

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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Dropout Commission Adopts Report

The Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation met Wednesday to review and adopt their report to the 2009 North Carolina General Assembly. Based upon the various presentations and Commission discussion, twelve findings were identified, including:

1. Innovative and non-traditional high school designs strengthen the retention of students in schools and reduce failure rates. North Carolina high schools that implemented reform/redesign models showed improved performance on 2007-2008 End-of-Course tests.
2. Current law requires children to attend school between the ages of seven and 16. In 2006-2007, students aged 17 were the most frequent dropouts. The next highest age group of dropouts was students aged 18, followed by students aged 16.
3. In North Carolina in 2006-2007, students dropped out more frequently during 9th Grade than any other grade.
4. The presence of the following risk factors increase a student's likelihood of failing to complete their high school education: multiple tardies, poor attendance, lack of parent involvement and support, multiple suspensions, low grades and lack of academic success, and being a pregnant or parenting teen.
5. The Commission heard from the Committee on Dropout Prevention that the availability of Dropout Prevention Grants has stimulated significant interest across the State. The Commission is hopeful that the planned evaluation of the funded proposals will identify successful practices that can be sustained locally and can be replicated in other locations.
6. The Commission finds that it is premature to develop a network for sharing best practices among grant recipients, the public schools and other interested organizations. The Commission recommends such a network be developed after there is data available from the grant recipients that documents practices that have proven to be successful in reducing the dropout rate and increasing the graduation rate. The Commission also encourages the Department of Public Instruction, as a part of its technical support to grant recipients, to assist in the development of this network.
7. Graduation rates should be a key factor used in accountability systems that measure and reward a school's efforts to improve student academic performance and close achievement gaps.

Dropout Commission Adopts Report (cont'd.)

In response to the above listed findings, the Commission's adopted report includes the following recommendations to the 2009 General Assembly:

1. The General Assembly shall appropriate funds for the 11 Learn and Earn early college high schools that received a planning grant in the 2008-2009 fiscal year and are ready to begin operations in the 2009-2010 school 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, in conjunction with the Department of Public Instruction and the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, to direct the appropriate entity to study raising the compulsory attendance age for public school attendance prior to completion of a high school diploma 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 General Assembly shall encourage local boards of education to adopt policies to encourage local businesses to adopt personnel policies to permit parents to attend student conferences, implement programs that assist students in making a successful transition between the middle school and high school years, increase parental involvement in student achievement, reduce suspension and expulsion rates and encourage academic progress during suspensions, and provide assistance and support to encourage pregnant and parenting students to graduate.
5. The General Assembly shall appropriate sufficient funds for Dropout Prevention Grants in the 2009 Session to continue some of the more successful initiatives and also to provide the opportunity for a new round of proposals to be funded.
6. The Commission strongly recommends the following:
 1. Prior to the 2009-2010 school year, the State Board of Education develop a growth model establishing annual goals for continuous and substantial improvement in the cohort graduation rate by local school administrative units.
 2. The State Board establish as a short term goal that local school administrative units meet the annual growth model goals for improvement in the cohort graduation rate beginning with the graduating class of 2010 and continuing annually thereafter.
 3. The State Board establish as a long-term goal a statewide four year cohort graduation rate of ninety percent by 2015.

Each of the above recommendations was adopted by the Committee and will be eligible for action in the legislative session which convenes on January 28th.

Regional Teachers of the Year Announced

Nine teachers throughout the state were recently selected to represent their regions and charter schools as regional Teachers of the Year. Two of this year's nominees are North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program alumni. Jo Peterson Gibbs, of Asheville Middle School, entered the program in 1991 and graduated in 1995 from UNC Asheville, and Matthew Bristow-Smith, of Tarboro High School, entered the program in 1990 and graduated in 1994 from Appalachian State University.

All nine teachers will go on to compete for the title of 2009-10 AT&T North Carolina Teacher of the Year. As regional teachers of the year, each will receive a one-time stipend of \$5,000 and a trip to a national conference. The AT&T 2009-10 North Carolina Teacher of the Year will be announced May 5 at a dinner and awards ceremony in Raleigh.

