

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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Senate "Reform Budget" Proposal Cuts Roughly \$500 per Student

If the proposed Senate budget were to be enacted, what the Senate leadership is calling "a responsible, education reform" budget would cut nearly \$700 million from K-12 school funding, dropping the State's per-student expenditure by nearly \$500 per child. Such a measure would put North Carolina at, or close to, the bottom of investments in education when compared to states across the country.

The proposed budget that the Senate leadership rolled out this week had two twists in K-12 funding proposals that were apparently aimed at diverting attention away from the draconian cuts contained in their proposal.

The first, which has gotten headlines throughout the week, is a proposal that would ostensibly begin a process of getting early elementary class size down to 1 teacher per 15 students. However, the State has gone down this road before during the Easley Administration and once again could be making class size promises that will be difficult to keep (see following story on class size reductions).

That proposal which would result in over 1,100 additional teachers being hired is laudable. Less commendable, however, is that it will be paid for by laying off roughly 12,000 teacher assistants working in first, second and third grade classrooms.

Thus far media attention is focused on the 1,000-plus new teaching positions. What isn't being reported is that the Senate budget also calls for a 21% cut in assistant principal positions, a cut that will impact 1-out-of-5 assistant principals. Nor are media reports covering the fact that non-teaching jobs (i.e., secretaries, janitors, etc.) are proposed to be cut by 15%, or that support staff (i.e., media specialists, counselors, etc.) are proposed to be cut by 5%.

These cuts, when coupled with "discretionary cuts" that must be determined locally will likely result in between 15,000 and 18,000 positions being eliminated at the same time the budget calls for hiring over 1,100 new teachers.

Senate “Reform Budget” Proposal (cont’d)

Beyond personnel proposals, the Senate’s budget would make cuts in critical funding areas.

For advocates of increased investment in STEM-related areas:

- Learn & Earn online and virtual school programs are cut by nearly \$6 million.
- Funding for the Science Olympiad competition is eliminated.
- Funding for the NC Science, Math & Technology Center is eliminated.
- 30 Technology Services positions are eliminated at the Department of Public Instruction.

For advocates of early education:

- More at Four is cut by \$16 million, cutting thousands of children off the More at Four rolls and the program will be transferred from DPI to DHHS.

For those who advocate for investments in building teacher capacity:

- The NC Center for the Advancement of Teaching is eliminated.
- Funding for mentors charged with helping new teachers is eliminated.
- Over \$12.5 million of funding for teacher training is cut.
- All funding for the Teacher Academy (a group that provides high-quality staff development for teachers) is eliminated.

For others:

- Over \$13 million in grants aimed at reducing drop outs are eliminated.
- The Teacher Cadet program, a program attempting to attract top high school students into teaching, would be unfunded.
- The Professional Standards Commission is eliminated.
- Funding for the Education Cabinet is eliminated, ending the effort to create seamless educational policies impacting young people from pre-school to graduate school.

The second surprise, or twist, in the Senate budget is a proposal that would lead to merit pay in the second year of the budget (i.e. 2012-13). Details are yet to be worked out but the Senate is proposing that teachers move to a merit pay system in a year and have budgeted enough to fund roughly the equivalent of 2-3% pay hikes in the second year of the budget, albeit they will be subject to a yet-to-be-determined merit pay plan. For this year, teachers and all other state employees will have salaries frozen for the third year in a row and it should be noted that proposed raises for the 2012-13 school and fiscal year are dependent on the state generating additional revenue.

Senate “Reform Budget” Proposal (cont’d)

All in all, the budget reductions come to nearly \$700 million -- \$696,788,000 to be exact. The Senate budget will be debated next week and, if passed, will go to the House and then, in all probability to a joint House/Senate Conference Committee to work out differences.

Follow this link for a comparison of the budgets proposed by the State Board, Governor, House and Senate, [click here](#).

Large Cuts Also Proposed for Colleges & Universities

K-12 education is not the only area slated for deep cuts in the Senate’s proposed budget. If enacted, the UNC System would see funding cut by \$435 million. UNC hospitals would be cut by 43%. Community college funding would be cut by 11%, representing a cut of \$53 million, even with a proposed increase in tuition.

Details of proposed cuts are available on-line. [Click here](#) to see the proposed Senate budget for all three areas of education.

Budget Negotiations May Bring More Funds to Public Schools

It appears that that legislative leaders have been working to strike an agreement that could potentially provide as much as \$300 million more than the \$19.4 billion called for in the Senate spending plan. While the House budget writers are more optimistic that an agreement deal could be imminent; Senate leaders are more cautious.

