

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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Volume 14, Issue 3

July 15, 2011

Quote of the Month

“The center of a classroom is not a test, a textbook, or the posters on the wall. It’s not a state or district policy. It most certainly is not a federal law. The heart of the classroom is found in the unique relationships between students and teachers. In the same way that a family turns a house into a home, a transformation takes place when teachers and students work together to reach common goals. We see it in the trust, the expectations, the experiences, and the knowledge of every person in the class.... Government cannot create these relationships, but what federal, state, district, and school leaders can do is create conditions that nurture and grow the talents of our teachers.... We must treat our teachers well. They are the force that forges the meaningful connections that are at the heart of every great classroom. Without teachers, the center cannot hold.”

-- Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (7/1/11),
in a letter for a virtual conference this month

As a Result of the Budget...

Wake County Looking at an Additional \$20M in Cuts

With a new state budget in place, Wake County school officials said the system will have to absorb a total budget cut of about \$40 million during the 2011-2012 school year. New reductions announced Tuesday - based on a fresh analysis of the state document - will amount to \$20 million of that amount. While some cuts will be offset by new state funding, the changes will mean everything from 70 lost custodial positions, to further cuts in teacher assistants' pay, to a new \$45 fee for driver education classes, chief business officer David Neter told board members during a afternoon work session.

According to Neter, the custodial staff will be reduced by 70 positions and contracts by 35 percent. The savings from the in-house and contract reductions will be \$2,478,490 each. Additional savings of \$200,000 brings the total savings to \$5,156,980. Paying teacher assistants for 9.25 months instead of 10 months will make up \$2.4 million. Board members approved the \$45 fee for driver education classes to make up The driver education program will take a \$493,000 cut, which will require a \$45 per-student fee for the program to offset that reduction.

Wake County (cont'd)

Overall the cut in state contributions to Wake schools will be closer to 6 percent than the 5 percent reduction budget planners used in crafting the \$1.2 billion county school budget. On the positive side, according to Neter, each elementary school will receive one additional teacher for Grades 1-3 and the state will supply an additional \$170,000 in funding for academically gifted programs.

More at Four Program Gets New Home and New Name

More at Four is gone. With the move from the Department of Public Instruction to the Department of Health and Human Services comes a name change for the preschool program Governor Mike Easley started. The program is being changed to the NC Pre-Kindergarten program (NCPK) and faces an eleven and a half percent reduction in funding as part of the new state budget.

In addition to the name change and departmental move, 80 percent of parents will now be required to pay a fee to participate in the program. Only 20 percent of the families now enrolled in the program will be eligible for the free pre-school. Educators say More at Four was developed under Governor Mike Easley to close the achievement gap for disadvantaged students, and the cuts will not help.

Six Bills Experience the Veto Override This Week

The Senate voted Wednesday to override six of Governor Beverly Perdue's vetoes as was expected. Republicans have a veto-proof majority in the chamber so long as their caucus stays in line, which it did Wednesday. The Senate bills passed during the Legislature's primary work session this year won't become law unless the House, scheduled to vote on July 25, also agrees to override the vetoes. Below are the Senate bills getting the veto override this week:

SB 781: Regulatory Reform Act of 2011 prohibits state agencies from issuing regulations not required by the federal government or state law in an effort to increase transparency in the regulatory process.

SB 33: Medical Liability Reforms caps non-economic damages awards in medical liability cases to \$500,000 and expands protections to emergency room providers.

Six Bills Experience the Veto Override This Week (cont'd)

SB 727: No Dues Checkoff for School Employees eliminates the automatic payroll dues deduction for the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE).

SB 496: Medicaid and Health Choice Provider Req. sets out requirements for Medicaid and Health Choice providers.

SB 709: Energy Jobs Act paves the way for onshore and offshore drilling. The bill directs Perdue to enter into a compact with South Carolina and Virginia governors to develop a strategy for exploring "all commercially viable federal and state offshore energy resources.

SB 532: ESC / Jobs Reform rolls the Employment Security Commission into the Commerce Department and expands the reason that a person can be disqualified from receiving benefits.

The House also has its own vetoed bills to consider later this month, including abortion restrictions and photo identification requirements for voters.

National News...

