

# *The Public School Forum's Friday Report*

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## Outcome of Manning Ruling On More at Four Has Narrow Focus

While the latest hearing in the Leandro case ostensibly was to determine whether General Assembly cuts to education over the last three years put the state out of compliance with the order to provide all children with a sound, basic education, the ruling coming out of the two-day hearing focused only on one very-narrow issue at hand. Specifically, whether General Assembly changes to the More at Four program created barriers to at-risk young people in need of preschool.

The bulk of the ruling issued this week by Judge Manning focused specifically on a provision of the law saying that only 20% of the participants in the program would be drawn from at-risk, low-income students. All others would be charged a fee in order to participate. That fee could be as much as 10% of family income.

Manning ruled that the state needed to remove barriers to participation but was silent on what exactly the state was to do.

In addition, Manning didn't address on what General Assembly cuts have the potential of doing to the preschool program. For instance, the program was transferred to the Division of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the state agency which supported getting out of the school business only two years ago when attempting to transfer the Schools for the Deaf to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). No comment was made on the appropriateness of that transfer. Nor did the Judge raise questions about how the program would be supported as a result of the layoff of 19 More at Four employees, most of them instructional support specialists and a 20% budget reduction...

Predictably the reaction to the ruling has been mixed. On Wednesday of this week, for instance, the editorial section of the *Raleigh News & Observer* had an editorial on one page lauding the Judge's decision while a column on the opposite page criticized Manning for "becoming a defender of the educational status quo" and calling for the Supreme Court Chief Justice "to quietly advise the judge to come to a conclusion so we all can move on.

As for leadership in the General Assembly, reactions range from "it (i.e., the bill) was poorly written," to speculation that Manning's ruling would be over turned to others who feel nothing is required in response.

## Outcome of Manning Ruling (cont'd)

Given the draconian cuts that have been made over the previous three years, the elimination of practically all of the state's professional development capacity, bringing to an end scholarship support for those willing to go into teaching and large numbers of layoffs of educators and support staff across the state, the expectation had been for Manning to focus on the overall system of education and find the state moving farther and farther away from the goal of providing a sound, basic education to all children. On those matters Manning was silent.

The General Assembly's actions to begin charging parents a fee for More At Four services will likely mean thousands fewer at-risk youngsters getting More At Four services and Manning's ruling is vital to their futures, but his silence on the deteriorating state of North Carolina's education overall is difficult to understand. His silence on all other matters and the narrowness of the ruling leaves one thing clear. The seventeen year saga has not ended.

WRAL News reporter Mike Charbonneau reports that Bob Orr, the former Supreme Court justice who wrote the Leandro II ruling Manning is charged with enforcing said the court clearly defined the role of pre-kindergarten programs when it comes to the constitutional right for a sound, basic education. According to Charbonneau, Orr said "all of these at-risk kids need to at least have this opportunity to attend a pre-K program. If this particular law does, in fact, violate the constitution, then it cannot be enforced."

## Merger of Community Colleges Sparks Opposition

On the theory that "bigger is better," General Assembly members are proposing community college mergers that would involve over twenty of the state's 58 community colleges. A study found that the state would save slightly more than \$5 million if community colleges enrolling less than 3,000 students were merged with larger colleges, thus saving administrative positions.

The move, however, would mean a loss of identity for small community colleges. Beaufort County, as an example, would no longer have its own community college. It would be an extension branch of a larger community college in another county.

The proposal has sparked, and is sparking, growing opposition ranging from Governor Purdue who publically has opposed the move to county commissioners, community college officials, local chambers of commerce, economic development specialists and others.

## Merger of Community Colleges (cont'd)

Several arguments are being advanced against the move. One of the most persuasive is that the \$5 million in savings represents one four-hundredths of 1 percent of the \$1.3 billion community college system budget. For that relatively insignificant savings, local community colleges lose their local identity; county commissioners in the larger counties would be making decisions on the formerly independent small college budgets; there would undoubtedly be squabbles between county commissioners of small counties who saw their independent colleges absorbed by larger counties; economic development recruiters could no longer promise that small county community colleges would tailor programs to the needs of potential employers, and the list goes on.

