

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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Dear Colleague:

On Wednesday, May 26 the Public School Forum will be celebrating its 25th Anniversary with a very special evening at the NC Museum of History from 5:30 – 7:30 pm.

This event will provide a unique opportunity to hear from long-time leaders from the business, foundation and political communities assess 25 years of school improvement and look at challenges ahead. We are particularly pleased that Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. will be moderating this discussion.

If you would like to attend, please [click here](#) to purchase your ticket (\$50 registration fee applied). Feel free to forward this email to anyone else who might be interested.

Many thanks,

Phil Kirk

Budget Process in High Gear

Senate budget drafters spent much of this first week of the 2010 Session behind closed doors with the goal of sending their budget proposal to the House as early as next week. At this point, it appears:

- There is growing awareness of the potential funding fall-off “cliff” that will face the State in the next fiscal year when over \$1 billion in federal stimulus money ends. Budget drafters are working with one eye on this year and one eye on the next.
- It is highly likely salary increases proposed by the Governor for teachers will be reduced or dropped in the budget process; the choice is stark: raises or employee cuts and sentiment is running strongly against cuts.
- It is also likely some decreases in the Governor’s proposed budget will be plowed back into reducing the amount of discretionary cuts for public schools called for in the Administration’s budget.

Budget Process in High Gear (cont'd)

While the Forum has been primarily covering education-related issues, Senate budget drafters are confronted with the whole range of governmental need. Given the continuing budget downturn, lobbyists of all stripes for virtually every nook-and-cranny of state government are roaming the halls attempting to prevent further cutbacks to their programs. However, it does appear that the budget process could be, in sharp contrast to recent years, be moving at hyper-speed as lawmakers focus on wrapping up the Session as early as the end of the state's June 30-July 1 budget year.

Education Advocates Plan Weekend Rally in Raleigh

Tomorrow, teachers and parents will be marching in Raleigh for a "Fund Schools First" rally. The North Carolina PTA and the NC Association of Educators are the primary sponsors of the event that starts at noon tomorrow with a march from the NCAE building to the Capitol building beginning at noon. The parent/teacher coalition has been sponsoring community rallies, forms and appearances at local school board and county commissioner budget meetings around the state. Parents and teachers have been especially vocal speaking out against draconian cuts in Charlotte, Durham and Winston-Salem.

Did You Know...

As the 2010 legislative short session began this week, here are a few numbers to consider, as pulled together in the May 12th edition of *The Insider*.

- 1.5 billion: The amount, in dollars, of federal stimulus money that legislators expect to use to help balance the 2010-11 fiscal year budget.
- 499 million: The amount of that total, in dollars, that Congress has yet to approve.
- 2,767: The number of House and Senate bills filed since the two-year session began in January 2009.
- 13: Days remaining before all bills containing appropriations must be filed.
- 7.22, the cost, in dollars, of a sandwich, chips and drink from the legislative cafeteria.
- 6: Incumbent legislators, including a House member who lost a bid for a Senate seat, who return to Raleigh having lost their primary races.
- 5: Number of groups whose name includes the word "tea" listed as sponsors of a protest planned at the Legislative Building on Wednesday.
- 1: Number of times that the Revenue Laws Study Committee has recommended that cities get voter approval before incurring debt to build their own high-speed Internet systems.
- 0: Number of times that the General Assembly, since 2002, has asked for voter approval before incurring state debt.

Wake Co. Schools to Develop New Alternative Program

Initiated by a complaint filed by Advocates for Children's Services, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) recently conducted an investigation of a Wake County alternative program. Based on the report, DPI has ordered the Wake County school system to develop a new alternative program after determining its new online program wasn't adequate for meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

Due to budgetary reasons, Richard Milburn High School was replaced last year with an online program to serve long-term suspended students. According to the DPI report, while around 200 long-term students were receiving instruction at home on weekends and after-school, these students were receiving less than six hours of weekly instruction. In addition, it was determined that many of the long-term suspension students receiving home instruction had been suspended several times without getting proper special education services.

