

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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State's Revenue Continues to Decline

According to a report released Monday by State Controller David McCoy's office, the gap between actual and budgeted tax collections is continuing to widen. While the state took in \$1.72 billion in tax and non-tax revenue last month, that amount is down 14 percent from the \$2 billion the state took in January 2008. McCoy's report found general operating revenues are down \$690 million for the first seven months of the fiscal year, about 6 percent below last year's totals. "Revenue growth is slowing dramatically," McCoy said in a news release. "This decline was expected, and the state's financial plan was adjusted, but we are continuing to feel the strain of budget pressures."

Governor Perdue projects the state government shortfall could reach \$2.2 billion before the fiscal year ends in June. Taking steps to manage the shortfall, she has now asked state agencies to reduce their budgets this year by as much as 9 percent. Additionally, as a precautionary measure, Governor Perdue has stated she will transfer up to \$300 million into the state's General Fund from such special accounts as the Clean Water Management Trust Fund, Public School Building Capital Fund, Public School Text Book Fund, and the lottery reserve fund.

Director of Teaching Fellows Program Named

Jo Ann Norris, Forum Associate Executive Director and Administrator of the Teaching Fellows Program has announced that the new Director of the Teaching Fellows Program is Kerry L. Mebane of Wilson County Schools. Currently, the Assistant Director of Technology and Media Services for Wilson County, Mebane is a nineteen-year educator who holds a BS degree in English and a Master of Arts in Education with certification in Middle School Language Arts and Math, K-12 Academically Gifted and Instructional Technology Specialist-Computers from East Carolina University. Prior to going to Wilson, Mebane was an Instructional Technology Consultant and Interim Team Lead for Instruction Technology at NC DPI. He has held positions in Pitt County Schools and Martin County Schools. While at NC DPI, Mebane served twenty schools system in northeastern North Carolina.

Mebane was the North Carolina Middle School Association Teacher of the Year Finalist in 1993-94. He has made numerous presentations at National School Boards Association conferences and at Southeastern Regional Teaching and Technology Conferences and North Carolina Educational Technology Conferences. In 2007-08, Mebane participated in the ten-month weekly Education Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP).

Director of Teaching Fellows Program (cont'd.)

Norris said of Mebane, "Kerry brings a level of skill sets to the Fellows Program that will provide opportunities for taking the program to new heights. We look forward to having a new set of eyes leading the most comprehensive teacher preparation program in the nation. The program, which began in 1986, annually awards \$26,000 scholarships to 500 promising high school seniors who will agree to prepare to be teachers. They repay the scholarship by teaching for four years in a public school in North Carolina. His myriad of work experience can only enhance the current strengths of the staff. Kerry will assume the position in April. Joe Freddoso, President of MCNC and a member of the Forum's Executive Committee said of Kerry, "He is one of best I have ever seen in integrating technology and instruction. He is a visionary guy. The Forum is fortunate to have him join us as the Director of the NC Teaching Fellows Program." Mebane follows Gladys Graves who served at the Director for seventeen years before retiring in September 2008.

Legislative News...

Bills Call for Amendments to Graduation Requirements

HB 149 and SB 66, both filed earlier this month, call for an act directing the State Board of Education to require one arts education credit for graduation from high school as recommended by the Joint Select Committee on Arts Education.

In addition, HB 223 has passed first reading and has been referred to the House Committee on Education. The bill, if passed, would remove the high school graduation project as a requirement for graduation and would direct the program evaluation division of the General Assembly to study the cost and effectiveness of requiring a high school graduation project. The bill does give local boards the option to require their students to complete a high school graduation project.

Restaurant Delivers Innovative Approach to Learning

At almost 14 percent, Scotland County has the state's highest unemployment rate, and is also one of the poorest counties in the state. Educating students in the county has been a challenge, but the school system is trying new approaches to engage students in learning. In one school, Scotland High School of Leadership and Public Service, culinary arts students run the Bagpiper Restaurant under the direction of Chef Steve Dibble, director of the culinary arts program. "Our culinary arts program is just one of our efforts to create a more relevant, authentic learning experience that keeps students in school and connects them to post-secondary opportunities that provide an incentive for them to go on to either a two or four-year college," said Scotland County Superintendent Dr. Shirley Prince.

Restaurant Delivers Innovative Approach (cont'd.)

The Bagpiper, located within the high school, opened for business last February through help from business partners and the Laurinburg/Scotland Area Chamber of Commerce. Upon its initial opening, the restaurant served breakfast and lunch to school staff. In October 2008, the Bagpiper opened its doors to the public, and now operates Tuesday through Thursday for breakfast and lunch.

Three years ago, Chef Dibble, Johnson and Wales College of Culinary Arts graduate, was recruited by the school system to develop the culinary arts program. In the 12-week program, students learn to cook, serve and manage a commercial kitchen, taking on a different job each week. According to Dr. Prince, "Mr. Dibble and Principal Kay Fuller expect their culinary students to demonstrate their skills at the highest level. I am proud of the work being done by our principals and teachers to raise standards at the same time that they are raising graduation rates."

