

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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MCNC Announces NC STEM Community Collaborative

MCNC announced this week the creation of the North Carolina STEM Community Collaborative, a program of support for communities whose economic vitality is dependent on a workforce with Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) skills. MCNC will provide services to these "STEM communities," helping local government, business and education leaders meet their STEM education and workforce needs. In addition to MCNC resources, a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation also will provide initial funding for the NC STEM Community Collaborative.

"North Carolina's economy is rapidly transitioning from an industrial base to a knowledge and creative base. Even in the face of rising unemployment, there are several communities in the State facing significant STEM workforce shortages. These can only be addressed by bringing together economic, policy, education and other community leaders to develop and implement education programs that address current and future workforce needs," commented Joe Freddoso, President and CEO of MCNC.

MCNC announced Karl Rectanus will lead the NC STEM Community Collaborative. He will work closely with a broad cross section of leaders in North Carolina to build strategies to meet the current and future STEM workforce needs of the State. Extending MCNC's role in advancing technology-based education and economic development in North Carolina, Rectanus will facilitate the face-to-face and virtual work sessions for education, policy, industry, and business which are required to develop a sustainable and meaningful STEM strategy.

"Karl's history of leadership in a number of sectors, including education, government and high tech business provides him a base for success in this important role. He brings an ability to connect and engage key community leaders in building the Collaborative," Freddoso added.

The Gates Foundation grant will help support this approach to improving North Carolina's STEM education and workforce development. Since 2005, the foundation has invested more than \$40 million in North Carolina, providing assistance to low-performing schools and supporting new school development efforts, data systems, and policy and advocacy initiatives. The NC STEM Community Collaborative will align the learning of the innovative school redesign programs with the current insights of industry, policy, education, and community leadership.

Nominations for the 2009 SMT Center Awards

Each year, the North Carolina Science, Mathematics, and Technology Education Center offers awards that recognize individuals and organizations whose extraordinary contributions to science, mathematics, and technology education in North Carolina are helping to advance education in NC. Categories include K-8 teacher, 9-16 teacher, administrator, student leadership as well as awards that recognize businesses and organizations that support STEM education.

Recipients of the awards are honored in the spring at the Celebration of Science, Mathematics, and Technology. View <http://ncsmt.org/prog.awards.html> for more information and to see videos of last year's winners. Deadline to nominate is November 3.

State Superintendent Debate Approaching

Democrat June Atkinson, the state superintendent for public instruction, and Republican challenger Richard Morgan will debate at an event hosted by the North Carolina PTA, NC Association of School Administrators, North Carolina School Boards Association, Public School Forum of North Carolina, Wake Education Partnership and Teach for America.

The event will take place on Monday, October 20th at 7 p.m. at the SAS Campus Auditorium, Building V. Seats for the Candidates' debate are still available and registration is underway on a first-come-first-serve basis. Readers wanting to attend the Forum can register by going to <http://www.eboardsolutions.com/ncsba/eMembership/getRegistrant.asp?E=2235>. Because of security policies on the SAS campus, participants must be registered in order to attend the Forum.

“Constitutional Tales”

Thursday, October 23rd 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?”

“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.

Education Issues Spotlited on State Ballots

Questions and constitutional amendments involving educational policy and finance will be on ballots in 15 states on November 4th. Gambling referendums in six states - Arkansas, Colorado, Maine, Maryland, Missouri, and Oregon – would create new sources of funding or alter the flow of gambling revenues earmarked for education. About half of the proposed referendums are concerned with funding. Other issues include unions, school board governance, teacher union involvement in political activities, and affirmative action.

No single issue dominates the debate this year, as individual states offer a variety of topics for voters to decide on. While gambling proposals have been fiercely debated, unions also remain the focus of several states, including Colorado, which is seeking a constitutional amendment to ban campaign contributions from unions with state or local contracts. New Mexico is also seeking a constitutional amendment in order to increase board sizes in communities with populations over 200,000. Colorado and Nebraska are seeking to restrict affirmative action in an effort to prohibit ‘preferential treatment,’ in education, contracting, or employment.

Some of the more contentious ballot questions may be in Oregon. Voters are being asked to limit bilingual education and performance-based raises for teachers. Spearheaded by one-time gubernatorial candidate Bill Sizemore, Measure 58, as it is known, would prevent instruction to English language learners in their native languages after one to two years, depending on grade level. Mr. Sizemore feels that native instruction prevents students from becoming fluent English speakers, and contends that schools benefit financially from holding students back. Educators disagree, saying that under the No Child Left Behind Act, good measures are in place to track the progress of English learners.