Atlanta Testing Scandal Puts Districts Nationwide on Alert

The Atlanta public schools are embroiled in a massive cheating scandal. It's a situation that's rippling far beyond the city's borders, because the alleged cheating involved the same sort of standardized tests used all over the country. It's a scathing report: A decade of systemic cheating in Atlanta's school system by the adults. Dozens of educators erased wrong student answers on state standardized tests, and inserted the right ones.

In all, investigators accused 38 principals and 178 educators working at 44 schools of cheating; saying that they were either directly involved in erasing wrong answers on a key standardized test or they knew -- or should have known -- what was going on, according to the governor's office. The motive for cheating? It was to show phony progress at often troubled schools, what the report calls "the pressure to meet targets in the data-driven environment."

The fallout from the Atlanta Public Schools cheating scandal is now being felt hundreds of miles away. Kathy Augustine's new role as superintendent of the Desoto Independent School District in Texas may be short-lived. Up until last Tuesday, Augustine worked for embattled Dr. Beverly Hall, and she is accused of aiding and abetting in the scandal.

Atlanta Testing Scandal (cont'd)

The scandal is also raising questions nationally about high-pressure testing and heightening concern about new exams Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) is crafting to judge teacher effectiveness. It can happen anywhere," said Claudia Flowers, a UNC Charlotte education professor who has served on state testing advisory boards for North Carolina and Georgia. "It seems to happen in places where there's a lot of pressure" to raise scores.

Chris Cobitz, CMS' top testing official, doubts a scandal like Atlanta's could happen here, even with the controversial new tests coming on line over the next three years. He said educators in CMS have little tolerance for cheating and are quick to report violations - so much so that his office usually gets alerted long before the compromised tests are scored."It's hard to imagine we could have anything like that going on in CMS without someone noticing," he said.

KY Continues Making Strides in Educational Performance

Kentucky educators should be proud of the substantial strides in education made during the past two decades. The state now ranks 33rd nationwide in an index of education performance indicators, according to a new study by the University of Kentucky.

The report, by UK's Center for Business and Economics Research, shows the state's ranking on the Index of Educational Progress has risen by more than almost any other state during the past 20 years. In 1990, Kentucky ranked 48th. The index used in the report includes the percentage of residents with high school, two-year or bachelor's degrees; high school dropout rates; American College Testing (ACT) scores; and advanced placement scores and national scores in reading, math and science. The study grew out of earlier work by the former Kentucky Long Term Research Center.

The new report was prompted by the availability of new education data and by Kentucky leaders' continuing desire to know how the state is doing compared with others across the country. According to the study, North Carolina was the only other state that was in the bottom 10 (43rd) in 1990 that climbed out of that group with similar gains to Kentucky's (now 32nd). To view the report in its entirety, [click here](#).

Save the Pell Grant Campaign Continues

On July 25, supporters across the country will band together for Save Pell Day — an online day of action to engage via blogs, Twitter, Facebook and other online tools as they raise their voices in opposition to Pell funding cuts.

Widely considered to be the backbone of financial aid to the country's most needy students, the Pell Grant program, which enables nearly 10 million students to attend college, has a huge target on its back. Changes being considered would take effect for the 2011-12 school year, decreasing the maximum amount of aid for the most needy students from \$5,550 to \$4,705, a difference of \$845. Plus, about 1.7 million students who receive smaller Pell Grants would become ineligible for the program.

On Save Pell Day, organizers are asking supporters to:

- Tweet at lawmakers using the #SavePell hashtag to demand they fund the \$5,550 maximum Pell Grant and that they not make harmful cuts to the program's eligibility requirements.
- Send e-mails to elected officials telling Congress and the White House that we cannot balance the federal budget on the backs of our most vulnerable Americans.
- Share information on blog and Facebook to let more people know that these potential cuts could derail the dreams of thousands of students trying to earn their way into the middle class.

To join the cause, "Like" the Save Pell community today: <http://www.facebook.com/savepell>.

