

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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Volume 11, Issue 20

November 14, 2008



Marvin Martin Ward, North Carolina State Senator from 1979 to 1995 and Emeritus Member of the Forum Board, died Monday, November 10th at the Moses H. Cone Memorial Hospital in Greensboro. Ward began his career in education teaching physics and mathematics in Cabarrus County in 1934. He served as a Principal, Administrative Assistant Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent before being appointed as Superintendent of the Winston-Salem City Schools from 1962 until his retirement in 1976. A memorial service will be held at 2:00 p.m. Tuesday, November 18, 2008 at Centenary United Methodist Church in Winston-Salem. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Ward family.

Commission Reviews Recommendations To 2009 General Assembly

This Thursday the Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation met to review their findings and discuss their recommendations to the 2009 General Assembly. The Commission will make a final decision on their recommendations at their December meeting. The Commission is considering the following four legislative proposals:

1. The General Assembly shall appropriate funds for the 11 Learn and Earn early college high schools that received a planning grant in the 2008-09 fiscal year.
2. The General Assembly shall appropriate funds for Communities in Schools of North Carolina, Inc. to place no fewer than 100 graduation coaches in either middle or high schools and give priority to schools that have a 4-year cohort graduation rate of less than 65%.
3. The General Assembly shall direct the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina to study raising the compulsory attendance age for public school attendance from sixteen to seventeen or eighteen. At a minimum, the study shall examine other states that have raised the compulsory attendance age to determine all impacts, including the effect on the dropout rate and the fiscal impact.
4. The Commission Strong encourages LEAs to focus on the transition to 9th grade by implementing programs to help prepare 8th graders for the expectations, challenges and rigors of high school; to develop early warning systems to flag students who are not ready for 9th grade and develop plans to address their needs so that they are successful in 9th grade; and to focus on the 9th grade by continuing to implement 9th grade Academies, pair incoming 9th graders with upperclassmen for mentoring support, and to implement graduation plans for students who have fallen behind and are off-track to graduate.

42 Groups Selected to Receive Dropout Prevention Grants

The North Carolina General Assembly's Committee on Dropout Prevention, this week, selected forty-two groups in 30 counties across the state to receive \$5.2 million in grants to help improve high school graduation rates. The grants, which range in size from \$43,260 to \$150,000, were awarded to school systems, schools, agencies and nonprofits that had originally applied for funding in 2007 but were not selected to receive funding in the first round.

The committee plans to evaluate the programs that receive grants to decide whether expanding or replicating them will improve graduation rates in the state. In addition, the committee will review research on student success, study major middle and high school reform efforts and how they may influence the dropout rate, and determine which strategies best help students remain in school when they are at risk of being retained.

The NC Dropout Prevention Committee's Grant Review Subcommittee, after meeting Monday to discuss the rubric to be used to grant continued funding for 37 applicants approved in the first round of funding, plans to determine those receiving additional and new funding at its November 20-21 meeting. A complete list of the 42 groups awarded the second round of grants can be found at the end of this week's *Friday Report*.

Six NC Schools Receive Blue Ribbon Recognition

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced six North Carolina public schools were recently named 2008 No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon Schools. In total, 274 public and 50 private schools were recognized with this honor for helping all students achieve at very high levels and for making significant progress toward closing the achievement gap.

For the past 26 years, this program has honored more than 5,800 of the nation's most successful schools for their models of excellence in leadership, teaching, curriculum, student achievement and parental involvement. North Carolina public schools receiving this year's prestigious recognition are:

- East Elementary (Cleveland County Schools)
- Jefferson Elementary (Cleveland County Schools)
- Arthur W. Edwards Elementary (Craven County Schools)
- Iron Station Elementary (Lincoln County Schools)
- Huntersville Elementary (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools)
- Providence Spring Elementary (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools)

Corporate Tax Revenues Down in First Quarter

In what has been the largest decline since the first three months of fiscal year 2001-2002, tax collections on corporate profits in North Carolina fell nearly 32 percent during the first quarter of the new fiscal year. The decline was larger than expected, according to state fiscal experts, and could be an indicator that the state is headed toward, if not already in, a recession.

From July through September 2008, business paid approximately \$194 million in corporate taxes, down \$90 million from the same period last year. Companies typically use the first quarter to submit a portion of anticipated corporate tax burdens. The drop this year suggests that companies are expecting a lower tax income than last year.

Defense Contractors Collaborate to Boost STEM Education

Rival defense contractors Northrop Grumman Corp and Lockheed Martin have come together in a collaborative program to boost STEM education in Baltimore County Schools. While Northrop Grumman Corp and Lockheed Martin compete for qualified workers near their facilities, they share the common interest in maintaining the quality and quantity of their talent pool by increasing the number of students interested in technical careers.

Joe A. Hairston, Baltimore County Superintendent, brought the two companies' local operations, as well as researchers from Johns Hopkins University, together to get a jump on technology students and teachers may not otherwise see for decades. The goals of the partnership are to develop software tools, such as virtual reality simulations, that expose students to real-world activities involving STEM subjects, and to connect employees with students and teachers within the Baltimore County schools.

