

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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Brad Sneed, Carteret County Superintendent, died last Wednesday from a blood clot to his lung. During his career, Sneed served as Superintendent of Craven County Schools and Deputy Superintendent of North Carolina. Services were held on Saturday at Centenary United Methodist Church in New Bern. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Sneed family.

“Be Bold in Your Ideas and Aspirations”

The 2007-08 class of twenty-seven EPFP Fellows was honored on Tuesday night by 150 alumni, sponsors, and friends at a gala reception and dinner at the Cardinal Club. As in the past, the graduation served as a reunion for alumni. Special recognition was given to Gladys Graves for her 14 years serving as the North Carolina EPFP Co-coordinator. Gladys received the Distinguished Service Award, "in appreciation for outstanding contributions to improved leadership for learning, as a Coordinator of IEL's Education Policy Fellowship Program." from Stefani Wilcox and Kwesi Rollins, representing the National EPFP office at the Institute of Educational Leadership in Washington, DC.

The guests were treated to a look back at the 2007-08 class with a slide show of meetings and conferences in Atlanta and Washington, DC. Everyone was energized by the keynote speaker, former NC Governor James B. Hunt Jr. A truly dynamic speaker, Governor Hunt shared his passion for education and his dream of seeing North Carolina first in the nation in education. It is his belief that with passionate leaders and successful leadership programs our state can continue to make the record gains it has experienced in the past. He charged all in the room to continue their work and to "be bold in your ideas and aspirations."

Jim Hunt is a nationally recognized leader in education and has led his state through twenty years of dramatic economic change. Serving a historic four terms as Governor, he has been at the forefront of education reform in his state and in the nation. Governor Hunt holds B.A. and M.S. degrees from North Carolina State University, the J.D. degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and honorary degrees from over a dozen colleges and universities. Governor Hunt is currently a member in the law firm of Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice, PLLC, in Raleigh. He and his wife, Carolyn, live on their beef cattle farm in eastern North Carolina. They have four children and ten grandchildren.

States, Including NC, Set Low Expectations for Graduation Rate Improvements

Policymakers in many states are setting graduation improvement targets lower than what is necessary for the United States to compete among industrialized nations. “Counting on Graduation,” a new report put out last week by The Education Trust, contends that states must immediately and substantially raise expectations for high school graduation. The report provides information on what states are, or are not doing to boost graduation rates, and offers specific recommendations for state leaders to support school and district efforts to accurately account for all students, hold them accountable for real improvement, and generate a statewide focus on closing the gaps and increasing graduation rates for all student groups.

Although federal law requires states to set improvement benchmarks, a standard method of computing graduation rates does not exist. Thus, the variety of methods states are using to compute graduation rates obscure the fact that nationally, one in four high school students do not graduate on time. That rate increases to more than one in three for African-American and Latino students. New federal regulations, due out within a month, will require states to use a single, more reliable graduation rate calculation, and ask schools to meet graduation goals for specific groups of students.

Individual states have a wide range of graduation rate goals, and more than half of all states have set annual targets so low that if minimum targets were met each year, overall graduation-rate goals would not be met for a very long time. According to the report, in North Carolina, this means the overall goal would not be reached until the year 2103, OR 95 YEARS FROM NOW. It would take an additional 95 years for the state’s African-American students and 180 years for its Latino students to reach the same goal. Other states, such as Georgia and Mississippi, are setting aggressive goals and targets, and providing support necessary in meeting these goals. To access the full report, go to:
<http://www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/Press+Room/countingongrad.htm> .

Teaching Fellow Receives “Oscar for Teaching”

This week, Bryan Holley, a fourth grade teacher at Corinth-Holders Elementary School in Johnston County, was named North Carolina’s 2008 Miliken Family Foundation National Educator award recipient. Holley is among the nation’s approximately 80 most recent recipients of the Miliken Family Foundation National Educator award.

Holley, a North Carolina Teaching Fellow, earned both a bachelor’s degree in Business Education in 2001, a master’s degree in Reading in 2007 from East Carolina University, and has just completed the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certification process.

Holley will join up to 80 other educators as the latest recipients of this prestigious award, which carries with it an unrestricted financial award of \$25,000 and membership in a network of over 2,300 past recipients from across the nation. In addition to the financial award and educational networking opportunities, the Miliken Family Foundation provides recipients with a variety of professional resources to help them cultivate and expand innovative program in their classrooms, schools and districts.

Foreign Teachers Fill Vacancies in US Schools

Across the country, more school districts are hiring foreign teachers to fill vacancies in math, science, and special education. The growing trend has become more evident in rural and poor urban districts that may have difficulty retaining teachers because of low pay, disruptive students, and insufficient teaching materials.

