

# *The Public School Forum's Friday Report*

PDF versions can be found at [www.ncforum.org](http://www.ncforum.org)

Volume 12, Issue 25

January 8, 2010

## State Board Hears Latest Budget Report

Phillip Price, Chief Financial Officer at the Department of Public Instruction, addressed the State Board of Education on Thursday with a report on the budget. Beginning the discussion with a review of the current budget cuts of nearly \$780 million, Price reminded board members that next year's budget already has \$1 billion in school cuts the legislature approved during the 2008-09 session.

In addition, Price told the State Board of Education that tax collections through November were lower than expected, and he anticipates an announcement lowering growth projections. The state budget office has asked for education budget recommendations showing a 3 percent increase and 3 percent, 5 percent and 7 percent cuts, Price said. A 7 percent cut would equal \$528 million, he said.

Price concluded his report by stating, "we have 3 options. We can ignore the request for budget proposals with 3, 5, or 7% cuts; come up with significant formula changes; or follow the request for budget proposals."

## ACRE Continues with K-12 Science Standards Review

State Board of Education members spent time reviewing the proposed new curriculum standards for K-12 science courses during their meeting this week. The new standards are the latest deliverable in North Carolina's Accountability and Curriculum Reform Effort (ACRE) approved by the State Board as part of its "Framework for Change." January marks the second month in which the science standards have come before Board members for discussion. Draft 4.0 of the N.C. Standard Course of Study Science Essential Standards will be posted online Jan. 18 at [www.ncpublicschools.org/acre/standards/](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/acre/standards/).

Public feedback will continue to be reviewed and incorporated as the standards are finalized. The Board will vote for approval of the new science curriculum in the next few months so it can be implemented no later than the 2012-13 school year. For more information, visit [www.ncpublicschools.org](http://www.ncpublicschools.org) and click on the appropriate link under "News."

## President Announces \$250M Initiative for STEM Teachers

President Obama announced this week a \$250 million public-private effort to improve science and mathematics instruction, aiming to help the nation compete in key fields in global economic rivals. Using funding from high-tech businesses, universities and foundations, the initiative seeks to prepare more than 10,000 new math and science teachers over five years and provide on-the-job training for an additional 100,000 in science, technology, engineering and math.

Business and government leaders have sounded alarms over science and math education in recent years as concern has mounted that the United States may be losing the technological edge that fueled its economy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While the nation's universities are still known as world leaders, the performance of its K-12 schools has come under scrutiny. International math testing in 2007 found that U.S. fourth graders trailed counterparts in some areas of Europe and Asia and that U.S. eighth graders lagged behind those from a handful of Asian powers. Similar results were found in science.

Addressing this issues, President Obama has sought to make science and math education a national cause. The \$4 billion Race to the Top (RTTT) federal grant competition for education reform funding gives states bonus points for proposals that stress STEM instruction. In addition, this week's announcement, described by administration officials and executives from businesses and foundations, shows a mobilization on several fronts.

"If we're going to be economically competitive and continue to innovate and create jobs, we have to get much better in STEM education," said Education Secretary Arne Duncan. "There's a huge sense of urgency."

## NCVPS Fifth in the Nation

A recent report "2009 Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning" lists North Carolina's Virtual Public School (NCVPS) the fifth largest virtual school in terms of enrollment. In just two and a half years, the school has become one of the fastest growing virtual schools in the nation, topping 20,000 in enrollments by the fall of 2009.

North Carolina continues to see rapid growth of over 50 percent per year in virtual school enrollments. The Fall 2008 and Spring 2009 terms posted more than 15,700 enrollments, while the Summer and Fall 2009 terms saw enrollment surge to the current levels above 20,000.

School districts are taking advantage of the resource to solve scheduling conflicts, space issues and to offer classes that might not be available to students. With the release of the latest performance report from the Friday Institute of Education Innovation, districts have recognized the value of the online high school. One district, Davidson County, has seen the greatest increase in online enrollments and is one of the top 5 districts using NCVPS with over 550 enrollments.

## NCVPS (cont'd)

The Keeping Pace report is an annual review of state-level policy and practice of US virtual schools researched by Evergreen Associates in Colorado and includes full-time and supplemental programs all across the United States. For more information or to download the report, visit <http://www.kpk12.com/>.

## Committee Awards \$13M in Dropout Prevention Grants

The North Carolina General Assembly's Committee on Dropout Prevention recently awarded grants totaling \$13 million to 83 organizations in 63 counties. The grants, ranging from \$17,710 to \$175,000, were award to school districts, schools, nonprofits organizations and government entities.

The Committee selected the grant recipients through a competitive application process. The committee was created by the General Assembly to help improve high school graduation rates in North Carolina. The NC Department of Public Instruction provides staff support to the committee. For a complete list of recipients, [click here](#).

## Wake County Teacher Recognized by LEARN NC

A.B. Combs Leadership Magnet Elementary School teacher Shannon Page is the subject of a recently published [feature article](#) by k-12 outreach group LEARN NC. The article, the fourth in a series spotlighting teachers who employ inventive instructional techniques, explores her use of virtual field trips to achieve all of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study goals and objectives for her fifth grade class throughout the year.

LEARN NC's goal for the series is to allow outstanding teachers to present, in their own words, successful instructional practices for the benefit of not only other teachers but also policy-makers, school administrators, and education researchers.

Via its [website](#), LEARN NC, an agency of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Education, delivers - every day and at no cost – lesson plans, best practices, and classroom content to more than 30,000 educators and students throughout North Carolina, the nation, and the world.

## Department of Commerce Releases 2010 Tiers

The North Carolina Department of Commerce has released the 2010 tier designations for the state's 100 counties. A county's tier ranking reflects its economic well-being on a scale of one to three, where Tier 1 counties are the most distressed and Tier 3 counties are the least distressed.

Of the 85 rural counties, Onslow, Pender and Wilson were classified with a lower level of economic distress than they were in the 2009 designations. Urban Cumberland County's economy also improved. McDowell, Lincoln, Craven, Haywood and Alexander were classified with a higher level of economic distress than a year earlier. To view the full county listing, [click here](#).

---

The *Friday Report* is published weekly by the Public School Forum of NC and is distributed to Forum Board members, legislators active in education policy, the press, and Forum subscribers. Archived editions can be found at [www.ncforum.org/doc](http://www.ncforum.org/doc) .