

§ 115C-333.1. Evaluation of teachers in schools not identified as low-performing; mandatory improvement plans; State Board notification upon dismissal of teachers.

(a) Annual Evaluations. – All teachers who are assigned to schools that are not designated as low-performing and who have not been employed for at least three consecutive years shall be observed at least three times annually by the principal or the principal's designee and at least once annually by a teacher and shall be evaluated at least once annually by a principal. For high schools with at least 1,500 students, the annual evaluation may be conducted by an assistant principal, provided that at least one evaluation in such a teacher's first three years of employment is conducted by a principal. All teachers who are assigned to schools that are not designated as low-performing and who have been licensed as a teacher for less than two years shall be observed at least three times annually by the principal or the principal's designee, at least once annually by a teacher, and at least once annually by a principal, and at least two of those observations shall be conducted in the first semester of the school year, and if practicable, at least one of those observations shall be conducted within the first grading period of the school year. All teachers with career status or on a four-year contract who are assigned to schools that are not designated as low-performing shall be evaluated annually unless a local board adopts rules that allow teachers with career status or on a four-year contract to be evaluated more or less frequently, provided that such rules are not inconsistent with State or federal requirements. Local boards also may adopt rules requiring the annual evaluation of nonlicensed employees. A local board shall use the performance standards and criteria adopted by the State Board and may adopt additional evaluation criteria and standards. All other provisions of this section shall apply if a local board uses an evaluation other than one adopted by the State Board.

(b) Mandatory Improvement Plans for Teachers. – If, in an observation report or year-end evaluation, a teacher receives a rating that is below proficient or otherwise represents unsatisfactory or below standard performance on any standard that the teacher was expected to demonstrate, the principal may place the teacher on a mandatory improvement plan as defined in G.S. 115C-333(b)(1a). The mandatory improvement plan shall be utilized only if the superintendent or superintendent's designee determines that an individual, monitored, or directed growth plan will not satisfactorily address the deficiencies.

If at any time a teacher engages in inappropriate conduct or performs inadequately to such a degree that such conduct or performance causes substantial harm to the educational environment, and immediate dismissal or demotion is not appropriate, then the principal may immediately institute a mandatory improvement plan regardless of any ratings on previous evaluations. The principal shall document the exigent reason for immediately instituting such a plan. The mandatory improvement plan shall be developed by the principal in consultation with the teacher. The teacher shall have five instructional days from receipt of the proposed mandatory improvement plan to request a modification of such plan before it is implemented, and the principal shall consider such suggested modifications before finalizing the plan. The teacher shall have at least 60 instructional days to complete the mandatory improvement plan. The State Board shall develop guidelines that include strategies to assist local boards in evaluating teachers and developing effective mandatory improvement plans. Local boards may adopt policies for the implementation of mandatory improvement plans under this section.

(c) Observation by a Qualified Observer. –

(1) The term "qualified observer" as used in this section is any administrator or teacher who is licensed by the State Board of Education and working in North Carolina; any employee of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction who is trained in evaluating licensed employees; or any

instructor or professor who teaches in an accredited North Carolina school of education and holds an educator's license.

- (2) The local board of education shall create a list of qualified observers who are employed by that board and available to do observations of employees on mandatory improvement plans. This list shall be limited to names of administrators and teachers selected by the local board of education. The local board of education shall strive to select administrators and teachers with excellent reputations for competence and fairness.
- (3) Any teacher, other than a teacher assigned to a school designated as low-performing, who has been placed on a mandatory improvement plan shall have a right to be observed by a qualified observer in the area or areas of concern identified in the mandatory improvement plan. The affected teacher and the principal shall jointly choose the qualified observer within 20 instructional days after the commencement of the mandatory improvement plan. If the teacher and the principal cannot agree on a qualified observer within this time period, they each shall designate a person from the list of qualified observers created pursuant to subdivision (2) of this subsection, and these two designated persons shall choose a qualified observer within five instructional days of their designation. The qualified observer shall draft a written report assessing the teacher in the areas of concern identified in the mandatory improvement plan. The report shall be submitted to the principal before the end of the mandatory improvement plan period. If a teacher or administrator from the same local school administrative unit is selected to serve as the qualified observer, the administration of the local school administrative unit shall provide such qualified observer with the time necessary to conduct the observation and prepare a report. If someone who is not employed by the same local school administrative unit is selected to serve as the qualified observer, the teacher who is the subject of the mandatory improvement plan will be responsible for any expenses related to the observations and reports prepared by the qualified observer. The qualified observer shall not unduly disrupt the classroom when conducting an observation.
- (4) No local board of education or employee of a local board of education shall discharge, threaten, or otherwise retaliate against another employee of the board regarding that employee's compensation, terms, conditions, location, or privileges of employment because of the employee's service or completion of a report as an objective observer pursuant to this subsection, unless the employee's report contained material information that the employee knew was false.

