

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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NC Center for Afterschool Programs Cautions Lawmakers on Possible Loss of Up to 1,000 Jobs

In a legislative alert issued this week, the North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs (NC CAP) cautioned lawmakers that the proposed elimination of the Support our Students program (SOS) could result in the loss of up to 1,000 full or part time jobs.

The proposal to eliminate the SOS program was contained in the Governor's proposed budget that is now under consideration in the General Assembly. The SOS program provides afterschool programs for over 14,000 middle school youth at 219 sites in 92 of North Carolina's 100 counties.

The program was created in 1994 as a result of a Governor's Crime Commission recommendation that was intended to curb juvenile crime by providing safe, supervised afterschool activities for middle school young people.

In the legislative report, NC CAP points out that if SOS prevents as few as 2% of the 14,000-plus young people in the program from becoming involved in juvenile crime, the return-on-investment for the state would be substantial. The state's \$5.9 million annual investment in the program translates to only \$421 per student. That investment pales when compared to the \$23,000 it costs to house one prisoner in a North Carolina prison for one year.

The NC CAP alert asks lawmakers to give careful consideration to the benefits of the SOS program and further asks them to consider whether SOS funding could be sustained through the state grant portion of the federal stimulus package.

To see the full NC CAP legislative report, a county-by-county breakdown showing where SOS programs are in operation and how many young people are served simply go the following link: <http://www.nccap.net/documents/SOS-Legislative-Alert.pdf> .

Editorial Comment...

If You Don't Know Where You're Going, Any Road Will Get You There . . . Or Not

Members of the General Assembly have been presented with a number of choices they should reasonably have expected to have been resolved by the leaders of various governmental agencies as well as the leadership of the state's educational systems. Among the issues under consideration are:

- Whether to eliminate the Support our Student (SOS) program, an afterschool program serving 14,000 students.
- Whether to merge the state's early education programs, *Smart Start* and *More at Four*, both of which have been models for other state early education efforts.
- Whether to continue funding the Principals' Executive Program (PEP), also once held as a model for states across the country.

While not on the legislative agenda, there is also the question of what to do with educational centers and institutes housed at UNC General Administration now that UNC President Erskine Bowles has announced that they are not part of UNC's "core academic mission." That list of organizations is long, and includes well-regarded programs like NCCAT, the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching; and CIU, the Center for International Understanding.

Had the North Carolina Education Cabinet not been allowed to languish over the previous eight years, these questions could have been answered if the previous Administration and top education officials of the state's three educational systems had designed a long-range, comprehensive plan for education.

Now that Governor Perdue intends to reinvigorate the Education Cabinet, the opportunity exists to design a comprehensive plan that answers questions like:

- Is *More at Four* an educational program that, like Kindergarten, should be administered by the Department of Public Instruction; or, is it a social services program that should be in DHHS?
- Should disadvantaged young people that go through *More at Four* be able to seamlessly enroll in programs like SOS and continue getting the advantage of additional support?
- If PEP is abandoned, who or what will provide on-going professional growth opportunities for principals and assistant principals?

Without a plan, General Assembly members are asked to make major educational decisions largely based on dollars and cents, not on the merits of the programs or on their contribution to reaching long-term goals. That is where the General Assembly finds itself as the budget is debated and the fault lies with the inability or unwillingness of former administration leaders and current educational leaders to frame a comprehensive road map for education in the twenty-first century.

Legal Action Challenging Changes in School Governance Expected Soon

SPINCycle, the weekly newsletter issued by the producers of the public policy television show NC SPIN, ran an article saying that State Superintendent of Public Instruction June Atkinson has decided to pursue legal action contending that her powers have been wrongfully taken away. The article predicts that Atkinson will hold a news conference announcing the legal challenge as early as today.

In related news, this Sunday's televised NC SPIN program, available in most viewing areas across the state, will focus on the lawsuit. Appearing on the program will be former Supreme Court Justice Robert Orr. Executive Director of the Institute for Constitutional Law, Orr will apparently be directly involved in the legal challenge.

Senate Budget Expected to be Unveiled Next Week

Senate budget deliberations have apparently been largely confined to closed door meetings of Senate leaders throughout this week. While rumors swirl, little is known about the budget that is to be unveiled next week. Complicating the process this week were increases in the state's unemployment rate that were larger than expected and decreases in corporate income tax collections.

Senator Linda Garrou, Co-Chair of the Senate Appropriation Committee, was reported to have said that the budget will be presented to Senate members early next week and that a final budget could be adopted as early as next Friday.

