

2016 Juvenile Delinquency Legislation

S.L. 2016-94 (H 1030): Pilot Program to Raise High School Dropout Age from 16 to 18. Section 8.21(a) of the 2016 Appropriations Act authorizes the Hickory Public Schools, Newton-Conover City Schools, and Rutherford County Schools to establish and implement a pilot program to increase the high school dropout age from 16 to 18, beginning with the 2016-2017 school year and continuing for subsequent school years. Each local school system may use available funds to implement the pilot program, including (i) hiring up to three additional teachers, (ii) funding additional student-related costs, such as transportation and technology, and (iii) operating a night school program for at-risk students. To the extent possible, Hickory Public Schools and Newton-Conover City Schools must partner with Catawba Valley Community College, and Rutherford County Schools must partner with Isothermal Community College in administering the pilot program. For purposes of implementing the pilot program:

- the local school systems may provide that if a parent, guardian, or custodian, or a student if age 18, has not made a good faith effort to comply with the compulsory school attendance law, the principal must notify the district attorney; and if the student is under age 18, the director of the county Department of Social Services;
- if a student under age 18 is habitually absent from school and the student's parent has made a good faith effort to comply with law, the principal may file a complaint with a juvenile court counselor pursuant to Chapter 7B that the student is habitually absent from school without a valid excuse;
- the local school systems must establish rules prescribing when an 18-year-old student may be excused from compulsory school attendance, including when the student has obtained a high school equivalency certificate or has enrolled in the military;
- a parent, guardian, or custodian, or student if age 18, who violates the provisions of the pilot program without a lawful exception under this section or Chapter 115C may be charged with a Class 1 misdemeanor; and
- if a student, parent, or other person files an affidavit with a school subject to this pilot program indicating that a student is unable to comply with compulsory school attendance by reason of necessity to work or labor for

the support of the student or the student's family, a school social worker must investigate the matter and notify the appropriate court, depending on the child's age. If the court finds the student or the student's parents are making a bona fide effort to comply but are unable to do so by reason of illness, lack of earning capacity, or any other valid cause, the court shall determine what help is needed for the student or family to enable compliance with the compulsory school attendance law.

The local school systems, in collaboration with the State Board of Education, must submit a report to specified legislative committees on the effectiveness of the pilot programs by January 15, 2018, and then bi-annually until the end of the operation of the pilot programs.