Loss of Government Jobs Continues to Drag Down Economic Recovery

For the second month in a row layoffs of local and state government employees cancelled out much of the economy's job growth. Employment numbers released last Friday found jobs grew in June by an anemic 19,000. Economists were predicting much higher job growth, but they failed to take into account how much draconian cuts in local and state government budgets would take a toll on recovery. For the month of June, government employment shrunk by 39,000 nationwide. The sector-by-sector employment showed a very mixed picture:

Loss of Government Jobs (cont'd)

• Government	Down 39,000
• Financial Services	Down 15,000
• Temporary Help Services	Down 12,000
• Construction	Down 9,000
• Transportation & Warehousing	Up 3,600
• Retail	Up 5,200
• Manufacturing	Up 6,000
• Prof. and Bus. Services	Up 12,000
• Health Care	Up 13,500
• Leisure/hospitality	Up 34,000

Looking down the road, the fastest growing jobs area in the month of June was “leisure/hospitality,” largely fueled by seasonal growth. Much of the growth in that area can be accounted for by coastal and resort employment during the summer months, seasonal amusement parks like Kings Dominion / Carowinds and vacation-related jobs that will begin dropping dramatically once schools reopen in the fall.

Turning back to the government jobs sector, however, the worst is still to come. With many state and local governments, including those in North Carolina, running on a July 1 to June 30 budget year, the impact of cuts for the coming year will rise sharply in July and August as the new budget year begins and public employee severance packages come to an end. In August and September, the employment numbers will be impacted as the anticipated layoffs of tens of thousands of public schools and colleges across the country are reflected.

Editorial Comment...

A Closer Look at the Argument that Private Sector Jobs are the Only “Good” or “Real” Jobs

One of the more maddening, and unsubstantiated arguments made by those who see cutting government services as the only way to save the economy is that public sector jobs are somehow not “good” or “real” jobs, instead they are made up jobs by those who see public employment as a jobs program.

Last week’s final launch of NASA’s space shuttle stands as testimony to the impact of government jobs on local economies. At the peak of the shuttle program’s 30 year history, 32,000 people were employed by the federal government to support the program. As of last week’s final launch that number was down to 6,300 and it will shrink to roughly 1,000 when the final launch has ended.

Private Sector Jobs (cont'd)

As a result of the program, Florida's Brevard County and others surrounding NASA's home base saw aeronautic companies like Northrop Grumman flock to the area creating more jobs for those in the business of supplying the shuttle program. More to the point, "real" jobs made possible because of the large numbers of federal employees were created. Automobile dealerships sprung up; new restaurants, banks and clothing stores opened up; real estate agencies boomed; construction jobs abounded – all this because of federal spending. Around the country technological advances made as a result of the investment in the space program created more jobs, more businesses and the need for supporting services that accompanied them.

The story in the region around NASA's home base is a different one today. Employment has shrunk. Real estate values have plummeted. Private manufacturing jobs and jobs in the service area have disappeared.

The NASA story is not isolated. In North Carolina consider the impact of UNC colleges on communities across the state. Greenville has become one of the more stable and growing economic stories in rural North Carolina, thanks largely to the ECU medical hospital which has spawned hundreds of health-related businesses. In towns like Boone and Elizabeth City, UNC colleges are the largest employer and the thousands of students attending their colleges are what keep rental properties, restaurants, clothing store and much more profitable. The same is true in isolated counties like Cullowhee, located in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains. In the Triangle area, it is highly unlikely that the vision for Research Triangle Park would have succeeded without the presence of UNC Chapel Hill and NC State.

As June's employment numbers show, government jobs have become an integral part of the nation's economy. A healthy government sector contributes to the overall economy; an unhealthy and shrinking government sector will only make it more difficult for the nation to rebound, for jobs to return and for citizens to regain optimism about a better tomorrow.

And the rhetoric of the "public sector jobs aren't real jobs" forgets one more thing. These "unreal" jobs are what make one's life work. They are the people who taught you when you were young. They are the people that keep traffic flowing and keep roads passable. They are the people you call at 911. They are your policemen, your firemen, your nurses, your garbage pick-up people. They are also your urban planners and your airport traffic controllers. They are the seen and unseen glue that keeps communities together. They work for our lives and they make our lives work.

Forum News...

Calling All Future EPFP Fellows!!!!

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 13, 2011 to May 15, 2012. This year's fellows will see a few enhancements in the program including a national book review, an online community connecting fellows throughout the country, and the infusion of social networking tools such as blogs, Twitter and Facebook.

The program addresses issues related to policy and leadership development. North Carolina's program 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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