2009 Wachovia North Carolina Principal of the Year Named

South Brunswick High School Principal Vann Pennell today was named the 2009 Wachovia North Carolina Principal of the Year during a luncheon ceremony held in Raleigh. The Brunswick County Schools' principal was selected from eight regional finalists and succeeds Debra Morris, principal of A.L. Brown High School (Kannapolis City Schools). Pennell has worked as a coach, teacher and administrator in North Carolina public schools for nearly three decades. The Wachovia Principal of the Year receives \$3,000 for his school and \$3,000 for personal use and will serve a one-year term as advisor to the State Board of Education.

Graduation Project Requirement Delayed by One Year

The State Board of Education approved a one-year delay to The North Carolina Graduation Project requirement for high school students. Today's action means that the Graduation Project will become a high school graduation requirement for the first time with students who first entered ninth grade in 2007-08 (Class of 2010-11). In making the recommendation, State Board of Education Chairman and CEO Bill Harrison said, "Many schools and districts across North Carolina have had a graduation project in some form or fashion for a decade or more. By giving the entire state more time to implement The North Carolina Graduation Project, we can ensure its success in every school and community." The Graduation Project requirement has drawn opposition in the General Assembly and some members favor an outright elimination of the requirement.

National News...

SC Governor Faces Deadline on Accepting Stimulus Cash

South Carolina is on the brink of becoming the first state to pass up the federal stimulus money intended to help recession-battered schools, throwing hundreds of teacher jobs into jeopardy because lawmakers doubt Washington can mandate how the state spends money.

Several GOP governors, including Rick Perry of Texas, Bobby Jindal of Louisiana and Haley Barbour of Mississippi, have said they would reject a portion of the money that would expand unemployment benefits to those not currently eligible to receive them. South Carolina Governor, Mark Sanford says he will also reject those funds, but he has threatened to go much further, requesting a waiver to spend some \$700 million targeted for education and other programs to pay down some of the state's debt instead; a position the White House has rejected twice.

South Carolina, which had the nation's second-highest jobless rate (11%) in February, cut \$1 billion from a \$7 billion spending plan as tax revenues slumped in 2008. The governor has proposed keeping many of those cuts for the next fiscal year, reiterating that federal money would be requested only if lawmakers agree to use the same amount of money to pay off state debt.

School officials and lawmakers are predicting chaos without the cash. State Superintendent Jim Rex has said that 1,100 positions are open right now, and that he doesn't know whether public schools can remain viable.

With today's deadline, South Carolina is among four states that hadn't told the U.S. Education Department it planned to use the money. However, officials in Alaska, Indiana and Montana are working on those plans. If South Carolina doesn't request the money, it can be sent to other states.

EdCast Seeks Schools for Pilot Program

One of the newest contributors to the world of online learning, EdCast provides schools in the United States with certified bilingual math and science virtual instructors through interactive web conferencing. These virtual instructors serve as coaches and co-teachers in classrooms throughout the country. Currently, the program uses bilingual teachers from Latin America, but is expanding to include partnerships in India and China.

EdCast is looking for schools in which to run additional pilots, as well as partner institutions in Asia. The group is about to launch several more pilots, including a World Languages pilot that will provide virtual instructors in Mandarin from China. For more information on EdCast, visit www.edcast.tv.

Forum News...

Last Weeks to Register for SYNERGY!

Only four weeks remain to register for SYNERGY, NC CAP's annual statewide afterschool conference, scheduled for April 29 – May 1, at the Koury Center in Greensboro. The conference will feature over 30 workshops that will address current challenges in the field and connect those working in, partnering with, or advocating for afterschool programs with the most recent research and tools.

The keynote speakers will include:

- Heba Salama and Ed Brantley, NBC's *The Biggest Loser* Contestants
- Dr. Robert Schwartz, NC Pediatric Association
- Wendy Miller, 2005-06 NC Teacher of the Year
- Levelle Moton, NC Central University Men's Basketball Assistant Coach and Boys and Girls Club Alumnus
- Jermaine Walker, NC CAP Afterschool Alumni Award Winner

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, Boys & Girls Clubs, Communities in Schools of NC, NCSU 4-H Youth Development, and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Visit <http://www.nccap.net/about/conference.cfm> for more information and to register, or contact Katie Biggerstaff at 919-781-6833 x132 or kbiggerstaff@ncforum.org.

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