

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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“It Could Have Been Much Worse . . . “

The prevailing sentiment in the K-12 community after seeing the Governor's proposed budget was that when compared to other state programs the public school funding proposals could have been much worse. Federal stimulus dollars for education should buffer or largely offset much of the proposed reduced levels of state spending.

That is not the cases in other state agencies, some of which have been cut substantially as the Governor's budget staff works to bring the state budget into balance.

Under the proposed budget, education, like virtually every other branch of government, would have salary dollars budgeted in such a way that, all things remaining equal, there would be no unspent money resulting from salary savings due to vacant positions. Again, if all things remain equal, that would not result in lost dollars to schools, but it removes budget flexibility and eliminates what normally would be a return of unspent dollars to the General Fund.

Of more concern across the educational community is a proposed “Flexibility Reduction” of \$144 million. In plain language, the state will provide \$144 million less of state funding to schools while giving local administrators and school boards the flexibility to determine where cuts will be made.

Presumably much, if not all, of the reduction can be made up through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (i.e., the federal stimulus package). However, groups like the School Boards Association are quick to point out that the stimulus money will come to an end in two years and the proposed cuts are recurring.

There are other cuts throughout the proposed education budget. Examples of additional proposed spending reductions include:

- Textbooks (\$37,977,279)
- Central Office staffing (\$6,470,262)
- School Resource Officers (\$1,202,256)
- Technology (\$4,000,000)
- Student Accountability Allotments (\$38,339,798)
- Non-Instructional Staffing (\$10,305,072)
- Staff Development (\$6,278,960)
- Instructional Material & Supplies (\$2,565,064)

Totaled, the proposed reductions in state spending on K-12 schools comes to \$318 million.

Questions Loom about Federal Stimulus Dollars

While budget makers are presuming that federal dollars will largely offset proposed educational reductions, it remains impossible to determine if that is accurate until complete rules and regulations for state use of the money are announced by the U.S. Department of Education.

The largest infusion of federal dollars, an estimated \$257 million, is earmarked for Title I funds. There are, however, strings attached to the use of new Title I dollars. First, the funds must be spent only in Title I schools (i.e., schools with 35% or more of students eligible for free and reduced lunch). Second, Title I spending is restricted to certain categories.

Whether, in light of deteriorating state revenue projections, the US DOE will opt to give states more flexibility in the use of the money is an unanswered question. If the use of Title I funds remains as restrictive as it is currently, it is unlikely that federal dollars will offset all of the proposed reductions in state spending.

A Larger Question is What Will Happen When Federal Dollars Stop

Not only are there questions on how federal stimulus dollars can be spent, there are larger questions about what will happen when those dollars end in two years. Currently, the infusion of federal dollars is scheduled only for the next two years. In light of the growing federal debt it is unlikely that stimulus dollars will continue beyond the two year period of time and, if they do, it is likely they would continue at a much-reduced level.

If that is the case, states like North Carolina that are making cuts in state support of schools while buffering those cuts with the federal stimulus dollars will be confronted with either making temporary cuts permanent or finding replacement dollars after the stimulus package ends.

Attempting to predict what will happen three years out, however, is impossible. One scenario envisions an economic recovery beginning as early as next year and restoring state revenues. If that scenario does not play out and states remain in the grip of a recession economy, policymakers could be facing even worse choices in the years ahead.

Manning Declares Halifax County an "Academic Disaster Zone"

Judge Howard Manning in a Notice of Hearing and Order is calling on the state to "exercise its constitutional authority over the Halifax County School System to remedy the academic disaster which is occurring there on behalf of the children who have no other place to turn to for a sound basic education."

Manning Declares "Academic Disaster Zone" (cont'd.)

In a lengthy letter to Dr. William Harrison, the CEO and Chair of the State Board of Education, and State Superintendent June Atkinson, Manning outlined the reasoning behind his order. While he had singled out the Halifax County high schools as among the worst performing in the State, the Judge had previously concluded that the County's elementary and middle schools were not the root of the problem. That conclusion, however, was based on the performance scores students had registered prior to the State Board setting more rigorous cut scores for the ABCs math and reading tests. Halifax County test scores on the new tests make it clear that the education foundation students are receiving at the elementary and middle school level is not preparing them to succeed in high school.

Based on a review of the new testing data led Manning to conclude: "The Court cannot ignore this any longer. The State is responsible for ensuring that these schools are Leandro compliant. The economic cost of continuing to permit this academic disaster of a school district inflict academic genocide on 60% of its students in math and on 70% of its students in reading in grades 3-8 is an additional concern."

Judge Manning has called a hearing on April 29 to enable the Executive Branch an opportunity to respond to Manning's conclusion that ". . . it is time for the State to exert itself and exercise command and control over the Halifax County Public Schools beginning in the school year 2009-2010, nothing more and nothing less." To read the entire order and hearing notice go to this link:

<http://www.ncforum.org/doclib/Halifax%20County%20Notice%20of%20Hearing%20for%204-29-09.pdf> .

NCPAPA Names New Executive Director

This Wednesday the North Carolina Principals and Assistant Principals' Association (NCPAPA) announced that noted state public education leader and current Superintendent of Scotland County Schools, Dr. Shirley Prince has been selected to serve as their new Executive Director. In 2007 Dr. Prince was named North Carolina's Superintendent of the Year and has since served on the N.C. State Board of Education as the superintendent advisor.

"Dr. Prince's vision, energy and enthusiasm perfectly align with the NCPAPA Board of Directors' goals," said Emily Doyle, NCPAP Assistant Executive Director. "She understands the needs of principals and will be able to focus the organization's professional development and advocacy efforts to meet those needs." A current Forum board member, Dr. Prince will assume her new role on July 1, 2009, stepping in for the outgoing Executive Director, W. Lloyd Thrower. This past fall Thrower was honored with the state's highest civilian award, the *Order of the Longleaf Pine*.

