

MIC3 State Council Meeting Minutes

March 19, 2026

IN PERSON:

EASTERN NC REGIONAL SKILLS CENTER, JACKSONVILLE, NC
Burton Industrial Park, 261 NW Corridor Blvd, Jacksonville, NC 28540

Council Members Attended:

- Mr. Nickolas Sojka, Commissioner (Executive Branch Appointment)
- Rep. Donnie Loftis, (Senate Appointment) (Chair)
- Rep. Erin Pare, (House of Representatives Appointment)
- Mr. Bill Lanier, (NC School Boards Association Representative)
- Ms. Jamie Livengood, (Student & Family Support Coordinator, Wayne County Public Schools)
- Dr. Marc Whichard, Interim Council Member (Superintendent, Wayne County Schools)

Opening Items:

- **Call to Order** - (10:00am) Mr. Nick Sojka (North Carolina MIC3 Commissioner)
- **Welcome:** Commissioner Sojka, Rep. Loftis and Rep. Pare Commissioner Sojka welcomed and thanked all for their attendance.
- **Approval of the Agenda**
 - o Ms. Livengood moved to approve the agenda as printed
 - o Mr. Lanier second
 - o The motion carried
- **Presentation of Colors:** Northside High School Air Force JROTC
- **Pledge of Allegiance:** Cadet Kelly, Northside High School Air Force JROTC
- **National Anthem:** Dixon High School Chorus
- **Welcome to Onslow County:** Dr. Chris Barnes (Superintendent, Onslow County Schools)
 - o Dr. Chris Barnes introduced OCS, School Board Chair and cabinet members. Dr. Barnes highlighted several milestones in supporting military-connected students.
 - o Purple Star Recognition: Onslow County Schools achieved 100% Purple Star recognition for the fourth consecutive year, reflecting sustained commitment to welcoming and supporting military-connected students and families across all schools.
 - o JROTC Expansion: Southwest High School opened a Marine Corps JROTC unit this school year, joining Northside High School's established program and expanding opportunities for military-connected students.
 - o Chapter 35 Approval: All eligible Onslow County High Schools are now Chapter 35, Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance, approved; increasing access to federal Veterans Affairs educational benefits for qualified military-connected students and families.
 - o School Adoption by Military Units: Every public school in Onslow County has been formally adopted by a military unit, making the district the second in the nation and first in North Carolina to achieve this milestone, leading to strengthening school-community partnerships.
 - o Student Achievements: Onslow County Schools students were recognized as semi-finalists and finalists for Military Child of the Year, and Swansboro High School was named the 2025 High School Student 2 Student Team of the Year, demonstrating the district's supportive culture.
- **Welcome to Onslow County:** Julie Fulton, School Liaison, Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune
 - o Welcome and shared the current state of affairs for Col. Thomas C Farrington II (CO, MCAS New River), and Brigadier General Ralph J. Rizzo Jr. (CG, Marine Corps Installations East at MCB Camp Lejeune.)
 - o Travel attire for military personnel is civilian clothes vs uniforms for safety reasons