Community Colleges that would be impact by the move include:

- Beaufort Community College
- Bladen Community College
- Blue Ridge Community College
- Brunswick Community College
- Carteret Community College
- Haywood Community College
- Isothermal Community College
- James Sprunt Community College
- Martin Community College
- Mayland Community College
- McDowell Technical Community College
- Montgomery Community College
- Nash Community College
- Pamlico Community College
- Piedmont Community College
- Richmond Community College
- Rockingham Community College
- Sampson Community College
- South Piedmont Community College
- Southeastern Community College
- Southeastern Community College
- Wilson Community College

The State Board for Community Colleges and the Governor have come out against the proposal. With opposition to the move growing, it remains to be seen if the General Assembly will pursue its "bigger is better" approach.

## Lengthening the School Year by 5 Days: Good Idea; Lousy Implementation Plan

For years the Public School Forum has been recommending that North Carolina lengthen its school year of 180 days, one of the shortest school years in the industrial world. The average school year in developed countries is over 200 days meaning that schools in the United States “spot” young people around the world 20 or more days of learning every year. By ninth grade that represents a “spot” of over one full North Carolina year of learning. And we wonder why our young people fare badly on international educational comparisons.

That said, the General Assembly unexpectedly moved to lengthen the North Carolina school year by 5 days. A great idea, but the implementation left a good deal to be desired. First, in a money-saving move, the days were not added to the calendar. Rather, 5 existing teacher work days used for planning and staff development were converted into instructional days. Subsequently, schools have 5 less days to work with teachers, provide training, etc.

Second, no additional money for transportation was provided. Without additional resources school districts were left to find additional money for gasoline, drivers, upkeep, etc. at the same time they were under the gun to return hundreds of millions of dollars to the state for what is lovingly called “negative reversions” (i.e., we give you \$10 and you have to return \$9 of it).

Last, the decision to add days came at the end of the June session. Staffing plans for most systems were firm; school calendars had already been distributed to parents, year round schools were scheduled to begin in July.

Recognizing the virtual impossibility for putting the extended year plan into effect in the 2011-12 school year, the State Board of Education prudently offered waivers for school districts and charter schools that were unable to accommodate the mandate on short notice.

Last week the State Board granted 131 waivers – 87 school systems will not make the change this year nor will 44 charter schools (see link for complete listing). None of the state’s largest systems, Forsyth, Guilford, Mecklenburg or Wake, are making the change.

Extending the school year – a good idea? Yes, one of the soundest. Doing it by eliminating teacher work days and leaving local schools to pay for the additional costs, however, is a classic case of taking five steps forward and 10 steps backward.

## Teaching Fellows Graduate joins Citizen Schools NC

Citizen Schools announced this week that Tonya Horton is joining the organization as Executive Director of Citizen Schools North Carolina. Citizen Schools is a national nonprofit organization that partners with middle schools to expand the learning day for low-income students. The North Carolina program partners with schools in Charlotte, Durham and Henderson.

Tonya Horton, a North Carolina Teaching Fellows graduate, brings deep education experience to the organization's work in North Carolina. Prior to joining Citizen Schools, as a District Transformation Coach for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Horton worked with district leadership to build capacity and structures to foster school improvement. Her work was critical in helping one of the lowest-performing districts in North Carolina make major strides forward with student achievement. Hallmarks of her work are being a thoughtful agent of change, using strategic planning and data to drive effective action, engaging communities in accessing resources for students and teachers, and building strong relationships and partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders. Previously, Horton served in various school district roles in North Carolina and Texas, including curriculum coordinator, student achievement specialist, middle school principal and teacher. Horton holds a B.A. in History Education and a M.A. in History from North Carolina Central University, as well as a M.Ed. in Educational Administration from the University of North Texas. She will soon complete her doctorate in Educational Administration from the University of North Texas.

Citizen Schools is a leading national education initiative that partners with middle schools to expand the learning day for children in low-income communities across the country through afterschool and expanded learning time programs. The organization mobilizes a second shift of afternoon educators, who provide academic support, leadership development, and "apprenticeships"—hands-on projects taught by volunteers from business and civic organizations. At 37 middle schools in seven states across the country, Citizen Schools students develop the skills they need to succeed in high school, college, the workforce, and civic life.