Summer Leadership Conference Falls Victim To Budget Tightening

In a letter to its members this week, the North Carolina Association of School Administrators (NCASA) and its staff announced the suspension of their 2009 Summer Leadership Conference. Due to the economic climate and the resulting budget constraints faced by many, NCASA has decided to instead, have a one-day virtual Summer Leadership Update on July 14, 2009. This one-day virtual conference is being sponsored by the Western Region Education Service Alliance (WRESA), NCASA, and NCVPS. Michael Horne, co-author of "Disrupting Class" will be one of the keynote speakers. Each of the eight RESA areas will have a central site to view the conference. Once the details are completed, more information will be sent to their members and posted to their website at www.ncasa.net.

North Carolina Receives High Business Ranking

North Carolina is the second-best state to do business in, according to an annual ranking by *Chief Executive* magazine. The state ranked third on the list last year. The magazine's "Best & Worst States" survey asked 543 CEOs to evaluate their states on a broad range of issues, including proximity to resources, regulation, tax policies, education, quality of living and infrastructure.

According to the magazine, the state's best resource is its workforce. *Chief Executive* ranked North Carolina's work force the third best in the country. The state ranked 10th for access to capital and business friendliness, and ranked 15th for transportation. The magazine says states that perform well in the rankings tend to have lower taxes and low rates of unionization. California and New York were ranked the worst and the second worst states to do business in, respectively, for the fourth straight year.

National News...

Texas Students May Get Paid For Good Grades

A bill filed last week by Representative Joe Deshotel (D-Beaumont) would, if passed, create a pilot program in Texas that would pay cash to ninth grade students at low-performing schools for good grades in English, math, science, or social studies. Proposed award amounts would be \$50 for each "A," \$35 for each "B," and \$20 for each "C" received in these core classes. Half of the award money would be distributed at the end of each grading period, with the remainder being awarded in the form of savings bonds when the student graduates from high school. The proposal calls for college and career counseling to be provided to participating students throughout their high school experience.

Texas Students (cont'd.)

Though the pilot program does not have an estimated cost yet, funding will come from the \$6 billion in federal stimulus money the state has slated for use on education. Schools rated academically unacceptable would be selected through a lottery to participate in the pilot. "If it does help cut down the dropout rate, which is unacceptably high in Texas, then we can look at expanding it," Deshotel said. While there is no strong research to prove such incentives work, other pay-for-grade programs are already in place in Chicago; Baltimore; New York; Atlanta; Tucson, Ariz.; and Washington, D.C.

Wyoming School District Debates Teacher Learning

According to "Professional Learning in the Learning Profession," a report released in February by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), the world's best students learn from teachers who participate in sustained and intensive professional development. In southeast Wyoming, one school district has released students at its four elementary schools early every Wednesday in order to provide teachers the opportunity for staff development. This has all changed, though, since the Laramie County School District 2 board voted recently to get rid of "Wacky Wednesday," as it is called by locals.

Parents and other community members strongly objected to the schedule, and expressed concerns that the weekly early release was cheating the students out of valuable class time. Teachers and school administrators do not agree, however. Sue Stevens, principal of two Laramie County 2 elementary schools, has seen how routine, in-school training has given her teachers a boost, and credits the training with improvements in the district's math and reading scores on statewide assessment tests. Now that the school board has done away with Wacky Wednesday, Superintendent Marjorie Simineo is looking for ways for the district to find time for routine teacher development.

According to the NSDC report, Wyoming is one of the leading states in supporting professional development opportunities for teachers. The report found that American teachers spend roughly 80 percent of their time teaching and only about 20 percent on planning lessons, talking to other teachers and improving their skills. Very few other schools offer as much at-school training as the teachers in Laramie County 2 receive. In many European and Asian countries, teachers are provided significantly more professional learning than in the United States. Students in these countries spend less time in the classroom, yet outscore their American counterparts on math and science assessment tests. To view the NSDC report, go to <http://www.nsd.org/news/NSDCstudy2009.pdf>.

Teaching Fellows Program Launches New Alumni Site

The North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program is proud to announce the recent development and launch of the Alumni section of its website at www.teachingfellows.org.

This site will prompt Alumni to create a user account on their first visit. Once they have created an online account and profile they will be able to view the Bulletin Board section which has information about upcoming events and volunteer opportunities with the Program. They will also be able to post and read messages on the Message Forum. The site features a search option which will allow Alumni to locate long lost friends.

All Teaching Fellows Alumni are cordially invited to begin using the site. For any questions or comment please contact Melissa Rains at mrains@ncforum.org or Danny Bland at dbland@ncforum.org.

NC CAP SYNERGY 2009 Conference

The North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs (NC CAP) is pleased to announce the upcoming 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.

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.

For more information, or to 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.

"I use the Finance Study as a reference document for advocacy contacts with members of the General Assembly. It gives the data I am sharing instant credibility with legislators, and it is the only document that provides school district and county government financial-related information in a single source." – Kerry Crutchfield, Director, Financial Services; Winston-Salem / Forsyth County Schools.

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> .

On a Lighter Note . . .

UNC Wins Tournament!

Amidst this week's budget news, Tom Lambeth, one of Chapel Hill's more fervent fans, passed along news about a tournament that UNC has won handily -- the "Academic Performance Tournament." The brackets in the link below match this year's NAACP basketball finalists up on the basis of graduation rates of their basketball teams, not prowess on the court. Using this criteria, UNC Chapel Hill ends up being number one and was the only ACC team to make the final four. To view the link go to: <http://www.ncforum.org/doclib/insidehighered%20bracket.jpg> .

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