

# *The Public School Forum's Friday Report*

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Volume 11, Issue 14

October 3, 2008

## **“Testing That Matters and is Appropriate”**

In May 2007, the State Board of Education convened a Blue Ribbon Commission on Testing and Accountability. The Commission, chaired by Dr. Sam Houston, undertook the task of doing a comprehensive review of the current assessment and accountability system and accountability system. Upon completion of that review, the Commission presented twenty-seven recommendations for modifications to the current testing program as well as identified the next steps needed to accomplish this mammoth task.

In June 2008, the State board adopted the “Framework for Change-The Next Generation of Assessments and Account ability.” This framework included specific improvements to the standard course of study, the testing system and the accountability measures. It can be accessed at [http://www.ncpublicschools.org/sbe\\_meetings/revisions/2008/pdfs/0805issues.pdf](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/sbe_meetings/revisions/2008/pdfs/0805issues.pdf).

This week, State Board of Education members were formally introduced to the Next Generation of Standards, Assessments and Accountability. Presented by Dr. Angela Quick, Deputy Chief Academic Officer of Curriculum, Instruction, Technology and Accountability Services this new system has been designed “to provide an assessment and accountability system that serves the needs of the public to know how their schools are doing, that serves the needs of the teachers to that they can target their efforts to student needs and that serves the needs of the students”.

The plan is visionary and in-depth and addresses the features of benchmarking-interim assessments, formative assessment, summative assessment, and the implementation of innovative assessments such as simulations, adaptive testing and electronic accommodations. Assessments that forward thinking educators have long been calling for.

Dr. Quick’s presentation included strategies and timelines for the work which must be accomplished if North Carolina schools are to truly become globally competitive. This is a comprehensive plan that will not only require time but funding support.

## **Expectations Increase, Student Reading Scores Decrease**

End-of-grade testing results for North Carolina students dropped by double digits statewide in third through eighth grades. These steep decreases are the result of new higher standards for passing the test adopted by the State Board of Education on Thursday.

“The new tests reflect changes that the state board made a few years ago in what it wanted students to learn, said Lou Fabrizio, director of accountability services at the Department of Public Instruction. School districts experienced a similar result two years ago, when the state board made it harder for students to pass the end-of-grade math test.

## Expectations Increase (cont'd)

While the test results will not adversely affect individual students or teachers, it is likely that fewer schools will meet progress goals set by No Child Left Behind. Because of this, the state has asked the federal government to drop its reading targets for third through eighth grades from 84.5 percent to 43.3 percent. Even if this change is made, not all schools that met federal standards in 2007 will meet them this year.

## The Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation Welcomes Input on Education Grant Making

The [Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation](#) (ZSR) has traditionally considered pre-collegiate education to be one important focus of its grant making. ZSR is currently re-examining its grant making in an effort to more effectively improve educational outcomes for children and decrease disparities in educational attainment in North Carolina.

ZSR has spoken to numerous education thinkers about what is most needed in K-12 education in NC, and there is a remarkable amount of consensus about the most critical needs. Now they would like to hear your ideas—not so much about the greatest needs, but about how ZSR could use its limited resources to accomplish the most positive change.

**You can help** by participating in their Education Wiki. You can view the wiki by clicking [here](#). The staff of the Foundation have outlined strategies they are considering for future education grant making. They would greatly appreciate your feedback and hope that you will:

- Visit the [ZSR Education Wiki](#)
- Read about the [strategies](#) they are considering for education grants
- Take a [brief survey](#)
- [Comment](#) on the individual strategies

Comments will be collected until the end of October, 2008. If you have any questions about participating in the wiki, please contact [Mary Small](#) at the Foundation.

## “Constitutional Tales”

Thursday, October 23<sup>rd</sup> from 7-9 p.m. Ann McColl, attorney and visiting associate professor of public law and government at the School of Government at UNC-Chapel Hill and associate professor of educational leadership at the College of Education at UNC-Charlotte, will be presenting her lecture entitled “Constitutional Tales” as part of the UNC Friday Center’s public engagement series called, “What’s the Big Idea?”

In the midst of extreme racism, poverty, and political turmoil, North Carolina created one of the best statements of the constitutional right to education in the country. A product of the courageous leadership of black freemen and freedmen and northern and native whites during Reconstruction, the 1868 North Carolina Constitution continues to guide our public schools and universities.

## “Constitutional Tales” (cont’d)

Professor Ann McColl uses tales of the birth of the NC Constitution to provide participants with a better understanding of the role of state constitutions in defining important rights. By tracing the development of the NC Constitution through key political figures and events, participants will learn first-hand the connections between the history of the times and important legal principles.