- Due to the current conflict situation, Marine Corps Installations are “Safe Havens” therefore, are receiving immigrants from the Middle East
- **Approval Previous Meeting Minutes:** October 16, 2025
 - Mr. Lanier moved to approve the minutes as printed
 - Ms. Livengood second
 - The motion carried
- **Announcements:** Commissioner Sojka
 - Recognize the service of Dr. Locklair, Superintendent, Moore County Schools as he transitions to retirement.
 - Introduced and gave a warm welcome to Dr. Whichard, Interim Council Member (Superintendent, Wayne County Schools). His formal approval is on April’s Agenda, NC State Board of Education
- **General Updates, NCDPI:** Mr. Howard Lattimore
 - Welcome New & Farewell to Support Members
 - Cumberland and Moore County Schools (in the interview process for second position)
 - Farewell to Ms. Iris Pierce and Ms. Julie Fulton as they transition to retirement
 - MIC3 Professional Development Dates
 - Shared the remaining training dates for the calendar year. District military POCs are encouraged to attend professional development courses and present certificates.
 - 2025-2026 Purple Star Updates
 - Purple Star applications increased significantly, with 598 schools awarded in 2025-2026, up from 455 in the previous year, marking a 143-school increase which demonstrates expanded awareness of the Interstate Compact.
 - Purple Star Schools Academic Report
 - DPI analytics presented how Purple Star schools outperformed non-Purple Star schools in 11 out of 18 test areas, while seven assessments were lower, prompting requests for more detailed accountability presentations at a future meeting.
 - Remarks from 2025 Operation Homefront Military Child of the Year for Marine Corps, Isabella Smith, Swansboro High School.
 - Shared her experiences as a military-connected student with both parents on active duty.
 - Shared her appreciation for support programs like the Purple Star Initiative and Student 2 Student program.
 - Questions and Comments:
 - Mr. Commissioner shared how programs such as the Purple Star Initiative and Student 2 Student program are not only beneficial to military-connected students but also social emotional benefits to the entire student population.
 - Mr. Commissioner requested an in-depth presentation during our next council meeting from DPI Testing & Accountability Department on the test data that was mentioned. Ask to present where LEAs and areas are doing well, needs improvements.
 - Ms. Livingood requested, in addition to the accountability piece, to include a School Report Card Redesign update.
 - Dr. Whichard shared how Wayne County Schools had greater than 53% of schools low performing at D or F. After his 1st year as Superintendent, they dropped 6 schools from low performing, and now have 20% low performing. Highest growth with middle and high schools in NC. He shared how pleased he is with the trajectory the district is moving. He also shared how pleased he is to hear the progress on the budget and teacher pay.
- **Legislation Updates:** Representatives Erin Paré and Donnie Loftus discussed upcoming legislative sessions, budget priorities, teacher pay increases, and efforts to address funding shortfalls for wartime veterans’ scholarships, with additional input from council members and stakeholders.

- Short Session Preparation: The legislative, short session is set to begin in mid-April, with ongoing committee meetings and behind-the-scenes budget discussions, including department budget requests and policy agendas.
- Wartime Veterans Scholarship Funding: Rep. Paré is working, and asking Rep. Loftus for his support on a funding bill that is being prepared to address shortfalls in the wartime veteran's scholarship program. Rep. Loftus shared how it's hard to understand why there is not enough funding to support the scholarships, and he supports fixing the issue where it should not fall short again.
- Teacher Pay and Budget Progress: The House budget includes significant increases in starting teacher pay, aiming to be the highest in the Southeast, and reinstates master teacher certification, with 75% of the budget passed and remaining items under negotiation.
- Local vs. State Funding Context: Clarification was provided, that North Carolina's state per-pupil funding exceeds the national average, but local contributions are among the lowest, impacting overall funding for schools.
- **MIC3 Updates, Marine Corps**: Megan Fahy School Liaison, Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune
 - Continue to see the value of the compact while students continuously transition in and out of NC schools.
 - SB-118 has been a major success and making meaningful differences with enrollments.
 - Partial Credit and Transcript issues are still a concern
- **North Carolina Commanders Council (NCCC) Updates**: Jose M. Vasquez Jr., Director Legislative Affairs
 - Shared the purpose of NCCC.
 - Shared information on the NC DPI & State Board Strategic Plan Pillars Dr. Pitre-Matin shared during the last NCCC meeting.
 - Rep. Paré made comments on Local vs. State Funding Context. Clarification was provided that North Carolina's state per-pupil funding exceeds the national average, but local contributions are among the lowest, which impacts overall funding for schools.
- **MIC3 Cases, Support Members**: Julie Fulton School Liaison, Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune
 - Class Size Flexibility for Highly Mobile Military Students: Julie Fulton led a case study discussion on the challenges of the rigid K-3 class size limits for military families; advocating for legislative waivers or flexibility, with support from council members and legislative representatives. References: NC: (GS-115C) and HB-13
 - Statutory Class Size Limits: North Carolina statute mandates strict K-3 class size ratios with no flexibility for highly mobile populations, leading to disruptive classroom splits when enrollment exceeds limits.
 - Impact on Military Students: Frequent transitions and classroom reassignments disproportionately affect military students, especially those with special needs, causing additional stress and challenges for families.
 - Parent and Teacher Perspectives: Class size restrictions are popular among parents and teachers, but council members acknowledged the need for reasonable flexibility in certain circumstances, particularly for military families.
 - Rep. Paré made comments on how the House Budget includes a provision formula that provides for limited class size flexibility. She is willing to incorporate a provision for military connected students into a similar formula and then try again in the short session but just wanted to share that she and Rep. Loftus are aware of the concern and trying their best to make some improvements in that area.
- **Council Member updates/comments**:
 - Jamie Livengood reported on efforts to address partial credit issues for transferring military students.
 - Subcommittee Representation: The subcommittee includes members from multiple districts, ensuring diverse perspectives on transcript and partial credit challenges faced by military students.