So far, the program has met with great success. According to Chef Dibble, the students have been excited about the program, even though it can sometimes feel more like a job than school. Others are excited about the program as well. According to Representative Doug Yongue (D-Scotland), "This is one of the most successful and innovative programs to be implemented at Scotland High School. It is remarkable what these kids can accomplish when they are given such a unique learning opportunity. And I know that I share this sentiment with the community - as they have raved about the food and service!"

Summer Institutes for NC Science Teachers

The North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences is seeking teachers to participate in the Museum's summer Educators of Excellence Institutes. Programs this summer include the exploration of wildlife, eco-systems and conservation in Yellowstone National Park, Ecuador, South America, and Belize, Central America.

More than 300 North Carolina science educators have participated in Educators of Excellence programs since they began in 1987, with more than 30,000 North Carolina children benefiting from their teachers' experiences. Institute alumni become part of the Educators of Excellence Network to exchange innovative ideas for teaching science and promote conservation awareness. All Institutes have an online component that allows colleagues and students to follow along on the trip through pictures, journal entries and email Q&A.

The application process is open to current N.C. science teachers and environmental educators, as well as administrators and university professors who work with these teachers. Applications are due March 13 and are available online at www.naturalsciences.org . For more information, contact Elizabeth Baird at liz.baird@ncmail.net .

Texas Schools Look to Finland for Education Improvements

Dallas schools have improved greatly over the years, yet there are still many students left behind, and great disparities in academic achievement between the city and suburbs. Because Finnish students continuously score at the top among other countries in international tests in math, science, problem solving and reading, Texas schools are looking to Finland for ideas to help improve their education reform efforts. Especially intriguing to Dallas reformers is how Finland consistently sees positive results from all of its schools and nearly all of its students.

The first difference in academic approaches has been Finland's long-term commitment to educational reform. For over thirty years, Finns have been fine-tuning their equivalent to No Child Left Behind. The law, passed in 1968, calls for a unified, national curriculum in both public and private schools, in order to equalize the quality of education students receive in all parts of the country. The law has been reformed several times since then, and reformers are constantly evaluating ways in which the educational system can be improved.

A second major difference is that the national board of education has allowed teachers the freedom to conduct their courses without dictating how the courses should be run. While they have greater autonomy to conduct their classes to meet the national curriculum goals, all teachers in Finland are required to have a master's degree. Teachers in that country may be paid less than those in the United States, but teaching is a highly regarded, honored profession. Only one in 10 applicants seeking to major in education is accepted at Finland's universities.

While Finland differs greatly in size and population from Texas, its efforts to improve education offer Texas several ideas for success including establishing a single curriculum for all schools, expecting good results from all students and providing extra teaching resources to get those results and giving well-trained teachers respect and freedom to teach.

Florida School District Cuts 522 Teachers

Florida's Marion County School District recently notified all first- and second-year teachers that they would not be offered contracts for the 2009-10 school year. In Addition to these cuts, school board officials anticipate the need to cut 110 non-teaching employees before the start of the next school year. The cuts represent a 17 percent reduction in teachers in Marion County, and will save the district an estimated \$23.5 million in salary and benefits.

School District spokesman Kevin Christian said that although the full impact of the state budget cuts will not be known for some time, district officials wanted to make the announcement as early as possible to allow teachers time to search for new positions elsewhere. As vacancies open up due to routine departures over the summer, there is a possibility that some of the teachers cut could be rehired. With the cuts, classrooms will grow by three to five students on average, though Mr. Christian said class sizes will stay within state guidelines.

Florida School District Cuts Teachers (cont'd.)

Due to declining sales tax and other state revenue, the Marion County School District is facing a projected \$33 million reduction in funding. The county is also considering additional cost-saving measures, such as reductions in bus service, and possible four-day school weeks. It is unlikely the \$10 billion Florida is slated to receive in stimulus money will offset any of these losses, however. The stimulus money must be used for targeted education programs. According to Christian, even if the funds could go toward teacher salaries, "it's a one-time shot; it's not a long-term solution."

Schools Hit Hardest in California Budget Cuts

A new budget passed in California on Thursday, February 19th, will cut \$8.4 billion from the \$58.1 billion budget for public education, lowering per-pupil spending from \$8,784 to \$8,404 over the next two years. The education budget is shared by public schools and community colleges, though colleges will see virtually no cuts, according to state legislative analyst Edgar Cabral. Compared to other state agencies, education has taken the largest hit.

It is still unclear how much the federal stimulus package will help school districts, since the majority of that money is earmarked for specific uses, but California schools and colleges are expecting at least \$5 billion in stimulus money.

Cuts over two years to public education under the new state budget deal:

- California State University: \$163 million, of which \$50 million could be restored from the federal stimulus package.
- University of California: \$115.5 million, of which \$50 million could be restored with federal money.
- Community colleges: Lose a cost-of-living adjustment of less than 1 percent.
- K-12: \$8.4 billion in cuts, or \$380 per pupil.
- All other programs, including charter school facilities grants and state testing will be cut by 15 to 20 percent.
- Optional programs now include gifted education, arts and music, and summer school. Safe from cuts: Eight K-12 programs, including special education and K-3 class-size reduction.

NC CAP SYNERGY 2009 Conference – Today is Deadline for Scholarship Applications

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/lfsf-order.aspx> .

Seeking Jay Robinson Award Nominations Deadline: March 2nd

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; 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.

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