

THE EXPRESS

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Serving Anson County and the Municipalities of Ansonville, Lilesville, McFarlan, Morven, Peachland, Polkton and Wadesboro.

Governor's Advisory Council Says All Districts Have Plans for Cellphone-Free Classrooms

Youth well-being and academic focus highlighted as statewide policy takes effect

The Governor's Advisory Council for Student Safety & Well-Being released a report this month highlighting early successes from cellphone-free classrooms in North Carolina's public schools. According to a December 11 press release, all traditional public school districts have now developed local policies to comply with the new statewide requirement restricting student cellphone use during the school day.

"Getting rid of the distraction of cell phones in classrooms prioritizes our students' well-being and academic achievement and improves their learning environments," Governor Josh Stein said in the release. He added that schools are reporting improved academic outcomes, increased social interaction and engagement, and fewer discipline concerns after implementing local cellphone policies.

Stein signed House Bill 959 into law on July 1. The legislation, which takes effect January 1, requires school districts to restrict student cellphone use during school hours. With the bill's passage, North Carolina became the 32nd state in the nation to enact statewide limits on cellphone use in classrooms.

The advisory council's report includes a video spotlighting schools that have already put cellphone restrictions in place and documents how districts across the state are preparing for full implementation. According to the report, every traditional public school district has created a local policy in response to the law.

Senate Democratic Leader Sydney Batch, co-chair of the advisory council, said school leaders moved quickly to meet the new requirements. "Every public school unit now has a plan in place to manage student cell phone use, and most have updated their policies in response to the new law," Batch said. "That's incredibly encouraging because these changes are all about creating classrooms where students can focus, learn, and thrive."

The council released a handbook in June outlining best practices for districts, as required by the executive order that created the council and was signed by the governor in April. The handbook recommends eliminating the use of personal communication devices from the start to the end of the school day.

The report also cites a nationwide survey of 20,000 educators conducted by Phones in Focus, a research initiative led by the University of Pennsylvania and supported by the National Governors Association. The survey found that schoolwide cellphone policies are associated with reduced phone use during class and improved teacher satisfaction.

According to the handbook, school leaders are encouraged to begin by clearly communicating the rationale for cellphone policies to families and educators, emphasizing the impact of phones on student health and learning. The council also recommends engaging students, parents, and staff through surveys, focus groups, or town halls before finalizing policies.

Additional guidance addresses which devices are covered, when and how access is restricted, allowable exemptions, and potential challenges in enforcement. The council encourages pairing cellphone restrictions with digital literacy education and tracking outcomes such as attendance, academic performance, and student well-being to measure effectiveness.

"It is clear that North Carolina has prioritized student academic achievement and well-being by giving our students eight hours a day Monday through Friday when they can focus on being students free of online pressures and distractions," the report states. "We feel confident this policy implementation will continue to show positive results for students, educators, and families."

Anson County Schools' Super Saturday Returns January 10 with Inspiration and Impact

Anson County Schools, in partnership with Dr. Adolph Brown, are inviting students, parents, and mentors to take part in an energizing and meaningful Super Saturday event on Saturday, January 10. The event will begin at 10:30 a.m. at Wadesboro Elementary School and promises to be a powerful morning focused on growth, encouragement, and real-world support.

Super Saturday is designed to uplift and equip students, families, and educators by addressing the urgent and everyday challenges facing today's school communities. The event offers timely strategies, motivation, and connection, meeting participants exactly where they are and helping move them forward with purpose and confidence.

From 10:30 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. students will engage in dynamic, high-impact sessions led by mentors and skilled facilitators. These sessions are crafted to empower young people, strengthen confidence, and build essential skills that support success both in the classroom and beyond.

Adding to the experience, a meal will be served, making Super Saturday not only a time of learning and inspiration, but also one of fellowship and community. Organizers encourage students, parents, and mentors to attend and be part of an event designed to motivate, connect, and inspire Anson County's future leaders.

Concert Featuring 'Remember This' Set at Hampton B. Allen Library

The Hampton B. Allen Library will host a live concert featuring the talented group 'Remember This' on Monday, January 12, in the library's Little Theater. The concert will begin at 10:30 a.m. and is open to the public.

