

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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School Governance Issue Bubbling

The Public School Forum weighed in on the school governance issue this week with the issuance of recommendations coming out of a six-month study on ways to improve the management and accountability of public schools. Last spring, the Forum Board identified school governance as one of two critical issues facing the state. That was long before Governor Perdue announced the creation of a Chief Executive Officer for schools and before the State Superintendent of Public Instruction formally wrote to the leaders of the General Assembly requesting a clarification of her role.

Since then, editorial writers have opined on the issue, education reporters have recorded reactions around the state and political affairs programs like NC Spin have featured the issue.

There are two things that most people don't know about school governance. First, North Carolina is the only state in the nation which constitutionally gives the State Board of Education the primary authority over schools. To put the elected State Superintendent in charge of education would require constitutional changes making the State Board more of an advisory body and redefining the role of the State Superintendent. Second, the average citizen does not know that since the mid-nineties the State Superintendent has not been in charge of education. This issue has largely been one for "inside the Raleigh beltliners," not the public at large.

Suffice it to say, today's situation remains murky. Governor Perdue to her credit has gone as far as she can without a constitutional change and her move should bring some clarity to school governance; however, a long-term remedy and an end to the ambivalence around the elected Superintendent's position will require constitutional action.

That is the conclusion reached by the Forum Study Group that analyzed the situation for six months. Follow this link (http://www.ncforum.org/doclib/Forum_paper.pdf) to read the position paper issued this week by the Forum. It lays out a series of recommendations aimed at strengthening the governance of public schools. The full report is also printed at the end of this week's *Friday Report*.

School Finances . . . Where to Begin?

This year may go down as the year that more important news broke in the opening weeks of both Congress and the General Assembly than any in recent memory. In what seems like record-breaking time, Congress appears close to an agreement on an \$800 billion stimulus package that would have been virtually impossible to imagine only two months ago.

School Finances (cont'd)

In like fashion, state lawmakers are receiving back-to-back briefings revealing budget problems that have left the state facing what appears to be a 10%, or \$2 billion plus, budget deficit. Last week, lawmakers were briefed on the dimension of the shortfall in the state employee's health plan – a shortfall that has given members of the General Assembly a \$300 million problem that will apparently have to be dealt with immediately, and a \$1.2 billion shortfall that will have to be resolved in the budget debates soon to begin. This week, lawmakers were briefed on community college and UNC enrollment growth projections – projections that add potentially another \$100 million to the list of fiscal challenges faced by the General Assembly.

For educators, watching the federal stimulus package unfold has been like watching a roller coaster. The House version would have provided the largest federal budget increase for education in the nation's history. The Senate version stripped much of the education spending out of their version of the bill. The current compromise is somewhere in the middle leaning, however, more to the stripped-down Senate plan for education.

Closer to home, the Department of Public Instruction responded this week to the Governor's directive to frame 3%, 5% and 7% cuts from the education budget. Those proposed cuts are printed below. It should be noted that these cuts have not been presented to, or approved by, the State Board of Education. They are a first pass at what it would take to remove 7% from the K-12 budget.

Public Schools Budget - Possible Reduction Options for Discussion January 25, 2009

Category	FY 2009-10 Appropriation	Amount	Reduction Options		
	Positions		3%	5%	7%
Central Office		\$ 121,425,235	\$ -	\$ (6,470,262)	\$ (6,470,262)
Classroom Teachers	68,269.50	3,688,454,481	-	(38,051,322)	(170,211,234)
Teacher Assistants		520,024,110	(130,135,446)	(130,135,446)	(130,135,446)
Instructional Support	7,559.0	455,370,807	-	(10,994,165)	(21,506,394)
School Building Admin.	4,304.6	324,334,058	-	(11,979,360)	(11,979,360)
Classroom Materials/Supplies		90,226,179	(3,895,397)	(7,889,231)	(7,889,231)
Textbooks		110,108,366	(37,977,278)	(37,977,278)	(37,977,278)
Mentor Pay		11,164,616	-	(558,231)	(1,116,462)
Literacy Coaches		12,048,320	-	(6,024,160)	(6,024,160)
Noninstructional Support		412,202,880	(10,305,072)	(20,610,144)	(20,610,144)
Academically Gifted		69,694,356	-	(3,484,718)	(3,484,718)
At-Risk		228,951,550	-	(2,862,330)	(2,862,330)
DSSF		78,371,565	-	(9,162,487)	(9,162,487)
Children with Special Needs		693,457,153	-	(13,869,143)	(13,869,143)
Improving Student Accountability		38,339,798	(38,339,798)	(38,339,798)	(38,339,798)

