

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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State News

Economic Indicators Indicate Possible Recovery

Dr. Michael Walden, an NC State University economist, recently released the December 2011 *NCSU Index of North Carolina Leading Economic Indicators*. The index, which is a forecast of the economy's direction four to six months ahead, rose 1.9% in November. This increase, described by Walden as "robust," was the second straight monthly gain in the index.

The index is composed of five components: the Economic Cycle Research Institute (ECRI)'s Weekly Leading Index – the national index, NC initial claims for unemployment benefits, NC building permits, average weekly hours of work for all NC employees in manufacturing, and average weekly earnings of all NC employees in manufacturing. All five components moved in a positive direction. The national index, building permits, manufacturing hours, and manufacturing earnings all rose. Initial unemployment claims decreased.

About a month before releasing the latest index results, Dr. Walden released a document entitled *The North Carolina Economic Outlook Winter 2011*. In that report, Walden seems cautiously optimistic about a possible, albeit slight, acceleration in the pace of the recovery in 2012. Dr. Walden stated that though the economy is technically in the third year of a long-term recovery the pace has been so slow that it still feels like a recession to many. He stated that two key factors have been holding back economic growth. Both of those factors, problems in the residential housing market, and depressed consumer spending may be improving according to information in the latest index.

To view both the latest index, and the report on North Carolina's economic outlook, visit Dr. Walden's website: <http://www.ag-econ.ncsu.edu/faculty/walden/walden.htm>

NC Public Charter Schools Association Forms

Former state Senator Eddie Goodall recently announced that he has decided to launch a new association for public charter schools in North Carolina. Goodall, the former president of the N.C. Alliance for Public Charter Schools cited concerns over “conflicts of interest” several of his former organizations board members had with a new state committee on charter schools as a reason for his decision to step down. The Alliance’s formal position is that the organization is restructuring and the recent moves are all a part of a larger plan to decentralize.

The N.C. Alliance for Public Charter Schools has posted a press release regarding the recent changes on its home page at www.nccharters.org. NC Policy Watch has also written an article detailing what has transpired. To view that article, visit the NC Policy Watch [website](#).

Entrance Exams Bear Scrutiny

Just as North Carolina enters a new era of student testing utilizing the ACT college entrance exam, a new book argues such tests may not be an effective indicator of academic success. Among other things, the book, “SAT Wars,” reports the results of Wake Forest University's 2008 decision to move away from requiring students to submit their scores on the ACT or SAT, which is more widely administered to college-bound North Carolina students. Since then, the university in Winston-Salem has become more racially and socio-economically diverse. Pell Grant recipients almost doubled. Students of color increased from 18 percent to nearly 23 percent. Along the way, the university also saw an uptick in the number of students with an exemplary high school track record, which, research shows, is the best predictor of college success. The percentage of Wake Forest first-year students who graduated in the top 10 percent of their high school classes grew from 65 percent in 2008 to 83 percent last fall. The book was edited by Joseph Soares, a sociology professor at Wake Forest. Starting in March, the state will require high school juniors to take the ACT. Soares has been an outspoken critic of college entrance exams, which he describes as having built-in biases and a discriminatory effect. He said North Carolina's plan makes no sense. "This is a terrible idea," Soares said.

Dr. June Atkinson, the state superintendent, said the ACT will be one useful component in evaluating performance of students and schools. "What we want to gain from administering ACT -- which is more content-based than SAT -- is that we want to have an indication of whether students have the content necessary for them to be college-ready," she said. At least a half dozen other states require the ACT. The ACT was chosen because it includes a section on science. Because most colleges still require the ACT or SAT, all North Carolina high school students will have one test under their belt -- paid for by the state. They can then use that score to seek college admission. And, Atkinson said, the ACT can help the state identify weaknesses in academic content areas. So for example, if North Carolina scored below par in science, the state could pursue professional development for teachers, curriculum changes or even better lab equipment for public school classrooms. "So it will give us feedback about where we need to make improvements," Atkinson said. The ACT testing is part of a broader effort to test students that will cost \$5.5 million. A diagnostic test will also be given to high school sophomores.

Veto Override

Legislators were called back to Raleigh to consider overriding Gov. Beverly Perdue's veto of a legislative repeal of the Racial Justice Act, a 2009 law that Republicans criticized as creating a de facto moratorium on the death penalty. All day long, and into the wee hours of Thursday morning, Democrats feared that the GOP majority instead might attempt overrides of vetoes blocking a voter ID law and an oil and natural gas exploration plan. Instead, the House voted to override a Perdue veto of a bill eliminating a paycheck dues check-off for members of the N.C. Association of Educators.

