

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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Voters' Opinions on Education

For the third consecutive election, a consortium of North Carolina newspapers, television and radio stations polled North Carolina voters on the major issues affecting the state. Respondents to the *Your Voice, Your Vote* survey ranked education as “the most critical issue for the state to address”—almost six times greater than the next closest issue.

As part of the survey, respondents were asked 13 education-related questions ranging from their overall satisfaction with public education to their views on specific education initiatives. According to the results, voters have mixed feelings about the direction schools are moving: 42 percent of voters felt public schools were moving in the right direction while 41 percent felt “major changes” were needed. People who had children in public schools felt schools were moving in the right direction (53%) compared to those who wanted change (39%). Part of these changes, however, did not include vouchers for private schools. Sixty-two percent of respondents opposed vouchers for private schools, including 64 percent of those with children in public school.

There were mixed reactions concerning ending social promotion. Forty-one percent of respondents did not support “eliminating all social promotion” compared to 26 percent who “strongly support” its elimination. Comparisons between whites and blacks demonstrated similar results—41 percent of whites and 43 percent of blacks did not support eliminating all social promotion, and similarly 27 percent of whites and 21 percent of blacks strongly supported its elimination.

An analysis of the overall satisfaction with local schools showed that despite the fact two in 5 respondents felt that schools were not moving in the right direction, they were satisfied with their local schools. Sixty-two percent of respondents were somewhat or very satisfied with their local schools compared to 22 percent who were somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. By a margin of 3:1, individuals who have children in public schools felt more satisfied than individuals who did not have children in public schools (76% to 24%). See the table for more poll results.

Other Education Issues

Education Issue	Support	Don't Support
Measuring teachers' performance/pay through student performance	54%	20%
Offer bonuses to attract teachers to low-performing schools	64%	12%
Spend more money to close the achievement gap	58%	19%
Pay higher taxes to reduce class size	71% (yes)	22% (no)

The responses were on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 representing do not support and all and 5 indicating strongly support. Responses 1 and 2 were combined and 4 and 5.

For more information, visit the *Your Voice, Your Vote* website (www.yvyv.com).

NC Community College System Is Nation's Third Largest

While it is easy for citizens of North Carolina to take the state's Community College System for granted, it is one of the state's best economic recruiting tools for businesses across the country. The creators of the system envisioned a Community College within easy access of citizens across the state and the 59 college system is now the nation's third largest community college system. Last year, roughly 750,000 people took at least one skill or academic curriculum class, and nearly a quarter of a million people were in degree and certificate programs. In terms of "full-time equivalent" students, the community college system served 113,000 last year, but enrollment is projected to swell to 170,000 by the end of the decade.

On November 7th, voters will be asked to approve a \$3.1 billion bond that will pump additional resources into colleges and universities across the state--\$600 million of the bond proceeds are earmarked for the community college system. The Forum's Board of Directors was one of the first statewide groups to endorse the bond proposition and urges readers to study the proposition carefully and to vote on election day.

Former Governor James E. Holshouser Brands Locke Foundation Proposal "Elitist"

In last week's *Friday Report*, the Forum sharply criticized the John Locke Foundation's proposal to oppose the upcoming bond proposal for higher education. In lieu of additional funds, the Foundation's proposal is to raise admission standards and tuition at the same time – thereby trimming admission rolls and eliminating the need for new buildings. This week, former Governor Jim Holshouser branded the Foundation's proposals "elitist." In a strongly worded statement, the former Governor went on to say, "that is not the North Carolina way. We have a tradition of investing in quality education, and in keeping it affordable." The Locke Foundation's call to reduce higher education costs by raising the admission standards bar and tuition has received a cool response across the state.

Holshouser, together with former Governors Bob Scott and Jim Martin and Governor Hunt, are Honorary Co-Chairman of *North Carolinians for Educational Opportunity*, the group supporting the upcoming vote.

Non-English Speaking Student Enrollment Triples in Five Years

A *Raleigh News & Observer* story about the growing demand for teachers of students who are not fluent in English, documented the dramatic rise in non-English speaking students. From 1994 to 1999, school enrollment figures for students with little or no English surged from 12,408 to 37,251. The greatest increase has been in Spanish-speaking young people who now make up 69 percent of the 37,251 public school students with little or no English skills.

Former State Board of Education Chair And Forum Board Member Dies at 65

Mebane Pritchett, long-time Executive Director of the Morehead Scholarship Program and a former Chairman of the State Board of Education died this week after a long bout with a debilitating illness. Pritchett, a former member of the Forum Board, holds a special place in the history of the organization.

“In 1986,” the Forum’s Executive Director, John Doorman, recalls, “the Forum was asked to manage the Teaching Fellows Scholarship Program and we had only a few months in which to shape the program. We knew we wanted the Fellows Program to mean something, to gain a special place in North Carolina, but none of us had any experience with scholarship programs. Mebane Pritchett, then the Executive Director of the Morehead Program, literally taught us the business.”

