

# **A Round Table of Thoughts about Public Education**

A  
*“White Paper”*

## **Presented By:**

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## **A Round Table of Thoughts about Public Education**

In its June 19, 2012 communication, N.C. Policy Watch wrote: *“A lot of important battles throughout history (be they political or military) have turned on a matter of just a few critical moments in the middle of the night, many took place before the victors or the vanquished even realized what was happening. We may be approaching one of those moments right now in North Carolina when it comes to the future of public education.”*

Continuing, with reference to public education and the legislative proposal related to vouchers, which at one point was considered as a potential part of the state’s budget, the bulletin warned, *“Unfortunately, thus far, it appears that most of the general public remains blissfully unaware that this important birthright is being sold out from under them....One can only hope that they will wake up and speak out before it’s too late....”* An area Superintendent and many others also have recently spoken of real or perceived “threats” to public education.

As persons deeply interested in education and its essential role in the well-being of our community, some members of the League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad, the Greensboro Branch of the American Association of University Women, the Guilford County Association of Educators, the Guilford Education Alliance, the NAACP and former teachers came together to discuss and research public education issues and to produce this “White Paper” as a culmination of our work together.

### **Goals of the Group**

- (1) To acknowledge and applaud the United States’ commitment to provide free public education for ALL children.
- (2) To become knowledgeable about the explosion of new proposals and ideas for the delivery, content and assessment of education services.
- (3) To endorse those initiatives which promise to serve ALL public school students and the future of our communities best – and to publicly question and oppose those which we see as likely to harm public education: and therefore, the future of our state and nation’s citizens.
- (4) To ultimately seek ways to best share our thoughts/findings with the public, the media and our elected representatives.

## Outline of Work

In establishing a base for understanding current public education dynamics, we want to: (1) look briefly at the history of public schooling in America and the U.S., (2) review the components of most school systems in North Carolina – as outlined by the Legislature, Department of Public Instruction and local school boards, (3) examine the elements which seem to characterize successful school systems, (4) describe severe challenges now facing public education and (5) suggest some strategies for meeting and overcoming the identified challenges in order to strengthen public education.

### A Brief History of Public Education in the United States and North Carolina

As Context for Understanding Current Education Issues

There seems to be strong consensus that public education has been a defining imperative in America's history. The National League of Women Voters 2011-2012 Study regarding the role of the federal government of public education states: "From the beginning of our nation, a well educated citizenry has been thought essential to freedom and general welfare of the people"<sup>1</sup>... A new state-wide initiative, *Public Education First-North Carolina*, opens its Vision Statement thusly: "A strong system of public education lies at the heart of our democracy."<sup>2</sup>

#### First a glimpse of United States history:

Early in our Nation's beginnings, in Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution, Congress was granted the power to provide for the general welfare. Public education was not named as a specific federal responsibility; thus, the 10th Amendment, passed in 1791, laid the basis for funding and operational responsibilities for education to become essentially state and local functions. However, throughout U. S. history, the federal role, particularly that of the courts, has often dominated the status of public education.

Decisions rendered in Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896) and Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) are prime examples of totally opposite rulings which caused "sea changes" for public schools and communities – with long lasting consequences. Plessy, declared the legality of "separate, but equal" public schools and Brown ruled that "separate but equal" schools based on race are illegal/unconstitutional.... The advent of Sputnik was impetus for passage of the National Defense Act, the aim of which was improved teaching and learning of science, mathematics and foreign language in order to be competitive with Russia. Similarly current STEM movements are designed to improve student outcomes in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics so as to meet competition from China, India and other advancing countries.

The 1964 Civil Rights Act followed by passage of ESEA (the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) in 1965 outlawed funds for segregated programs, provided grants for "handicapped children" and compensatory funds for the education of low income

students – all huge changes designed to provide better opportunities for all children and to strengthen families and the nation.

ESEA has amazingly survived – with some changes – until now. It ultimately took on the format of NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND and because of controversies surrounding that model, has stalled and has not been re-authorized by Congress for the past several years. President Obama has offered a process of waivers to offset the negative sanctions of NCLB and initiated competitive grants (for example, Race To The Top) whereby states can apply for funds for making major new efforts to meet higher student performance standards. North Carolina has just adopted AMOs (Annual Measurable Objectives) based on student growth measures replacing AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) of NCLB – based on proficiency of each student regardless of impacting variables such as English as a Second Language or a Handicapped designation.

