

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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Enjoy Thanksgiving . . .



This early edition of the *Friday Report* will be our only publication this week. The Forum will be closed Thursday and Friday for the Thanksgiving Holiday. We wish all of our readers a joyous Thanksgiving Day.

NC School Connectivity Initiative Honored

On Thursday, November 13, the NC School Connectivity Initiative (SCI) received the Public Leadership in Technology Award from the North Carolina Technology Association (NCTA) at the annual NCTA 21 Awards ceremony. More than 500 technology executives and leaders from across the state attended the ceremony. Eight organizations and individuals instrumental in planning and implementing the Initiative were honored.

Developed under the leadership of Governor-Elect Beverly Perdue and the Business Education Technology Alliance (BETA), the NC School Connectivity Initiative has nearly completed its goal of connecting all 115 K-12 public school districts in the state to the existing North Carolina Research and Education Network (NCREN). According to Governor-Elect Perdue, SCI is “a major step in helping all North Carolina’s students reach their full potential in the global, knowledge-based economy of the 21st century.”

Members of the SCI team who were honored at the ceremony were Sen. Vernon Malone, Rep. Joe Tolson, Director of BETA and E-Learning Commission Myra Best, Executive Director of the e-NC Authority Jane Smith Patterson, N.C. Chief Information Officer George Bakolia, N.C. Department of Public Instruction Chief Information Officer Peter Asmar, and Friday Institute Director of Technology Phil Emer and MCNC, which is the operating organization of NCREN.

“Barack Obama Can’t Do It Alone”

This was the charge led by former Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. last Friday at a breakfast briefing hosted by the both former Governor Hunt and the Hunt Institute Foundation Board of Directors. With special guest Jon Schnur, the co-founder of New Leaders for New Schools and key spokesman for President-elect Barack Obama’s education agenda, the briefing invited guests throughout the state’s education landscape to hear first-hand the education priorities of the new administration.

“Barack Obama” (cont’d)

Schnur led attendees through the President-elect’s Four Point Education Agenda. This consisted of:

1. Early Childhood
2. K-12 Public Schools
3. College Access
4. Civic Responsibility

Opening the floor for questions, several key education leaders expressed interest in school / business partnerships, national standards, a global focus in education, and the prospects for states in leadership innovations. Schnur closed his presentation by assuring those in attendance that education remained one President-elect Obama’s top three priorities. He encouraged education leaders throughout the state to communicate their concerns to both he and other members of the transition team.

Forum Attends Perdue Transition Session on Education

Held Tuesday at the Western Campus of Wake Tech, staff members from Governor-elect Perdue’s transition team lead a round table discussion on education. Lastly from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. the meeting opened with an overview of the K-12, Community College, and UNC Systems. The overviews highlighted the history, structure and challenges faced by each system.

After a brainstorming session that focused predominantly on the challenges facing the K-12 public school system, attendees were led through an exercise where they were to identify the key issues facing our State in education. The issues identified included:

- The need to reinvent the structure and function of the Education Cabinet and K-12 Governance.
- The disconnect between business and education.
- The needs and role of early childhood education (0-5 years).
- Classroom infrastructure and technological tools.
- The retention of students through post-secondary education.
- The need to hire, retain and develop the best teachers and administrators.

The transition staff plan to prepare a document notating the identified issues and recommendations, providing it to Governor-elect Perdue on or before December 6th.

Education Challenges Ahead for President-Elect Obama

President-elect Barack Obama has made big promises for education: vowing to recruit new teachers, create better tests, give public schools more funding, and make college affordable. However, political and economic challenges face the new administration as it prepare to take over the Education Department.

Education Challenges (cont'd)

School experts feel one of Obama's toughest jobs will be to restore broad bipartisan support of the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. On his campaign website, Obama promised to "improve NCLB's accountability system so that we are supporting schools that need improvement, rather than punishing them." NCLB is up for reauthorization, but efforts in Congress have stalled as lawmakers await the new administration.