Category	FY 2009-10 Appropriation	Amount	Reduction Options		
	Positions		3%	5%	7%
Limited English		80,151,802	-	(4,007,590)	(4,007,590)
Low Wealth		196,927,160	-	(18,161,868)	(18,161,868)
School Technology		10,000,000	-	(4,000,000)	(4,000,000)
Small County		45,189,185	-	(1,511,912)	(1,511,912)
Staff Development		12,641,249	-	(1,264,125)	(1,264,125)
Transportation		432,636,860	(12,800,000)	(12,800,000)	(12,800,000)
CTE Months of Empl.	6,619.5	372,966,150	-	(6,479,508)	(16,198,772)
CTE Program Support		19,391,341	-	(575,000)	(575,000)
Small Specialty High Schools		7,239,800	-	-	(4,833,728)
Child and Family Support Teams		12,529,125	-	(6,251,908)	(6,251,908)
Focused Education Reform		4,833,728	-	(483,373)	(483,373)
Finance Officer Staff Dev.		64,560	(64,560)	(64,560)	(64,560)
School Bus Replacement		69,790,884	(7,500,000)	(7,500,000)	(7,500,000)
Non-Profits					
Public School Forum (Collaborative Pilot)		2,342,705	(234,271)	(585,676)	(585,676)
Communities in Schools		1,607,500	(160,750)	(401,875)	(803,750)
Schools Attuned		820,911	(82,091)	(205,228)	(410,456)
ExplorNet		300,000	(30,000)	(75,000)	(150,000)
Teacher Cadet		400,000	(40,000)	(100,000)	(200,000)
NC Network		312,625	(31,263)	(78,156)	(156,313)
Science Olympiad		150,000	(15,000)	(37,500)	(75,000)
Teach for America		950,000	(95,000)	(237,500)	(475,000)
Math & Science		100,000	(10,000)	(25,000)	(50,000)
Project Enlightenment		200,000	(20,000)	(50,000)	(100,000)
<i>Teacher fellows was not reduced (scholarships are committed)</i>					
Other Programs					
Children's Trust (Balance eliminated 5% & 7%)		247,500	-	(247,500)	(247,500)
Per. Financial Literacy (80% reduction)		500,000	(400,000)	(400,000)	(400,000)
Critical Foreign Language (Eliminate)		500,000	(500,000)	(500,000)	(500,000)
Teach Acad Literacy Coaches (50%)		1,500,000	(750,000)	(750,000)	(750,000)
NC Wise Owl (Subscription) (Delete SAS)		1,328,000	(500,000)	(500,000)	(500,000)
Info Highway (pays for connectivity)		1,200,000	(1,200,000)	(1,200,000)	(1,200,000)
<i>Not reduced: IT projects, Connectivity, Governor's School, NCVPS and Learn and Earn On-Line.</i>					

	FY 2009-10 Appropriation		Reduction Options		
Category	Positions	Amount	3%	5%	7%
Other More at Four LR 84,635,709		85,735,535	-	-	(6,000,000)
A set reduction to appropriated funds. Only reducing State appropriations. Lottery Funds (\$84.6 million) not reduced.					
Subtotal SPSF			(245,085,926)	(407,119,191)	(572,112,815)
SPSF Reduction Requirements Based on FY 2008-09 Authorized Budget		8,166,968,601	(245,009,058)	(408,348,430)	(571,687,802)
Variance from Target (positive = over cut)			\$ 76,868	\$ (1,229,239)	\$ 425,013
Allotments not reduced:	Total	\$278,313,828			
Annual Leave, Math Science Supplement, ADM Reserve, Learn and Earn, Learn and Earn On-Line, EVAAS, NBPTS, Textbooks for Children with Special Needs, School Breakfast, Testing, Tort Claims, Workers Comp, Longevity, Short Term Disability, Reserve for Connectivity, Teaching Fellows, IT Projects, and Governors School.					

