


The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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 *Raymond Sarbaugh, the first Executive Director of the North Carolina Association of School Administrators, passed away February 23rd in Winston-Salem. With eleven years at the helm from 1978 to 1989, Mr. Sarbaugh was NCASA's longest serving Executive Director. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Sarbaugh family.*

It Happens to the Best of Them . . .

Highly-regarded high schools, like highly-regarded universities, are not immune from scandals as Chapel Hill High found out this week. The *Raleigh News & Observer* ran back-to-back stories on Tuesday and Wednesday of this week covering the break-up of a cheating ring that has resulted in at least four students being suspended.

According to the story, a former student came into possession of a master key that opened most of the locks in the high school. Using the key, students apparently entered classrooms in search of tests in teachers' desks or files and either copied the questions and answers or, for those more technologically advanced, photographed the tests with cell phone cameras. The practice appears to have gone on for more than this school year and far more than four students were aware of, or involved in, the cheating scandal. For students in the highly competitive high school, however, far more is involved than simply getting to the bottom of the "who did what" issues. Changes in test scores can lead to changes in class rankings and in a high school with a large number of high performing students, class rankings can mean the difference in college acceptance.



Thumbs up to Speaker Hackney for Donating Leadership Prize to Local Elementary School

House Speaker Joe Hackney has donated a \$10,000 leadership prize he won last year to his alma mater, Silk Hope Elementary School, to build an outdoor classroom and dining space, and to purchase a new projector and screen.

Speaker Hackney grew up on a farm near Silk Hope and graduated from Silk Hope School in 1963, when it was a community school with grades 1-12. Now an elementary school with 400 students in pre-K through eighth grade, the school recently celebrated its 100th anniversary.

The prize money, intended to go to the winner's charity of choice, comes from the National Conference of State Legislatures and the State Legislative Leadership Foundation, who awarded Speaker Hackney with the 2007 Excellence in State Legislative Leadership Award.

Wake Education Partnership Takes Lead in Making Schools Globally Competitive

The focus of the Wake Education Partnership's major annual community event was on ways to make schools more globally competitive. Nearly 200 community, educational and business leaders gathered this week in Raleigh to examine what it will take for schools to better prepare young people for the global economy. Martin Lancaster, President of the N.C. Community College system, keynoted the conference and highlighted steps community colleges are already taking to respond to the challenge. Following that, a panel that included John Dornan, the Forum's Executive Director, looked at lessons learned from other countries. The leadership of the Wake Education Partnership envisions this week's meeting as the first step toward engaging the community in a campaign to make Wake County a leader in global competitiveness.

Candidate for State Superintendent Calls for Series of Debates

In a publicly released letter to announced candidates for State Superintendent, challenger Eddie Davis invited them to agree to a series of "at least six open and public debates on the important issues facing public education." He further proposed that the debates should be open to the public and held in different areas around the state. Finally, he proposed that the candidates invite well-known organizations ranging from the NAACP to the League of Women Voters to sponsor the events. Unless there is a late candidate filing today, there are only three candidates for the office of State Superintendent of Instruction. On the Democratic side, incumbent June Atkinson is running for re-election. She will be challenged by Eddie Davis. As of Thursday, only one candidate Joe Johnson, of Tryon, North Carolina had filed to run for the seat. While it remains to be seen if the other candidates will accept Davis's invitation, garnering public attention for the Superintendent's race is a major challenge as voters tend to be focused on candidates competing for President and Governor.

Greene County Middle School Named Apple Distinguished School

Congratulations to Greene County Middle School for being named an Apple Distinguished School by Apple Computers. Apple Distinguished Schools are recognized by Apple for their demonstrated success in implementing a 21st century learning environment. This learning environment manifests itself through visible "best practices" of visionary leadership, and IT infrastructure that support learning, engaging teaching and learning methods, on-to-one mobile computer access for students and teachers, ongoing professional development, and systematic evaluation and assessment of their program.

Greene County Middle School's instructional vision is to establish a Professional Learning Community with parents, students, and teachers being active participants in learning. MacBooks have allowed for this vision to become a reality at the school through its utilization of such software applications as Appleworks, Labpro and Keynote. Greene County Middle School is one of just 18 schools Apple is recognizing nationwide and the only school in the state of North Carolina to receive this honor.

Virginia Considers Abandoning NCLB

The Virginia General Assembly is considering the possibility of abandoning a landmark federal law that governs schools in the United States, costing Virginia more than \$350 million a year in federal aid. The decision could make Virginia the first state to set a deadline, summer 2009, for planning a pullout from the No Child Left Behind Act, which ties billions of dollars to federally mandated testing standards in public schools.

Both the state's Senate and House of Delegates are working with bills that say that if the state's waiver requests aren't granted, Virginia's Board of Education would develop a plan to withdraw from NCLB by July 2009. Delegates have approved the bills, even adding language to one seeking to recoup federal tax money if the state withdraws.

Senators keep deleting the deadline, leaving the bills (SB 490 and HB 1425) more open-ended. Legislators from both chambers will have to negotiate a compromise for a bill with a deadline to make it to the governor's desk.

