

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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“April Surprise” Far Worse Than Expected

State budget makers typically do not move into high gear until the April 15th revenue collection numbers are announced. The so-called “April Surprise” revenue projections can mean good or bad news for lawmakers attempting to arrive at a budget.

This year’s April Surprise did not bring good news. In fact, final tax payments due by April 15 were 40% less than those collected a year ago. That decline is nearly twice as large as declines registered in the previous two recessions. For this fiscal year which ends on June 30, the state’s total tax collections are projected to be 11% less than last year.

Barry Boardman, the General Assembly’s chief economist, told lawmakers, “The state has never experienced the types of shifts in revenue that we’re experiencing now.”

What the declining revenue means for House budget committee Co-Chairs is dealing with a much larger budget gap than either the Governor or the Senate anticipated when making their budget proposals. The new projections find that revenue for the fiscal year ending June 30 will be \$1.3 billion less than earlier projections that were used by both the Governor and the Senate in their budget proposals. That means that House budget makers are confronted with a formidable challenge as they work with the new figures.

More challenging yet are the new projections that suggest that lawmakers need to find \$2 billion more in either new revenue or cost cuts than the Governor or Senate projected for the 2010-11 year.

As of this Thursday, House budget targets had not been announced. A major unknown is how far leaders in the House or Senate are willing to go on raising revenue through new taxing sources. Senate plans were to raise roughly \$500 million; however, the Senate has yet to finalize a revenue-generating plan.

The Senate’s revenue target, however, was based on previous budget projections. This week’s revised projections make the gap between projected revenue and spending much larger and House budget makers will have to either find more revenue streams or cut programs much deeper.

Estimate of Gap Between Revenues and Continuation Budget has Changed			
FY 2009-10 (\$ millions)			
	Governor (March '09)	Senate (April '09)	(May '09)
Revenue Forecast	18,861.5	18,861.5	17,516.4
Continuation Budget	22,113.9	22,113.9	22,113.9
Shortfall	-3,252.4	-3,252.4	-4,597.5

Is the Glass Half-Full or Half-Empty?

The Labor Department issued a report this week that was reported by some as good news and by others as bad news. Applications for benefits, from newly laid off workers, dropped to 601,000 last week -- far better than the 635,000 claims economists expected. That is the good news.

The bad news is that the total number of people receiving jobless benefits climbed to 6.35 million, a 14th straight record. By comparison, weekly jobless claims totaled only 372,000 one year ago.

While one can interpret the slow down in new claims as good (or bad) news, economists appear to agree on one thing. Even if this month's decline signals that layoffs have peaked, they expect the jobless rate will keep rising through the rest of this year.

NC Elementary Schools Participate in Program to Promote a Healthier School Environment

Students at sixty-two North Carolina elementary schools will have access to fresh fruits and vegetables during the school day next year thanks to an almost \$1.8 million grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). For the sixth consecutive year North Carolina has had the opportunity to participate in the USDA's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. The primary purpose of the grant is to promote healthier food choices by introducing a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables through daily snacks and incorporating nutrition education in lesson plans.

Schools participating in the program make nutrition education a priority so students will learn the importance of fresh fruits and vegetables in a healthy diet. Schools that have previously participated in the program used the funds to provide fruit baskets inside classrooms, kiosks in the hallways, and other innovative approaches to give students the opportunity to grab a fresh fruit or vegetable snack during the school day.

The NCDPI's Child Nutrition Services Section is partnering with the NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, and the NC Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Public Health, to implement the program in sixty-two elementary schools statewide. For a list of the participating schools as well as more information on the USDA's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, visit <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/newsroom/news/2008-09/20090506-01>.

Spanish Teacher Named 2009-10 NC Teacher of the Year

Jessica Garner, a Spanish teacher at Porter Ridge High School, Union County Schools, was named the 2009-10 AT&T North Carolina Teacher of the Year at an awards ceremony held Tuesday at the Renaissance Hotel in Raleigh. Garner succeeds Cindi Rigsbee from Gravelly Hills Middle School, Orange County Schools.

Garner has been a public school teacher for 11 years and has spent the last four years teaching at Porter Ridge High. Garner is a member of the Foreign Language Association of North Carolina, and has presented at the annual conference for the Foreign Language Association of North Carolina as well as various county-level staff development and curriculum workshops. In addition, Garner helped the Union County Curriculum Coordinator create the Spanish Resources for Parents and Students Web site.

At the school level, she has served as the foreign language department chair at Porter Ridge High since 2005 and is co-sponsor of the Spanish Club. She worked with the guidance department to develop the "Noche de Voces Latinas" or "Night of Latin Voices," a program which has encouraged Latino students and their parents to visit the school and talk with guidance counselors and teachers. Garner earned a grant to purchase interactive software for foreign language classrooms and started the Advanced Placement Spanish program at Porter Ridge High. The world traveler, she has taken students to Costa Rica, Spain and Italy.