Highlights of the Compromise Federal Stimulus Package Now Under Consideration

- Preventing Teacher Layoffs and Education Cuts by the States
 - Prevents teacher layoffs and other cutbacks in education and other key services, by establishing a \$53.6 billion State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, including \$40.6 billion to local school districts using existing funding formulas, which can be used for preventing cutbacks, preventing layoffs, school modernization, or other purposes; \$5 billion to states as bonus grants for meeting key performance measures in education; and \$8 billion to states for other high priority needs such as public safety and other critical services, which may include education.
- Making College More Affordable
 - Increases the higher education tax credit to a maximum of \$2,500. Also makes it available to nearly 4 million low-income students who had not had any access to the higher education tax credit in the past – by making it partially refundable.
 - Increases the maximum Pell Grant by \$500, for a maximum of \$5,350 in 2009 and \$5,550 in 2010.
 - Adds \$200 million to the vital College Work-Study program.
- Investing in Early Childhood Development
 - Provides \$1.1 billion for Early Head Start and \$1 billion for Head Start, which provide comprehensive development services to low-income infants and preschool children – thereby providing services for 110,000 additional infants and children.
 - Provides \$2 billion for the Child Care Development Block Grant to provide child care services to an additional 300,000 children in low-income families while their parents go to work.
- Providing Other Key Education Investments
 - Provides \$13 billion for Title I grants to help disadvantaged kids reach high academic standards – ensuring that in this period of tight state and local budgets these vital services are maintained.
 - Provides \$12.2 billion for grants for IDEA (Special Education) to increase the federal share of these costs, and prevent these mandatory costs from forcing states to cut other areas of education.

Courts to Take Up Issue of Rights of Students Who Receive Long-Term Suspensions

A long-debated issue may be resolved by a legal challenge contending that suspended students who are denied alternate educational opportunities are being denied their right to an education.

The suit has been filed in Beaufort County on behalf of two teenage girls who were suspended from school because of fighting. They were then denied access to an alternate form of education away from their regular school regimen, subsequently losing the remainder of a year's education.

Student advocacy groups and those attempting to improve student drop out rates have long argued that schools are obligated to continue to provide access to education for students on long-term suspensions (i.e., suspensions of more than 10 days). An estimated 4,400 North Carolina students are given long-term suspensions each year.

The outcome of this suit will be heavily scrutinized by those who call for more alternate forms of schooling for suspended students and by those who contend that the cost of those alternatives and the need to have students take responsibility for the consequences of their actions justify the punishment.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools May Cut 700 Positions

If budget conditions do not improve, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) may need to cut 700 positions, including 350 teachers. Superintendent Peter Gorman said state and county officials, who are struggling to balance their own budgets, have asked schools to outline how to cut 5% of state and county money from their budgets. For CMS, this means \$53 million in cuts. "Every area of CMS will be affected," Gorman told school board members last week as they met to hammer out CMS's 2009-2010 budget. While they made every effort to spare classrooms, they were unable to do so.

The final budget proposal from the school board will be sent to Mecklenburg County commissioners in mid-May. Because the proposed cuts are subject to debate and alteration by the board, Gorman encouraged the board members to talk to teachers and principals, as well as each other, in hopes of developing a consensus on where cuts should come from.

The proposed cuts include:

- 350 teachers, 29 assistant principals and 63 school-based support positions
- All middle school sports programs except intramural programs
- About 50 school security personnel. Charlotte-Mecklenburg police school resource officers would not be affected
- About \$6.3 million from the district's building-services program
- Elimination of the High School Challenge, a program that sends extra resources to four of the county's lowest-performing high schools
- Consolidating schools with small student bodies

Legislative News...

This week Representative Leo Daughtry (R-Johnston) filed a bill that calls for the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to be appointed by the governor. The proposed constitutional amendment would have to be put to a statewide vote, which Representative Daughtry proposes for the November 3, 2010 ballot.

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 Local School Finance Study has been of great value to school systems across North Carolina. It has provided the information necessary that has allowed school systems to be able to accurately compare the level of local funding from their county with that of other school systems across North Carolina. This ability has led to significant increases in local funding for many school systems." – Jim Causby; Executive Director, NC School Superintendents Association.

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

Creating an Educational Governance Framework For the Twenty-First Century

Introduction . . .

In her third week as Governor of North Carolina, Beverly Perdue made an announcement that caught many by surprise. She announced that she was appointing a Chief Executive Officer who would both direct the public schools of North Carolina and be recommended as Chair of the State Board of Education.

The Governor's decision to end the confusion around lines of accountability and responsibility for public education was a positive first step toward clarifying the governance of public education, the largest enterprise in North Carolina, representing 37% of the entire state budget and touching the lives of 1.4 million young people.

For the past six months, the Public School Forum has been examining the governance structure of schools in North Carolina and is recommending that the State go even further in clarifying accountability for education. Given that the new Administration came into office recognizing the need to overhaul a system that has remained little changed since 1945, the new Governor could provide the leadership to modernize the educational governance structure by calling for constitutional and operational changes that could greatly strengthen the governance, and hopefully, the effectiveness of the State's education system.