The regional teachers of the year are:

- North Central Region: Matthew Bristow-Smith, Tarboro High (Edgecombe County Schools);
- Northeast Region: Gina Beaman, Creekside Elementary (Pitt County Schools);
- Northwest Region: Robert Turner, Grandview Middle (Hickory Public Schools);
- Southeast Region: Nicole Murray, James Kenan School of Engineering (Duplin County Schools);
- Southwest Region: Jessica Garner, Porter Ridge High (Union County Schools);
- Sandhills/South Central Region: Martha Anderson, Washington Street Elementary (Richmond County Schools);
- Piedmont-Triad/Central Region: Phillip Little, Northwood High (Chatham County Schools);
- West Region: Jo Peterson Gibbs, Asheville Middle (Asheville City Schools); and
- Charter Schools: John Hall, ArtSpace Charter (Buncombe County).

Nomination Period for Class of 2011 Kenan Fellows is Open

The Kenan Fellows for Curriculum and Leadership Development Program, established in 2000, grew out of a community effort to address math and science teacher retention and recruitment. Classroom teachers selected as Kenan Fellows represent the most outstanding and committed educators across the state. As Fellows, they engage in a two-year fellowship in partnership with distinguished scientists and university faculty to develop innovative curricula for use in classrooms all across N.C.

Recipients will:

- Receive a \$10,000 stipend
- Work with a mentor/researcher in a laboratory to develop new and innovative STEM-related curriculum
- Earn six graduate credits from NC State University

The Kenan Fellows Program is accepting applications for Fellowships through January 30, 2009. K-12 public school teachers from all disciplines are encouraged to apply. School

Nomination Period for Kenan Fellows (cont'd.)

administrators, community leaders, parents of students, and former Kenan Fellows may nominate candidates online. For a map of the eligible counties and more information on how to nominate a candidate, visit the Kenan Fellows Program website at: www.kenanfellows.org.

MeckEd to Hold Open Conversation on Public Education

Mecklenburg Citizens for Public Education (MeckEd) and WTVI invite you to attend a reception and opportunity to learn about Globalization and Education in the 21st Century. Preview the film "*Where We Stand: America's Schools in the 21st Century*" with comments by NC General Assembly Representative Becky Carney, CMS Associate Superintendent Ann Blakeney Clark and CMS Principal Kodra Rattley (International Studies School at Garinger High School). "*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, 200 East 7th Street, Charlotte on Monday, January 26th from 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. Admission is free, and free parking will be available at Seventh Street Station, adjacent to the Museum. To RSVP, call 704-371-8855 or email spierce@mecked.org. For further information, visit <http://www.mecked.org/calendar.htm>.

National News...

Education Highlighted in Inaugural Events

Education is among the list of crises the country faces, according to the new President. In his Inaugural Address, President Barack Obama called on Americans to come together to work to solve the challenges the nation faces in a spirit of public service and personal accountability. "Everywhere we look, there is work to be done. ...We will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age." Though not as pressing a priority as the economy and health care, the fact that education was mentioned so early in the address may mean that President Obama sees education as a policy priority.

Other events leading up to the inauguration echoed the President's call to come together to solve the education problem. At a reception Sunday in honor of Linda Darling-Hammond, head of President Obama's transition team on education, both Darling-Hammond and New York City's Public Schools Chancellor Joel Klein addressed the perceived split in the Democratic Party on education issues. Bipartisan cooperation was the theme at an event Monday evening hosted by the Education Equality Project. While the event was headlined by Mr. Klein and organization cofounder Al Sharpton, many prominent Republican figures spoke at the event, including Senator John McCain and outgoing U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings.

Education Sees Largest Portion of Economic Stimulus Plan

Public schools will see the largest portion of Congress' \$825 billion economic stimulus plan that was unveiled last week. Over the next two years, schools are scheduled to receive \$142 billion, which is more than health care, energy or infrastructure projects will receive.

The stimulus does not come without stipulations, however. In order to receive the money, schools must spend at least a portion of it on high-quality educational tests, ways to recruit and retain top teachers in hard-to-staff schools, and longitudinal data systems that let schools track long-term progress. The plan will also help schools update and repair existing buildings, and require that states use a portion of the funds to attract quality teachers to schools serving low-income and minority students.

Recent Cuts Result in Payroll Shortages

Earlier this week, superintendents in the 152 school districts throughout Alabama were notified of their portion of \$85 million in cuts to elementary and secondary schools in the current fiscal year. The result, eight of Alabama's public school districts won't be able to make payroll through the end of the school year.

