

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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Social Promotion Policy Lacks Teeth

According to a report in the *News and Observer*, the State Board of Education's policy to end social promotion lacks teeth and not many students are retained. In 1999 the Board adopted a student accountability policy that allows students in grades 3, 5, and 8 who fail their end-of-grade tests to have up to two additional chances to successfully pass the test or face being retained. In 2001-02, 60% of the third graders who failed the three times, including the retests, were promoted, and 75% of fifth and eighth graders who failed three times were promoted. State Board Chair and policy proponent Phil Kirk observed that "the policy has been taken as a joke by many school systems. Students are being promoted who don't have the basic skills. The ones we were hoping to help are being hurt....We haven't ended social promotion."

The policy took effect for fifth graders in 2000-01, and third and eighth graders were added the next year. The *News and Observer* noted that there was little change between the two years: "In 2001-02, when the rule also was applied to grades three and eight, the percentages of students who were held back remained unchanged from the previous year. In eighth grade, 2.3 percent of all students were retained; in fifth grade, 2 percent were kept back. But in third grade, retentions increased from 3.4 percent of all students in 2000-01 to 4.6 percent with the new rule last year."

Principals make the final promotion decisions and have the authority to consider other factors, such as student performance, grades, age of the student, and previous retentions. Principals are forbidden by state law from using only standardized test score in their decisions, and the *News and Observer* notes that last year almost half of the 16,800 were promoted because of principals' decisions.

State News . . .

Teacher Education Program Performance Rankings Released

The 2001-02 North Carolina Performance Report on Teacher Education Programs rated seven of the 48 North Carolina undergraduate teacher education programs as exemplary. Appalachian State University (135), East Carolina University (135), Elon University (126), UNC-Greensboro (129), UNC-Pembroke (126), UNC-Wilmington (129), and Western Carolina University (133) received the state's top rating.

Performance Rankings (cont'd)

The report rates teacher education programs according to compliance with state and national accreditation standards, the quality of program completers, and involvement with and service to the public schools. Programs receiving 97 points or fewer or receiving less than 70 percent of the points available in each category were identified as Low-Performing, and this year Elizabeth City State University and Livingstone College were identified as Low Performing.

The report shows that enrollment of undergraduate degree seeking full-time students is up from 5,940 to 6,371, and enrollment for part-time students is also up from 496 to 780. Also reported is a 20 percent increase in the number of lateral entry teachers enrolled in classes leading to licensure, and the number of lateral entry teachers has doubled since the first report was released.

For more information, please go to www.ncpublicschools.org/IHE/IHE02/

National News . . .

Virginia Governor Spares Education from Budget Cuts

Virginia Governor Mark R. Warner recently told business leaders that he will work to protect state funding for public schools from budget cuts. Virginia's two-year budget has already lost more than \$3 billion, and Warner and lawmakers expect to cut almost \$2 billion more early in 2003. The governor warned that cuts will affect core government services. His announcement scared education advocates, but Warner calmed their fears when he announced that he will not reduce the \$4.6 billion in annual state funding earmarked for education. Warner announced that he would not sign any state budgets that included cuts to core educational programs. In his prepared remarks Warner said, "This priority is based on my core belief that strong public schools are key to our future economic success and quality of life. We have made too much progress in raising student achievement to retreat, even during these difficult times."

Currently Virginia's K-12 enrollment is 1.2 million and education expenditures have risen about \$1.7 billion since 1994, largely because of 100,000 newly enrolled students. Virginia's aid to local schools accounts for about one third of the state's operating budget.

By exempting education Warner has put increased pressure on other governmental services like health care, but Warner is not promising anything for supplemental education programs like dropout prevention or assistance for at-risk 4-year-olds. Warner said that the supplemental services, which cost about \$500 million annually, will be examined to see if they will be cut. Legislative budget leaders applauded Warner's remarks. Republican Del. Vincent F. Callahan, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, said, "We've got to do the fundamentals before we can do anything else. I think we all want to protect elementary and secondary education. There seems to be universal support to keep it untouchable."

Gambling Could Fund Florida's Class Size Reduction Plan

The Florida class-size limitation could cost up to \$3 billion next year, and the gambling industry is using this as an opportunity to gain legislative authorization to use video lottery machines in the state's dog and horse tracks. The industry says that video lottery machines will help draw people back to the tracks, which are struggling to compete with Indian casinos, Internet games, cruise ships, and nearby states that allow gambling and will provide much needed revenue to help meet the new class-size requirements.

Gambling industry lobbyists estimate that revenue from thousands of new video machines at the 27 existing tracks could total \$1 billion and could create thousands of new jobs for Floridians. Wilbur Brewton, a lobbyist for the gambling industry, said, "Until these initiatives passed, I have us a 50/50 shot. This [class size reduction] clearly creates a new opportunity for us."

Both Governor Bush and state House Speaker Johnnie Byrd have been critical of expanding gambling, but in consideration of the economic state and the cost of the class-size initiative, they are not willing to rule out the idea of video lotteries.