Background . . .

Since the Public School Forum came into being in 1985 every-other-year its Board of Directors devotes the better part of a school year to examining issues critical to education and framing recommendations that have the potential to strengthen schools across North Carolina. During what the Forum calls "Study Group" years, the Forum Board is converted into the equivalent of a Legislative Study Commission, examining issues, hearing from educational experts within and without of North Carolina, while working toward a consensus on recommendations. Previous Forum Study Groups have led to major legislative and policy changes including the creation of the Teaching Fellows Program, the establishment of supplemental funds for low-wealth and small schools, the beginning of the state's educational technology fund and much more.

In the year prior to a Study Group examination, the Forum Board discusses at length the most pressing issues facing education in North Carolina and ultimately settles on an issue. However, in 2008, the Forum Board deviated from past practice and opted to focus on two distinctly different issues, both of which were viewed as critical to the future of education.

Roughly one-half of the Forum Board chose to be part of a study focusing on strategies the state could employ to improve both the quality and quantity of leaders for North Carolina's schools. The other one-half of the Forum Board chose to examine ways that the governance of North Carolina's schools and the State's long-range educational planning process could be strengthened to insure that education will make more of a contribution to North Carolina throughout the twenty-first century.

What follows is a position paper that will outline four recommendations that the Forum believes have the potential to improve education for the young people across North Carolina.

Executive Summary . . .

The advent of a new Governor's Administration offers a timely opportunity to change the current system of governing K-12 schools – a system that is widely perceived as confusing and devoid of clear accountability lines. At the root of the problem is a lack of clarity around the role and responsibilities of a State Superintendent of Public Instruction who is elected by the people, but essentially stripped of day-to-day authority for administering the State's educational system as a result of legislation enacted in the mid-nineteen nineties that gave the State Board of Education the authority not only to establish educational policy but to oversee the day-to-day administration of the Department of Public Instruction.

Additionally, the State Board of Education in the mid-nineties created a Deputy Superintendent's position to serve at the pleasure of the State Board, and to assume the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) role that previously was performed by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The result was a school governance structure that many considered a "four-headed" monster with unclear and sometimes confusing lines of authority between the elected State Superintendent, the Chairman of the State Board, the Governor's Office and the Deputy Superintendent.

Governor Perdue's quick action to establish a CEO who also will chair the State Board of Education is a positive step toward ending the confusion that has existed. The Forum Study Group offers the following recommendations to the new Administration and to the General Assembly in the hopes that policymakers will take additional steps that will strengthen the governance of public education while establishing even clearer lines of accountability and responsibility for the years ahead.

Forum Study Group XIII Recommendations

Recommendation One:

The General Assembly should place a constitutional amendment proposition on the ballot that would call for the elimination of the elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction position and instead empower the State Board of Education to appoint a Commissioner of K-12 Education.

Recommendation Two:

The proposed constitutional amendment proposition should include a call for reconstituting the State Board of Education in the following manner:

The Governor will appoint 8 members of the State Board each of whom will represent one of the 8 educational regions in the State.

The Governor will also appoint the Chair of the State Board who will serve at the pleasure of the Governor.

The Speaker of the House & President Pro Tempore of the Senate will each appoint three members of the State Board.

All Board appointments should reflect the diversity of both North Carolina's people and geography.

The Lt. Governor and State Treasurer will continue to serve as members of the Board by virtue of position.

The terms of office for Board members will be for six years. Board members will be limited to serving no more than two, consecutive six year terms.

The initial members of the State Board will have terms of either two, four or six years. All subsequently appointed members of the State Board will be appointed to six year terms to provide for staggered terms of Board members.

Upon passage of the proposed constitutional amendment, the State Board shall be reconstituted as described above within six months of passage, giving the Board adequate time to conduct a national search for an Appointed Commissioner of K-12 Education, and be prepared to implement the transition from an elected State Superintendent of Instruction to coincide with the end of current Council of State terms following the 2012 elections

Recommendation Three:

The State Board should conduct a wage comparability study comparing DPI salaries with those paid to education in the top twenty performing school systems in the nation, the Departments of Education in the nation's largest twenty states and to those in the Community College and UNC systems, with a special focus on pay for the CEO's and top administrative staff. If the study finds a disparity between North Carolina's DPI reward system and those in the comparability study, the Board should make recommendations for change to the General Assembly.