(d) Reassessment of the Teacher. – Upon completion of a mandatory improvement plan under subsection (b) of this section, the principal shall assess the performance of the teacher a second time. The principal shall also review and consider any report provided by the qualified observer under subsection (c) of this section if one has been submitted before the end of the mandatory improvement plan period. If, after the second assessment of the teacher and consideration of any report from the qualified observer, the superintendent or superintendent's designee determines that the teacher has failed to become proficient in any of the performance standards identified as deficient in the mandatory improvement plan or demonstrate sufficient improvement toward such standards, the superintendent may recommend that a teacher with career status be dismissed or demoted under G.S. 115C-325, or if the teacher is on contract that the teacher's contract not be renewed or if the teacher has engaged in inappropriate conduct or

performed inadequately to such a degree that such conduct or performance causes substantial harm to the educational environment, that the teacher be immediately dismissed or demoted under G.S. 115C-325.4. The results of the second assessment produced pursuant to the terms of this subsection shall constitute substantial evidence of the teacher's inadequate performance.

(e) Dismissal Proceedings Without a Mandatory Improvement Plan. – The absence of a mandatory improvement plan as described in this section shall not prohibit a superintendent from initiating a dismissal proceeding against a teacher under the provisions of G.S. 115C-325 or G.S. 115C-325.4. However, the superintendent shall not be entitled to the substantial evidence provision in subsection (d) of this section if such mandatory improvement plan is not utilized.

(f) State Board Notification. – If a local board dismisses a teacher with career status for any reason except a reduction in force under G.S. 115C-325(e)(1)/., or dismisses a teacher on contract for cause or elects to not renew a teacher's contract as a result of a superintendent's recommendation under subsection (d) of this section, it shall notify the State Board of the action, and the State Board annually shall provide to all local boards the names of those teachers. If a local board hires one of these teachers, within 60 days the superintendent or the superintendent's designee shall observe the teacher, develop a mandatory improvement plan to assist the teacher, and submit the plan to the State Board. The State Board shall review the mandatory improvement plan and may provide comments and suggestions to the superintendent. If on the next evaluation the teacher receives a rating on any standard that was an area of concern on the mandatory improvement plan that is again below proficient or a rating that otherwise represents unsatisfactory or below standard performance, the local board shall notify the State Board, and the State Board shall initiate a proceeding to revoke the teacher's license under G.S. 115C-270.35. If on the next evaluation the teacher receives at least a proficient rating on all of the overall performance standards that were areas of concern on the mandatory improvement plan, the local board shall notify the State Board that the teacher is in good standing, and the State Board shall not continue to provide the teacher's name to local boards under this subsection unless the teacher has career status and is subsequently dismissed under G.S. 115C-325 except for a reduction in force or is a teacher on contract who is subsequently dismissed under G.S. 115C-325.4. If, however, on this next evaluation the teacher receives a developing rating on any standards that were areas of concern on the mandatory improvement plan, the teacher shall have one more year to bring the rating to proficient if the local board elects to renew the teacher's contract. If by the end of this second year the teacher is not proficient in all standards that were areas of concern on the mandatory improvement plan, the local board shall notify the State Board, and the State Board shall initiate a proceeding to revoke the teacher's license under G.S. 115C-270.35.

(g) Civil Immunity. – There shall be no liability for negligence on the part of the State Board of Education, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, or a local board of education, or their members or employees, individually or collectively, arising from any action taken or omission by any of them in carrying out the provisions of this section. The immunity established by this subsection shall not extend to gross negligence, wanton conduct, or intentional wrongdoing that would otherwise be actionable. The immunity established by this subsection shall be deemed to have been waived to the extent of indemnification by insurance, indemnification under Articles 31A and 31B of Chapter 143 of the General Statutes, and to the extent sovereign immunity is waived under the Tort Claims Act, as set forth in Article 31 of Chapter 143 of the General Statutes. (2011-348, ss. 3, 8.6; 2013-360, s. 9.7(j), (t); 2016-94, s. 8.32(i); 2016-126, 4th Ex. Sess., s. 22; 2017-157, ss. 2(n), 3(b); 2017-189, s. 6(f).)