



Test Scores, Formulas and Leandro



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High Schools on the Hot Seat

The December 7, 2004 hearing on *Leandro*, the state school finance lawsuit, was held to receive an update on the State Board of Education's formula index for the Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Fund (DSSF). However, Superior Court Judge Howard Manning first wanted to discuss the recently released data on test scores for the state's high schools. Commenting that "the scores tell the story," Judge Manning focused on Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) as an example of the poor academic performance on state tests at high schools across the state.

Prior to the December 7 hearing, in a letter dated November 10, 2004, Judge Manning commented favorably on elementary and middle school composite test scores (reading and math composite) for 2003-2004 but expressed dismay at the high school composite scores, "When the high

school scores are revealed, the good news disappears." Based on data provided by the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) for 2003-2004 ABCs composite scores for all local education agencies (LEA), the judge concluded that 69% of North Carolina's high schools had composite scores below 80%. For CMS, ten out of fifteen high schools had composite scores below 70%.

"When the high school scores are revealed, the good news disappears."

The focus on CMS' substandard academic performance puts the spotlight again on per pupil

spending. CMS ranks 4th in local spending per pupil, outspending a system such as Wake County in local money but weighs in much lower than Wake does on any measure of academic achievement. An ever present issue in the ten years of the *Leandro* litigation is whether the problems with public education in North Carolina arise from a lack of money or poor allocation of existing funds. *From the Ground Up* would like to suggest that the answer is both

Test Scores, Formulas and Leandro Cont'd

insufficient funding and misallocation of existing funds.

In a recently released report by the Education and Law Project, one of the several special projects of the North Carolina Justice Center, we propose that the State must develop a comprehensive plan for how to best provide all students with a sound basic education. In order to prepare such a plan, the State needs to review existing standards, instructional strategies and programs and weed out the ones that are ineffective. For a more extensive review of the content of the report, read the full report on our website at <http://www.ncjustice.org/edlaw/CommonGrd04.pdf>

Formula for Success?

In addition to highlighting Charlotte Mecklenburg High Schools' academic shortcomings, the December 7, 2004 hearing also provided the State an opportunity to present its revised Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Fund (DSSF). For the current school year, the DSSF provides \$22 million in additional funds that is divided among sixteen school districts.

The State Board of Education (SBE) decided to revise the formula for allocating the dollar amounts to each school district under the DSSF because it determined that the current formula "...will not produce a stable source of funding for the action plans for at-risk students that the DSSF program is intended to support," according to a report that the State presented at the December 7 hearing.

The DSSF formula is used to assign a rank or index to each school district that indicates a particular school districts ability or capacity to meet the educational needs of at-risk students. Eligible districts receive funds based on their ranking on the index. The current formula measures student poverty, student proficiency, teacher retention and teacher

experience.

According to the State's report, when a school district improves on these measures by putting into action a successful DSSF, the result will be that its rank under the current formula will improve. Because the school district has shown improvement and received a higher ranking, it will receive fewer funds to continue its successful action plan for the following school year. According to the report, this will result in a school district losing the funding necessary to continue the action plan that resulted in improved student performance and teacher quality. In essence, a school district that is successful will be rewarded by losing the funding necessary to continue that success.

The proposed revised formula focuses on identifying certain characteristics that are indicative of "at-risk" students. The selected characteristics are" (1) the percentage of students with at least one parent who has less than a high school diploma; (2) the percentage of students in single parent families; and (3) the percentage of students in single parent families. According to the State's report, the revised formula will avoid the problems of the current formula and allow for long-term funding of the DSSF.

The court approved the revised DSSF formula at a hearing on January 11, 2005. The State Board of Education has requested \$25 million for the 2005-2006 school year, of which \$2.5 million will be used to study the effectiveness of the pilot programs in the 16 designated schools. The parties have suggested that the State Board's budget request is too low and doesn't indicate any plans to expand the DSSF program in the next few years. The DSSF is part of the State Board of Education's plan submitted to the court on October 25, 2004 designed to provide all of North Carolina's children with an equal opportunity to receive a sound basic education.

