

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

PDF versions can be found at www.ncforum.org

Volume 11, Issue 31

February 6, 2009

North Carolina's Annual Dropout Rate Falls Below 5 Percent

For the first time in three years, our state's dropout rate is below 5.0 percent. During the 2007-08 academic year, North Carolina high schools reported that 4.97 percent of students dropped out of school, according to the 2007-08 Dropout Report presented to the State Board of Education on Thursday. The report shows 1,116 fewer students across the state dropped out in 2007-08 than in the previous year. Overall, 22,434 of the approximately 450,000 North Carolina high school students dropped out of school in 2007-08.

Dropout rates fell in 66 of the state's 115 school districts with the districts reporting the lowest dropout rates being: Chapel Hill-Carrboro, Dare, Newton Conover City, Elkin City, Mt. Airy City, Hertford, Yadkin, Guilford, Union, and Iredell-Statesville.

Superintendent of Burke County Schools, David Burlison, addressed the State Board on Thursday sharing that his school district has made high school graduation a priority. "We realized that the dropout problem was not just a high school issue, but a pre-K – 12 issue. To solve the dropout problem it takes everyone working together: schools, partners, churches, and the entire community."

For more information, and to view the 2007-08 Dropout Report in its entirety, go to www.ncpublicschools.org/research/dropout/reports .

State Health Plan Requires Immediate Attention

According to the report presented at a legislative briefing on Wednesday, North Carolina may need \$1 billion over the next two years to cover claims under the State Health Plan. The price tag doesn't include an estimated \$228 million that would have to be paid by public employees whose spouses or dependents receive coverage. That figure would equate to a 30.8 percent premium increase through mid-2011 for employees receiving those coverage options. Currently, employees pay no monthly premium for their own coverage. The premium increases and cash injections required by the state could be reduced if some benefits are scaled back, the report said. The State Health Plan covers about 667,000 public employees, retirees and their dependents. The amounts also don't include an additional \$300 million needed starting in April because the plan is in danger of running out of money .

State Health Plan			
Projected Additional Funding Requirements			
Employer Premiums by Fund Source (\$million)			
	FY 2009-10	FY 2010-11	Biennium
General Fund	\$343.5	\$458.0	\$801.5
Highway Fund	16.0	21.4	37.4
Other Receipts	70.9	94.5	165.4
Total	\$430.4	\$573.9	\$1,004.3

More at Four Shows Continued Success

A new report from the FPG Child Development Institute at UNC Chapel Hill shows that the More at Four program continues to successfully prepare at-risk 4-year-olds for entering school by helping them improve language and literacy, math, general knowledge and social skills. The report concludes that More at Four continues to produce significant growth among at-risk and underserved children across all of these areas, and produces even greater benefits among children with lower levels of English proficiency.

The FPG Child Development Institute has been conducting independent statewide evaluations of More at Four since the program began in 2001, in order to examine program quality and child outcomes. This year's report on North Carolina's nationally-recognized program, "offers solid proof that More at Four is a critical part of the Department of Public Instruction's efforts to prepare every student for school success," according to John Pruette, executive director of the N.C. Office of School Readiness.

More at Four, which has been ranked as one of top two pre-kindergarten programs in the nation for the past three years by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), operates programs in all 100 counties through public school districts, child care centers and Head Start agencies. More at Four funding is administered through the Office of School Readiness in the N.C. Department of Public Instruction.

The complete report can be viewed at www.fpg.unc.edu/~mafeval. For more information about More at Four, visit www.osr.nc.gov.

NC SPIN to Discuss School Governance on Sunday's Program

Governor Perdue's action making Cumberland County School Superintendent Bill Harrison the Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the State Board of Education will be discussed this weekend on NC SPIN, a public affairs program televised statewide. This week's show is devoted entirely to education, talking about the new structure for public education as well as how our universities and communities colleges can respond to budget cuts. This week's show will include guest panelist John Dornan, Executive Director of the Public School Forum of North Carolina. Check local listings for times in your area.