The President-elect would like to refine the role of federal government in the classroom, which may be the biggest political and policy challenge. Until President Bush enacted NCLB, the federal government played a minor role in public education. Education experts feel that the next president will need to appoint an Education Secretary who will be able to, "reinvigorate support for the federal role in reforming public education," according to the Washington Post.

States Make Gains in Longitudinal Data Systems

In a 2008 survey of all 50 states, six states reported having all 10 elements of a student progress tracking system, and 48 states have at least half of the elements. The survey results were released last week in a report by the Data Quality Campaign (DQC), a national partnership focused on improving the quality, accessibility and use of data in education.

The DQC emphasizes the power of developing and using longitudinal data systems to improve student achievement. Since its launch in 2005, states have made impressive gains in building the student-level longitudinal data systems, which make it possible to follow individual student academic growth, determine the value of specific programs, and identify consistently high-performing schools and school systems. 42 states have the systems in place, and almost every state will have them developed by 2011. 47 states plan to have eight or more of the 10 elements by that time. Currently, North Carolina has eight of the 10 Essential Elements.

While states are committed to building these systems, the DQC still faces the problem of getting the states to implement the system elements and use the information gathered to improve student achievement. Many barriers to implementing the systems exist due to a lack of political will and resources, and the DQC is calling on states to help policymakers, educators and other stakeholders make better use of the data. The 2008 survey results can be viewed at: www.dataqualitycampaign.org/survey_results .

Three States to Pioneer Education Reform

The New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, a project of the National Center on Education and the Economy, is encouraging states to adopt a comprehensive set of education reforms in order to better prepare workers to be competitive in the 21st century global economy. Three states have agreed to pioneer some of these proposals: Massachusetts, Utah, and New Hampshire. If successful, they could build support for the reforms around the country.

Three States (cont'd)

The goal of the proposals, outlined in the Commission's 2006 report, "Tough Choices or Tough Times," is to broaden reform beyond the current test-driven accountability system, a system that has been criticized for not meeting its desired results. The Commission is working to address America's low standing among industrialized nations in high school graduation rates, and low math, science and general literacy scores.

Of the proposals made, New Hampshire is considering developing a state board exam. This would allow students who pass to move on to college or career training beginning at age 16, an age at which students in other industrialized countries are already attending college. The report urges that teaching be treated as a more respected profession. In response to this, Utah has begun raising teacher salaries and recruiting top college graduates. Utah has also created the 21st Century Workforce Initiative, in response to the report, to address the steep drop-off of high school graduates who do not pursue a post-secondary education. Massachusetts has responded to the report's urging to ensure that young people have the support they need to do well in school by creating the Child and Youth Readiness Cabinet, a panel that will share health, social services, and education information in a student-data system. For more information on the Commission's report and their State Consortium, visit: <http://www.skillscommission.org>.

Schools in Michigan to Charge Teachers for Electricity Use

Beginning January 1, 2009, teachers in the Van Buren Public School district will be charged fees if they want to use small appliances in their classrooms. Van Buren joins other school districts in Michigan who are looking to help fight tight budgets by charging teachers for plugging in to public school outlets. The Van Buren school district already laid off 24 teachers to cut expenses, and may need to lay off more in January.

The Van Buren School Board has decided to assess fees for teachers as part of an effort to fill a \$2.2 million budget hole caused by an unanticipated drop in enrollment this fall. Fees will range from \$13 for a microwave to \$32 for a coffee pot to \$182 for a mini-fridge. School officials believe they can save \$15,000 on energy costs by enacting the fees.

According to a 2006 study by Denver-based marketing research firm, Quality Education Data, Inc., teachers nationally spend an average of \$425 on out-of-pocket purchases for classroom supplies. While the fee decision has left many teachers upset, some say they will go along with the charges for the sake of the students.

Editor's note: Last week's article "Second Georgia County May Lose Accreditation" incorrectly reported that Georgia's Clay County became the first county in the country to lose accreditation in almost 40 years. Clayton County, Georgia, was the county that lost SACS accreditation. We regret the error.

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