According to Segun Eubanks, director of teacher quality at the National Education Association, the USA's largest teachers union, American teachers are not as willing to work under those conditions as foreign teachers may be. Eubanks feels these teachers enrich students' experiences by exposing them to new cultures, though he believes the teacher shortage needs to be addressed by training more teachers and improving schools.

While the practice of hiring overseas has become more common, the Department of Education does not track foreign teachers. The American Federation of Teachers Union estimates that roughly 18,000 of the 3.7 million teachers in the United States are from elsewhere. These teachers must pass state tests and meet federal requirements in order to teach in the United States. In Baltimore, 593 of its 7,000 public school teachers are from other countries. In Wichita, 43 of its 4,000 teachers are foreign, and in Los Angeles, there are 326 foreign teachers out of its 33,529 teachers. Nearly 1,000 foreign teachers are now employed in North Carolina schools.

North Carolina Not Alone in Having Scores Decline after Testing Changes

Changes designed to make New Jersey's elementary and middle school proficiency tests more rigorous have caused passing rates to plummet in both urban and suburban districts. Revisions made to the statewide tests over the summer include requiring higher grades in order to pass the exams, causing far fewer students to be deemed 'proficient.' The changes come as part of a new reform package approved by the Board of Education.

In Newark, almost all elementary schools are seeing double-digit drops in the percentage of fifth- and sixth-graders passing the language arts sections. These same schools would have seen gains under the previous scoring system. In other districts, some schools' passing rates are dropping from 50 or 60 percent down into the teens. Test score decreases were not across the board, but the full extent of the impact of the changes will not be known until school-by-school data is released this winter.

Similarly, this fall North Carolina elementary and middle schools' reading results will reflect higher proficiency standards for the state's new end-of-grade reading assessments that were approved by State Board members in October. As a result of the new proficiency standards, the state's standards more closely align with those of the proficiency standards of the National Assessment of Educational Progress and are more challenging in preparing students for the 21st century. Test results for individual schools in North Carolina will be reported later next week.

Declining Economy Takes Educational Toll in Mass

The launch of Governor Deval Patrick's ambitious 10-year Readiness Project will be scaled back next year due to Massachusetts' worsening budget problems. With Patrick's term ending in two years, doubts are being raised as to how much of the initiative he will be able to accomplish given the recent emergency budget cuts and the state's \$1 billion budget shortfall. The proposed project, which would provide students with a free education from preschool through community college, was announced over a year ago, yet the administration has yet to say what the cost will be.

The administration plans to proceed in January with some components of the project, though they will not ask Legislature to spend as much on them as originally hoped. According to Education Secretary Paul Reville, "The economy will impose limits and constraints on how far we can go with our vision but it does not diminish the need to realize that vision. It's imperative for our children and the future of our economy." A gubernatorial advisory commission in charge of identifying new revenue and cost-saving measures by mid-November was not told by the administration how much the programs would cost.

The 40-page report, released in June, made 50 recommendations. Only four of these are to be pursued in the coming year. Two dozen other recommendations, including free community college for some low-income students and those pursuing careers in early childhood education, were targeted for completion sometime in the next three years. Longer-term goals included making community college free for everyone. Still, supporters and some critics feel that several aspects of the plan hold promise in the next legislative session.

Fun Facts...

NC Early Voting Statistics

Civilian Absentee votes:

Democrats: 36,426
Republicans: 70,859
Unaffiliated: 21,199

Military Absentee votes:

Democrats: 1,958
Republicans: 1,961
Unaffiliated: 1,531

One Stop:

Democrats: 796,014
Republicans: 362,390
Unaffiliated: 242,120

Overseas:

Democrats: 1,172
Republicans: 1,009
Unaffiliated: 603

NC Early Voting Stats (cont'd)

Grand Totals:

Democrats: 835,570
Republicans: 436,219
Unaffiliated: 265,453

Total Early votes: 1,537,242



Time to Fall Back

At 2 a.m. on November 2nd, sleepy Americans will turn their clocks back one hour, marking the end of Daylight Saving Time (DST). The federal law that established "daylight time" in this country does not require any area to observe daylight saving time. But if a state chooses to observe DST, it must follow the starting and ending dates set by the law.

From 1986 to 2006 this has been the first Sunday in April to the last Sunday in October; but, starting last year, it is to be observed from the second Sunday in March to the first Sunday in November, adding about a month to daylight saving time.

Arizona (with the exception of the Navajo Nation) and Hawaii and the territories of Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Guam, and American Samoa are the only places in the U.S. that do not observe DST but instead stay on "standard time" all year long.

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