### **And now a look at North Carolina's commitment to Public Education:**

Our state has, for the most part, been considered a progressive leader in education since early times – experiencing peaks and valleys intermittently – with race and taxes often being determining issues in policy-making. In 1766, "the Assembly" (legislature) approved the N. C. Constitution which stated that "...schools shall be established...for the convenient instruction of youth, with such salaries to the masters, paid by the public, as may enable them to instruct at low prices; and all useful learning shall be duly encouraged and promoted in one or more universities."<sup>3</sup>

This 1766 Assembly's use of the term, "public school" had two implications: (1) the beginning of state aid to education and (2) the beginning of free admission for poor children into tax financed schools. (Indigent children were...apprenticed to learn to read, write and learn a trade; other children were sent to private chartered schools.) The two actions "eventually merged into a single, tax supported system of free public schools for all white children." Gradually, the "system" came to include public grade schools and high schools.<sup>3</sup>

The Jacksonian emphasis on the "common man" and the leadership of Archibald Murphy called "the Father of Public Education in North Carolina" preceded the 1825 "Literary Fund" legislation which required funding for schools from both state and local resources. This action essentially "signaled an end to private schools and the rise of 'common schools.'" By 1846, every N. C. county had at least one public school. North Carolina's early commitment to education was fueled by convictions about learning and justice held by religious groups which settled the state; particularly Quakers and Presbyterians.

Although taxation for schools was often resisted, North Carolina entered the Civil War era with one of the best systems within the Southern states. Calvin Wiley, State Superintendent of N. C. Public Schools, kept the schools open throughout the war despite attempts to use school funds for military purposes.

A adequate funding for public schools has not been consistently forth coming. The public system in North Carolina collapsed after the war, with conservatives in the Legislature making no appropriations and virtually giving responsibility for public education to the counties. In 1881, the General Assembly gave some counties the right to divide voter approved special school taxes on the basis of race, although the schools for black students were required to remain separate from those populated by white students. In 1907, a state-wide system of secondary education was begun, reflecting the tremendous leadership of Governors Jarvis and Aycock and Educators McIver and Alderman.

The 1954 Brown decision and the Civil Rights movement and laws of the 60s represented attempts to provide free public education for all children. Given the past history of no schools at all for blacks and then separate ones with inadequate funding, the necessity for compensatory funding became obvious and resulted ultimately in Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. In “a vision of public education in North Carolina,” Edward B. Fiske and Helen F. Ladd wrote that even now "Test results confirm that the performance between students of different racial backgrounds remain a persistent problem in the state."<sup>4</sup>

North Carolina has historically been at the forefront of Education among Southern states – establishing the first public university in the nation and in recent years, recognizing the necessity and power of early childhood education, i.e. Smart Start and More at Four; and at present, having qualified for Race to the Top funding and becoming an early implementer of Common Core Standards.

### **Components/Structure of Most North Carolina School Systems**

Designed to serve the diverse populations of students in the state’s public schools.

**A. Early Childhood Education.** Even prior to entry into formal educational settings, many communities have agencies which provide pre-natal, infant and early childhood care. A case in point is Dr. Old’s nurse visiting program in Guilford County. All counties have some aspects of early education such as focused child care via “Smart Start” and other programs provided in private daycare agencies, schools and early Head Start.

**B. Pre-K Education – 5<sup>th</sup> grade.** In N.C., until recently, there were Pre-K classes for via More-at-Four public slots and some local and Smart Start funding for four-year old children who demonstrated developmental delay on nationally normed tests or who came from homes with incomes below the federally defined poverty level. Cuts and policy changes were made in these programs in the 2012 legislative budget. Most public kindergarten, primary and elementary grade children attend schools in geographically districted attendance zones or in magnet schools. Most school systems provide separate and “main streamed” classes for mentally and physically handicapped students as authorized by IDEA (Individual Disability Education Act) legislation.

**C. In 6-8 Middle School.** Enrollments in these grade levels are also generally determined by districts and some magnets. Later in this paper, comments prepared by Willie Taylor, LWV member, discuss variable options for education in the middle/transitional years, i.e. K-8, 6-12. Handicapped students are served at all levels of the public schools.

**D. In 9-12 Public High School.** There are in most systems some large, traditional high schools. In some, there are growing numbers of small “middle college” or “early college” high schools – often located on college campuses. Also there are some alternative type high schools for students who have been suspended or who work during day-time hours.

**E. Post High School.** Community Colleges grant GEDs (General Educational Diplomas) for adult individuals and some high school students who didn’t graduate. They also offer technical and job re-training courses as well as courses in art, technology and general education.

Higher education institutions – Colleges/Universities

### **A. & B. Early Childhood – Pre-K - 5 Education**

**Goal :** To prepare young children for stronger performance in Kindergarten and throughout their school lives; especially those children with language deficiency and lack of exposure in group settings.

Early childhood education is essential to the future well-being of the United States social fabric and economy. It is perhaps the single greatest potential asset for our future. The education of generationally deprived children – both educationally and financially – cannot wait until Kindergarten. Equitable early education funding and developmentally appropriate programs for public school children must be addressed seriously now. Some community programs should address birth to 5 health needs.

Today’s educational research shows that the achievement gap between poor and middle income children begins much earlier than at the elementary level as formerly believed. It also indicates that deprivation actually impacts the formation of the brain’s physical maturation and functioning, making early nurturing and education quite determining in the life cycle.

Research clearly also shows the economic benefit of early childhood education. Research cited in the 2011 study about public education, commissioned by the League of Women Voters, states that every dollar invested in early childhood education returns ten cents on the dollar annually for the life of a child. <sup>1</sup>

With over 22% of children in America living in homes at or below the poverty level, the lack of early childhood education contributes to later problems related to low self-

confidence, poor health, the economy, crime and drugs, lowered graduation rates and education failure.

