

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 2019**

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**HOUSE BILL 485**

Short Title: Virtual Early Learning Pilot Program. (Public)

Sponsors: Representatives Horn, Fraley, Warren, and Lucas (Primary Sponsors).  
*For a complete list of sponsors, refer to the North Carolina General Assembly web site.*

Referred to: Education - K-12, if favorable, Appropriations, Education, if favorable,  
Appropriations, if favorable, Rules, Calendar, and Operations of the House

March 28, 2019

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT TO ESTABLISH A VIRTUAL EARLY LEARNING PILOT PROGRAM FOR  
PRESCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

**SECTION 1.(a)** Pilot Program. – The State Board of Education (Board), in consultation with the Department of Public Instruction, Office of Early Learning, and the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education, shall establish a three-year virtual early learning pilot program known as "UpStart." The pilot program shall be targeted to "at-risk," preschool-age children to develop school readiness skills and created to: (i) evaluate the effectiveness of giving preschool-age children access, at home, to interactive individualized instruction delivered by computers and the Internet to prepare them academically for success in school; and (ii) test the feasibility of scaling a home-based curriculum in reading, math, and science delivered by computers and the Internet to all preschool-age children in the State.

**SECTION 1.(b)** Contractor Requirements. – In establishing the pilot program, the Board shall develop and issue a request for proposal (RFP) to contract with a third-party organization (contractor). The contractor shall have demonstrated experience in the delivery of a home-based educational technology program to provide adaptive computer software for literacy and numeracy instruction and an assessment for preschool-age children. The Board shall ensure that the contractor selected to conduct the pilot program does each of the following:

- (1) Provides computer-assisted instruction for preschool-age children on a home computer connected by the Internet to a centralized file storage facility.
- (2) Provides technical support to families for the installation and operation of the instructional software.
- (3) Provides for the installation of computer and Internet access in homes of low-income families that cannot afford the equipment and service.
- (4) Has the capability of doing the following through the Internet:
  - a. Communicating with parents.
  - b. Updating the instructional software.
  - c. Validating user access.
  - d. Collecting usage data.
  - e. Storing research data.
  - f. Producing reports for parents, schools, and the General Assembly.
- (5) Develops and implements a program consisting of the following components:



- 1 a. Computer-assisted, individualized instruction in reading,  
2 mathematics, and science.
- 3 b. A multisensory reading tutorial program for children needing  
4 additional reading instruction.
- 5 c. A validated computer adaptive reading test that accurately indicates  
6 reading readiness of children who cannot read and provides easily  
7 understood reports for parents and educators.
- 8 (6) Has the capability to quickly and efficiently modify, improve, and support the  
9 product.
- 10 (7) Collaborates with school district personnel who will provide administrative  
11 and technical support of the program.
- 12 (8) Purchases equipment and service through cooperative purchasing contracts.

13 **SECTION 2.(a)** School District Participation in Pilot Program. – The Board shall  
14 select up to 10 local education agencies (LEAs) to participate in the pilot program. The LEAs  
15 selected for participation in the pilot program shall have demonstrated waiting lists for the North  
16 Carolina Prekindergarten (NC Pre-K) program. LEAs shall be from geographically diverse areas  
17 in the State, with representation from tier one, tier two, and tier three counties. For purposes of  
18 this section, tier one, tier two, and tier three counties shall have the same designations as those  
19 established by the N.C. Department of Commerce's 2017 County Tier Designations.

20 **SECTION 2.(b)** Equipment. – The Board or an LEA may purchase computers,  
21 peripheral equipment, and Internet service for low-income families who cannot afford them.

22 **SECTION 3.** Family Participation in Pilot Program. – The contractor selected to  
23 develop and implement the pilot program and the LEAs selected to participate in the pilot shall  
24 solicit family participants through a public information campaign and referrals from participating  
25 LEAs. Qualifying children shall be selected through a random lottery. For purposes of this pilot  
26 program, a preschool-age child is eligible for participation in the program based on the following:

- 27 (1) Is 4 years of age on or before August 31 of the program year.
- 28 (2) Is at risk, which shall be defined to include the following:
  - 29 a. A child whose family's gross income is at or below one hundred  
30 percent (100%) of the federal poverty level.
  - 31 b. A child of either the following: (i) an active duty member of the Armed  
32 Forces of the United States, including the North Carolina National  
33 Guard, State military forces, or a reserve component of the Armed  
34 Forces, who is ordered to active duty by the proper authority within  
35 the last 18 months or is expected to be ordered within the next 18  
36 months or (ii) a member of the Armed Forces of the United States,  
37 including the North Carolina National Guard, State military forces, or  
38 a reserve component of the Armed Forces, who was injured or killed  
39 while serving on active duty.

40 Eligibility determinations for participation in the pilot program may be made by local North  
41 Carolina Partnerships for Children, Inc., partnerships. If funds are available, in addition to the  
42 children defined as "at risk" in this section, the pilot program may also serve a child whose  
43 family's gross income is at or below one hundred thirty percent (130%) of the federal poverty  
44 guidelines.

45 **SECTION 4.** Annual Report. – The Board shall make a report on the pilot program  
46 to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by November 30 of each year for the  
47 duration of the pilot program. The report shall include the following:

- 48 (1) The extent to which the pilot program is accomplishing the purposes for which  
49 it was established.
- 50 (2) The number of families selected to participate in the pilot.
- 51 (3) The number of families requesting computers.

- 1 (4) The number of computers furnished.
- 2 (5) The number of families requiring Internet access.
- 3 (6) The frequency of use of the instructional software.
- 4 (7) Any obstacles encountered with software or hardware usage or in providing
- 5 technical assistance to families.
- 6 (8) Student performance on pre-kindergarten and post-kindergarten assessments
- 7 conducted by LEAs and charter schools for students who participated in the
- 8 pilot program in comparison to those students who did not participate in the
- 9 pilot program.

10 **SECTION 5.** Appropriation. – There is appropriated from the General Fund to the  
11 State Board of Education the sum of five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) in nonrecurring  
12 funds for each year of the 2019-2021 fiscal biennium to provide funding for qualifying  
13 preschool-age children to participate in the pilot program established by this act. For the  
14 2021-2022 fiscal year only, the Director of Budget shall also include in the base budget, as  
15 defined by G.S. 143C-1-1(d)(1c), the amount of nonrecurring funds needed to support the pilot  
16 program. Funds appropriated pursuant to this section shall be divided evenly in each fiscal year  
17 among the LEAs selected to participate in the pilot program. Upon completion of the pilot  
18 program, any unexpended funds shall revert back to the General Fund.

19 **SECTION 6.** Effective Date. – This act becomes effective July 1, 2019.