

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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The Public School Forum expresses its sympathy to the family of Phil Kirk, Vice President of External Relations at Catawba College and Forum Board Chair, upon the death this week of his mother, Geneva Kirk. Donations for Mrs. Kirk may be made to the following: Nazareth Children's Home, P.O. Box 1438, Rockwell, NC 28138; First United Church of Christ, 207 West Horah St., Salisbury, NC 28144; or Hospice of Wake County, 1300 St. Mary's St., 4th Floor, Raleigh, NC 27605.

Forum on Education Will Air Twice Today

Friday's Governors Forum on Education will be broadcast twice today. The Forum will be aired live on Time Warner's Channel 14 news channel in the Triangle area from 10:30 AM – 11:30 AM, and will be replayed tonight at 10:00 PM on UNC TV. "We appreciate the opportunity to bring this important candidates' forum to a statewide viewing audience," said Shannon Vickery, UNC-TV's Director of Production. "This will be an important addition to our effort to provide the people of North Carolina with comprehensive election coverage, both on the air and online."

The Forum is a collaboration between the North Carolina Cable Telecommunications Association, SAS, Time Warner and the Education: Everybody's Business Coalition that includes the Forum, the NC Chamber, the Association of School Administrators, the School Boards Association and the NC Council of Local Chambers.

"In a general election year," said John Dornan, the Forum's Executive Director, "educational issues can get lost in the flood of presidential and U.S. Senate ads and charges and counter charges. The educational community is grateful to the Cable Association, Time Warner and UNC-TV for giving the public the opportunity to hear the candidate's views on education."

Locke Foundation Study Conclusions Only Tell Half of the Story

The lead sentence in a Locke Foundation press release about a new study reads, "More than 70 percent of the school districts that won state dropout prevention grants last year saw their graduation rates decline in 2008." It goes on to say "A John Locke Foundation analyst offers that evidence in a new Spotlight report that questions the grants' value."

What the headlines fail to report is that the drop out grant awards were not granted until mid-January of last year and that most school systems receiving grants did not have their new programs up and running until March / April, giving them only three months of the 10 month school year to operate.

Locke Foundation Study (cont'd)

That, however, is also only part of the story. A number of the dropout grants went to support programs targeting students in elementary or middle school. One program in Moore County is focused on Latino preschoolers. The impact of these programs will not be measurable for years.

If the Locke Foundation contributes anything to the discussion about state grants it should underscore the frailty of new projects or grants that, because of the General Assembly's budget process, do not get up and running until the school year is well underway. Legislative expectations, however, coincide with election cycles. Programs started in the first year of a biennium are expected to show results, if not in the first year, certainly by the second.

For better or worse, drop out prevention initiatives are typically long-term efforts that will take years to show dramatic results. That runs contrary to legislative expectations and to Locke Foundation-like studies that only tell half of the story.

Ripple Effect of Ailing Financial Markets

The federal government bail out of AIG, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, coupled with Lehman Brothers bankruptcy and other institutions like Washington Mutual teetering, have created a shock wave on Wall Street with ripples now being felt on Main Street. Millions are confronting potential home losses. Soon-to-be retirees are watching their 401 accounts turn into 201 accounts.

State retirement systems may also feel the impact. This week *The Insider* reported that North Carolina's public employee pension fund, a \$70 billion fund considered one of the better-managed and funded in the nation, had extensive holdings in some of the most severely impacted financial institutions. As of June 30 the state pension fund held 3,197,515 common and preferred shares of Fannie Mae; 1,105,989 shares of Freddie Mac; 2,860,203 shares of insurer AIG; 1,701,070 shares of investment bank Lehman Brothers and 3,123,151 shares of savings and loan Washington Mutual.

The Next Federal Bailout?

Pell Grants Facing \$6 Billion Shortfall

The *New York Times* reported this Thursday that Bush administration officials are warning Congressional leaders that the nation's largest federal aid program for education, Pell Grants, may need up to \$6 billion more, or else grants will have to be reduced as early as next year.

Currently over six million low-income college students are receiving Pell Grants that range in size from as little as \$431 to as much as \$4,731 per year. \$14 billion has been appropriated for grants for this fiscal year, but because of increased demand for grants and accumulated shortfalls from previous years, \$6 billion more is needed.