Recommendation Four:

The Forum commends the Governor-Elect with her decision to reinvigorate the Education Cabinet upon assuming office and calls on her to develop strategies that would lead to an integration of economic development and educational planning.

Rationale Behind Recommendations

Recommendation One: Amend the Constitution

While Governor Perdue's actions intend to make clear accountability lines in education, they will not totally end today's confusion around the role of the elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Every other official in state government who is elected through a statewide vote of the people is clearly in charge of his or her branch of State Government (*i.e.*, the Commissioners of Labor, Agriculture and Insurance, the Attorney General, *et al*).

Only in education does an official elected by a statewide vote of the people become an honorific position with little if any authority over their area of responsibility. As long as the position exists, to many average voters there will remain an assumption that they are electing “the person in charge.” The very title “State Superintendent of Public Instruction,” to the average voter and to most educators, implies the kind of authority that a local superintendent of school has.

That was a key finding in an exhaustive study of the structure and organization of education in North Carolina that was recently conducted on behalf of the General Assembly by Evergreen Solutions, a consulting firm hired to examine the State’s educational system. That report, issued in January of 2009, cited feedback such as the following:

- *“A clear pathway for accountability and leadership is non-existent in our state. Districts currently recognize multiple “islands” of governance with mandates coming from DPI, SBOE, Lt. Governor and the Governor. Add Judge Manning’s directives from the bench to the mix and we have chaos.”*
- *“ . . . no one is really in charge. Without the State Superintendent having authority to act as a superintendent, there is no real leadership and no one is seen as having authority . . . “*

That type of feedback, reinforced by extensive interviews and surveys, led the Evergreen Solutions consultants to conclude *“. . . the current governance structure that diffuses responsibility and hinders accountability needs to be changed. The current hybrid situation does not work.”*

The Forum Study Group reached the same conclusion as a result of hearing similar input from multiple sources and drawing comparisons between the governance of public schools and that of Community Colleges and the UNC System. The comparisons between public education and the State’s other systems were best summed up by a high-ranking state official who observed:

“If I need to know where UNC stands on an issue, I make one call to the President’s office and get an answer. If someone needs to know something about the Community College system, one phone call to the President’s office will do it. However, when it comes to Public Schools one has to decide whether to call the State Superintendent, the Deputy Superintendent, the Chairman of the State Board of Education; or, would it be simpler to go directly to the Governor’s Office? Once that is decided one needs to decide how many people to contact and in what order.”

In comparing the governance of public schools to that of either the Community College or UNC Systems, two major differences are clear. First, the governance of both systems of higher education has tended to be stable. There is a continuity of direction and leadership. Following an election and a change of administration in State Government, one does not wonder, for instance, who will be in charge of UNC or what new directions they will embark on. UNC’s North Carolina Tomorrow initiative, as an example, which started two years ago, will continue to set the direction for the University System in the years ahead.

In contrast to that, the direction and priorities for public schools are very much subject to changes in administrations because of the degree to which school governance has become politicized, especially in the previous eight years, culminating with the Governor's Education Advisor, an unsuccessful candidate for the office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction, becoming Deputy State Superintendent, thus in charge of the day-to-day operations of the Department of Public Instruction.

Those differences led the Forum Study Group to conclude that the goals of any governance changes should be threefold. One, to professionalize the leadership of the Department and create a governance system that could attract and retain high-quality educational leaders to be entrusted with guiding the State's public schools.

Second, a governance system should, as much as possible, lead to continuity and stability of leadership. Third the system should end today's confusion around lines of authority and accountability.

The Forum Study Group, however, reached one very different solution than that proposed by the Evergreen Solutions consultants. The Study Group is recommending that the General Assembly place a constitutional change on the ballot intended to end the leadership confusion once and for all, while strengthening today's governance system for public education.

The Evergreen Solutions report pointed to previous efforts to change the constitutional language governing public schools and concluded that it was politically impossible to successfully gain the public support needed to change the constitution. The Forum Study Group disagrees with that view.

Given the current state of affairs, legitimate concerns about whether today's public schools are capable of giving young people the educational foundation they need in the twenty-first century, mounting awareness of the large number of students dropping out of the State's high schools and increased focus on the shortcomings of today's educational governance system, the Study Group believes that if the State's political leaders were to give strong support to a constitutional change, the public would vote in the affirmative. Thus, the key recommendation coming from the Study Group is not to seek a half-way solution to today's diffused governing system, but to change it altogether through the constitutional amendment process.

