

# *The Public School Forum's Friday Report*

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## **Best Wishes to President Friday**

When it was made public that former UNC President Bill Friday had suffered a mild heart attack, the news spawned dozens of editorials and news comments wishing him a speedy recovery. The Friday Report is only the latest to echo that wish. Former President Friday occupies a special place in the history of the Forum. When the Forum was nothing more than an idea under discussion, he agreed to become a member of the founding Board of Directors and was an active supporter of the new organization during its critical formative years.

While most appropriately think of Friday in the context of UNC, he has long been an ardent supporter of strengthening K-12 schools and made the link between a strong K-12 education foundation and a strong North Carolina long before school reform became a national issue. Retired for some time, Friday gives "retirement" new definition. He has remained active supporting causes he believes in, serving on boards and commissions and continuing to speak out on issues of the day. The Forum sends its best wishes to President Friday and thanks him once again for all that he has done and continues to do for North Carolina.

## **State Board Tackles the Retest Issue**

The State Board of Education (SBE), in its *Framework for Change* report, has called for the allowing of retest results in the calculation of performance composites of the ABCs for Public Education. This will necessitate changes in several current SBE policies and practices and amendments to the NC Accountability Workbook upon subsequent approval from the United States Department of Education (USED).

The Globally Competitive Students Committee of the State Board discussed this item at the December meeting and reviewed three options including:

1. No changes to current policies or practices in 2008-09
2. Retest at Grades 3,5, and 8 for student accountability standards and for 5 EOCs for high school exit standards
3. Rest at Grades 3-8 and for all 10 EOCs.

After further discussion this week and a forceful argument from Bill McNeal, executive director of the North Carolina Association of School Administrators (NCASA), the committee decided to recommend to the full board a modified option 3, which recommends counting retests in third through eighth grades this year (2008-09) and expanding to the high school end-of-course (EOC) tests in 2009-10. The full board approved this option on Thursday.

## Atlanta School Receives \$365k Gift from Oprah

The Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta received a letter last week from Oprah Winfrey that included a check for an unsolicited donation of \$365,000. The gift was made through the Oprah Winfrey Foundation, which contributed over \$4 million to educational programs in 2008. Upon the announcement of the gift at a gathering at the school last Wednesday morning, children, parents and teachers erupted in deafening cheers. According to Clark, the donation, which likely will go to scholarships for students, could cover tuition for 26 children to attend the school for one year.

The innovative 80-student private school, located in one of Atlanta's poorest neighborhoods, was founded by educator Ron Clark in 2007, and depends almost entirely on donations to operate. Clark, an ECU Teaching Fellow from the entering class of 1990 and the 2001 Disney Teacher of the year, wrote "The Essential 55," a best-selling book about teaching. Last year he opened the middle school with donations and proceeds from the book. In her letter, Ms. Winfrey called Clark a role model and applauded the "profound difference," he has made with his, "passion for teaching."

## MeckEd to Hold Open Conversation on Public Education

Mecklenburg Citizens for Public Education (MeckEd) and WTVI invite you to save the date for a meaningful conversation about public education featuring the PBS Documentary, "Where We Stand: America's Schools in the 21st Century". "Where We Stand: America's Schools in the 21st Century" presents a frank evaluation of our educational system's strengths and weaknesses. Hosted by Judy Woodruff, Senior Correspondent for The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, the documentary introduces students, parents, teachers and administrators whose stories illustrate the overwhelming odds and shining successes of education in America. The forum will be held at the Levine Museum of the New South in Charlotte on Monday, January 26<sup>th</sup> from 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. For further information, visit <http://www.mecked.org/calendar.htm> .

### National News...

## Quality Counts 2009 Report Released

The Education Week annual report, *Quality Counts 2009: Portrait of a Population*, was released on Thursday, January 8<sup>th</sup>. *Quality Counts* provides state-by-state data, including state report cards and highlights reports. The special focus of this year's report is how English-language learners are putting schools to the test.

Overall, North Carolina received a grade of 75.5 (C), slightly below the national average of 76.2. One area the state did well in was the Teaching Profession, ranking third in the country behind South Carolina and Arkansas with a score of 84.8. The national average was 73.1. While North Carolina beat the national average of 83.6 with a score of 88.2 in the Standards, Assessment, & Accountability category, it ranked 20<sup>th</sup> out of all of the states. The full report can be viewed at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2009/01/08/index.html> .

## Spellings Offers Graduation Rate Guidance

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings released non-regulatory guidance on December 23, 2008 to implement a uniform and accurate measure of the high school graduation rate that is comparable across states. A uniform high school graduation rate is seen as a critical step toward improving high school accountability. Secretary Spellings feels the current graduation rate is “abysmal,” and has developed the guidance to, “help ensure resources are better targeted so that students earn a regular high school diploma.”