Dornan recalled he and Pat Sumner, the first Director of the Fellows Program, sitting for hours in Pritchett’s office at Chapel Hill as he walked them through the history of the Morehead Program. “Thanks to Mebane,” Dornan said, “we reached three conclusions that helped make the Fellows Program what it is today. Specifically, we concluded that the selection process had to be rigorous – it had to mean something to be named a Fellow. Second, we concluded that the program couldn’t be spread around 44 teacher training institutions; instead, we wanted a sizable cohort on a limited number of campuses so when freshman Fellows arrived, they would automatically be part of something and have support from upper-class Fellows. Last, we concluded that having enrichment programs in the summer between semesters would create a bond among the Fellows and give them a much richer program than they would receive otherwise. Thousands of Teaching Fellows have benefited because Mebane was willing to share and give us the benefit of what he had learned through his Moorhead experience.”

In 1986, Pritchett became the Chairman of the State Board of Education. He was appointed to the Board by Governor Hunt during his first administration. In 1987, Pritchett moved to Atlanta to establish the Coca Cola Scholars Foundation. He is survived by his wife and son.

Publication Going to Teachers Across the State

Learn NC, a UNC-Chapel Hill-based initiative that works to build the capacity of teachers in the use of technology in schools across the state is now mailing its publication, *The Beacon* to 85,000 teachers free of charge. *The Beacon* has a new full-color look and a new magazine format. It is aimed at helping teachers make the best possible use of the Internet. You can view *The Beacon* online at www.learnnc.org. Learn NC's Executive Director is Jim Barber, a founding member of the Public School Forum Board of Directors.

Los Angeles Schools Intervention Pays Dividends

At the end of last school year, the Los Angeles school system had identified 13,500 students who faced being retained if they did not improve their reading and math performance. After a series of interventions, by the start of this year, the number had declined to 6,350—a 114% decrease.

The most dramatic improvements occurred amongst eighth graders: 3,800 faced not advancing to high school and by end of the program only 750 will be retained. While some district officials credited the summer school, after school and Saturday academy interventions with improving the struggling students' performance, not everyone was as confident as to the efficacy of the interventions.

Some officials wondered if the level for promotion had been set to low. Critics asked if the intervention programs that helped students advance to high school would be enough to meet the academic demands of high school.

One of the strategies that will be used to help the retained students progress is smaller class size. The retained students will have smaller class sizes this year, including eighth grade classes of 20 students, 15 less than usual and second graders will have half their typical size with 10 students. The school system is facing severe classrooms shortages and this program will only exacerbate this situation.

All Is Not Peachy Between Elected Officials in Georgia

A feud between Georgia's Governor and elected Superintendent of Schools is receiving nationwide attention and could be setting the stage for a grudge match for Governor in 2002. In his second year of office, Governor Barnes succeeded in promoting what many believe is one of the most sweeping school accountability packages ever enacted into law. Among other things, the law created an independent Office of Accountability and stripped teachers of tenure.

Barnes, a Democrat, has advocated some of the most radical reforms enacted in recent years. Ironically, the Republican elected Superintendent of Schools, Linda Schrenko, has

Georgia (cont'd)

joined forces with Georgia's NEA affiliate and is stumping the state in opposition to the new accountability law. She has even worked against Republican candidates for office who supported the reform package. As the struggle between Georgia's Governor and school superintendent heats up, many are viewing it as the preliminary for a free-for-all election contest for Governor when their terms are up in 2002. The situation is the subject of a lengthy feature in the September 20 issue of *Education Week*.

Valeria Lee to Head Up Golden Leaf Foundation

Valeria Lee, a senior official of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, has been tapped to be the Executive Director of the Golden Leaf Foundation which will be created with one-half the proceeds of North Carolina's \$4.6 billion share of the tobacco settlement funds. The new foundation has the potential to be a key player in building the capacity of communities most heavily dependent on a tobacco-based economy. Lee is a native of Halifax and no stranger to rural North Carolina. The Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation has been a consistent and major investor in rural communities in North Carolina and, during her fifteen years with the foundation, Lee has been part of starting and overseeing scores of innovative initiatives. She also was a founding member of the NC Rural Economic Development Center and serves as its Vice Chair.

Playback Schedule for Gubernatorial Debate

Thanks to Time Warner Cable Company and the NC Cable Telecommunications Association, the debate on educational issues between Republican and Democratic candidates for governor will be aired from now until election day. Following are playback schedules. In addition, C-SPAN will air the debate.

- * In the Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill viewing area (Channel 24 in Raleigh; Channel 23 in Durham and Channel 60 in other Raleigh viewing areas). **Mondays at 8:30 PM on October 16, 23 & 30 and Saturday at 1 PM on September 30 and on October 21 and 28**
- * In the Charlotte viewing area . . . **8 PM on November 6th**
- * In the Hickory viewing area on Channel 23 . . . **8 PM on October 2nd**
- * In the Henderson area on Channel 22 . . . **8 PM on October 4th**
- * In the Mooresville viewing area on Channel 4. . . **8 PM on September 28**
- * In the Wilson viewing area on Channel 16 . . . **Monday through Thursday at 8:45 PM**
- * **UNC-TV--8:00 PM on October 11**

The *Friday Report* is published weekly by the Public School Forum of NC and is distributed to Forum Board members, the press, legislators active in educational policy and Forum subscribers.