“Constitutional Tales,” is the second in a series of four lectures designed to allow participants to engage in discussion with UNC-Chapel Hill scholars, researchers, and clinicians, and runs Thursday evenings beginning October 16 from 7 to 9 pm at the Friday Center. “What’s the Big Idea?” is presented by the Friday Center in partnership with *Endeavors Magazine*. For more information, visit [www.fridaycenter.unc.edu/pdep/wbi/index.htm](http://www.fridaycenter.unc.edu/pdep/wbi/index.htm).

## Global Kick-Off Conference for Onslow County Schools

900 educators gathered at Jacksonville High School last month to advance global education in Onslow County, which was designated a North Carolina in the World Global District in 2007. The conference kicked off the new school year with a look at North Carolina and Onslow County connections to the rest of the world and the global skills and knowledge that every graduate will need to maneuver successfully in an increasingly interconnected world. Local business and community leaders at the conference underscored the importance of global competencies to thrive in the global economy

The conference grew out of the many successful global education programs that have taken root in the district, including an International Studies Academy, and plans for an International Studies Magnet elementary school. Other resources in the county include formal connections with 14 other countries, 22 different languages spoken by educators, and student bodies that include students from 11 non-US countries.

World View, a program of UNC-Chapel Hill, and the Center for International Understanding jointly supported the event and will continue to assist Onslow County Schools’ efforts to strengthen and expand its international education offerings.

### *National News...*

## NCLB Test Results ‘Illusionary’

At a recent panel at the American Enterprise Institute, a Washington, D.C. think tank, Daniel Koretz told policymakers looking to reauthorize the No Child Left Behind Act that gains in state testing were bogus. Dr. Koretz, professor at Harvard’s Graduate School of Education, stated that inflated test scores are giving illusions of progress. NCLB has led to widespread teaching to the test, strategic reallocation of teaching talent, and other means to produce scores that do not reflect the students’ actual mastery of the material.

## NCLB Test Results (cont'd)

These thoughts were echoed by educational consultant Ella Rosenberg, who feels this behavior is 'officially sanctioned malpractice.' Under the NCLB law, she feels achievement gaps are being obscured, rather than illuminated.

Not everyone agrees, however. Roberto Rodriguez, a senior education adviser to U.S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, and advocate for the NCLB law, feels that while accountability needs to be more effective, these assessments are critical to that accountability. Mr. Rodriguez, a panel member at the discussion, believes it is possible for the current standards-based system to better reflect the curriculum.

## Pilot Program Offers Online Learning on Buses

For students in rural areas, a one way bus trip to school can take anywhere from 1 to 2 hours. The Aspirnaut Initiative, launched in 2007, provides students in the Sheridan School District of Arkansas with laptops and iPods and gives students the opportunity to take online science and math courses during these long commutes.

Developed by Professors Julie and Billy Hudson of Vanderbilt University, the program allows students to make productive use of their time spent riding to and from school. So far, students have completed 14 semesters of study in addition to their regular course load. According to the Hudsons, the program also addresses the growing need for people entering the workforce with knowledge in science, technology, engineering, and math.

Students in the Aspirnaut Initiative are given laptops and headphones, and are seated at the back of the buses in order to avoid distraction while they work. Students who do not participate in the program are given iPods to occupy them quietly while the other students work. Students who live closer to the schools are eligible to participate in the program by coming to school early or using study halls to work on courses.

With the success of the pilot program and the partnership between Vanderbilt University and the school district, the Hudsons plan to ask for state funding for its continuation and expansion into other school districts. According to Sen. Jim Argue, D-Little Rock, the Senate Education Committee chairman, the \$2 million funding request for the first year and \$1.5 million each for the second and third years is "not a lot of money," in budgetary terms. If it is funded, the program can expand by 2,000 students each year, with school districts applying to join.

*Just for Fun...*

## What could you do with \$700,000,000?

- Give every person in the U.S. \$2,300 or give every household \$6,200
- Pay the income taxes of every American who makes \$500,000 or less a year
- Fully fund the Defense, Treasury, Education, State, Veterans Affairs and Interior departments next year as well as NASA
- Buy gasoline for every car in the U.S. for 16 months
- Buy every NFL, NBA and Major League Baseball team and build each one a new stadium – and pay your players \$191 million a piece for a year
- Create the 17<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world – roughly equal to that of the Netherlands
- ...or you could pay off just 7% of the \$9.8 trillion national debt

The Treasury Department has just issued a new dollar bill to reflect the state of the economy...



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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](http://www.ncforum.org/doclib).