The 69 votes in favor of the override were exactly the number needed to meet the three-fifths threshold to override a veto. The vote, which occurred shortly after 1 a.m., came with five Democrats absent, two of them ill. Two Democrats, Reps. Bill Brisson, D-Bladen, and Jim Crawford, D-Granville, voted with the majority Republicans in what was otherwise a party-line vote. The Senate had already voted to override Perdue's veto of the check-off legislation last year. It took no action late Wednesday or early Thursday other than agreeing to a change of the adjournment resolution that allowed the House to consider any vetoes by the governor. The Senate did vote earlier in the day to override Perdue's veto of the Racial Justice Act repeal. The House, though, never took up that override vote, apparently deciding that it didn't have the votes required. Democrats' claim that the dues check-off override was unconstitutional was based on language that limits override sessions only to the specific bill for which the governor calls legislators back into session. Republicans maintained the limitation didn't prevent them from changing an adjournment resolution. Governor Perdue also called the House's action unconstitutional.

Teaching Fellows News

UNCA Teaching Fellows Learning in D.C.

Several things likely come to mind when one hears the phrase “winter break.” Relaxation, spending time with friends and family, enjoying the holidays, and sleeping in are probably a few that would apply to most college students. For sophomore and junior Teaching Fellows at UNC Asheville, the opportunity to engage in those things was reduced by one week this year so that they could gain valuable insight into issues affecting education from beyond their own state.

As a part of the collaborative agreement between the Teaching Fellows Commission and the 17 colleges and universities that participate in the program, Fellows institutions must provide opportunities to grow and learn that are above and beyond the traditional teacher education program experience on each campus. UNC Asheville Fellows agreed to forgo part of their winter break to engage in a week of exploration and learning in the nation's capital.

UNCA (cont'd)

UNCA Fellows met in the wee hours of the morning on Monday (Jan. 2nd) to travel via Amtrak (appropriately named the Carolinian) to Washington D.C. On Tuesday, Fellows participated in an EdLabs workshop designed by the Smithsonian Institute for D.C. educators to learn innovative strategies for utilizing the rich resources housed at the institute. Small groups of Fellows were assigned “challenge missions” and presented their final products in front of their peers prior to posting them online to be shared with educators from around the world. On Wednesday and Thursday, Fellows visited the D.C. Public Schools and central office to learn about and experience firsthand the work being done through the school system’s Catalyst Project. Fellows enjoyed a special dinner and performance of Billy Elliott at the Kennedy Center on Wednesday night. Before boarding a 6:30pm train this evening for the return trip home, the Fellows will spend today exploring the city.

An interesting aspect of the trip is that no travel arrangements were made (in D.C.) prior to the groups arrival. Instead, students were given an allowance (per diem) for travel and shown how to navigate the city’s transit system. Each student was given an itinerary with detailed times and meeting locations with the expectation that everyone would be present and on-time for all activities. “The goal is to have the Fellows take responsibility for their learning experience. It is one thing to tell them about professionalism and responsibility, and another to put them in position to practice it”, says Dr. Joyce Davis, the UNCA Teaching Fellows Campus Director. Dr. Mark Sidelnick, a UNCA faculty member, Ericka Lugo, the UNCA Teaching Fellows Program Assistant, Danny Bland, statewide Teaching Fellows Program Director of Teacher Recruitment, and Dr. Davis are traveling with the students.

The group is expected to return to Salisbury, NC, around 2:00 a.m. Saturday morning. From Salisbury the students will return to their respective homes just in time to prepare to return to UNC Asheville for the start of classes next week. The students will spend a seminar session later this month debriefing the trip and critiquing the overall experience.

Local Boards of Education Support Teaching Fellows

The North Carolina Teaching Fellows Commission and staff continue to receive copies of resolutions passed by local boards of education in support of the restoration of the NC Teaching Fellows Program. NEW RESOLUTIONS received since last week’s *Friday Report* are included in the list in **BOLD** type.

Alamance-Burlington Board of Education, Jackie Cole, Chair; Dr. Lillie Cox, Supt.

Alexander County Board of Education, Josh Lail, Chair; Jack Hole, Supt.

Avery County Board of Education, John L. Greene, Chair; David Burleson, Supt.

Cumberland County Board of Education, Carrie Sutton, Chair; Dr. Frank Till, Supt.

Local Boards (cont'd)

Edenton-Chowan Board of Education, Ricky Browder, Chair; Dr. Allan Smith, Supt.

