

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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Wake Ed Partnership Kicks off World-Class Education Initiative

This Monday nearly 65 legislators, business leaders and educators joined the Wake Education Partnership in launching its World-Class Education Initiative. A two-year project that will set out to define world-class education standards and compare them to Wake County public schools, the initiative is will be chaired by Sam Houston, President and CEO of the NC Science, Mathematics, and Technology Learning Center, Judith Rizzo, Executive Director of the Hunt Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy, and Michael Olander of Apple Gold Group.

Setting the stage for the group's work were presenters Dr. Allan Parnell, President of McMillan and Moss Research, Ted Abernathy, Executive Vice President and COO at Research Triangle Regional Partnership, and Clark Plexico, President of International Strategies, Inc.

The project will be guided by several basic questions: What do students need to know to compete globally? What benchmarks reflect those skills? What type of testing best reveals whether students are meeting the benchmarks and acquiring the skills they need?

Monday Marks State Superintendent Debate

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.

NC Child Health Report Card Released

This week the North Carolina Institute of Medicine and Action for Children North Carolina issued the 14th annual *Child Health Report Card*. The 2008 Report Card summarizes trend data on important child health indicators over the past five years and offers this information in a condensed, easily accessible format.

The 2008 Report Card indicates that while North Carolina's efforts to ensure positive health outcomes for children and youth have shown improvement in many areas, there is still cause for concern. As well, this year's Report Card makes the case that in addition to public investments, communities and parents must work collectively with government to improve children's health and safety. An online version of the 2008 North Carolina Child Health Report Card is available at both www.ncchild.org and www.nciom.org.

National News...

Who Might be the Next...Education Secretary?

It is the responsibility of the U.S. Department of Education to establish national policy to ensure equal access to education and promote excellence. In addition, while the department's emphasis has been in recent years on "No Child Left Behind", it also administers grants and contracts to state and local districts and oversees school aid to disadvantaged, disabled, migrant and Native American children.

According to Alex Wayne of *CQ Weekly*, the next U.S. Secretary of Education may look something like this:

For McCain – Tim Pawlenty, Paul Vallas, or Lisa Graham Keegan

Tim Pawlenty – Governor of Minnesota. During his six years as governor, Pawlenty has increased student achievement standards and instituted a merit-pay system for teachers in his state.

Paul Vallas – School Superintendent in New Orleans. He has had nearly unlimited funding and authority in the past year running the Recovery School District, and his work has drawn acclaim because New Orleans' schools are considered one of the few thriving public services three years after Hurricane Katrina.

Lisa Graham Keegan – Campaign's Top Education Advisor. Superintendent of Public Instruction in Arizona in 1994 and re-elected in 1998, she was a strong proponent of charter schools and student testing.

Education Secretary (cont'd)

For Obama – James B. Hunt Jr., Janet Napolitano, or Arne Duncan

James B. Hunt Jr. – Former Governor of North Carolina. During his four terms as governor, he created Smart Start, one of the nation's first early education initiatives, aimed at making sure young children from low-income families are given a better shot at succeeding in school.

Janet Napolitano – Governor of Arizona. She has emphasized the education spending in nearly all the state budgets she has proposed since becoming governor in 2003 after a career as a federal prosecutor and state attorney general.

Arne Duncan – Chief Executive of the Chicago Public Schools. A strong support of charter schools, he has made steady progress improving the schools in Chicago since his appointment as leader of the system seven years go.

States Consider Gambling Revenue to Fund Education

Initiatives or constitutional amendments on six state ballots this November are hoping to expand state-sanctioned gambling as a means of additional educational funding. Arkansas, Colorado, Maine, Maryland, Missouri and Ohio are all hoping to pass ballot measures to boost school funding through lotteries, casinos, slot machines, and other games. The funds will go toward community college funding, college scholarships, and K-12 general operating aid.

With the exception of Hawaii and Utah, all states offer at least one form of gambling. Of these, 42 states have lotteries, 43 have wagering on horse racing, 32 have gambling through Native American tribes, 12 states have commercial casinos, and 11 have “racinos,” which are slot machines housed in horse-betting facilities. In 2007, there was \$23 billion in gambling revenue from these states, though it is unclear how much of that revenue has gone toward education.

