



## from the ground up

Our voices  
working together for change  
in North Carolina's  
education world

June 2008

### Budget Negotiations Continue

**Budget negotiators for the House and Senate met this week to continue the process of hammering out differences between the two budgets.** Legislators are expected to continue to work throughout the weekend. A compromise budget may be crafted early next week.

In a tight budget year, the Senate budget spreads the money around a similar list of priorities as did the House, albeit with different emphases. Overall, the Senate spends \$23 million less than the House on K-12 public education. The Senate also spends slightly less - \$2 million- on community colleges. As in previous years, the Senate is more generous toward the university system and spends about \$70 million more.

Noteworthy differences between the House and the Senate in the pre-K-12 budget include \$15 million for the dropout prevention grants in the House versus \$8 million in the Senate, and \$23 million in the House for Governor's Easley's signature program, More at Four, versus \$41 million in the Senate budget.

Two controversial budget items for legislators and education officials are K-12 transportation fuel funding and ABC bonuses. The House budget proposes \$45 million in new funding to help school districts cope with rapidly rising fuel costs, while the Senate budget allocates just \$11 million. Allocations for teacher bonuses are another issue of contention. The \$71 million proposed by the Senate and the \$70 million proposed by the House are both less than what the Department of Public Instruction says is needed for the incentive program. School officials expect the legislature to agree on a plan that would allocate \$40 million more with an equal amount allocated to both programs.

### Budget Cuts Do Not Account for Rising Fuel Costs

Local school districts can cancel field trips and limit travel schedules for athletic teams, but there is little else they can do to offset rising fuel costs. As long as the price of gas soars, North Carolina schools will need more money from the General Assembly to pay for it. But budget negotiations that occurred this week indicate that the opposite will happen.

On Tuesday, State Board Chairman Howard Lee held an emergency meeting with State Board of Education members and announced that the Department of Public Instruction might have to withhold \$50 million in funding to counties in order to pay for fuel costs and teacher bonuses that are not covered by the legislative budget. Lee encouraged board members to call members of the legislature and convince them that teachers and students must be a priority in the budget.

### Anti-Gang Prevention Bill Passes Senate

Last week, the Judiciary II Committee met to consider and discuss [Senate Bill 1358, the Street Gang Prevention and Intervention Act](#). An amendment was introduced to include \$10 million for intervention and prevention programs. The measure passed the committee and was approved on the Senate floor.

Supporters argue that the gang legislation will decrease gang activity across the state. However, youth advocates say the bills place too much emphasis on punishment and not enough on prevention and intervention. In the coming weeks, members of the General Assembly will craft a compromise version of the House and Senate versions of the measure.

[http://capwiz.com/ncjustice/issues/alert/?alertid=11498756&type=CU&show\\_alert=1](http://capwiz.com/ncjustice/issues/alert/?alertid=11498756&type=CU&show_alert=1)

### Expert Says State Must Focus on Retention

On June 19, the Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University sponsored a forum entitled "Dropout Prevention: Strategies for Improving High School Graduation Rates." National experts provided legislators, advocates and practitioners with a variety of innovative, research-driven ideas and approaches to decrease North Carolina's alarmingly high dropout rate.

One of the speakers, Dr. Irving Hamer, who is an education consultant and former superintendent of the Miami-Dade School System in Florida, discussed the importance of identifying and addressing the conditions that push students out of school. He highlighted several policies and procedures that contribute to the problem of poor graduation rates. Hamer also spoke about North Carolina's retention policy and its negative impact on high school graduation rates. In the 2005-2006 school year, 81,370 North Carolina students were not promoted to the next grade. Only 17,881 of the students who were held back went on to summer school, and of those who did, the vast majority – 16,359 – were promoted. Hamer told the group that North Carolina lawmakers must reform current retention policies in order to fix the dropout crisis.

### Tax-credit Proposal Remains Controversial

Many North Carolina public schools are struggling to meet the complex and diverse needs of disabled students who are enrolled in special-education classes. But the move to provide financial incentives for parents who take their children out of those schools is stirring controversy among parents, educators and child-advocacy groups.

On Monday, the House Education Committee discussed [House Bill 388](#), which would provide up to \$6,000 in tax credits for parents who enroll a disabled child in private school when public schools fail to address the child's specific needs. Proponents of the credit say it is a necessary, short-term strategy to help families while the state improves and expands special-education programs.

Critics of the proposal say the tax credit would only duplicate current policies without improving them. They point out that school districts are already required to pay for disabled students to attend private schools when local public schools cannot provide adequate services.

House Education Committee members listened intently to the discussion but did not take a position on the bill.

*"The question is not whether we can afford to invest in every child; it is whether we can afford not to."*

-- Marian Wright Edelman

#### Does Your Child Have a Personal Education Plan?

All children who did not get passing scores on their end-of-grade or end-of-course tests have the right to Personal Education Plans.

If your child failed the test but was never offered a Personal Education Plan, please let us know!

Contact Jack Holtzman, Justice Center Staff Attorney, at 919-856-2156 or [jack@ncjustice.org](mailto:jack@ncjustice.org).



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■ CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**NC General Assembly Education Committee Meetings**

402 W. Jones Street, Raleigh  
Legislative Office Building  
[www.ncleg.net](http://www.ncleg.net)

**NC State Board of Education Meeting**

July 2-3, 9 a.m.  
Raleigh

**NC Dropout Prevention Association Annual Conference**

September 14-17  
Sea Trail Resort, NC

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