The agreement would have the Senate amending its budget plan to add additional money, most of it for public schools, and agreeing to some changes requested by House budget writers. Once adopted by the Senate, the House would then approve the bill without having to go through conference committee negotiations. As reported in *The Insider*, the additional money was being put in the budget, in part, at the request of the five Democrats who voted for the House budget. It reported that as of Thursday afternoon, the five were on board with the proposed agreement. Their support is critical to an agreement because Governor Perdue, who wants higher levels of spending for public schools, could otherwise veto the plan and prevent an override.

It appears that about \$280 million above the House budget would go to public school spending and \$100 million more elsewhere. By adding \$280 million to the House's proposed public school appropriation, the legislature's budget would spend \$138 million less than called for in Perdue's budget plan.

Senate Budget Proposals Would Also End Teaching Fellows Scholarships

One eleventh hour Senate Budget proposal that has surprised many is a proposal to phase out funding for Teaching Fellows scholarships. The proposal would bring an end next year to new scholarships being awarded. Currently, 500 top high school graduates receive state-funded scholarships if they agree to major in education, participate in extra preparation programs while attending college and teach for at least four years in a public school in North Carolina.

The Fellows Program was envisioned 25 years ago by the Public School Forum which has administered the program since its inception in 1986.

Today, nearly 4,000 graduates of the program are teaching in 99 of the State's 100 counties. Two have gone on to be Teachers of the Year; one became the Walt Disney national teacher of the year and scores have been named building and county teachers of the year in their school district.

The program has been copied by other states and a recent study of teacher effectiveness found Teaching Fellow graduates are among the most effective teachers in the state.

Ironically, virtually every educational program in North Carolina that has received national recognition and/or has been the model for similar programs in other states is currently on the chopping block – More at Four, Smart Start, the Center for Advancement of Teaching and the Teaching Fellows Program among them. If the Senate budget remains intact, programs that have brought positive recognition to the State will disappear.

Teaching Fellow Shares Frustration with News of Phase Out

To Members of the General Assembly,

My name is Kathryn Frazier and I am one Teaching fellow in a family of 250 at East Carolina and many more around our state. It has been brought to our attention that The NC Budget cuts have put the future of our family in jeopardy. I do not use the word family lightly, because although some may see it as just a scholarship, or just another program, we are much more than that--we truly are a family made up of the best and brightest future educators of the state.

This scholarship has given me the opportunity to attend a four year university and pursue a degree in something I love and am extremely passionate about. Without this scholarship I would not have been blessed with the many opportunities I've already received and those still yet to come. However, this is only one perk of this program. I just returned from my first summer requirement as a North Carolina Teaching Fellow, Discovery. This trip was life changing and I know will make me a better educator when it is time to start my own classroom.

Teaching Fellow Shares Frustration (cont'd)

As a Teaching Fellow, we are given the opportunity to participate in activities that will open our eyes to the world of education. We get to travel our state and see all the different school systems and what they have to offer us as future educators, and network with some of North Carolina's finest. These are all opportunities that other education majors, who are not Teachings Fellows, are not given. These opportunities are what helps to mold us into the best in North Carolina. Both of my parents were teachers in North Carolina and I could see everyday the difference they made to each and everyone of their students and one day I hope to do the same. Teaching Fellows enables me to become an even better educator and mentor to my future students.

The current and past Teaching Fellows, Directors, and others involved in our program are not the only ones who see just how amazing this program is. While traveling this past week on Discovery, we got the opportunity to talk to superintendents and principals, who all told us that when looking at people to hire in their schools, they felt that Teaching Fellows were the best candidates and most qualified. That in itself proves that cutting this program, and dismantling our family, would be a huge hindrance to the promotion of education in schools. It is also discouraging to those of us who know that the children are our future and they need the best teachers there molding them, and those teachers need the support of their state. This cycle enables our youth to become the bright minded and critical thinking individuals who will give back to us one day.

I visited our local high school just a few weeks ago and there are aspiring educators in schools right now who are so excited about the this program. I have had students emailing me questioning about the program ever since I left the school that day. This shows how big of an impression this program leaves on people around us and how excited our youth is to learn. If you believe in the success of our schools, and believe in bettering our schools, do not pass this bill. Teaching Fellows is an amazing program that has already changed my life, as well as the lives of hundreds of other Teaching Fellows, thousands of students, and North Carolina's School system as a whole. Please do not dismantle our family, don't deprive an aspiring teacher from entering the education field due to financial difficulty, and more importantly do not take away every child's opportunity to learn from the best and brightest teachers in our state, North Carolina Teaching Fellows. Thank you so much for your time and consideration. Teaching Fellows are the best and the brightest, help us to carry on this legend.