2009 NC Science Summit: Best Practices in STEM Education

This year's NC Science Summit will be held April 19-20, 2009 at the Embassy Suites in Cary. The focus of the event will be the importance of a systematic approach to STEM education, highlighting the nation's most innovative models and successful practices.

Co-sponsors for the event are the North Carolina Science, Mathematics, and Technology Education Center and the James B. Hunt, Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy, with program support from the International Center for Leadership in Education.

To read more about the summit, download a brochure or register online at www.LeaderEd.com/NCSTEMregister.html.

Task Force Report on Childhood Obesity Now Available

The North Carolina Task Force on Preventing Childhood Obesity recently released its report which highlights disturbing childhood obesity trends in North Carolina and 22 detailed recommendations for reversing those trends. The Task Force reviewed current state-level activities in the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction, and the N.C. Health and Wellness Trust Fund that address the prevention of childhood obesity.

Among the report's findings were:

- North Carolina had the fifth highest national rate of obese children in 2007
- The cost of obesity in NC's youth was nearly \$16 million in 2003
- In 2004, overweight North Carolina adolescents had Medicaid expenditures that were 33 percent higher than those for healthy-weight adolescents, and the obese group had expenditures that were 25 percent higher
- A significantly higher percentage of obese adolescents had a claim for diabetes, asthma, or other respiratory conditions than the healthy-weight adolescents
- This may be the first generation of children and youth in history to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents due to obesity-related health problems.

The full report can be viewed at http://www.ncpublicschools.org/state_board/taskforce.html.

Newspaper Lovers of the World . . . More Bad News

Those of us who can't begin a day without reading a newspaper over a cup of coffee should prepare for another round of changes at our daily papers -- at least if you live in Raleigh or Charlotte. The McClatchy publishing firm, which owns both the *Raleigh News and Observer* and the *Charlotte Observer*, just announced that deep cuts, \$100 - \$110 million are in the offing and are likely to negatively impact both papers. Unfortunately, both have already been impacted by staffing cuts and reductions in the coverage and volume of news being provided each day.

Sparking the cutback announcement was a reported \$21.7 million loss for McClatchy's publishing firm in the fourth quarter. McClatchy isn't alone in feeling the impact of the economic downturn. News Corp., the media conglomerate of Rupert Murdoch's, just reported a \$6.4 billion loss for the latest quarter, largely due to a large write-down in the value of its assets which include the *Wall Street Journal* and Fox broadcasting.

NC Legislative News...

Senator Richard Stevens (R-Wake) will be joining Senator Vernon Malone (D-Wake) as co-chair of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Education. Vice chairs include Senator Malcolm Graham (D-Mecklenburg) and Senator Joe Sam Queen (D-Haywood).

Senator A.B. Swindell (D-Nash) will be joining Senators Linda Garrou (D-Forsyth); Charlie Dannelly (D-Mecklenburg); and Charlie Alberston (D-Duplin), as co-chairs of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

National News...

Duncan Announces DOE Assistant Secretaries

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced last Friday President Barack Obama's nomination of, Assistant Secretary for Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development and Peter Cunningham, Assistant Secretary for Communications and Outreach as Assistant Secretaries for the Department of Education

Ms. Martin received her Juris Doctorate from the University of Texas, School of Law, a Masters in Public Affairs from the LBJ School of Public Affairs, and her B.A. in Economics and International Studies from Manhattan College. Carmel Martin was an Associate in the Education Group with Hogan & Hartson L.L.P in the mid 1990's, counseling school districts, colleges and universities. From there, she moved to the United States Department of Justice where her focus was on enforcing key provisions of Civil Rights Act. She has served as Counsel to both Senator Tom Daschle and Senator Jeff Bingaman before becoming the Associate Director for Domestic Policy at the Center for American Progress in 2004. Most recently, she has worked with Senator Edward M. Kennedy as Chief Education Advisor on the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions from 2005 until December 2008, where she counseled the Senator on all education issues and led negotiations on all education legislation.