Is this the America we want? Is this the America we can be proud of? The case for providing education and health services to all children birth to 5:

- More than 30% of low-income children entering kindergarten have no familiarity with the printed word.
- About 60% of low-income children and more than a third of middle-income children do not know the alphabet when entering school.
- Only 6% of poor and 18% of middle-income children understand numerical sequence when entering school.

As noted earlier, North Carolina has been a leader among the states in innovation and implementation of early childhood education for qualifying children. N.C. Superior Court Judge Howard Manning in 2011 told the N.C. Legislature that it could not “bar eligible 4-year olds from access to More-at-Four prekindergarten programs.” The legislature had earlier “passed a budget that made organizational changes to the More-at-Four program” and mandated that “the total number of at-risk children served shall constitute no more than twenty percent of the 4 year-olds served within the prekindergarten program.” In August of 2012, the N.C. Supreme Court unanimously upheld Judge Manning’s ruling, making it a clear requirement “that ALL children should have access to a sound basic education,” and that that is not doable unless “children from poor backgrounds are prepared to learn when they start school.”<sup>9</sup> At the time of the Supreme Court’s ruling, the state is still enrolling only about one-third of eligible children.

Our future is at stake! The support of public education, including early childhood education, is essential now or it may be too late.

### **C. Middle School Education**

**Goal:** To prepare students to transition to high school, retaining some of the softer methods of elementary school.

The origin of the middle school concept in public education is generally traced to a speech given by William Alexander at a conference for school administrators at Cornell University in 1963. At this time, the organizational structure for America’s schools was K-8 or K-6 and junior high, a two year bridge to high school that originated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The conference topic was “The Dynamic Junior High School.” At this time, there were more than 7,000 junior high schools in the U.S.

Alexander, then chairman of the education department at George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville, was assigned the keynote address. He stated that he could find no “dynamism.” The account of how Alexander arrived at the concept of middle school was

chronicled in *Kappa Delta Pi* in 1978 by Jessica Hodge. The professor's flight to New York was delayed and provided him "the time he needed to outline a new focus an organization for the school 'between' the elementary and high school." Alexander stated *that too many junior highs had merely appended high-school practices on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades making them "a vestibule added at the front door of the high school."*<sup>5</sup>

Alexander told the gathered educators that these young students had their own needs which were not being met in junior high, including "more freedom of movement, more appropriate health and physical education, more chances to participate in planning and managing their own activities, more resources for help on their problems of growing up, and more opportunities to explore new interest and to develop new aspirations." "He added that these students need more *exploratory experiences* rather than *greater emphasis* on the academic subjects. He was reacting to the scare caused by *Sputnik and its gremlins*, bemoaning that greater emphasis on math, science and 'more homework' meant for many students less time and energy for the fine arts, for homemaking and the industrial arts, and such special interests as dramatics, journalism, mental performance, scouting, camping, jobs and general reading."<sup>5</sup>

Hodge concluded that the "*content of (Alexander's) Cornell address would forever alter the nature of education at the middle school level... Educators and citizens were receptive to creating schools that respond to the needs of young people.*"<sup>5</sup>

Recommendations:

- Traditional middle school should be an option, not a requirement
- Students/parents should have choices as to a K-8, 6-12, K-12. or other combinations
- Needs of students should be weighed heavily in grade composition choices/assignments
- Consideration should be given to eliminating middle-school altogether in a phased-out manner should be on the table for discussion.

Examples of 6-8 middle schools, K-8 schools and 6-12 configurations can all be found in the Piedmont Triad, giving parents and students some choices in the middle grades.

#### **D. 9-12 Public High Schools**

**Goal:** To prepare students for success in higher education pursuits and in productive work force opportunities.

1. As noted earlier, there are multiple models of high school education – some large and comprehensive; others small, often on college campuses. The goal of each is to prepare students for productive entry to higher education/training or meaningful work.

2. Guilford County – and subsequently North Carolina – played early roles in the development and implementation of middle and early college high schools. The Guilford County Public Schools and area colleges and universities led the state in establishing cooperative, joint, innovative high schools – where students seem to thrive and to often graduate with college credits, making entry to higher education more successful and sometimes less expensive because of prior completed courses. The availability of the middle and early college high school provides interesting public school choices at the high school level.

3. Attachment I at the end of the paper is a helpful document entitled “*Eight Elements of High School Improvement: a mapping framework.*” It is an analysis of the elements which characterize successful comprehensive high school improvement strategies.

### **E. Higher Education in North Carolina**

North Carolina has reason to be proud of its state system of public universities and community colleges. The seventeen campus system offers courses of study in every major or specialty that any student could desire through masters and even doctoral levels in most subjects. Students no longer need to travel abroad or “up north” to receive an excellent education.

