

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2025

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SENATE BILL DRS15041-NH-8A

Short Title: Released Time Education Act. (Public)

Sponsors: Senators Hanig, Alexander, and Ford (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to:

1 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
2 AN ACT TO ALLOW PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS TO BE RELEASED DURING THE
3 INSTRUCTIONAL DAY TO ATTEND COURSES IN RELIGIOUS MORAL
4 INSTRUCTION.

5 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

6 **SECTION 1.** Article 7B of Chapter 115C of the General Statutes is amended by
7 adding a new Part to read:

8 "Part 8. Courses and Credits.

9 **"§ 115C-78.3. Released time courses.**

10 (a) The following definitions apply in this section:

11 (1) Released time course. – A course in religious moral instruction taught by a
12 sponsoring entity that a student attends during the instructional day.

13 (2) Sponsoring entity. – An organization that provides released time courses.

14 (b) Released Time Course Policy. – The governing body of a public school unit may
15 adopt a policy to allow students to attend a released time course for at least one but no more than
16 five hours per week. At a minimum, the policy shall require that:

17 (1) A student's parent or legal guardian gives written consent for the student to
18 attend the released time course.

19 (2) Transportation to and from the location of the released time course, including
20 transportation for students with disabilities, is the complete responsibility of
21 the sponsoring entity, parent or legal guardian, or student.

22 (3) No federal, State, or local funds, other than minimal administrative costs
23 incurred by facilitating the released time course policy, are expended in
24 providing the released time course.

25 (4) Students assume responsibility for any missed schoolwork.

26 (5) Released time courses are not to be held on school property unless permitted
27 under a neutral policy of equal access opening school property for use by
28 community groups.

29 (6) Students shall not be considered absent from school while attending a released
30 time course.

31 (c) Credit for Released Time Courses. – Notwithstanding any State Board of Education
32 rules, as part of a governing body of a public school unit's released time course policy, the
33 governing body may allow the awarding of up to two elective course credits to a student who
34 successfully completes a released time course in accordance with the following:

35 (1) A student's participation in a released time course but failure to earn credit
36 shall not be denoted as a fail on the student's transcript.



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- 1 (2) In determining how much credit to award for completion of a released time
2 course, the governing body of the public school unit shall evaluate the course
3 based on purely secular criteria that are substantially the same criteria used to
4 evaluate similar courses. The decision to award credit for a released time
5 course shall be neutral to, and shall not involve any test for, religious content
6 or denominational affiliation. For purposes of this section, secular criteria may
7 include the following:
- 8 a. The number of hours of classroom instruction time.
9 b. A review of the course syllabus that reflects course requirements and
10 materials used.
11 c. The methods of assessment used in the course.
12 d. The qualifications of the course instructor, which shall be similar to
13 the qualifications of other teachers within the public school unit.
- 14 (d) Duties and Responsibilities of Sponsoring Organizations. – An organization that
15 provides a released time course shall do the following:
- 16 (1) Maintain attendance records and make the records available to the public
17 school unit the students enrolled in the course attend.
18 (2) Upon request of a governing body of a public school unit that has students
19 taking or seeking to take a released time course from that organization,
20 provide a copy of the syllabus for the course.
21 (3) Make provisions for and assume liability for students while they are under
22 supervision of the sponsoring organization."

23 **SECTION 2.** This act is effective when it becomes law and applies beginning with
24 the 2025-2026 school year.