The AT&T North Carolina Teacher of the Year will spend the school year traveling the state as an ambassador for the teaching profession. In addition, she will receive a personal automobile, an engraved plaque, a one-time cash award of \$7,500, a trip to the National Teacher of the Year conference, the opportunity to travel abroad through an endowment at the North Carolina Center for International Understanding, and a technology package valued at over \$14,000 from the SmarterKids Foundation. She will serve as an advisor to the State Board of Education for two years.

RFP Issued for Study of School Funding Formulas & Distributions

The North Carolina Joint Select Committee on Public School Funding Formulas was created in 2007 and charged with performing an extensive study of all North Carolina public school funding formulas and distributions. The Committee considered those issues for several months throughout 2007 and 2008, reviewing staff presentations and receiving the testimony of external experts.

The Committee issued an Interim Report in May 2008. One of the central recommendations of the report was to conduct an independent study of all major State public school funding formulas that would "evaluate the efficiency, equity, and efficacy of State public school investments". The Committee's Request for Proposals calls for proposals that will assess our public school funding system and ensure that our State resources are effectively distributed in a manner that targets student achievement, encourages efficient use of resources, ensures that all children, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status and geography, are provided the opportunity to receive a sound basic education, and, minimizes complexity and maximizes transparency. A copy of the RFP and its key dates and deadlines can be found at http://www.ncforum.org/doclib/PSFF%20RFP_2009_05_05.pdf.

Teaching Fellows Program is Attractive to Siblings

The North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program was featured this week in the *News and Observer*. The story, by staff writer T. Keung Hui, highlights the Bajorek family from Cary, North Carolina. Quinn Bajorek, 18, a Cary High School senior was recently named as one of the 534 students accepted into the Teaching Fellows program this year out of 2,252 applicants.

She follows in the footsteps of her two older sisters, Lauren (20) and Jenny (25), both Teaching Fellows alum. Lauren is completing her second year in the program as a sophomore at Campbell University. Jenny, the oldest sister, is a fifth-grade teacher at Northwoods Elementary in Cary.

As the story reports, this school year, 3,514 graduates of the teaching fellows program are working in all 100 North Carolina counties. "I am confident that the state has reaped its investment," said Jo Ann Norris, administrator of the program, which is managed by the Public School Forum of North Carolina, an education think tank in Raleigh.

The Bajorek family is not alone; they are one of 3 families who have sent 3 siblings through the program. Since the programs' first class in 1987, 181 sets of 2 siblings, of which 16 sets are twins have been accepted into the program. To view the article, visit <http://www.newsobserver.com/news/story/1513771.html>.

Fellows' Day at the NC General Assembly

This Tuesday E.P.F.P fellows spent the day at the North Carolina General Assembly. Their morning began with the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education. Representative Rick Glazier presided as the committee heard from education programs including All Kinds of Minds, Communities in Schools, and the NC Science, Math and Technology Education Center.

Once the committee adjourned, fellows were visited by Representatives Joe Tolson and Doug Yongue. Each fielded questions from fellows on such hot topics as the Stimulus Package, funding for Community Colleges, and the future of *More at Four* and *Smart Start*. Fellows also had an opportunity to hear from Robin Johnson, General Counsel to Speaker of the House Joe Hackney. Robin, an EPFP alum, shared with fellows her responsibilities as General Counsel to the Speaker, as well as her experiences working with the NC General Assembly through this year's budget crisis.

Fellows were recognized by Speaker of the House Joe Hackney during the afternoon session. "What a great experience. Seeing education policy makers at work brought this entire process into light for me," said Lindsey Molusky, Assistant Manager, Latino Initiative, Center for International Understanding. "E.P.F.P has introduced me to a whole new side of education policy. I am excited to apply my new knowledge and experiences to my work at the Center."

E.P.F.P Fellows (cont'd)

The 2008-09 class will complete its 10-month weekly seminar sessions on May 12. The class' graduation will be held on October 27, 2009 at the Cardinal Club in downtown Raleigh. Coordinators Jo Ann Norris and Kendall Jordan are now taking applications for the 2009-10 class. If you are interested, contact either coordinator by calling 781-7833, or email them at jnorris@ncforum.org (Jo Ann Norris) or kjordan@ncforum.org (Kendall Jordan). The application period will close when twenty-five Fellows have been accepted. The program will begin mid-September 2009. Meeting every Tuesday night from 5:30 to 8:30 pm, the program will end mid-May 2010.

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