- The advantages of higher education are numerous. Among them are: (a) the preparation for today’s workforce; (b) adaptation to technology and new concepts; (c) the ability to solve problems; (d) ability to compete in world markets; (e) greater earning ability. The latter, verified in the U.S. Census 2010 report, shows that the college educated worker earns \$1.3 million more on average than the person with just a high school education. More income means more revenues for state and federal governments so that everyone benefits.
- Why are more people seeking a college education now? (1) The “back-up” system that once supported the high school graduate has disappeared. Family farms are few and smaller than ever. Manufacturing jobs have dwindled and textiles have moved to other countries. Skill sets and specialties have changed. Widespread job loss has made it necessary for the formerly employed to return to seek careers, learn different skills, and adapt to changing conditions.
- Our young people must compete with students and workers from other countries, yet they have a disadvantage. Other countries such as Great Britain, France, Germany, and Turkey (to name a few) provide free public education to their young people from kindergarten through university. Their young people don’t enter the world with staggering debts owed from attending college.
- What are the other challenges facing our young people? (a) The cost of education has risen at twice the rate of inflation. (b) Cuts to the state budget have resulted in the loss of college and university revenues amounting to \$1 billion over the last five years according to President

Tom Ross. This year alone the universities lost \$414,000 due to the cuts. (c) Over 3000 university employees – administrators, professors, maintenance, housekeeping, etc. lost their jobs. (d) Thousands of courses had to be cut from the scheduled offerings which mean that students will have to attend additional semesters to get the courses needed for graduation. (e) The threat to let the tax credit expire would double the loan interest rates and made debts even greater. (f) Cuts in state grants mean that fewer monies are available to students to help finance their educations. More money will have to come from loans that will have to be repaid when they graduate, thus deferring dreams of being independent.

What can be done to remove the threats to the future of our young people? (1) State legislators must make education a higher priority. (2) Legislators must recognize the value of an educated citizenry for the maintenance of a Democracy. (3) They need to realize educated young people are the future of our state, our nation, and the world; the leaders of business and industry, the engineers, technologist and scientist, professors and teachers, future leaders and legislators. (4) Legislators should do everything in their power to make the public education system of the state one of the best in the nation. To do that, they must fund the public education system according to its needs and requirements. (5) Through university funding, grants, scholarships and loans, legislators must be certain that no citizens are deprived of a good education because they can't afford it. Education that is priced out of reach of students, young or old, does not serve North Carolina or the nation.

### **Some Characteristics of a “Great School System”**

In “A Vision of Public Education in North Carolina,” Edward B. Fiske and Helen F. Ladd write “*Great states and great education systems go together*”... “The fortunes of North Carolina and those of its public school system are inextricably intertwined. Our aspirations for North Carolina should be nothing less than to be a great state with a great education system.”<sup>4</sup>

Having reviewed the basic components of most public school systems, we now ask the question: What characteristics make a school system “a great education system?” – What ingredients are necessary for a school system to prepare its students well?

Following are some groups’ current answers to those questions:

- (1) The new ***Public Education First – North Carolina*** initiative cites “four key aspects of public schooling that...will promote broad, long-lasting achievement among North Carolina students:”<sup>2</sup>
  - a. A strong funding base

- b. Strong teacher morale
  - c. A rich curriculum
  - d. Integrated schools
- (2) The recently adopted national League of Women Voters' position suggests that "Equity in public education" means equitable access to:
- a. High quality teaching and learning
  - b. Adequate and current learning materials
  - c. Clean and well maintained physical facilities
  - d. Food and health care
  - e. Safe and secure neighborhoods
  - f. Secure housing <sup>6</sup>
- (3) Fiske and Ladd envision a state education system "which will have high standards consistent with knowledge and skills needed tomorrow...which will respect and understand how technology is reshaping cultural attitudes...will be inclusive and value/celebrate diversity..., focus will be on success for all students; will be flexible, embracing a variety of educational structures; requires sufficient funding and manages that funding in ways that respect the growing diversity of the system."<sup>4</sup>
- (4) The North Carolina NAACP, Great Schools in Wake, and the coalition of Concerned Citizens for African American Children state: "We stand for... what makes for high quality and excellence in education:
- a. Stop resegregation and promote diversity.
  - b. Provide equity in funding for all schools.
  - c. Provide high quality teachers and smaller classrooms.
  - d. Provide high quality leadership teams.
  - e. Provide high quality facilities.
  - f. Focus on math, science, reading and history.
  - g. Support parental and community involvement.
  - h. Address unjust and disproportionate suspensions, reduce drop out rates and increase graduation rates among African-American students."<sup>7</sup>

### **Current Challenges to Public Education**

We have reviewed that our state and nation have historically and incrementally championed free, high quality public education as the bedrock of our Democracy. Many individuals and groups currently expect public education to be the hope of our country's continued strength; yet, many see formidable challenges to its continuation in forms as we've known it. Fiske and Ladd cite movements which "constitute a frontal attack on the existence of public education as it has evolved over the last century and a half. ...The goal is not to make the current public school system better but rather to weaken it... to

denigrate public schools... to assert that the system is broken and beyond repair... to replace the public school system with a loose network of schools that is oriented around private rather than common interest.”<sup>4</sup>

What are “ominous signs” that threaten the long considered “good” of public education – this “important birthright” of all American children?