*Kathryn Frazier
East Carolina University
North Carolina Teaching Fellow*

Other Bill Updates...

HB 823 (Rep. Brian Holloway) Governance of the Dept. of Public Instruction passed second reading on Wednesday on a vote of 111-8 and third reading on Thursday on a vote of 106-10. It will now go to the Senate. The Bill calls for a constitutional amendment to make the Superintendent of Public Instruction a member of and Chair of the State Board of Education. It will require the Superintendent to make all state-level appointments necessary for the supervision and administration of the free public schools. It will also change the membership of the State Board of Education to include an additional at-large member, to require the General Assembly to elect all at-large members, and sets the term of office to six years. The Governor shall appoint eight members, one from each of the eight educational districts. Two members shall be elected by the Senate and two members by the House of Representatives. The amendments to the state constitution shall be submitted to the voters at a statewide election on May 8, 2012. If they pass, the act becomes effective on January 1, 2013.

HB 758 (Rep. Carney, Glazier, Adams, Johnson) Establish Arts Education Commission. This bill passed the House Education Committee on Tuesday of this week. The bill creates the Arts Education Commission in the General Assembly. The Commission would consist of 14 members: 4 appointed by the Governor; 6 members appointed by the Speaker of the House, including 3 Representatives and 3 citizens at-large; and 4 appointed by the President Pro Tem of the Senate, including 2 Senators and 2 citizens at-large. The bill would prioritize, and recommend implementation strategies for the recommendations of the Comprehensive Arts Education Plan for K-12; recommend the content and process for establishing an annual arts education “report card”; recommend ways to assess and promote opportunities for students to learn creativity and innovation; work with DPI to create assessments models for arts education; recommend the establishment of arts education accountability incentives for schools and recommend a permanent financing strategy to provide for comprehensive arts education in grades K-12. The bill passed the House and is in the Senate Education/Higher Education Committee.

SB 727 (Senator Hise) No Dues Checkoff for School Employees. This bill eliminates the dues checkoff option for active and retired public school employees. It passed second and third reading in the Senate on Thursday.

Class Size Reduction . . .

The Devil's In the Details

The Senate has staked out a laudable goal – one supported by research. For years studies have found that if class size gets down in the 1 teacher to 15 or fewer students that there is a significant jump in student achievement. The Senate's announcement that they are going to attempt to get class size to that level deserves applause, but lest we forget lowering class size in the early elementary grades was one of the primary goals of the Easley Administration during his first four years in office. Hundreds of millions were spent trying to accomplish that goal and, at the end of the road there was little, if anything, to show for it. Why? The devil is in the details.

The Devil's In the Details (cont'd)

Here are three things that can be learned from the Easley attempt to dramatically boost student performance by lowering class size.

Lesson One: use honest numbers to reach the goal. Currently when calculating class size ratios, the State not only takes the total of classroom teachers and divides by the number of students, but it includes other teachers (i.e., art, music, reading specialists, etc.) when dividing. Subsequently, the reported ratio of teachers to students is misleading. The current ratio on paper is 1 teacher to 18 students. However, as almost any mom or dad can tell you that misrepresents current class sizes. In many districts elementary classrooms have a ratio more like 1 teacher to 23 or 24 students.

The lesson to be learned? When calculating elementary class sizes, count only classroom teachers when dividing by the number of students. Getting to 1 teacher to 15 students on paper is a far cry from getting to it in reality. Unless that type of math is used, the State could repeat the Easley Administration experience and look good on paper but find little, if any, improvement in performance.

Lesson Two: be strategic. During the Easley Administration class size reduction was done across the board. Subsequently, a classroom in a middle to upper-middle class suburb was reduced at the same rate as a classroom in a district serving high numbers of students classified as “at risk.” Subsequently, hundreds of millions of dollars were spent reducing class size equally and not reaching the goal of 1 teacher to 15 students.

Research finds that the largest gains in student performance come from having at-risk youngsters in small class size environments. For more advantaged students the gains are marginal.

For far less money the state could focus on getting class sizes down to 1 teacher to 15 students in classrooms where 50% or more of the students are “at risk” and potentially show significant gains.

Lesson Three: if teachers aren't trained to teach differently with small class sizes, gains will not be as large as they could be. Teaching a class with 15 students is very different than teaching a class with 23 or 24 students. Without teacher training focused on maximizing the benefits of small class sizes, predicted gains will not be as large as expected.