The districts, Hazlehurst, Benton County, Indianola, Jefferson Davis County, Kemper County, Tate County, Noxubee County and Covington, are among 14 that the state Department of Education has flagged as potentially developing negative fund balances. Department of Education officials are suggesting small ways for districts to reduce spending including turning off lights and equipment at the end of the day, reallocating fuel costs, and charging more for school meals.

In addition, House Education Committee Chairman Cecil Brown, D-Jackson, announced that a House committee would discuss a bill that would use \$68 million in tobacco tax revenue to restore some K-12 education funding. Even with this assistance, it will take longer for those districts already in debt to get out of the hole. State Superintendent Hank Bounds has stressed that school districts should begin looking at their budgets for 2009-10, stating, "the really ugly picture could be next year."

Education Task Force Urges Alabama to Offer Teacher Incentives

Last Wednesday, the Governor's Commission on Quality Teaching presented their recommendations at a news conference at the Capital. The Commission, appointed by Governor Bob Riley and comprised mostly of teachers and school administrators, recommended that Alabama establish a system that will give teachers greater career advancement opportunities and higher pay without them having to leave the classroom for an administrative position.

Education Task Force (cont'd.)

The Commission's report, "*Innovations in Teaching: Creating Professional Pathways for Alabama Teachers*," which was released in December 2008, recommends that teaching be divided into five levels: apprentice teacher, classroom teacher, professional teacher, master teacher and learning designer. Teachers can advance to higher levels by meeting education and experience requirements, and fulfilling mentorship and leadership responsibilities. Under the current system, the teaching profession offers few options to teachers who want to advance their careers without moving into school administration.

It will be up to the Alabama Board of Education to implement the Commission's recommendations, but the current economic slowdown and education budget cuts may mean money is not initially available to put in to the program. State Schools Superintendent Joe Morton expects that the system will be introduced on a trial basis in one or two school systems. If successful, the program could redesign the teaching profession.

The full report can be viewed at

<http://www.governorpress.alabama.gov/documents/InnovationsinTeachingRpt.pdf> .

Forum News...

Seeking Jay Robinson Award Nominations

The Jay Robinson Leadership Award was established by the Public School Forum Board of Directors in recognition of outstanding leaders in the field of public education. The award may be given to anyone who has displayed innovative, creative, effective leadership for the public schools of North Carolina.

Past winners include Laura Bilbro-Berry, the first Teaching Fellow to be named North Carolina Teacher of the Year; Tom McNeel, superintendent of Caldwell County schools; Jim Causby, two-time state Superintendent of the Year and executive director of the NC Association of School Administrators; Robert Bridges, former superintendent of Wake County Schools and former chair of the state's Raising Achievement and Closing Gap Commission; Superior Court Judge Howard E. Manning, Jr., the trial court judge in the *Leandro* school finance case; Dr. Ann Denlinger, former superintendent of Durham Public Schools and Wilson County Schools and currently President, Wake Education Partnership; Phillip J. Kirk Jr., Vice President for External Relations at Catawba College and Dr. Bill Harrison, superintendent Cumberland County Schools.

The nominations must be postmarked by March 2, 2009. Nominations postmarked after that date and nominations delivered in person will not be accepted. The award ceremony will be held on June 8, 2009, at the North Raleigh Hilton Hotel. Admission will be by invitation only. The honor includes a cash award sponsored by BB&T.

To obtain an application, contact Debra Jordan (djordan@ncforum.org) at 919-781-6833 x. 101 or you can download a copy at www.ncforum.org.

Fun Facts...

Presidential Inauguration, January 20, 2009

- At 12:00 PM on January 20, 2009, Barack H. Obama became the 44th President of the United States.
- He and Vice President Joe R. Biden, Jr. were sworn in before an audience of an estimated 2 million people, the largest inaugural crowd in US history.
- Barack Obama is the third US President to hail from Illinois. Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant were also from Illinois.
- President Obama is the 5th youngest person to serve as President. Theodore Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Bill Clinton and Ulysses S. Grant, in that order, were younger than Obama when they took the oath of office.
- President Obama's Inaugural Address lasted approximately 18 minutes. The shortest address, 135 words and 2 minutes to deliver, was given by President Washington at his second inauguration. William Henry Harrison gave the longest at almost 8,500 words.

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