We will examine the following six challenges: *Poverty, Funding and Equity, the Imperative of High Quality Teaching, Curriculum Issues, Privatization, and Resegregation of Schools:*

## I. Poverty

Research has long shown that poor children face education challenges directly related to poverty. “Numerous studies have documented how poverty and related social conditions (i.e. lack of access to health care, early education, stable housing, etc.) affect child development and student achievement.” (Pedro H. Noquera – Kappa Magazine – org. V93N3) “School reform efforts can’t ignore the effects of poverty on children’s lives or on the performance of schools.” (Noquera) <sup>8</sup>

The 2011 National League of Women Voters’ study of the federal role in public education notes that the U.S. has one of the highest poverty rates for children (22.6%) compared to industrial European countries, according to researchers: Bell, Bernstein and Greenberg (2008.) They also found that the U.S. does less to reduce the effects of poverty for low income families. “Wealth inequity in the U.S. is currently at an ‘historical high.’ ... In the U.S., 20% of the population owns 84% of the nation’s wealth. The poorest 40% owns less than 1% of the nation’s wealth.”<sup>1</sup>

The League study points out that “parents in middle and upper incomes raise money for schools through PTA and other organizations. They will not stand for ineffective facilities and demand effective teachers. Poorer populations often lack the confidence and experience to make such demands... Often times teachers prefer to teach in schools in which they can experience more successful outcomes.”<sup>1</sup>

The LWV study also notes that, “While it appears that increased federal spending on schools is correlated with a reduced achievement gap, it is also possible that ‘educational inequality is rooted in economic problems and social pathologies too deep to be overcome by school alone.’ “(Traub 2000)<sup>1</sup> – This observation is reflective of the much heralded Coleman Report which found that a child’s neighborhood/social/environmental setting had a stronger impact upon achievement than the classroom, curriculum and other mandated resources. Similarly, the high student outcomes in Finland currently seem to relate to the minimum amount of poverty and the high family support systems operative in the country rather than exacting teaching practices and curriculum.

Peter Noquera cites three ways that poverty influences learning: (1) External Support – Academic and social support is less available to students outside of school. (2) Environmental Obstacles – Adverse conditions influence student health, safety and well being” – all of which impact learning and (3) Negative Social Capital: Adverse conditions undermine the ability of parents and schools to influence the character of schools and ensure that they serve their interests.”<sup>8</sup>

In a recent editorial column, David Brooks of *The New York Times* reported on a study done by Harvard researcher, Robert Putnam, which verified “*that the children of the more affluent and less affluent are raised in starkly different ways and have different opportunities.*” Putnam, himself, wrote “*It’s perfectly understandable that kids from working class backgrounds have become cynical.... Their test scores are lagging. Their opportunities are more limited.*” Brooks concludes, “*Equal opportunity, once core to the nation’s identity, is now a tertiary concern.... If America really wants to change that ... then people are going to have to make some pretty uncomfortable decisions.*”<sup>10</sup>

We, in Guilford County/the Piedmont Triad and North Carolina, are not at all immune to the impact of poverty. The North Carolina Budget and Tax Center recently examined concentrations of poverty throughout the state and found out that out of the 100 neighborhoods with the greatest poverty, 63 were in urban counties and 37, in rural counties. The study is based on the federal definition of poverty. In 2010, the poverty line for a family of four was \$22,314. “Five of the 100 U.S. Census Bureau tracts identified in the study with the highest number of people living in poverty are in High Point...”<sup>11</sup> Those living below poverty rate in Greensboro number 1 in 5 people... The percentage of public school students in Guilford County receiving free or reduced priced lunches is now 54.1 percent; the current number of identified homeless students is 1,550 and 60 Guilford County Schools (almost half) are characterized as “high poverty” Title I schools.<sup>12</sup>

The March 16, 2012 *US Congressional Committee on Education and the Workforce Newsletter* reported that “The Department of Education released new pieces of the Civil Rights Data Collection.... The data include information on suspensions, seclusion and restraint occurrences, students passing algebra, taking AP tests and passing AP tests, and teacher absenteeism.... The data show that equity disparities remain a problem in communities across the country.”<sup>13</sup>

## **II. Funding and Equity**

An April 6, 2012 article in the *Greensboro News and Record* noted that at a recent meeting, “dozens of local school superintendents described years of state budget cuts as hurting education (under both the current Republican led General Assembly and the Democratic leaders preceding the 2010 elections.)”<sup>14</sup> Similar articles can be found throughout the years and in most states. Securing sufficient funding for maximum educational outcomes has never been simple or easy. Our brief look at the history of public schools reminds us that as early as the North Carolina “1766 assembly,” the

lawmakers established schools "with such salaries to the masters as may enable them to instruct at low prices ..."³ The very relationship between tax rates and adequate public education makes for inherent and continuing challenges for elected officials – and for the future of society. This is true at federal and state levels – and certainly for county governments in North Carolina, where County Commissioners, not school board members, have taxing authority for public schools.