Some school advocacy groups and teachers' unions feel that gambling is a way to raise additional funding when tax increases are not politically possible. With 31 states having a combined \$40 billion deficit this year and at least 12 states planning to make cuts to K-12 funding, these groups are hoping voters will pass the gambling initiatives on November 4th. Of course, gambling is not a ‘sure thing.’ Research has shown that in tough economic times, the amount of money gambled can drop. According to a study published in the *Education Finance and Policy* journal in 2007, 50 to 70 percent of gambling profits earmarked for education actually was spent on education. Opponents of the initiatives also question the social issues involved in promoting gambling as a means of increasing education revenue. But with shrinking budgets, it provides some states a new way to generate education funding.

SC Districts Look to 4-Day Weeks

Last week the South Carolina Board of Economic Advisors reported the state's revenue collections were running \$554 million short of expectations. In response, State Superintendent Jim Rex said the state's public schools will be faced with cuts of at least \$240 million in their \$2.3 billion budget. To cope, Rex says school districts want the freedom to do away with some mandates including those that now bar the use of a four-day school week.

Rex explains that districts want five key things to deal with the nearly \$240 million in budget cuts, including independence from the state's requirement of 180 school days in a year, thus allowing districts to choose to operate a four-day school week, extend the length of days and have a shorter year, or some other combination including year round schooling to save money.

With the state's Education Department sending roughly \$300,000 a day fueling school buses, Rex says the savings are easily grasped with the four-day schedule. "You would immediately get a 20 percent savings in fuel".

Georgia Merges Technical Colleges

Due to the state's deepening fiscal crisis, Georgia has decided to merge 14 of its 33 technical colleges. Officials say the merger will not eliminate programs or reduce the quality of education at the schools, but it should save roughly \$3.5 million in top administrators' salaries, benefits, and other expenses. According to Michael Light, spokesperson for the Technical College System of Georgia, the campuses will remain the same, with the only noticeable difference most likely being an expansion in programs offered to students due to the mergers.

While officials feel that what makes the technical colleges successful will not be lost when the 14 schools merge, many people worry about the change. In rural Georgia, these schools provide training, economic development potential, and small town pride. Opponents to the merger feel that their colleges would wind up becoming subsidiaries of schools in larger cities. With the growing loss of textile and manufacturing jobs, the ability of the technical schools to tailor training to meet the needs of companies has been an important tool for small counties to lure businesses to them.

Skeptics feel that programs may be cut in the mergers, not expanded, despite state assurances. Senator George Hooks (D-Americus), shares these concerns, and worries that this move will hinder economic development in the very communities that need it most. In these tough economic times, Senator Hooks feels that technical education, 'needs to be on the forefront of creating new jobs.'

This sentiment is being echoed across the country, as technical and community colleges in every state are seeing record enrollment during the current economic downturn. Historically, enrollment increases during recessions, due to difficulty in finding jobs. People of all ages are

Georgia Merges Technical Colleges (cont'd)

returning to school to increase their skill sets. Community colleges and technical schools become a primary resource for job hunters seeking new training or new skills, especially in industry and computer technology, as they can offer degrees in a shorter time frame and for lower tuition than comparable programs at four year colleges.

Higher enrollment, however, comes at a cost for these schools because of increased demand on facilities and resources. Tuition only accounts for a portion of school funding, and during a recession, other funding sources may be strained. Under Georgia's merger plan, technical schools will still be able to provide the same level of service, while saving the state roughly \$500,000 per merger in salaries and expenses.

Virginia Tracks Graduation Rates

For the first time, Virginia has tracked individual student progress instead of relying on estimates. According to state officials, 81% of students who entered high school four years ago earned diplomas this past spring, with several school systems in the northern part of the state beating that record. Percentages were lower for minority and low income students, with a 70 percent graduation rate for Hispanic and low income students, and a 73 percent graduation rate for African American students.

Overall, the graduation rate was slightly higher than the 80% estimate for 2007, though it shows a need to increase efforts to ensure that more students graduate after four years of high school. Students who fail to earn a diploma in four years are not all dropouts, according to Virginia officials. Thousands of students who started high school in 2004 remain in school or have earned GEDs or certificates of completion.

Concerns about dropouts have prompted a call for more precise accounting across the country of high school students who graduate in four years. States calculate dropout rates in different ways, which has led to claims that the dropout problem is understated. Virginia is the first state to track the progress of individual students, each of whom is assigned an identifying number, over the traditional four-year high school term.

Maryland is moving toward a similar method, and expects to have precise graduation rate data by 2011. In a ruling expected to become final this year, Education Secretary Margaret Spellings is using her regulatory power through the No Child Left Behind law to require all states to use the same formula for graduation rates by 2013.

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