Pell Grants (cont'd)

As of the end of July, 800,000 more students had applied for grants than had applied the year before. Many of those applying are nontraditional students who are returning to school to gain new job skills. In just the first six months of 2008, almost nine million students nationwide applied for federal grants and loans, a 16 percent increase from last year.

Student Responders Tested in Florida Schools

Recently, Pasco Elementary School students experimented with eInstruction's responders. These devices are about the size of a television remote, and allow students to enter in test answers. The responses are then fed directly to a computer and immediately made available to educators, compiling data that otherwise takes days or weeks to do.

The Pasco County School District, one of several in Florida that have used these devices, has 60 responders and is considering purchasing more. Aside from classroom assessments, the responders can be used for professional development for teachers, surveys, and elections. However, the devices cannot be used for written exams, and are very costly. For a class of 32 students, the cost would be approximately \$1800 for the responders. That does not include the \$1200 annual software fee, and roughly \$500 per year in batteries. In this tough economic climate, providing all 63,000 students with a responder is not something the Pasco County School District can consider right now.

The district would like to see responders in all high schools for administering semester exams. According to Peggy Jones, Director of Research and Evaluation for the district, grant money and money in the district's capital budget could be used to provide each high school with a set of responders. Sets would have to be shared, as not every classroom will have them.

This week at the Forum ...

Education Policy Fellowship Program Begins New Year

Tuesday marked the beginning of the 18th year that the Forum has sponsored the Education Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP). This year's EPFP cohort is the largest on record with 34 participants from a wide range of organizations. The program is focused on mid-career professionals in the educational, policy making and non-profit communities. The goal of the program is to introduce participants to educational policymaking at the state and national levels.

Included in this year's EPFP program are participants from: LEARN NC, James B. Hunt Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy, UNC's Center for International Understanding, PENC, NCDHHS, The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, New Schools Project, NCPAPA, North Carolina Association of Educators, MCNC, and the Partnership for a Drugfree NC. In addition, several school systems and higher education programs will be represented, including: NCCU, Mount Olive College at RTP, Southwestern Community College, Appalachian State University and Wake, Cumberland, Caswell, Greene, and Orange County school systems.

Education Policy Fellowship Program (cont'd)

Forum staffers Jo Ann Norris and Kendall Jordan co-coordinate the program. According to Norris, "This is not only the largest EPFP cohort we've had, it may also be the most diverse. That's good for the program and it's good for the participants. When we discuss issues, we will have the advantage of examining them from very different points of view."

Collaborative Project Leadership Institute Also Begins 2008-09 Program

Also meeting for the first time during the 2008-09 school year, was the Collaborative Project's Leadership Institute which brought together all of the elementary and middle school principals, superintendents and central office administrators from the five pilot project counties, Mitchell, Caswell, Washington, Greene and Warren.

Meeting at Raleigh's Crabtree Marriott Hotel beginning on Wednesday and running through Friday, the focus of the conference was "Leadership: Great Leaders, Great Teams, Great Results." The three-day institute was facilitated by Gary McGuey, a Senior Consultant with the Franklin Covey Institute.

This Week Also Started NC Partners Program Year

On Monday, NC Partners, the Forum's statewide network for school/business/community partnerships began its program for the year. Monday's program was a briefing on critical educational issues similar to the candidate briefings the Forum sponsored for candidates for the General Assembly during the summer. It was designed for staff and board members of partnership organizations. All of the state's urban partnerships including Mecklenburg, Wake, Forsythe Guilford County and Cumberland Counties were represented at the briefing as were Chamber-based, school based or non-profit partnerships from Catawba County, Wilson, Rocky Mount and elsewhere.

Topping the Week off . . . the Governors Forum on Education

Last but not least the Forum, working with Time Warner and SAS, has worked to organize today's Gubernatorial Forum with candidates for the Office of Governor (see lead story). It has been, to put it mildly, a busy week at the Forum.

Editor's Note: In last week's Friday report story "The Message: Graduate!" the school system was left out under "Top Two Schools by 9th Grade Cohort Size" for Weddington High. The school received an award for being the top graduation rate in the state for the 300-399 cohort size. Weddington High is located in Union County.

The *Friday Report* is published weekly by the Public School Forum of NC and is distributed to Forum Board members, legislators active in education policy, the press, and Forum subscribers. Archived editions can be found at www.ncforum.org/doclib .