National Notables

Let's hope that the title character in "Peggy Sue Got Married" was right when she asserted that no one needs algebra in real life.

According to the latest data from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey released by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), American 15-year-olds don't know a lot about math. Overall, the U.S. ranks 24 in math and 22 in science among the 29 nations that make up the OECD.

In addition to math literacy, the 2003 PISA survey also evaluated problem solving ability in math, measuring the skills of students to apply math concepts to real life problems outside of the classroom. U.S. students ranked 27 out of 30 in problem solving.

Similar disappointing results in the 1990s led to a focus on education reform that culminated with President Bush's successful enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

A total of 41 nations participated in PISA 2003. Twenty-five of those nations ranked higher than the U.S. in performance. For more information about the results of the PISA survey, see the OECD website at www.oecd.org.

State Board of Education

December 2004 Highlights

State Employees Credit Union Announces Scholarship Program

The State Employees' Credit Union (SECU) Foundation announced a new scholarship program that will provide a four-year college scholarship to a graduating senior from each of the 341 public and two charter high schools in North Carolina. The "People Helping People" High School Scholarships valued at \$10,000 each will be awarded to students

entering any of the 16 universities in the UNC system in the fall of 2005. Preference will be given to public sector employees and their families who work in state and local government agencies. Application details and other information will be available through local school systems by the end of January, 2005.

January 2005 Highlights

The State Board of Education held its January meeting at Sandy Grove Elementary School in Hoke County Schools

Hoke County Update

Hoke County Schools' Superintendent Allen Strickland made a special presentation to the Board concerning the progress that his school system has made over the past several years. Hoke County, the home county of the initial plaintiff in the Leandro case, has benefited from the LEA Assistance Program and also from Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Funding. Over the past nine years, math scores have gained an average of five points per year, moving from 54.7 percent to 84.1 percent. Reading proficiency has improved from 49.4 percent to 77.6 percent. Over the last three years, gains in reading have totaled 16.1 percent. End-of-course proficiency also has increased also, although more modestly, from 40.8 percent proficient to 53.9 percent proficient

Calendar Bill Waivers Requested by LEAs

Sixteen school districts received approval for district-wide waivers to the calendar law. The districts approved were Alleghany, Ashe, Asheville, Avery, Buncombe, Elkin, Granville, Haywood, Mitchell, Mount Airy, Stokes, Surry, Vance, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey counties. These approvals are based on the district's history of closures due to inclement weather. Seventy-seven additional waiver requests for individual schools based on educational purposes were discussed and will be on the Board's action agenda in February. **The next meeting of the State Board of Education will be held February 2-3, 2005 at 301 N. Wilmington Street, Raleigh, NC.**

Comments Sought on New High School Exit Standards

Six regional information sessions are being held across the state in January 2005 to receive public comment on options for implementing new High School Exit Standards. The new standards represent the first change to state graduation standards since 2000. According to a press release by the NC Department of Public Instruction, the new exit standards are "...a move toward making high school more rigorous and relevant to students." Students entering ninth grade for the first time in the 2006-07 school year will be the first class expected to meet the new standards.

Each session is scheduled from 6:30-8:30 p.m., and will include an informational presentation followed by approximately 90 minutes for public comment and questions. Locations and dates of each session are listed below.

Thursday, Jan. 13-- Gaston County Schools Board Room, 943 Osceola St., Gastonia

Tuesday, Jan. 18-- Jackson County Schools Scotts Creek School, Media Center/Auditorium, 516 Parris Branch, Sylva

Wednesday, Jan. 19-- Guilford County Schools Weaver Education Center, Media Center, 300 S. Spring St., Greensboro

Thursday, Jan. 20-- NC Department of Public Instruction, Education Building, Room 150N 301 N. Wilmington St., Raleigh

Monday, Jan. 24-- Bertie High School Gymnasium, 715 U.S. 13N, Windsor

Wednesday, Jan. 26-- Cumberland County Schools, Education Resource Center, Room 3, 396 Elementary Drive, Fayetteville

The new framework of High School Exit Standards approved by the State Board of Education at their October 2004 meeting includes performance on

five end-of-course assessments (Algebra I, Biology, English I, Civics & Economics, and U.S. History) and a senior project. In addition, students are still required to meet current state and local graduation standards.