Virtual environments have been used for training by companies in many industries, and the US Department of Education has given the Center for Technology in Education at Johns Hopkins a 3 year grant to study how these emerging technologies may be harnessed for classroom uses. The Baltimore projects are paving the way for other school districts to tap into high-tech resources accessible through military contractors, resources more sophisticated than those offered by educational publishers. The partnership may be followed by districts throughout the country as they seek ways to improve STEM education, especially as other high-tech companies, such as Boeing, Siemens, Intel and IBM, join the effort.

Charter Schools May Offer Hints to Closing Achievement Gaps

Despite social and economic disadvantages, students at more than 200 high-performing charter schools across the country are routinely outscoring district peers on statewide tests, top statewide averages, and, in some cases, surpass students from surrounding affluent suburban districts.

Charter Schools (cont'd)

Of the 17 charter schools in Boston, Massachusetts, seven are seeing striking results on the state's MCAS test, and of these, all but one operate on something similar to the KIPP model, where the focus of the vigorous academic program is to set every student on the path to college. This approach has been dubbed "No Excuses," due to teachers adopting high expectations for students and not accepting explanations from any quarter for low achievement. Enrollment at the seven schools does not vary demographically from Boston Public Schools, and the schools operate at a lower cost than the district.

The success of these schools may stem from the education of their teachers. More than half of these schools' staff members attended elite undergraduate institutions, and 82% attended at least a "very competitive" college, based on Barron's ranking system. In comparison, only 19% of public school teachers attended similar institutions. Even if one in ten academically gifted graduates were to enter teaching for two years, it would not be enough to reach every disadvantaged child in America, however. A more realistic approach to closing achievement gaps would be to develop instructional models that skilled educators of varied backgrounds can use to achieve results similar to those seen at No Excuses schools.

Tight Economy Reaches Cafeterias

As families feel the strain of the economic crisis, more and more children appear to be taking advantage of free and reduced lunch programs. For some school districts, this is beginning to affect already tight budget situations.

Bristol, Connecticut, has seen an increase in the number of families requesting and qualifying for help. The number of students who qualify for the program has risen 2.5% already this fall over last year. Greg Boulanger, the district's lunch director, feels more applications are to come this winter. One third of all lunches served in Bristol are free, and the school district loses 21 cents per meal. Add this to already high food costs and rigorous nutrition standards, and it is getting harder for school lunch budgets not to sustain a deficit.

Although the federal government increases its reimbursement amounts once a year, cafeteria costs are outpacing reimbursements across the country, according to representatives from the School Nutrition Association. The National School Lunch Program has seen steady growth since it was established in 1946, and currently helps pay for three out of five meals nationally. The federal income limit to qualify for a reduced price lunch in most states is \$39,220 for a family of four. To qualify for free lunch, a family of four must earn \$27,560 or less. At the current limits, it is projected that more than a quarter-million more students will qualify for help this school year. It will be up to Congress to decide how to keep funding the program when it is up for renewal next year.

Table #1...

Dropout Prevention Grant Awards		
<i>From 2007 Non-Funded Applicants</i>		
County	Grantee	Amount Awarded
Cabarrus	Kannapolis City Schools	\$130,000
Caldwell	Communities in Schools of Caldwell County	\$145,974
Columbus	New Hope Missionary Baptist Church	\$81,100
Columbus	Whiteville City Schools	\$150,000
Craven	Havelock High School	\$125,180
Cumberland	Cumberland County Schools Indian Education	\$150,000
Davidson	Thomasville City Schools	\$55,355
Duplin	Charity Middle School	\$79,426
Duplin	Duplin County Schools	\$150,000
Durham	Bridges Pointe Foundation, Inc	\$139,334
Edgecombe	OIC, Inc	\$139,494
Edgecombe	St Luke Total Community Outreach Ministries, Inc	\$71,508
Granville	Granville County Schools	\$150,000
Halifax	Together Transforming Lives, Inc	\$150,000
Halifax	Ivory Community Development Corporation, Inc.	\$150,000
Halifax	Hobgood Citizen Group, Inc.	\$53,793
Johnston	Johnston County Schools	\$125,402
Jones	Jones County Schools	\$43,360
Martin	Martin County Schools	\$109,516
Nash	Word Tabernacle Church	\$141,241
Northampton	Northampton County Schools	\$147,950
Perquimans	Perquimans County Schools	\$150,000
Pitt	Ray of Hope, Inc	\$150,000
Robeson	Boys and Girls Club of Lumberton/Robeson County	\$150,000
Robeson	Communities in Schools of Robeson County	\$57,200
Robeson	Sacred Pathways	\$92,452
Rockingham	Rockingham County Schools	\$150,000
Rowan	Communities in Schools of Rowan County, Inc	\$113,755
Rowan	West Rowan High School	\$150,000
Rutherford	Rutherford County Schools	\$150,000
Sampson	Clinton City Schools	\$150,000
Sampson	Sampson County Schools	\$58,450
Scotland	Scotland County Schools	\$149,948
Union	Environmental Expeditions	\$150,000
Vance	Vance County Schools	\$150,000
Warren	The Warren Family Institute	\$149,000
Watauga	Appalachian State University	\$147,692
Wayne	Dillard Academy Charter School	\$148,363
Wayne	ADLA, Inc	\$149,745
Wayne/Duplin	Mount Olive College	\$150,000
Wilson	Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) of Wilson, Inc	\$135,000
Wilson	The Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club of Wilson, NC	\$94,225

 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/doc .