While many public officials recognize and tout the benefits of a literate, well educated populace, many also resist the funding support for accomplishing that reality. The 2011 League of Women Voters' research made clear that the state of the economy and funding for education are integrally related. Current challenging economic conditions throughout the nation demonstrate that truism – with some in Congress and at state levels heavily advocating privatization of educational services rather than continued public funding for all public school students. Our look at history also clearly reveals that funding for public education has not always been equitable for all groups of children. For many years, funds were allocated for the education of white children only and later for "separate, but equal" facilities and supplies which were not "equal" at all. The mantra that equal funding for each child is not equitable funding continues to be easily demonstrated in the United States.

Current facts establish that about 23% of children in the United States live below the federally defined poverty line – often from generationally disadvantaged families with all that that means for their lack of financial and educational supports as they enter and continue in school. Contrasted with the fact that many other children enter public schools from backgrounds of monetary stability and family and neighborhood support systems, the need for compensatory funding for "leveling the playing field" so that all can move forward learning and progressing together becomes clear – both from the standpoint of the individual learners and the well being of our society.

Examples abound of young, poor children's lack of word adequacy and appropriate social group behaviors as they enter school and generally there is increasing support for better early childhood and Pre-k education, but examples also abound of how inequities continue to impact older students' school lives and academic achievement.... One case in point: Some school systems, including Guilford County Schools, are supporting increased use of ACT, a rival college entrance exam to the SAT. In discussing ACT scores for 2012, Jon Erickson, education president of ACT, reported in an AP wire to the News and Record that "overall scores have held steady even as the test -taking pool widens, and that math and science marks have improved..." Yet, he continues, "Also alarming are continued and widening gaps between racial groups...While 42% of Asians and 32% of whites met college readiness benchmarks in all four subject areas, just 13% of Hispanics and 5% of black students did so." Erickson concluded, "We still have a disparity in terms of the equity of education in our country, in both the equal distribution of quality teachers and quality curriculum across schools.... Hopefully things like the common core standard movement will help level the playing field."¹⁵

The 2011 League of Women Voters' study required that local leagues research the history of ESEA and its positions regarding compensatory funding – with particular attention to Title 1 (federal funding for education of low income students) and IDEA (formerly Education of the Handicapped Act – federal education dollars for mentally and physically handicapped students.) The research stressed that ESEA does not fund "general federal aid" to public schools; but, rather "categorical" support to specific student disadvantaged populations. The research also noted that since 1990 and the emergence of resegregation of public schools, "rather than looking at equity, most lawsuits have focused on adequacy---whether a state is providing local districts with just enough funding to give students a basic education."1 We, in North Carolina, have seen that focus played out in Judge Manning's insistence that even a basic education can't be accomplished for very poor or developmentally delayed children without the public provision of a Pre-K experience.

The League study notes that the relationship between education and the economy is integral. As our economy has become more complicated by the momentum of global competition, technological advancement and the lack of job availability within manual trades; the mandates for higher performance of K-12 graduates, ever higher college and university degrees and more innovative and productive entrepreneurship have escalated greatly. Subsequently, the awarding of federal funds for education has taken a turn toward large competitive grants targeted to states for making massive changes--particularly in the delivery of K-12 public education and for increased emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM education) Again, we, in North Carolina, know this first hand as our local school systems move toward meeting the requirements and opportunities inherent in our receipt of a RACE TO THE TOP grant.

The LWV question regarding equitable funding became: In a challenging economy, should ESEA continue to grant "categorical" funding for disadvantaged children or funding through competitive, large state appropriations, designed to revamp school systems via restructuring and innovation? Our local League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad answered the question in this way: "...in times of limited funding, we support non-competitive funding directed toward our disadvantaged populations first. When additional funding is available, new and innovative programs should be considered for competitive funding."16 "The national LWV position, based on the consensus answers of the 475 local leagues, states that "the role of the federal government in public education should include the provision of a combination of competitive grants and non-competitive funding to states and local school districts to achieve equity among states and populations.... Major programs of federal funding for public education (i.e. ESEA) should be targeted toward children living in poverty and /or children with special needs."6

In conclusion, ideal funding goals would be such that ALL public school students – the most impoverished and the advantaged – can move forward, maximizing their talents and opportunities for advancement. This would benefit individuals and strengthen our free society – utilizing the rich diversity of our many citizens.

Attachment II at the end of the paper describes congressional action related to equity for handicapped children. It is entitled: *Legislation and Funding for the Education of Children Who are Disadvantaged. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. Outlines ESEA categorical funding areas.

### **III. Challenges to Provision of Highly Qualified Teachers**

In a recent T.V. discussion, Tom Campbell, host of “N.C. Spin” posed this idea: *“Think about the possibilities if we could guarantee every child a master teacher in every subject.” Imagine!*

There is little disagreement anywhere that highly qualified, inspiring teachers are essential to successful student outcomes. The demand for skilled professional educators currently is great amidst ever higher academic standards, constant advances in technology and increasing pressures for meeting the needs of diverse populations – often in high poverty schools.

Challenges abound in the recruitment and retention of sufficient numbers of energetic, well prepared teachers. Those challenges begin in initially attracting highly capable individuals into teacher training programs when salaries and opportunities for advancement are often greater in other professions requiring equal years of training and experience.