- Draft Guidance and Scenarios: A detailed outline and draft proposal letter has been prepared referencing compact rules and policy documents, with plans for distribution from the state Superintendent to district leaders before the next school year.
- Individualized Transcript Approach: Ms. Livengood emphasized the importance of individualized transcript reviews to accurately reflect students' academic histories and facilitate smooth transitions.
- Legal and Policy Alignment: Guidance will be consistent with North Carolina law and the Interstate Compact, providing clarity and comfort for school staff enrolling military-connected students.
- **MIC3 Commissioner Updates:**
 - Commissioner Sojka discussed concerns about school safety in heavily military-connected districts, considering the need for additional state funding, safety assessments, and collaboration with local and military law enforcement.
 - Commissioner Sojka also shared how it's been a legislative agenda item for Cumberland County Board of Education to also look at school safety not just for the heavy populated military connected districts, but for all districts in terms of a long term, predictable, and steady funding stream. To build into continuation budgets and not so heavily dependent upon year-to-year grants to fund SRO's and other school safety and security measures that are in place.
 - Safety Assessment Completion: Districts have completed safety assessments, with ongoing evaluation and prioritization of schools near military installations as potential targets.
 - Funding Recommendations: Council members recommended concentrating additional funding on schools most vulnerable due to proximity to military installations, and advocates for steady, predictable funding streams for school safety.
 - Concurrent Jurisdiction Collaboration: Jose Vasquez suggested leveraging concurrent jurisdiction agreements between local and military law enforcement to enhance response capabilities and safety.
 - Impact on JROTC Programs: Brittany Sinks noted that JROTC programs, even those not adjacent to installations, are affected by security measures, such as restrictions on wearing uniforms to prevent identification as service members.
 - Rep. Loftus shared how we must look at every school as a likely target now, especially around military installations. However, there is limited funding for preparing for the unexpected or the unplanned.
 - Rep. Loftus requested Mr. Lattimore to investigate from the DPI folks of their safety assessments. To see if assessments are prioritized towards highly populated LEAs near military installations.
 - Mr. Lanier shares how safety is a moving target and we must not just evaluate the plan, but also have to follow up with drills that reinforce the effort. We can't say ok, and check safety off of the box and consider it done. We must look for all aspects of safety as it impacts us, such as things going on internationally, and things that are happening within various communities around the country and learn from it.
- **Final Remarks**
 - Rep. Pare shared how inspiring to see and hear from the students who preformed, the great work that the council and supporting members are doing, allowing her to speak and she is willing to go back and work on the concerns presented.
 - Rep. Loftus thanked OCS staff for their hospitality and enjoying Jacksonville, NC. He also shared, due to safety, how the JROTC cadets will experience his similar experience with not being able to wear uniforms after earning their awards.
 - Mr. Lanier thanked OCS staff for hosting the council; how proud he is on how we codify the work we do, and working hard on ensuring our students have an easy transition and receive the credits earned.
 - Ms. Livingood thanked council members for their work, especially the legislators for their work with continuing to fund support members' positions, and approval bills, such as SB-118 approved.
- **Next Schedule Meetings:**
 - Thursday, November 19, 2026 at 10:00am at Education Building, Raleigh, NC

- Thursday, March 18, 2027 at 10:00 at Education Building, Raleigh, NC
- **Adjourn:** 12:05