The new exit standards will only apply to students following the Career Preparation, College Technical Preparation, or College/University Preparation courses of study. Students following the Occupational Course of Study are required to meet rigorous exit standards as established by the State Board of Education.

For more information about the High School Exit Standards and the information sessions, you may contact DPI's Information and Communications Division at 919-807-3450.

North Carolina Notes

According to the Public School Forum's *2004 Local School Finance Study*, the spending gap between bottom spending counties and top spending counties on public education in North Carolina is wider than it has ever been.

The spending gap between counties spending the most per student and those spending the least has increased to a difference of \$1,670 per pupil. Top spending counties are spending \$43,420 more per classroom than bottom spending counties.

Ironically, in the ten years since five low-wealth counties sued the state, challenging the school finance system in the lawsuit commonly known as *Leandro*, the spending gap has increased 89%.

For more information, or to order a copy of the Public School Forum's study, go to www.ncforum.org.

"The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn."--Alvin Toffler

What's Happening !!!

The Ninth Annual Conference on Race, Class, Gender, and Ethnicity

This Year's Topic: Building, Empowering, and Sustaining Communities: Navigating the Past, Present, and Future of Community Economic Development.

WHEN: Saturday, February 19, 2005; WHERE: UNC Law School - Chapel Hill, NC

Panelists will be speaking on a variety of community economic development issues, including international CED, housing, CED as a civil rights movement, micro-lending, predatory lending, and creating social capital and wealth. The conference is free for students and only \$20 for non-students, which covers your written materials and a breakfast and lunch. To register or find out more information about the conference go to <http://www.unc.edu/crcge>.

The Sixth Annual Let's Talk R.A.C.E Conference [Racial Attitudes and Conversation in Education]

The theme is Language, Culture and Education and the keynote speakers will be Lisa Delpit and Enrique Murillo.

WHEN: February 26, 2005 from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm.

WHERE: Carolina Center for Educational Excellence at Smith Middle School, Chapel Hill, NC

The conference is sponsored by Carolina Teaching Fellows. You may register or find additional information online at <http://www.unc.edu/depts/ed/tf/ltr/> or contact Melinda Harder, mharder@email.unc.edu or (919) 962-0743. There is no charge for attending and a box lunch will be provided for attendees.

ALL Aboard...to the Future! *A conference for parents, families, educators and youth presented by the Exceptional Children's Assistance Center.*

WHEN: Friday, February 25 [Pre-Conference Workshop] and Saturday, February 26, 2005

WHERE: Adam's Mark Hotel, Winston-Salem

This conference is for parent, youth, educators and other advocates for students with disabilities. The conference will provide participants with the most recent changes in state and federal law including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reauthorization. The purpose of the conference is to bring the community together to learn about changes, to recognize effective practices that really make a difference and to become prepared for the future. More information about registration is available at <http://www.ecac-parentcenter.org/workshops/index.php> or you may call 1-800-962-6817. Don't delay—registration must be postmarked by February 14th. Some scholarships are available.

The **North Carolina Justice Center** is a state-wide, non-profit advocacy organization dedicated to securing legal, social and economic justice for persons living in poverty and disadvantaged communities. The Justice Center operates a number of special projects to further its mission and work including the *Education and Law Project* (EDLAW). The mission of EDLAW is to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for poor and minority students through education policy research and analysis, litigation, and grassroots leadership development. Since its inception in 1996, EDLAW has conducted policy analysis on major education issues, developed a leadership development program for community-based parent leaders, pursued major education litigation related to school finance and testing and advocated for changes in state policy and law which promoted improved education opportunities and outcomes for vulnerable students.