The bill's sponsor in the House, Del Steve Landes believes that now is an opportune time to take a stand, with the NCLB law up for renewal and a new president taking office in January 2009. Landes says the mere discussion of pulling out gives state education leaders leverage in negotiations with their federal peers. With reauthorization talks underway in Congress, the delayed date to plan a withdrawal gives officials a chance to gauge the law's future.

Milwaukee Test Scores Find Little Difference Between Students in Public Schools and Those Receiving Vouchers

Milwaukee is the nation's largest and oldest experiment with vouchers that enable public school parents to remove their children and put them in private schools. Begun in 1990, the Milwaukee experiment has been held up as a model by voucher advocates across the country.

Unfortunately, while there have been grandiose claims about the success of the program as well as vitriolic criticism of it, a lack of hard data has made it difficult to measure the impact of the program since the Legislature dropped a requirement to annually examine student results in 1995.

However, a just released study funded by major foundations, including three that are advocates for school choice programs, sheds some light on the academic value of the voucher program – and, as reported by the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, the light is very dim.

When given the same test that Milwaukee's public school students take, fourth grade students using vouchers to attend private schools are doing a little worse than their public school counterparts; eighth grade voucher recipients are doing a little better.

Tragically, neither voucher recipients nor their public school counterparts are doing well. Both groups score well below 50% passing rates on the tests; in fact, most are in the 33 percentile range which means that two-thirds of test takers outperform them.

Between Students in Public Schools (cont'd)

More than 18,000 Milwaukee children from low-income families now attend private schools with financial support from vouchers. 80% of them are attending religious schools. Other findings in the study include:

- There is little evidence that voucher schools “skim the cream” (i.e., take the most talented public school children; performance of voucher recipients and public school children is essentially the same.
- Religion is a major reason why parents enroll children in private schools.
- Public school parents were more likely than voucher parents to help their children with homework.
- Voucher schools have much smaller class sizes than public schools and school enrollment is much lower than that of public schools.
- Public school test scores tend to fall in a fairly narrow range; voucher schools, on the other hand, range from very high to very low, leading one to the conclusion that there is more quality variation between private schools.

The study was conducted by the School Choice Demonstration Project, part of the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas. One of the prime researchers previously studied the Milwaukee voucher program when he was on the faculty of the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

The researchers caution readers not to make too much of their first findings, but expect voucher critics to use the results to buttress their opposition to vouchers. On the other hand, expect voucher advocates to generally pooch pooch the results and claim that more and study are needed.

To view the study in its entirety, go to:

http://graphics.jsonline.com/graphics/news/voucherreport_summary22508.pdf .

Upcoming Forum Activities...

NC CAP Conference Kicks Off Monday

NC CAP's SYNERGY Conference, scheduled for March 3-5, 2008, will feature over 50 workshops, 30 vendors, networking receptions, and a special pre-conference opportunity on afterschool funding, sustainability, and quality enhancement. This fourth annual event was created to bring together a broad spectrum of community and school-based afterschool providers for training, networking, and sharing of effective practices. SYNERGY is held in collaboration with the NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC Department of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, Support Our Students Program, Boys & Girls Clubs, Communities in Schools, NCSU 4-H Youth Development, and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

NC CAP Conference (cont'd)

The NC Child Care Resource & Referral School Age Project is pleased to collaborate with the North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs and the North Carolina Division of Child Development to announce the availability of scholarships to attend the NC CAP SYNERGY 2008 Conference. Funding for these scholarships has been made available by the North Carolina Division of Child Development.

For more information on the SYNERGY Conference scholarships and to register, please visit: <http://www.nccap.net/about/conference.cfm>.

Forum News...

Last Day for Jay Robinson Award Nominations

The Jay Robinson Leadership Award was established by the Public School Forum Board of Directors in recognition of outstanding leaders in the field of public education. The award may be given to anyone who has displayed innovative, creative, effective leadership for the public schools of North Carolina.

Past winners include Laura Bilbro-Berry, the first Teaching Fellow to be named North Carolina Teacher of the Year; Tom McNeel, superintendent of Caldwell County schools; Jim Causby, two-time state Superintendent of the Year and executive director of the NC Association of School Administrators; Robert Bridges, former superintendent of Wake County Schools and former chair of the state's Raising Achievement and Closing Gap Commission; Superior Court Judge Howard E. Manning, Jr., the trial court judge in the *Leandro* school finance case; Dr. Ann Denlinger, former superintendent of Durham Public Schools and Wilson County Schools; and Phillip J. Kirk Jr., Vice President for External Relations at Catawba College.

The nominations must be postmarked **by March 1, 2008**. Nominations postmarked after that date and nominations delivered in person will not be accepted. The award ceremony will be held on June 9, 2008, at the Raleigh Crabtree Marriott Hotel. Admission will be by invitation only. The honor includes a cash award sponsored by BB&T.

To obtain an application, contact Claire Ancelet (cancelet@ncforum.org) at 919.781.6833 or you can download a copy at www.ncforum.org.

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