demand for services prior to the pandemic, and now are grappling with how to treat more students, staff, and faculty with significantly increased mental health needs. According to UNC, recent data indicate that 8 in 10 students report that the pandemic has negatively impacted their mental health.

The Governor will direct \$5.0 million to the UNC System Office to rapidly scale up evidence-based strategies to mitigate the immediate demand on mental health counseling resources across the state's higher education sectors. With these funds, UNC will deploy a range of strategies to expand evidence-based interventions, such as mental health first aid training, shared-service counseling, 24/7 telephonic counseling, and off-campus referrals. To the extent practicable, shared training and counseling resources developed with these funds will be made available at reduced cost to campuses outside of the UNC system, including community colleges and independent colleges and universities.

Administration: UNC System Office will receive the grant and, in consultation through an informal working group with NCCCS and NCICU, determine appropriate and sustainable approaches to make shared training and counseling resources available to the other postsecondary sectors.

Expand 'Jobs for North Carolina Graduates'

Total Funding: \$825,000

Recipient: Communities in Schools, a nonprofit organization that leads JNCG programming.

Overview: The Jobs for North Carolina Graduates (JNCG), North Carolina's offshoot of the national Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) program, teaches 11th and 12th grade high school students' employability and workplace skills in preparation for the workforce post-graduation. JNCG empowers college and career coaches at each participating school identify students who are at risk of not completing high school or transitioning into the workplace due to economic, family, academic, or personal barriers. The students participate in two years of coaching with high success rates of job and college placement. The program currently operates at eight high schools in mostly rural counties in North Carolina, serving 227 students. This grant will help serve another cohort of students and expand program impact during a critical time in pandemic recovery.

Develop and launch an education recovery data dashboard

Total Funding: \$750,000

Recipient: Government Data Analytics Center (GDAC) at the NC Department of Information Technology

Overview: With finite resources available, our K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions need timely, reliable data to learning and enrollment recovery decisions in a way that the DHHS COVID-19 dashboard has informed local and state public health decisions. A recovery-oriented data resource for education leaders will help close information gaps necessary to ensure NC's education recovery is effective and equitable for students, schools, and colleges.

The Governor will direct \$750k to develop an Education Recovery Dashboard ("Dashboard") that leverages data to:

- assess how the pandemic has affected NC's P-20 education pipeline with the 2018 Leaky Pipeline report as a baseline; and
- track the impacts of and progress toward recovery from the pandemic at a local, regional, and state level across the P-20 pipeline.

The project will fund data analysis, development of an online resource, technical assistance and outreach to education leaders, and access to any data necessary to the effectiveness of this research.

Administration: GDAC will manage project development. Funds may be used to contract with appropriate entities to conduct relevant analysis, build the dashboard, and fund any necessary data access.

Expand digital literacy programs

Total Funding: \$650,000

Recipient: NC Student Connect, managed by the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

Overview: The quick turn to digital education has demonstrated the importance of broadband access, but further work is necessary to ensure that everyone with access have the skills to succeed in an increasingly digital environment. The Andrea Harris Task Force, as established by the Governor in Executive Order 143 to address the social, economic, environmental, and health disparities in communities of color as exacerbated by COVID-19, recognized the disparities that stem from inequities in digital literacy and access, and created this recommendation to ensure that all students and parents have the resources necessary to succeed in virtual environments. This grant will improve digital literacy for students and families by

supporting and promoting an accessible digital literacy toolkit that educates students and parents on the digital literacy skills that are critical to remote learning and workforce opportunities.

Building on the success of the Governor's NC Student Connect initiative, DNCR will administer this grant and work with members of the AHTF as well as other organizations as necessary to implement the digital literacy initiative.

Supplement support for high school programs at UNC institutions

Total Funding: \$173,000

Recipient: University of North Carolina System

Overview: High school students attending programs at UNC School for Arts and NC School of Science and Math were not counted toward federal relief programs for K-12 schools or higher education. In the first round of GEER awards, the Governor provided \$566,000 to help close the COVID-19 response funding gap. This award will ensure the schools have funds from GEER II, which can be used for a year longer than GEER I funds.