Currently, the proposed state budget essentially wipes out all funds for teacher training, a budget cut that could have consequences for years to come.

Setting a goal of 1 teacher to 15 students is a laudable goal. However, the devil is in the details. What remains to be seen is whether North Carolina can learn lessons from previous attempts to bolster performance through reducing class size; or, will we simply repeat the mistakes of the past?

Also in the Senate Budget . . .

A Proposal to Stop Funding for City School Districts

Another eleventh hour provision in the proposed Senate budget would stop funding the administration of the 15 remaining city school systems in North Carolina. Currently, there are fifteen city school systems, all of them small or medium-sized cities like Chapel Hill, Asheville, Roanoke Rapids and others.

The Senate budget would stop funding superintendents and other administrative positions in these districts forcing them to either assume the costs locally or merge with their county school systems.

Similar proposals that would result in 100 county-wide school systems have been proposed and debated in previous sessions. With a number of House members in leadership positions representing districts that include city systems it is debatable whether this provision will remain in the final House/Senate budget proposal, but it will generate a lively debate in the coming weeks.

Strong Ammunition for Advocates of STEM Education . . .

At the same time the proposed Senate budget would reduce the State's investment in STEM-related education (i.e., science, technology, engineering and math), the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce has found eight of the top ten undergraduate majors with the highest median salaries were in STEM-related areas.

STEM-related majors including naval architecture and marine engineering command the highest starting salaries while other majors, including elementary education and psychology generate some of the lowest.

The study categorized 171 undergraduate majors into 15 groups including health, humanities, liberal arts, law and public policy. They then analyzed data from more than half a million respondents to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2009 American Community Survey who reported their undergraduate major and how much they earned.

As a group, engineering majors reported the highest median earnings at \$75,000. The lowest pay, at \$42,000, came from those in education, psychology and social work.

Teaching Fellow Receives Presidential Award for Excellence

Haywood County Schools' fifth-grade teacher Amanda Northrup recently received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics teaching. Northrup is one of 85 math and science teachers from around the country receiving the award. She wins \$10,000 and a trip to the White House for a reception and a chance to meet the President on May 16th.

Last fall, Northrup learned she was one of three finalists for the award. She received an email last Thursday notifying her that she had won. In an announcement on the White House website, President Obama said the winners "have demonstrated uncommon skill and devotion in the classroom, nurturing the young minds of tomorrow's science and math leaders. America's competitiveness rests on the excellence of our citizens in technical fields, and we owe these teachers a debt of gratitude for strengthening America's prosperity."

A North Carolina Teaching Fellows scholarship recipient and graduate of UNC Greensboro, Northrup is in her eighth year at Riverbend. She started out as a third-grade teacher. "I didn't plan to be a teacher," Northrup said. "It (the Teaching Fellows program) requires four years of teaching service. When my four years were over, I loved teaching."

2011-12 EPFP Fellows Reflect on their Journey

This year's Education Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP) ended with a celebration for fellows and a reflection of on the past 10 months. Several of the 2010-11 EPFP fellows wanted to take a moment to reflect on their experience as well as thank those who made the program such a rewarding experience.

"The EPFP journey is one that should be taken by anyone who is in public education. The depth and breadth of the experience along with the great friends I made will impact me for many years to come." - *Dave Edwards, Chief Communications and Professional Learning Officer, NC Virtual Public School*

"EPFP is simply top notch. It is a program that should not be missed. Jo Ann Norris and Kendall Jordan provide fantastic leadership and their passion for education is contagious. In less than a year you gain the access and the insight into our public education system that would take a career to experience otherwise. It has been only one week from the program's conclusion and my Tuesday evening feels empty." - *Todd LoFrese, Assistant Superintendent for Support Services Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools*

2011-12 EPFP Fellows (cont'd)

“More than an overview of education policy and the policy-making process, EPFP provided me with an opportunity to review my personal definition of and commitment to education for all. Being a part of such a dynamic and intelligent group (led so skillfully by Jo Ann Norris and Kendall Jordan), I am definitely more confident in my understanding of the policy process and the need for my involvement.” - *Trina Gabriel, Online Student Support Services, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro*

The 2010-11 class completed its 10-month weekly seminar sessions on May 17. The class' graduation will be held on October 25, 2011 at the Cardinal Club in downtown Raleigh. Applications are now being accepted for the 2011-12 class of Fellows. The-ten month seminar program meets weekly on Tuesday night from 5:30 to 8:30 pm from September 13, 2011 to May 15, 2012. 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, 2011 whichever comes first. Don't delay. Apply today!

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