

## Class is in Session--But Not Driver's Ed

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School is back in session across North Carolina, but many high school students and their parents may be disappointed that driver's education is not. Driver's education has long been a staple of the high school experience in this state. I vividly recall my afternoon class in the [Northwood High School](#) auditorium with driving instructor Ed Kitchen. I can see him now with his foot perched by the passenger-side brake as we drove the rural roads of Chatham County. What has interrupted this rite of passage at some North Carolina high schools?

**The General Assembly.** The legislature [eliminated state funding for driver's education programs](#) as of July 1, 2015, and directed local boards of education to foot the bill. [Local schools may charge students](#) participating in a driver education course a fee of up to \$65 to offset the cost of providing the training and instruction. The problem is that driver's education, which has largely been outsourced to private companies, can cost a lot more than \$65 to provide. [Some school districts](#) lack the funds to make up the difference.

**Why does it matter?** Just ask a high school student. To obtain a driver's license before age 18, a person must progress through North Carolina's graduated licensing system. That process begins with a limited learner's permit. And a person cannot obtain such a permit without having first passed "a course of driver education prescribed in [G.S. 115C-215](#) or a course of driver instruction at a licensed commercial driver training school." [G.S. 20-11\(b\)\(1\)](#). A 16-year-old may obtain a limited provisional driver's license only after he or she has held a limited learner's permit for at least 12 months.

A person who does not participate in the graduating licensing system may not obtain a driver's license until reaching the age of 18.

**What happens next?** That's not clear.

The Senate's [proposed budget](#) provides no funding for driver's education. Instead, it amends G.S. 115C-216(g) to allow schools to charge participating students the actual cost of providing the driver's education course. It also moves responsibility for driver's education from the State Department of Public Instruction to the state's community college system, which is to provide driver's education to students effective July 1, 2016.

The [House budget](#) proposes a new fee for the late renewal of motor vehicle registrations, which will be used to fund driver's education beginning in the 2016-2017 fiscal year.

Other ways of funding driver's education also were proposed this session, including allowing [parents to teach their children to drive](#).

**Have your say.** The state's current driver's education system serves an [estimated 90,000 high school students](#) each year at a relatively low cost—but it is not without [its critics](#). Pertinent questions include:

- Should the public schools be in the business of overseeing driver's education?
- Should the State subsidize the cost of such instruction?

- Is the current model for instruction effective?

You can share your thoughts here. The legislature's view will likely be reflected in the final state budget.