Peter Cunningham received a B.A. in Philosophy at Duke University and an M.S. in Journalism from Columbia University. He is the founder and President of Cunningham Communications, a Chicago communications firm specializing in local government, politics and non-profits. Their clients have included the Chicago Public Schools, Chicago Housing Authority, Ariel Investments, Axelrod and Associates and the Regional Transportation Authority. Prior to founding Cunningham Communications in 1997, Mr. Cunningham worked as a speechwriter and aide in the Office of Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley, the Illinois Attorney General's office and the Finance Committee for the Chicago City Council. He began his career as a reporter and writer for business and general interest publications.

Arizona Education Hit Hard by Budget Cuts

Arizona Governor Jan Brewer signed legislation last Saturday to fix the current state budget that calls for \$580 million in spending cuts, as well as paves the way for lawmakers to begin dealing with an even larger budget deficit expected for the next fiscal year. Education took the hardest hit, with the university system losing \$142 million, the community college system losing \$9 million, and public schools losing \$133 in state aid.

Arizona Education Hit Hard (cont'd.)

The legislation, proposed on January 16th by House Appropriations Chairman John Kavanagh, requires spending cuts from every state agency, leaving it up to each department to decide whether to fire employees or enforce mandatory unpaid time off. Public schools are expected to come up with their own money-saving plans. According to Representative Kavanagh, further cuts are likely to education, as it makes up almost half of the state budget.

The proposal outlines more than 500 options to help close a \$1.6 billion budget deficit this year and a projected \$3 billion shortfall in the next. Among the options are the phasing out of state funds for teacher bonuses, elimination of all-day kindergarten, and the suspension of money set aside for items such as furniture, textbooks and new school buses.

More than 1,500 public education supporters, including teachers, students, and elected officials, gathered on Arizona's Capital mall on Sunday, January 25th to protest the proposal. Assistant Senate Minority Leader Rebecca Rios, D-Apache Junction, said the protest was one of the largest crowds she had ever seen on the Capitol Mall.

Forum News...

NC CAP SYNERGY 2009 Conference – Scholarships to attend now available!

The North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs (NC CAP) is pleased to announce the availability of \$6,000 in scholarships to attend the statewide afterschool SYNERGY Conference, scheduled for April 29 – May 1, 2009, at the Koury Center in Greensboro. The event will feature over 30 workshops, 20 vendors, networking receptions, and Pre-Conference opportunities on curriculum training and building effective partnerships with businesses. Persons interested in applying should complete a scholarship application and special registration form and submit to Katie Biggerstaff no later than Friday, February 27, 2009. Scholarship recipients will be notified on Monday, March 9, 2009.

NC CAP extends a special invitation to elected officials to attend a youth-led Forum on Afterschool from 4:15 pm - 6:15 pm on April 30. Youth leaders will share their perspectives on the importance of high quality afterschool programs. The event is meant to foster dialogue between afterschool providers, community leaders, parents and others on the issues surrounding quality afterschool care.

SYNERGY is held in collaboration with the NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC Department of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, Support Our Students Program, Boys & Girls Clubs, NCSU 4-H Youth Development, and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

To obtain a scholarship application or register for the Youth Forum, visit: www.nccap.net/about/conference.cfm or contact Katie Biggerstaff at 919-781-6833 x132.

2008 Local Finance Study is Here!

The Public School Forum's annual Local Finance Study is available for order. This study has become the "last word" in county expenditures on schools. The study annually ranks North Carolina's 100 counties on their actual spending on schools as well as the effort they make in supporting schools. School boards, finance officers, and county commissioners routinely rely on the Forum's annual study as budget decisions are made.

"The Forum's Local Finance Study has been an essential tool when I teach school finance. I use the study as a basic "text" in helping graduate students in school administration understand finance and taxation theory as well as value-laden issues such as equity, fairness, and responsibility." – Dr. Ken Jenkins, Appalachian State University

To order your copy today, visit the Forum's website and complete the order form by going to: <http://www.ncforum.org/doclib/lfs-order.aspx> .

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.

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 .