

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2025

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HOUSE BILL 708

Short Title: IROBOT - Increasing Robotics Opportunities. (Public)

Sponsors: Representatives T. Brown, Willis, and Lofton (Primary Sponsors).
For a complete list of sponsors, refer to the North Carolina General Assembly web site.

Referred to: Appropriations, if favorable, Rules, Calendar, and Operations of the House

April 3, 2025

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT TO INCREASE ROBOTICS OPPORTUNITIES AND BUILD OUR TALENTS BY
CONTINUING THE ROBOTICS GRANT PROGRAM FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS.
The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1.(a) Article 16 of Chapter 115C of the General Statutes is amended by
adding a new Part to read:

"Part 12. Academic Grant Programs.

"§ 115C-238.90. Educational and Competitive High School Robotics Grant Program.

(a) Program; Purpose. – To the extent funds are made available, there is established the Educational and Competitive High School Robotics Grant Program (Program). The purpose of the Program shall be to (i) promote evidence-based, after-school programs for robotics education and competition for high school students and (ii) motivate students to pursue education and career opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics while building critical life and work-related skills. The Program shall operate in accordance with the provisions of this section in any year in which funds are made available for the purpose.

(b) Eligibility. – Any robotics team is eligible to apply to the Department of Public Instruction for a grant to develop an educational and competitive high school robotics program with a robotics partner. Robotics teams may be coordinated through a public school unit or a community organization. As used in this subsection, the term "community organization" means a nonprofit or for-profit corporation or other entity registered to operate in the State with a purpose of providing academically and socially enriching activities for school-aged children and the term "robotics partner" shall refer to a third-party entity, such as a nonprofit organization or institution of higher education, approved by the Department of Public Instruction, that is able to provide adequate support for an high school robotics program. In order to provide adequate support, a robotics partner must meet at least all of the following criteria:

- (1) Have a statewide or national presence in robotics education and competition.
- (2) Provide adequate instruction and programming for students and adult volunteers in (i) robotics education, (ii) project-based learning, and (iii) competitive robotics.
- (3) Promote a safe and equitable social environment.

(c) Applications; Criteria and Guidelines. – No later than August 1 of each year of the Program, the Department shall develop and publish criteria and guidelines for the application process for the Program in the upcoming school year, including any documentation required to be submitted by the applicants. The Department shall accept applications until September 30. Applications shall include, at a minimum, the following information:



- 1 (1) Evidence that the applicant has or will be able to establish a relationship with
2 a robotics partner.
3 (2) A proposed budget for the educational and competitive after-school robotics
4 program.

5 (d) Award and Use of Funds. – The Department shall award grants to the selected
6 applicants by October 31 of each year of the Program. Funds may be used for any of the following
7 purposes:

- 8 (1) Establish a relationship with a robotics partner.
9 (2) Purchase robotics kits, parts, or supplies.
10 (3) Provide stipends for coaches.
11 (4) Make payments associated with participation in a robotics league or robotics
12 competition.
13 (5) Pay fees incurred as part of the administration of a robotics team.

14 (e) Reporting. – No later than October 15 of each year of the Program, the Department
15 shall report the following information from the prior school year to the Joint Legislative
16 Education Oversight Committee and the Fiscal Research Division:

- 17 (1) The robotics teams that received grants, the public school units or community
18 organization coordinating the team, and the amount of those grants.
19 (2) The robotics partner for each robotics team.
20 (3) The number of robotics teams that applied for grants but did not receive one.
21 (4) The extent to which students participating in after-school robotics programs
22 funded by the Program experienced measurable improvement in academic
23 performance."

24 **SECTION 1.(b)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of
25 Public Instruction the sum of two million five hundred thousand dollars (\$2,500,000) in recurring
26 funds for the 2025-2026 fiscal year to establish and administer the Educational and Competitive
27 High School Robotics Grant Program under G.S. 115C-238.90, as enacted by this act.

28 **SECTION 2.** G.S. 115C-379(b) reads as rewritten:

29 "(b) In addition to any excused absences authorized pursuant to subsection (a) of this
30 section, the rules shall require school principals to authorize the following excused absences:

- 31 ...
32 (3) Academic competitions. – A principal shall make reasonable accommodations
33 to grant students excused absences to participate in school-sanctioned
34 academic competitions, including Science Olympiad, 4-H, high school
35 robotics, and speech and debate.

36 The rules may require that the student's parent or legal guardian give the principal written
37 notice of the request for an excused absence a reasonable time prior to the ~~religious observance~~
38 ~~or military leave.~~ absence requested pursuant to this section. The student shall be given the
39 opportunity to make up any tests or other work missed due to an excused absence ~~for a religious~~
40 ~~observance or military leave under this section."~~

41 **SECTION 3.** Subsection 1(b) of this act is effective July 1, 2025. The remainder of
42 this act is effective when it becomes law and applies beginning with the 2025-2026 school year.