Holiday Humor . . .

editor's note: Below are some humorous holiday-related emails that have come into to the *Friday Report* inbox recently that we wanted to share. The first is an engineer's perspective of Christmas Eve logistics. The *Friday Report* does not necessarily endorse this point of view because it wants a new drill from Santa and has been very good all year. The second item should give us all an opportunity for reflection and personal growth as the end of 2002 nears. Please note how many items on this list affect you.

Christmas Logistics

There are approximately two billion children (persons under 18) in the world. However, since Santa does not visit children of Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, or Buddhist (except maybe in Japan) religions, this reduces the workload for Christmas night to 15% of the total, or 378 million (according to the population reference bureau).

At an average (census) rate of 3.5 children per household, that comes to 108 million homes, presuming there is at least one good child in each.

Santa has about 31 hours of Christmas to work with, thanks to the different time zones and the rotation of the earth, assuming east to west (which seems logical). This works out to 967.7 visits per second.

This is to say that for each household with a good child, Santa has around 1/1000th of a second to park the sleigh, hop out, jump down the chimney, fill the stockings, distribute the remaining presents under the tree, eat whatever snacks have been left for him, get back up the chimney, jump into the sleigh and get onto the next house.

Logistics (cont'd)

Assuming that each of these 108 million stops is evenly distributed around the earth (which, of course, we know to be false, but will accept for the purposes of our calculations), we are talking about 0.78 miles per household; a total trip of 75.5 million miles, not counting bathroom stops or breaks.

This means Santa's sleigh is moving at 650 miles per second - 3,000 times the speed of sound. For purposes of comparison, the fastest man made vehicle, the Ulysses space probe, moves at a pokey 27.4 miles per second, and a conventional reindeer can run (at best) 15 miles per hour.

The payload of the sleigh adds another interesting element. Assuming that each child gets nothing more than a medium sized LEGO set (two pounds), the sleigh is carrying over 500 thousand tons, not counting Santa himself. On land, a conventional reindeer can pull no more than 300 pounds. Even granting that flying reindeer can pull 10 times the normal amount, the job can't be done with eight or even nine of them -Santa would need 360,000 of them. This increases the payload, not counting the weight of the sleigh, another 54,000 tons, or roughly seven times the weight of the Queen Elizabeth (the ship, not the monarch).

A mass of nearly 600,000 tons traveling at 650 miles per second creates enormous air resistance - this would heat up the reindeer in the same fashion as a spacecraft re-entering the earth's atmosphere. The lead pair of reindeer would absorb 14.3 quintillion joules of energy per second each. In short, they would burst into flames almost instantaneously, exposing the reindeer behind them and creating deafening sonic booms in their wake. The entire reindeer team would be vaporized within 4.26 thousandths of a second, or right about the time Santa reaches the fifth house on his trip.

Not that it matters, however, since Santa, as a result of accelerating from a dead stop to 650 m.p.s. in .001 seconds, would be subjected to acceleration forces of 17,000 G's. A 250 pound Santa (which seems ludicrously slim considering all the high calorie snacks he must have consumed over the years) would be pinned to the back of the sleigh by 4,315,015 pounds of force, instantly crushing his bones and organs and reducing him to a quivering blob of pink goo.

You Know You're Living In The Year 2002 When...

1. Your reason for not staying in touch with family is because they do not have an e-mail address.
2. You have a list of 15 phone numbers to reach your family of three.
3. Your grandmother asks you to send her a JPEG file of your newborn so she can create a screen saver.
4. You pull up in your own driveway and use your cell phone to see if anyone is home.

2002 (cont'd)

5. Every commercial on television has a web site address at the bottom of the screen.
6. You buy a computer and 3 months later it is out of date and now sells for half the price you paid.
7. Leaving the house without your cell phone, which you didn't have the first 20 or 30 years of your life, is now a cause for panic and you turn around to go get it.
8. Using real money, instead of credit or debit to make a purchase, would be a hassle and take planning.
9. You just tried to enter your password on the microwave.
10. You consider second-day air delivery painfully slow.
11. Your dining room table is now your flat filing cabinet
12. Your idea of being organized is multiple-colored Post-it notes.
13. You hear most of your jokes via e-mail instead of in person.
14. You get an extra phone line so you can get phone calls.
15. You disconnect from the Internet and get this awful feeling, as if you just pulled the plug on a loved one.
16. You get up in the morning and go online before getting your coffee.
17. You wake up at 2 AM to go to the bathroom and check your E-mail on your way back to bed.
18. You start tilting your head sideways to smile. :)
19. You're reading this.
20. Even worse; you're going to forward it to someone else.

editor's note: The Forum will be closed December 24-January 1 and reopen on January 2. We would like to wish everyone a safe and happy holiday season and a Happy New Year. The *Friday Report* will resume publication on January 10, 2003.

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