Music lovers are invited to come enjoy a lively and uplifting program featuring a mix of country and gospel selections, performed by the group known for their engaging style and heartfelt sound.

The concert will take place at the Hampton B. Allen Library, and everyone is welcome to attend and enjoy an entertaining morning of music.



Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration Events Announced For January

Honoring the life, legacy, and enduring dream of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Planning Committee is inviting the community to come together for a series of events honoring the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose leadership helped transform the civil rights movement and shape the nation's ongoing pursuit of equality, justice, and peace. The annual MLK Jr. Celebration will feature multiple events throughout the week, encouraging reflection, fellowship, and community unity.

Dr. King, a Baptist minister and Nobel Peace Prize recipient, is remembered for his commitment to nonviolent activism and his powerful vision of a nation where people are judged by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin. His work continues to inspire communities across the country to come together in service, dialogue, and action.

The week's events will begin on Thursday, January 15 with Round Table Discussions held at local churches. These discussions are intended to foster meaningful conversation and reflection on Dr. King's teachings and their relevance today.

On Friday, January 16 the celebration will continue with MLK Jr. Jazzy Night featuring Nygel Graham at HOPPLA! in Morven. The event will begin at 7:00 p.m., with food served. Tickets are \$35 and may be purchased by contacting HOPPLA directly. The website is www.HOPPLA.ws, and the telephone number is 704-851-3144.

Saturday, January 17 will feature the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Prayer Breakfast at the Lockhart-Taylor Center beginning at 9:00 a.m., offering a time for prayer, inspiration, and fellowship.

The week will conclude on Monday, January 19 with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration Events. The MLK Jr. Commemorative March will begin at 8:00 a.m. from the Anson County Department of Social Services parking area, followed immediately by the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration Event at the Lockhart-Taylor Center.

The Lockhart-Taylor Center is located at 514 North Washington Street in Wadesboro.

In Anson County, community members are encouraged to come together in the spirit of unity and purpose to help make Dr. King's dream a reality for all Americans.

For additional information contact Winnie Bennett at 704-465-0867.

Wadesboro Youth Curfew Ordinance Outlined For Parents And Residents

The Town of Wadesboro has a youth curfew ordinance in place designed to protect juveniles from victimization and exposure to criminal activity while reinforcing parental responsibility and promoting public safety throughout the community. The ordinance applies to all juveniles under the age of 18 and establishes specific restricted hours during which minors may not remain in public places or on business premises unless an exception applies.

The Town of Wadesboro Juvenile Ordinance/ Curfew document can be found on the Town of Wadesboro's Facebook page. It goes into detail about the ordinance. A summary is presented below:

Under the ordinance, restricted hours are based on prevailing local time. Children ages 12 and under are prohibited from being in public places or establishments between 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. the following day. For juveniles ages 13 through 17, restricted hours begin at 11:00 p.m. and continue until 6:00 a.m. the next morning.

A juvenile commits a violation by being present in or remaining in any public place or establishment within the town during restricted hours. Parents or guardians may also be found in violation if they knowingly permit, or through insufficient control allow, a juvenile to remain out during restricted hours. Business owners, operators, or employees can likewise be cited if they knowingly allow a juvenile to remain on their premises during prohibited times.

The ordinance includes a number of important exceptions. Juveniles are permitted to be out during restricted hours if accompanied by a parent or legal guardian, or by an adult age 21 or older who has been authorized by the parent or guardian. Exceptions also apply for juveniles traveling directly to or from lawful employment, responding to an emergency, riding in a motor vehicle with parental consent, or attending and traveling directly to or from supervised school, religious, recreational, or civic activities.

Additional exceptions exist for juveniles exercising First Amendment rights, including freedom of speech, religion, and assembly, as well as for those who are married or legally emancipated. Special permits may also be issued by the chief of police or designee when necessary to allow juveniles to participate in nighttime activities that cannot reasonably be accommodated otherwise.

Before taking enforcement action, a police officer is required to ask the apparent offender's age and reason for being in a public place or establishment during restricted hours. Officers may not issue a citation or make an arrest unless there is reasonable belief that a violation has occurred and no exception or defense applies.

Penalties under the ordinance vary. Juveniles who violate the curfew may be adjudicated delinquent, with the court determining appropriate alternatives under the state juvenile code. Adults other than juveniles who violate the ordinance may face a Class 3 misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of up to \$500.