The guidance provides states, school districts, and schools with information about how to put into practice the graduation rate regulations the Department announced in October. The guidance:

- defines the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate, the extended-year cohort graduation rate, and the transitional graduation rates that are allowed until states must implement (by 2010-2011) the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate;
- guides states in setting a single graduation rate goal and annual graduation rate targets; outlines requirements for reporting graduation rates;
- answers questions about how states include the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate and any extended-year adjusted cohort graduation rate in Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) determinations, including the use of disaggregated rates for student subgroups;
- explains how a state must revise its Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook to include certain information and submit its revisions to the Department for technical assistance and peer review; and
- spells out the timeline for implementing the new graduation rate provisions, as well as the process for how a state that cannot meet the deadlines outlined in the final regulations may request an extension of time to meet the requirements.

The guidance can be viewed at <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/hsgrguidance.pdf> .  
The October report can be viewed at <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/reg/proposal/uniform-grad-rate.html> .

## Denver Superintendent to Fill Senate Seat

Denver Public Schools Superintendent Michael Bennet was appointed by Colorado Governor Bill Ritter to fill the Senate seat that will be left vacant when Senator Ken Salazar becomes Interior Secretary for the Obama Administration. While Bennet lacks legislative experience and has never campaigned for or held public office, Ritter feels he is a proven leader and problem-solver in both the public and private sectors. President-elect Barack Obama felt Ritter made an “excellent choice” in selecting Bennet.

In a statement, President-elect Obama referred to Superintendent Bennet as a “breath of fresh air,” and went on to say, “Michael Bennet perfectly reflects the qualities of the ruggedly independent state he has been chosen to serve. An innovator in the public and private sectors, he has shown himself willing to challenge old thinking and stale policies. His breakthrough work at the helm of Denver's schools has reflected that commitment, and established Michael as one of the nation's leading education reformers.”

## Denver Superintendent (cont'd.)

Michael Bennet was appointed unanimously by the Denver Board of Education in 2005 to serve as superintendent after he promised to provide each school with a highly skilled faculty, got teachers to support merit pay, and promised to track student progress and provide help to students. Bennet has delivered on his promises and Denver Public Schools students have made strong improvements in reading, math, writing and science.

## Slipping Economy Being Felt in Schools around the Country

From individual school buildings to sweeping statewide changes, the economic downturn is taking its toll on education throughout the United States. In rural southeast Minnesota, the McLeod West School district is preparing to close its last remaining school. In just over 10 years, this part of the state will have gone from having two districts with two schools to no districts and no schools. In the past two years, the district has lost more than half of its students, due to parents moving them to neighboring districts, which has meant the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars in state funding. A \$2 million deficit on a \$3 million budget this year is forcing the district to close down entirely.

In Hartford, Connecticut, where student-based budgeting has been adopted in order to make funding more fair across the schools, unexpected drops in enrollment are beginning to take their toll. With the start of the new calendar year, dozens of teachers and support staff are returning to work after the holidays to find themselves in different roles. Though no layoffs have been announced, roughly 50 positions will be shifted in the district in an effort to address shrinking budgets due to lower enrollment figures.

As Governor Schwarzenegger works to address his state's budget crisis, schools in California may see increased class sizes and shorter school years under his new plan. The new proposal will allow schools maximum flexibility to cut costs, including allowing districts to drop one of two high school science courses required for graduation. Schwarzenegger's plan would provide no teacher salary increases, eliminate a program providing subsidies to overhaul low-performing schools, allow schools to cut the academic year from 180 to 175 days, and suspend participation in a program encouraging teachers to obtain national certification. Students could see dramatic impacts from the governor's proposed \$2.1 billion in education cuts this fiscal year and an anticipated \$3.1 billion in 2009-2010.

## Enrollment Decreases in Florida's Public Schools

For the third straight year, enrollment in Florida's public schools has dropped, according to state figures. Enrollment is down about 30,000 from a peak of 2.6 million students in the 2005-06 academic year. More than half of those 30,000 students left during the past year. This is a sharp turnaround from a few years ago when students were flooding some schools so fast districts could not find space for them. While the number of foreign students moving to the state has seen little change, fewer children from within the United States are moving in to Florida.

## FL Budget Cuts Limit Teachers Seeking National Certification

Second only to North Carolina, Florida currently has 12,670 National Board Certified Teachers. Recently, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards announced that 1,826 out of a group of 4,000 Florida Teachers seeking National Board Certification had achieved it. Next year, however, the number of teachers seeking certification is expected to drop to about 400 statewide, with only a handful expected to achieve it, due to changes made by the state legislature.

In order to cut costs, the state has reduced the program budget from \$100 million last year to \$55 million this year, with the potential for further cuts. In previous years, the state paid 90 percent of the \$2500 program fee, as well as offered 10 percent pay bonuses to certified teachers, plus an additional 10 percent bonus to certified teachers who agreed to mentor other teachers. With the collapsing economy, the Florida Legislature discontinued payment of the initial certification fee, as well as dropped the mentoring bonus. Only a few teachers this year will qualify for federal funding for partial-fee payment, though most teachers cannot afford the \$2,500 program fee.

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