Ideally, Public Education would be perceived as so important, so imperative for the preservation of democracy – so necessary to a productive economy and satisfying lives that the teaching profession would be well funded at levels commensurate with other occupations requiring like preparation and expertise. However, as we’ve noted before, funding for public education is often perilous – and rarely at upper levels of fiscal compensation.

While pay scales are important, they are not the only factor at play when decisions about entering the field of education are made. Issues of respect and valuing are also determinants. Teachers want to be successful in their daily lives and efforts to educate students. The demands and negative sanctions of No Child Left Behind were hard on educators. Those whose students made strong growth – among huge classroom and outside efforts – were sometimes shown the least public appreciation. Their schools were often declared and publicized as “low performing” on the basis of the very few students who, often for quite understandable reasons, did not reach “the proficiency mark.”

Thankfully, waivers from this policy can now be secured – and growth rather than pure proficiency can be used as a gage for assessing student outcomes. (This was always the case in the N.C. accountability model – called ABCs – but not in the NCLB federal requirements of AYP – Annual Yearly Performance.)

The use of “high stakes testing” as a sole measure of student performance has been another NCLB anathema for many teachers, requiring constant assessment and

“benchmark testing,” before the end of course/end of grade tests. Some see the process as limiting time and energy for the more flexible, innovative methods which some creative teachers see as more productive for student acquisition of critical thinking skills and ultimate mastery of curriculum.

Rewards for successful student outcomes, rather than negative sanctions for failure to meet standards is more characteristic of the prevailing Race To The Top model; however, the movement to evaluate teacher effectiveness based on improvements in their students’ performance (a plank of RTTT) is causing ripples within teacher ranks. One problem – as stated in the LWV study is that “a valid assessment has not been developed. There appear to be major flaws with formulas used to calculate value-added-assessments.”<sup>1</sup>

The public, in surveys, indicates strong preference for tying teacher pay and bonuses to student achievement outcomes. Systems (including GCS) in states which won RTTT funds are searching for fair assessment strategies. The national necessity for excellent student academic performance is so strong that changes in teacher evaluations seem – and perhaps must be – inevitable. At the same time, such potential changes pose further cause for anxiety among current teaching ranks – and among those contemplating the profession.

Teacher training departments in our university and college Schools of Education have high roles to play in the cultivation and training within the teacher/education leadership field. It is imperative that apt, energetic, academically able students be sought out for entering the programs and that creative, challenging professors guide and inspire them to mastery of the teaching art and skills.

It is also essential that the link between the teacher training institutions and Pre-K-12 classrooms be constant during the college students’ training – so that they are aware and prepared for the challenges and deep rewards of teaching in America’s public schools. They should come to realize the power of public education to safeguard and enhance our democratic way of life for all the nation’s citizens.

The LWV study states, “In order to recruit, prepare and support a teaching force in America, Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) notes that our country must refuse to continue its practices of hiring minimally-trained teachers and paying the lowest salaries to teachers in the poorest districts. Instead, all school districts need to be able to recruit top candidates. She recommends that the federal government provide:

- Scholarships to cover the costs of teacher education for high-ability students who plan on teaching in low-income districts,
- Incentives for institutions of higher education to create successful models of teacher education to prepare educators to work with diverse learners,
- Scholarships for teacher residencies such as those available to doctors and psychologists after they have graduated,
- Matching grants to states and districts in order to attract and retain highly-qualified teachers in high-need schools,

- Matching grants to enable districts to give teachers time and resources for ongoing professional development including mentoring and collaborative research, and
- Valid and reliable national assessments for teacher certification.

Finally, since highly-qualified educational administrators are also essential to the job satisfaction of teachers, Darling-Hammond recommends that similar funding policies should be adopted by the federal government for recruiting, training and keeping strong educational leaders.”<sup>1</sup>

Linda Darling-Hammond is a well known educator and researcher and published author.

#### **IV. Curriculum Issues and Common Core Standards**

An August 23 headline in the *High Point Enterprise* read, “*New school year brings changes in Guilford*” The accompanying article continued, “*For the first time, North Carolina will operate under more rigorous Common Core standards adopted in 40 states.... This will make it easier for families to move across state lines.... To adjust quickly to their new environments because the same standards will be taught at the same grade level in nearly every state,*” stated Jacelyn Becoats, District Chief GCS curriculum officer. <sup>17</sup>

Such changes will be experienced in most school systems across the nation as implementation of Common Core Standards begins.

##### What are Common Core Standards?

They are national standards for educational performance and “expectations for achievement” designed to “provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare students for college and the work force.” In 2010, the National Governors’ Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers began the Common Core Standards Initiative “in an effort to bring more alignment, rigor and consistency to student ‘proficiency and to foster improvement in college and career readiness across the nation.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

In an era of global competitiveness and high mobility, the need has been great for students to acquire a core of necessary knowledge for functioning productively wherever they might live in the nation or world. Previous to formation of The National Standards (developed not by the federal government, but a coalition of state officials, teachers, school administrators and others) each state had been allowed to develop its own tests and standards, which were approved by the U.S. Department of Education. Consequently, “there is wide variation in rigor and content of both curriculum and assessments for accountability across the 50 states.”<sup>1</sup>

North Carolina began preparation for implementing Common Core Standards when it was awarded the federal Race To The Top grant. Adoption of the standards was a prerequisite for acceptance of the funds.

