

**ORANGE COUNTY  
BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**AGENDA ITEM ABSTRACT**

**Meeting Date:** April 16, 2012

**AGENDA ITEM No.** 12-04-(2)-09

**ACTION ITEM (Y/N)** N

**SUBJECT:** Driver Education Program Report

**INFO. CONTACT:** Dr. George McFarley/Frank Meadows/Buddy Hartley **PHONE:** 919-732-8126

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. "New Fee is Keeping Students Out of Driver's Ed," WRAL news article dated 4/10/12

---

**PURPOSE:** To provide the Board of Education with an update on the Orange County Schools driver education program.

**BACKGROUND:** NC House Bill 200 enacted by the 2011 Legislature authorized LEAs to charge a fee of up to \$45 for each student attending Driver Education classes, beginning August 2011. OCS chose not to charge a fee for this school year.

It has been estimated that about one-third of the state's school systems decided to charge the fee. A survey of surrounding school districts found the following results on driver education fees:

- Alamance NONE
- CHCCS NONE
- Cumberland \$45
- Durham \$45
- Granville \$45
- Johnston \$45
- Person \$45
- Randolph \$38
- Wake \$45

In the past, driver education has been a state-funded program requiring no local revenue or fees. Over the past few years, the state allotment for driver education has been reduced every year. In 2010-2011, \$173,928 was allotted; in 2011-2012, \$144,544 was allotted. Our planning allotment for 2012-2013 is \$141,564.

Last school year, there were 708 9<sup>th</sup> graders eligible for driver education, 542 were enrolled, and 475 successfully completed the program. Each student is required to receive 30 hours of classroom instruction and six hours behind-the-wheel driving practice.

The OCS driver education program maintains six instructors and a fleet of 7 vehicles. All of the vehicles are serviceable, but mileage on these vehicles range from 37,512 to 108,163 miles. More specifically, only two of the vehicles have less than 60,000 miles on the odometer. Additionally, the cost of fuel continues to increase.

continued

With the state allotment for driver education continuing to dwindle, the need to maintain a safe and serviceable fleet of cars, the volatility of fuel costs, a large population to serve, and instructor salaries, staff questions the viability of continuing not to charge a fee for driver education. On the same hand, staff believes that charging the maximum legislated fee may reduce the number of students taking driver education. Staff has recommended a fee of \$25 per student to help offset state cuts to the program, fund vehicle replacement and manage rising fuel costs.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:** None at this time.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Superintendent recommends the Board of Education receive an update on the district's driver education program.

# New fee is keeping students out of driver's ed

Posted: March 13

Driver's education used to be provided free in all North Carolina high schools, but state lawmakers cut \$5 million from the program last year, saying schools could make up the money by charging a fee of up to \$45.

School officials say the fee is keeping thousands of students out of the program.

"There was no problem filling classes prior to this," Broughton High School driver's education teacher Beth Parsons said.

Parsons used to teach two classes a month, but it has been cut to one.

Reginald Flythe, driver's education coordinator for Wake County schools, said enrollment numbers were steady until the fee was put in place last September.

"As of Sept. 1, we've had about a 20 percent reduction overall in the number of students who have entered the classroom phase of driver education," Flythe said.

In North Carolina, teens have to go through driver's education in order to get a learner's permit. After that, they spend a year driving under supervision before being eligible for a full license.

Arthur Goodwin with the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center said the process, called graduated licensing, has significantly reduced deaths among teen drivers.

"One of the main factors why teens get in so many crashes is just inexperience," Goodwin said. "That full year of driving with mom or dad is really critical for getting the experience you need to be a safe driver."

Goodwin thinks the fee might be encouraging teens to wait until they turn 18, when they can skip driver's education completely.

"At that point, you can just go out and get your adult license, and you don't have to go through the permit phase," Goodwin said.

Flythe hopes that isn't the case.

"Just because they're 18 doesn't mean they're going to be any more safe," Flythe said.

Mecklenburg County's driver's education director Connie Sessoms said about a third of the state's school systems decided to charge the fee. He says many of those that didn't impose a fee are limiting enrollment because they're running out of money for the program.

