

**LEGISLATING:**  
**Academic Achievement**  
**&**  
**Life-skills Proficiency**  
**in**  
**North Carolina**



# Excellent Public Schools Act of 2024 - DRAFT LEGISLATION

To ensure that the extremely important matter of Critical Thinking is properly taught in NC by DPI, the Legislature should update [115C](#) in **at least** two areas, and call it something like the *Excellent Public Schools Act of 2024*:

- a) § 115C-81.5 [Standard Course of Study](#) shall be revised. The current sentence saying “**Instruction shall be offered in the areas of arts, communication skills,...**” should be modified to read “**Instruction shall be offered in the areas of arts, critical thinking skills, communication skills,...**”.
- b) A new detailed section dedicated to Critical Thinking should be added. See below for a draft of “**§ 115C-81.17. Critical Thinking**”.

## § 115C-81.17. Critical Thinking

### (A) Background

- (1) A **basic definition** is that Critical Thinking is looking at things **wider** and **deeper**. An **academic definition** is that Critical Thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of skillfully synthesizing, conceptualizing, and evaluating information, as a guide to **belief** and **behavior**.

Critical Thinking can be seen as having two teachable components: **1)** a set of information processing skills, *and* **2)** the habit (based on intellectual commitment), of continually using those skills (grounded in fair-mindedness and intellectual integrity) to positively influence the thinker’s perspectives and actions.

One’s level of Critical Thinking quality is a matter of degree, and dependent on factors like attentiveness, commitment, interest in objectivity, etc. concerning particular issues. Once properly instilled, the development of the Critical Thinking skill and disposition is a life-long endeavor.

- (2) Critical Thinking will be encouraged and applied in all subject areas, from kindergarten through high school.
- (3) Students will be taught how to do Critical Thinking in Science classes. Scientists are people who are trained to ask questions (who?, why?, when?, how?, etc.), and questioning what one is told is foundational to Critical Thinking.
- (4) Critical Thinking needs to be presented in such a way that students appreciate its extreme importance in essentially all aspects of life (e.g., employment, selection of a life partner, civic responsibility, maintaining optimal health, etc.).

- (5) Some additional outcomes of proper Critical Thinking education are that students will have improved decision-making, better self-management, as well as more self and interpersonal awareness.
- (6) Students should be educated about how Critical Thinking is a powerful tool that enables them to be aware of (and sensitive to) internal illusions (e.g., cognitive dissonance and confirmation bias) as well as external deceptions (e.g., media misinformation and groupthink).
- (7) Students should be educated that Critical Thinking arguments rely on facts not feelings or the much weaker political position of consensus.
- (8) Students should be educated that Critical Thinking needs to be applied (not disengaged) when they encounter claims from computer models and experts.
- (9) Four objectives of a successful education are that Critical Thinking will become a lifelong skill that is instinctive, pervasive, empowering, and enjoyable.

## **(B) Implementation**

- (1) The State Board of Education (SBE) shall:
  - (a) develop and maintain a recommended list of Critical Thinking education materials. These will include components for teacher training as well as for ongoing teacher assessment and evaluation to verify success and ensure the use of up-to-date information and strategies.
  - (b) Assure that all critical thinking educational instruction materials developed, provided, or maintained by SBE shall be age-appropriate (for the grade level such instruction is to be utilized), be clear and consistent, reflect up-to-date research, and include interactive or participatory learning experiences.
  - (c) Shall annually provide a report on the implementation of critical thinking instruction in school districts, per § 115C-81.18.
- (2) The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) shall do the following:
  - (a) Develop curricular materials and resources that supplement, meet, and extend Critical Thinking education as outlined in the Standard Course of Study and DPI Educator Standards.
  - (b) Recommend to the State Board of Education any Critical Thinking education support materials that should be added to (or removed from) the State Board of Education list of recommended educational resources.
  - (c) Exclusively bring about all Social Emotional Learning (SEL) objectives by properly educating students to be Critical Thinkers.
  - (d) In conjunction with local school administrative units, provide Professional Development classes to fully train educators to implement an effective Critical Thinking education program.

- (3) The State Board of Education, with the assistance of DPI, shall provide sequential, age-appropriate instruction that includes all of the following:
  - (a) Reaches all students in all grades.
  - (b) Presents a clear and consistent message that Critical Thinking is an essential ingredient of a successful education.
  - (c) Reflects current research and theory.
  - (d) Involves students in active "hands-on" learning experiences (like classroom debates about "controversial" topics).
  - (e) Thoroughly integrates Critical Thinking with all other subject and skill areas of the Standard Course of Study.
  - (f) Includes strategies to involve parents, family members, and the community.
  - (g) Is continually open to revision, expansion, and improvement.
- (4) Local boards of education:
  - (a) Shall implement approved Critical Thinking education as a primary part of their comprehensive education program.
  - (b) Shall provide for ongoing evaluation of Critical Thinking resources, including participation in ongoing evaluations with the Department of Public Instruction.
  - (c) May select supplemental Critical Thinking materials from the list maintained by the State Board of Education, or develop their own supplemental materials (to be approved by the State Board of Education).

### **§ 115C-81.18. Annual Report on Critical Thinking Education.**

The State Board of Education and the Department of Public Instruction shall report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by March 30 of each year on the compliance of each local school administrative unit with the requirements regarding Critical Thinking pursuant to G.S. 115C-81.17. The report shall include at least the following information:

- (1) A list of all local school administrative units in the State, and an indication as to how much each of them are complying with G.S. 115C-81.17.
- (2) A list of all instructional strategies used by each local school administrative unit to comply with G.S. 115C-81.17 categorized by unit.
- (3) A list of each instructional strategy identified under subdivision (2) of this section and the corresponding percentage of local school administrative units in the State using that strategy to comply with G.S. 115C-81.17.

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*Also see this detailed [Report](#) — which include an extensive list of reasons why this legislation is both necessary and exceptionally beneficial.*