National News...

Home-Schooling Statistics Raise Eyebrows in Texas

According to Texas Education Agency figures, more than 22,600 Texas secondary students who stopped attending classes in 2008 were excluded from the state's dropout figures because administrators stated they were being home-schooled. This has raised suspicion among experts convinced that schools are disguising thousands of middle and high school dropouts in the less regulated home-schooling category.

While home-schooling's popularity has increased throughout the country, the rate of growth concentrated in Texas' high school population is off the charts. In the past decade, Texas' home-schooling numbers have nearly tripled, including a 23 percent jump in a single year.

The Texas Education Agency requires a signed or oral statement from a parent/guardian or qualified student noting that they intend to attend home-school; a standard that isn't met in many cases. Once families withdraw from public school in Texas, there is no follow-up. The state's hands-off approach to home-schoolers makes it impossible to determine how many students are actually being taught at home, and opens the door to abuse of the designation, which school districts may use to avoid sanctions that come with high dropout rates.

In other states, parents are required to file sworn affidavits when they withdraw their children. Many states also require families to submit curriculum, attendance records or test scores when they opt to home-school.

Forum News...

Teaching Fellows Launching Discovery Trip

A sure sign of spring is the arrival of nearly 500 Teaching Fellows who have just completed their Freshman year at one of the 17 university and college Fellows' campuses around the state. Beginning Sunday, Fellows will assemble at NC Central University and begin the week-long Discovery Trip that will take them from one end of North Carolina to the other in what is described as a "crash course" in the wide diversity of North Carolina's educational, business and cultural communities. In the morning they will visit schools. Afternoons are typically spent examining different facets of North Carolina's economy, and in the evening, Fellows might see clogging in the mountains or hear from North Carolina writers near the coast.

Discovery is the first of many enrichment programs planned for Teaching Fellows award winners currently preparing to teach in schools across the state. Currently, over 3,700 Fellows graduates are working in schools in all 100 North Carolina counties.

More Forum Activity on Tap . . .

In addition to coordinating the Fellows' Discovery trip, this week Forum staff will be:

- Presenting at a Charlotte Media Briefing on Education sponsored by MeckEd, Charlotte's educational support organization that draws its support from leading business and community leaders in the city.
- Kicking off a Charlotte community leaders' symposium on key educational issues that could impact area schools.
- Presenting at a Business Leaders Executive Briefing sponsored by the Guilford Education Alliance. The Alliance, like MeckEd, is an educational advocacy group focused on schools in Guilford County.

Call for EPFP Applications

Applications are now being accepted for the Forum's Education Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP). The ten-month seminar program meets weekly on Tuesday night from 5:30 to 8:30 pm from September 14, 2010 to May 17, 2011. The program addresses issues related to policy and leadership development. North Carolina boasts over 600 EPFP alumni. The program seeks high energy individuals committed to enhancing their professional career through networking and exploring leadership and policy in the real world. An application may be obtained at the Forum's website. Go to www.ncforum.org and click on EPFP. The deadline is when the new class reaches its 30th participant or August 1, 2010 whichever comes first. Don't delay. Apply today!

2009 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 done by the North Carolina Public School Forum is one of the best financial planning tools available to local leaders. It allows a county to determine with great accuracy how able they are to fund their public schools and how well they compare with other counties in doing that. I encourage all superintendents, school board members and county commission members to use this tool to make the best financial decisions on how they use their local funds." - *Jim Causby, North Carolina School Superintendents' Association*

"The Local School District Finance Study, published by the Public School Forum, is an excellent source of information to help educate the public about the degree of commitment of boards of county commissioners to funding their public schools. I use the report to help boards of education work with their commissioners to improve education in their respective school districts. The Public School Forum is to be commended for their continued work in this important area." - *Ed Dunlap, North Carolina School Boards Association.*

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