Measure 60 on the Oregon ballot is seeking to tie teacher salaries to classroom performance. The current system is a blend of seniority, certification, experience, education level, and performance. While supporters feel the new system would reward the most effective teachers, opponents fear it will lead to more standardized testing and undermine local school districts’ authority.

Texas to Revamp Teachers’ Merit Pay

Texas’ two year old merit-pay program is being revamped after nearly 60 percent of participating schools failed to meet performance targets. From the list of 1,000 schools selected for year 3 of the Texas Educator Excellence Grant, 669 schools will have to terminate their bonus payments to teachers for failing to meet performance targets. Meanwhile, education officials are asking the Legislature to increase the merit-pay funding by more than 25 percent in the next state budget, for a total of \$311 million per year.

Texas to Revamp (cont'd)

Because of the volatility in participation, state officials are looking to recommend a fix to Legislature next year. According to associate commissioner for educator quality at the Texas Education Agency, Jerel Booker, recommendations will be made to merge the two state merit plans, the Texas Educator Excellence Grant (TEEG) program and the District Awards for Teacher Excellence (DATE) in order to provide more consistency and gain a better picture of the relationship between merit pay and student achievement.

Teacher groups, however, argue that the merit pay program is not working and should be terminated, questioning the efficacy of a program with such a high turnover rate. Linda Bridges, president of the Texas AFT, feels that it should be up to the local districts, not the state, to make decisions on incentive pay for teachers. Others feel that if the program were working, more schools would maintain their eligibility. Since the program began three years ago, only 256 schools have remained eligible all three years.

Grants from the state under the TEEG program target schools with high percentages of low-income students. Grants range in size from \$40,000 for elementary schools to \$300,000 for some of the biggest high schools in the state. Each school decides the criteria for the payments. While the bonuses are popular, an independent state-funded study conducted earlier this year found that 85 percent of teachers at participating schools did not feel the incentive pay affected their work in the classroom.

Forum News...

Christensen Shares the NC Paradox with EPFP Fellows

This week NC EPFP Fellows were given the opportunity to hear from *News and Observer* political reporter/columnist Rob Christensen. Christensen spent the evening with fellows sharing stories from his recently released book entitled “The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics; the Personalities, Elections, and Events that Shaped Modern North Carolina”, in which he sets out to answer the question, “how can a state be represented by both Jesse Helms and John Edwards at the same time?”

In a state known for its heavily Republican lean, fellows were surprised to learn that North Carolina holds the record in the south for longest straight years with a Democratic Governor (at 16 years). Christensen also pointed out that during the Great Depression, not only did 215 banks throughout the state fold between 1929 and 1933, but 39 counties and 70 towns found themselves declaring bankruptcy.

Through the course of the evening, Christensen had successfully detailed the climate of competition and challenge in the state that has enabled North Carolina to rise from poverty to become a true leader in research, education and banking.

Teaching Fellow Recognized for Effective Monitoring Tool

Earlier this week Rebecca Luhm, a 2003 graduate of the Teaching Fellows Program at UNC-CH was spotlighted in the *Raleigh News and Observer* for her positive contributions to the Wake Forest-Rolesville Football Program. Luhm, a U.S. History teacher in her third year at WF-R, and the wife of Broughton High junior varsity coach Nick Luhm, has developed a student performance monitoring system to aide the school's coaching staff in holding athletes accountable for their academic progress.

The effectiveness of the program that she developed with Wake Forest-Rolesville coach Earl Smith is impressive. Not a single WF-R football player needed to go to summer school in 2008 to be academically eligible. "That was a first for me," said Smith, who has not only been a high school coach for more than 30 years but who once gave the Forum's Director of Public Policy, Kendall Jordan a letter for serving as manager of the high school football team.

Smith, like most high school football coaches, has long had an academic program for players. Most coaches request teachers notify them of misbehavior or academic troubles, but that request puts the impetus on the teachers, while Luhm's system places the responsibility on the players or the coaches. To read the full article, go to <http://www.newsobserver.com/print/wednesday/sports/story/1246852.html> .

Gubernatorial Debate on Education Airtimes

If you didn't get a chance to attend the September 19th Gubernatorial Candidates' Forum on Education here is your chance. The debate will be airing in the Triangle on Time Warner Cable's Local Origination Channel 24 on the following dates/times:

- Oct 10 – 6 pm
- Oct 11 – 11:30 am
- Oct 17 – 6 pm
- Oct 18 – 11:30 am
- Oct 24 – 6 pm
- Oct 25 – 11:30 am
- Oct 31 – 6pm

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