Guilford County Board of Education, Alan W. Duncan, Chair; Maurice Green, Supt.

Hoke County Board of Education, Hank Richards, Chair; Dr. Freddie Williamson, Supt.

Jackson County Board of Education, Ken Henke, Chair; Michael Murray, Supt.

Richmond County Board of Education, Wiley L. Mabe, Chair; Dr. George Norris, Supt.

**Robeson County Board of Education, Dr. Jo Ann Chavis Lowery, Chair;
Dr. Johnny Hunt, Supt.**

Surry County Board of Education, Sexton E. Coe, Chair; Dr. Ashley Hinson, Jr., Supt.

Vance County Board of Education, Gloria J. White, Chair; Ronald Gregory, Supt.

Watauga County Board of Ed., Deborah H. Miller, Chair; Dr. Marty Hemric, Supt.

Whiteville City Board of Education, James DiMuzio, Chair; Dr. C. T. Hager, Supt.

Dr. Mike Priddy, retired superintendent and NC Teaching Fellows Commission Chair stated, "Having had the privilege of hiring the first Teaching Fellows graduate and many more since then, I personally know their value to our children, classrooms, and schools. I also know that every principal, superintendent, and school board member in NC appreciates the quality that is so very predictable. Even though there are many important, even competing, educational priorities, we must remain diligent in seeking support for the re-instatement of the Teaching Fellows Program."

National News

NCLB Waivers

The Center on Education Policy (CEP) recently released a report which analyzes the 11 state applications submitted in the first wave of applications for consideration for waivers from certain requirements of the No Child Left Behind legislation. The US Department of Education is set to announce decisions on the first 11 applications later this month. All of the submitted applications are a matter of public record so the CEP was able to access them to analyze their contents.

NCLB (cont'd)

The CEP report specifically analyzes the major themes of the accountability related provisions in the waiver requests. The analysis focuses on the changes proposed for NCLB accountability that are common to most or all of the 11 states rather than on the specifics of each state's proposal. The analysis revealed that as a group, the accountability provisions being proposed by the states are far more complex in most respects than those in current law. A general finding of the report is that not only would proposed changes result in a more diverse and complicated array of accountability systems across states, but they also would lead to greater complexity within many states.

In addition to this general finding, the analysis also highlighted several other key findings:

- >Greater coordination (integrating federal provisions) with state accountability systems
- >Adoption of the Common Core State Standards
- >Greater complexity of achievement targets
- >New measures of AYP
- >Multiple performance levels for AYP
- >Fewer subgroups tracked for accountability

In total, 39 states and U.S. territories submitted intent documentation by the deadline last October indicating plans to submit waiver applications. Since only 11 states met the deadline to submit applications in the first wave, the CEP report is likely to be a useful tool for the remaining states and territories which will need to apply by February 21st to be considered in the second wave. To read the full CEP report, visit <http://www.cep-dc.org>.

Congratulations to Forum Board Member Ann Goodnight

The Forum extends its congratulations to board member Ann Goodnight, owner of the Umstead Hotel and Spa in the Research Triangle Park. The hotel has recently been awarded the highest symbols of excellence in the hospitality industry by two major entities.

- The hotel has received the 2012 AAA Five Diamond Award, the highest honor bestowed by AAA.
- The hotel's famous restaurant, Heron's, also received the 2012 AAA Five Diamond award.
- The hotel has also been named to the *Conde Nast Traveler's* Top 200 Best Hotels in the United States in the 2011 Readers' Choice Awards. It debuted on the list in the number 41 spot.

Nominations Open for Jay Robinson Leadership Awards

Nominations for the Forum's Jay Robinson Leadership Awards are now open. The original award was established by the Public School Forum Board of Directors in honor of Dr. Jay Robinson, former Superintendent Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, UNC Vice President and Chair of the State Board of Education. In 2011 the award was expanded to two awards; Exemplary Educator with statewide impact in K-12 education and Exemplary Leadership in Public Service with statewide impact in K-12 education. The awards may be given to anyone who has displayed innovative, creative, effective leadership for the public schools of North Carolina.

The nominations must be postmarked by March 1, 2012. Nominations postmarked after that date and nominations delivered in person will not be accepted. The award ceremony will be held on June 11, 2012 at the Raleigh Crabtree Marriott Hotel. Admission will be by invitation only. The honor includes a cash award sponsored by BB&T.

To obtain a nomination form, contact Pat Franklin (pfranklin@ncforum.org) at 919-781-6833. You may also use the form in the Winter 2011 edition of the ***Forum Report which was released over the holidays.***

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.