### *National News...*

## Former Gates Exec Walks from NY Area Charter Project

Tom Vander Ark, former executive director of education for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was granted charters in 2010 to open charter high schools in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn and Newark. But after spending more than \$1.5 million of investors' money on consultants and lawyers, the now CEO of OpenEd Solutions, has walked from the project and the schools will not open as planned this fall.

## NY Area Charter Project (cont'd)

A former businessman and superintendent in Washington State, Vander Ark, in 2008 founded City Prep Academies (now named OpenEd Solutions), a for-profit organization intended to create and operate charter schools that combined traditional classroom teaching and online learning. Brooklyn City Prep was slated to open in September 2011. After the initial \$1.5 million investment from his own venture fund, Vander Ark faced a challenge in fundraising, the need to raise up to an additional \$500,000 per school.

Vander Ark, unable to get any money from the Charter School Growth Fund or other similar national organizations, has basically abandoned the idea of beginning a charter management organization and has left the schools to find outside help on their own.

### *Forum News...*

## Senior Conference 2011 Survive and Thrive!

The 2011 NC Teaching Fellows Senior Conference was held at Elon University on July 15-17, 2011. The theme was "Survive and Thrive." The conference focused on how to take care of your body, mind, and spirit as a student, and as a future educator.

On Friday Fellows participated in dynamic workshops lead by Leading to Change, Inc. Fellows registered in advance to take part in their choice of workshops. Options included workshops on using music and media across the curriculum, tips on social networking in the classroom and methods for teaching the newest generation of North Carolina students.

Friday evening Fellows were afforded the opportunity to hear motivational and inspiring words from Michelle Shearer, the 2011 National Teacher of the Year. Mrs. Shearer, an AP Chemistry teacher from Maryland, encouraged the rising seniors to engage with their students. "Students want their teachers to be engaged. This is a people business that you're in. They want to connect with you... and there are days when that's going to be difficult," Shearer said. Shearer continued with her one of her ways of getting through those difficult days. "One of my favorite quotes is that 'teachers do the work from which all of society benefits.' So on difficult days, sometimes it's helpful to have an inspirational quote to help you remember why you came into this profession in the first place," Shearer shared.

## Senior Conference 2011 (cont'd)

On Saturday, each Fellow participated in 4 workshops of their choosing. Workshops were lead by Teaching Fellow and NCAAT alumni, as well as university and community organization professionals. Workshop choices included: "Stress Reduction through Massage Therapy," "Everything I Need To Know About Teaching... They Forgot to Tell Me," "Surviving your First Year as a Classroom Teacher," "Everything a Math Teacher Wants to Know," and "How to Get Hired and Not Get Fired," among others. The workshops offered practical tips for beginning teachers, including lesson plans, classroom management and how to stay sane during the first years of classroom teaching. Fellows commented on how they were excited about the variety and diversity of the sessions that they were offered.

On Saturday evening students heard firsthand "The Ron Clark Story." Ron Clark, 2000-2001 Disney American Teacher Award winner, and North Carolina Teaching Fellows alumnus was the keynote speaker. Mr. Clark shared his remarkable experiences teaching in Aurora, North Carolina and in Harlem, New York. He also shared stories and his experiences from the Ron Clark Academy. He gave the seniors much inspiration and insight as they prepare for their upcoming student teaching and job searching adventures. Fellows then had the unique opportunity to meet with Mr. Clark as he spent time signing books and talking with individual Fellows.

On Sunday, the conference concluded with a closing session lead by the trainers from Leading to Change. This session was designed as the culminating experience of the weekend, which included selected conference participants sharing what they had learned and would take away from the experience. The session ended with a surprise photo and video montage made from the hundreds of photos taken over the weekend.

This conference was somewhat bittersweet, as it will be last time that the 2008 cohort will come together as one large group. Also on participants minds were the recent actions taken by the North Carolina General Assembly to begin the process of phasing out the Fellows program after the incoming 2011 cohort. Mrs. Jo Ann Norris, Executive Director of the Public School Forum and Administrator of the Teaching Fellows Program challenged Fellows to continue to voice their concerns about the loss of the program. She reminded the Fellows to continue to communicate with the members of the House and Senate who represent their county as well as the House and Senate leadership. She closed by saying, "they have already heard from me. They have to hear from each of you."

## 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](http://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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