If successful the recommended constitutional change would result in the same type of governance structure that exists in both the Community College and UNC Systems. Appointed Board members would employ a Commissioner or CEO of Public Education who would be accountable to the Board. The position of State Superintendent of Public Instruction would be eliminated.

Recommendation Two: Overhaul the State Board of Education

The importance of North Carolina's State Board of Education can not be overstated. North Carolina is the only state in the nation which gives the State Board the constitutional authority to administer and supervise public education.

Recognizing the importance of the State Board, the Forum Study Group recommends that it, like the Community College System Board the UNC Board of Governors and the boards of most major state commissions, include appointed representatives of not only the Governor but of the State Senate and House of Representatives.

The Study Group recommendations maintain and in one important way increase the strong Governor's model currently in place. The recommendations would insure that the Governor not only appoints the majority of the members to the State Board, but they would also give the Governor the power to name the Chair of the State Board who would serve at the pleasure of the Governor. Currently, the State Board elects its Chair and Vice Chair, albeit, Chairmanship recommendations from the Governor typically are supported.

Additionally, the Study Group recommendations would give three appointments each to the President Pro Tempore and to the Speaker of the House in an effort to create closer ties to the General Assembly upon which education depends for financial support.

Last, the Study Group recommends six year terms of office for State Board members instead of today's eight-year terms. No other branch of education has terms as long as the State Board's current eight year terms. That creates today's situation where, barring State Board seats becoming open because of death, relocation or resignation, a newly elected Governor will not be able to appoint a majority of members to the Board until, or unless, they are elected to a second term of office.

Recommendation Three: Conduct a Wage Comparability Study of the Department of Public Instruction

Professionalizing the leadership of public schools is not as simple as clarifying who is in charge. Over time, the salaries paid to key employees in the State Department of Public Instruction (SDPI) have become less and less competitive.

In recent years, high-ranking SDPI employees have left leadership positions in state government only to receive considerably higher salaries in large school systems within North Carolina. Top positions within the Department are paid at salaries equal to or little higher than school principals of large schools. Leadership salaries within the Department are paid at a rate far less than that found in the state's university system.

The Study Group believes that any effort to professionalize the department must include an examination of wage comparability with positions carrying similar responsibility in both the private and public sector. This study could be undertaken by the State Board immediately and any actions recommended as a result of a study could be made directly to the General Assembly for action.

Recommendation Four: Work to Integrate Educational & Economic Development Planning

The Public School Forum has organized nine studies of best educational practices in other countries. The most recent four studies have focused on countries that are emerging as economic leaders – China, India, Singapore and Ireland.

In each of those countries, economic development and educational planning are one and the same. Education in those countries is viewed as the basic building block for reaching national economic aspirations.

In contrast, education planning and economic development planning in the United States tend to take place in isolation. Commerce Departments and Education Departments work within separate “silos.”

While things like drop out rates or lower participation in STEM-related studies (i.e., science, technology, engineering and mathematics) are bemoaned in economic terms, such concerns rarely lead to integrated planning that would better focus education priorities on contributing to accomplishing economic goals.

Newly installed Governor Perdue is to be commended for announcing her intent to revive the Education Cabinet, a legislatively-created group designed to bring about closer collaboration and cooperation between the State’s three educational systems.

The Forum Study Group recommends that the Governor go even farther in attempting to make North Carolina a leader in integrating economic development and educational planning. Such an initiative could result in early and more intensive counseling of students regarding jobs for the future. It could lead to strengthening community college and university programs in areas likely to prosper in the new economy. It could be central to the development of long-range education planning.

Conclusion . . .

“The existing division of authority at the state level serves to confuse those administering the schools locally. . . This arrangement makes for confusion, duplication and uncertainty of duties. It is responsible for a lack of coordination not only in administering the public schools but also in promoting a program of school improvement.”

The description of North Carolina’s school governance written above was not written in 2009. It was written in 1948 as part of a “Report of the State Education Commission” that was an omnibus study of education in North Carolina.

The description, written sixty years ago, remains largely valid today. And the problem did not emerge within the last eight years. The Public School Forum and other organizations have been calling for a constitutional amendment that would clarify the governance of the public schools since the mid-nineties.

As noted in the introduction to this position paper, the Forum commends Governor Perdue for proposing changes aimed at clarifying responsibility and accountability for the public schools within weeks of assuming office. The Forum Study Group believes the recommendations outlined in this position paper offer the Governor and the General Assembly a way to finish the job and create a school governance system that will serve the State well for years to come.

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