Town officials emphasize that the curfew ordinance is intended not as punishment, but as a proactive measure to safeguard young people, support families, and promote a safer community environment for all residents of Wadesboro.

Anson Mobile Food Market is January 15

When January fifteenth dawns on a Thursday morn,

At ten o'clock sharp, a promise is born.

On the Square in uptown Wadesboro's heart,

Where Wade meets Greene, the market will start.

Baskets of goodness will be given away, Fresh fruits and vegetables, bright as the day. Bread may be offered, if loaves remain, Shared freely with neighbors - no cost, no strain.

Each month, six to eight kinds of produce appear, A steady gift offered throughout the year.

For Anson County residents, faithful and true, Just come as you are, there's nothing to do.

Blood pressure checks and blood sugar, too, Healthy living topics are waiting for you.

Informative booths will line the square,

Offering guidance, support, and care.

For elders and neighbors whose steps may be slow, Or those with disabilities, help will flow.

Produce bags carried for you with kindness and grace,

So no one is burdened in this shared space.

This gathering blooms through Extension's embrace,

With partners beside them, serving this place.

Anson County Extension, joined hand in hand,

Brings care and compassion across the land.

Born of a need where fresh food is sometimes rare, This market responds with thoughtful care.

It meets the challenge of scarcity faced,

With healthy choices in an easy to reach place.

It teaches as well, with a purposeful aim,

On health concerns known by name:

Tobacco use and hypertension's toll,

With agencies present to inform and console.

So come to the Square when the morning is new,

A market, a mission, a gift meant for you.

Shared knowledge, community care - a fresh food array

Anson County's heart on open display.

NC Treasurer Brad Briner Opposes Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for State Retirees

Bills proposing COLA increases have been filed but have not become law

North Carolina's State Retirement Systems posted strong investment gains in 2025, but retirees should not expect a cost-of-living adjustment anytime soon. First-year State Treasurer Brad Briner said the improved performance is being used to pay down long-standing pension debt rather than increase monthly benefits for retirees already struggling with rising prices.

The retirement system requires annual investment returns of roughly 6.5 to 7 percent to remain fully funded. Over the past two decades, however, it fell short of that goal, leaving the system with approximately \$16 billion in unfunded liabilities. Continued under-performance would have widened the gap between promised benefits and available assets.

Briner, a Republican elected on a platform of fixing the state's pension finances, said progress has been made. The Treasurer's Office reported in November that assets managed by the North Carolina Retirement Systems had grown to \$139 billion, reflecting a 12 percent return since January. Still, Briner cautioned that those gains do not erase the pension shortfall.

"When we talk about making \$15 billion this year, that doesn't mean that we've reduced that \$16 billion deficit by \$15 billion," Briner told Carolina Public Press. "We've reduced it probably by 7 or 8 billion dollars. It's great progress, but we still have a material debt."

Because of that remaining liability, Briner said now is not the right time for a cost-of-living adjustment, the last of which was approved in 2017. In recent years, lawmakers have instead authorized occasional one-time bonuses for retirees rather than permanent increases to base benefits.

The Teachers' and State Employees' Retirement System requires legislative approval for any COLA, based on recommendations from its board, which Briner chairs. The Local Governmental Employees' Retirement System has authority to grant its own increases. Ongoing budget gridlock this year resulted in no benefit increases at all.

Retirees say inflation has made the lack of a COLA increasingly painful. Betsy Crone, a retired public school librarian living in Greensboro, said higher prices have forced her to delay home projects and rely on adjunct teaching work to supplement her pension. According to federal data, a dollar today has lost about 20 percent of its purchasing power since 2020.

The State Employees Association of North Carolina continues to press lawmakers for a COLA, arguing that recent investment gains are sufficient to provide relief while still addressing pension debt. SEANC officials say retirees have already waited too long for a permanent adjustment.

Briner said a COLA could be more realistic in 2027, depending on continued investment performance. For now, he plans to stick with his revised investment strategy, which has shifted the system toward a more stock-heavy portfolio while remaining more conservative than most other states.

While supporters applaud the stronger returns, retirees and advocates say the ultimate test will be whether those gains translate into meaningful relief for those who spent decades serving the state.

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