From the LWV study, it's important to note that "standards do not tell teachers how to teach, but help them to determine the knowledge and skills students need and to guide them in setting goals."<sup>1</sup> Standards are "a first step" in delivery of rich, meaningful curriculum.

Florida Commissioner Dr. Eric J. Smith said, "*Our best understanding of what works in our schools comes from teachers who teach in our classrooms every day. That is why these standards established what students need to learn, but do not dictate how teachers should teach.*"<sup>1</sup>

### How will the Common Core be assessed?

The federal government doesn't plan on a national test for assessing whether or not adoption of Common Core Standards improves student performance. Instead, two coalitions: (1) Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and (2) the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) won a U.S. Department of Education competition to design "comprehensive assessment systems" for measuring whether or not students are "on track for college and career success." States/school systems will be able to voluntarily assess accountability for successful implementation of the CC standards according to their students' success rates in post secondary pursuits.

Questions are circulating regarding the ways the assessments might negatively impact teacher evaluation.

### Curriculum

The new Public Education First – NC group cites "a rich curriculum" as necessary for students' learning – a broad education that includes a significant study of literature, mathematics, the arts, history, civics, science, foreign language and physical education. It cites as threats to "a rich curriculum": (1) growth in standardized testing – which "narrows" the curriculum and places emphasis on those areas to be tested to the neglect of others, and (2) cuts to foreign language, AP courses, music, arts, as well as technology and basic instruction materials.

Kay Doost, former chair of the LWVPT Education Round Table wrote the following interesting characterization of rich curriculum:

*Curriculum is a blend of developmental knowledge, knowledge of particular children and knowledge of core standards. Choosing topics to study reflects developmental appropriateness and the interest of the particular children in a class. The implication of*

*this view of curriculum is that “skills” can be taught through virtually any topic. Further implications are that teachers have a solid grasp of child development and are good observers of the children in their care so they know the children’s interests and strengths. Likewise they need to know the “core” so that “skills” are well-integrated into the topics of interest and serve the growth of the children in their respective classes.*

*Curriculum also needs to be strong in the creative areas whatever the topic or skills at hand. Song, movement and drama as well as reading and writing are serious aspects of a good curriculum. They offer avenues of expression and learning that can confirm an external knowledge base as well as give children the means of personal expression and relationship to the topics and skills being presented. The basic assumption of having strong creative arts is that the thought and ideas come from children affirming them as agents of their own learning. The sense of inner discipline and personal agency is of critical importance because it genuinely places the child at the center of his/her learning, i.e. the child develops a sense of self as doer and learner.*

*The teachers in this scenario set high standards of engagement and achievement. He/she establishes his/her own level of curiosity and interest in being a learner thus setting a tone of curiosity, interest and high standards in the classroom.*

## **V. Privatization**

We’ve noted that excellent education “doesn’t come cheap.” While most elected officials pay high homage to the value of education, many resist the level of funding necessary for successfully serving the multiple needs of public school students.

Particularly after the 1954 Brown decision and mandated desegregation of public schools, from time to time the issue has surfaced for allowing public/tax payer funds to enable families to send their students to private and/or parochial schools. In the late 1980s, hard battles were fought in legislatures and the Congress over whether or not vouchers might be legally provided as subsidies and for tax credits to be given to citizens for private school enrollment.

Ultimately, those 1980s’ efforts weren’t largely successful, but “seeds were planted.” Recently, the momentum for privatization has surfaced nation-wide, as well as in North Carolina. In addition to voucher/tax credit proposals, the growth of charter schools is significant. Until 2010, since the beginning of the charter school movement, North Carolina legislatures, with strong support from school systems and local Boards of Education, had capped the allowable number of charter schools in the state at 100. With the change to Republican majorities in the House and Senate, the cap was lifted and large numbers of charter schools have been approved, some opening in the 2012-13 school year and additional proposals to be considered.

The Guilford County School System has joined Durham and Mecklenburg systems in complaints to the State Board of Education that charter schools are “siphoning away

funds from traditional public schools” (Greensboro *News & Record* 9/7/2012) and replicating existing programs provided via public school theme and magnet offerings.

Charter schools are considered public schools and receive public funding. When first proposed, charters were projected to try innovative techniques – freed from regulations and requirements of traditional public schools. The idea was that those techniques/best practices could be passed back to the traditional schools; however this has rarely happened. In most cases, innovation has not been forthcoming; and, student performance has not been better than in traditional public schools when the same type students are enrolled. While some charter schools have succeeded; some have failed and returned students to their former public schools. All have received public tax dollars, which has meant fewer resources for children in traditional public schools.

From the LWV study, Diane Ravitch, long heralded educator, observes that many charters “are now managed by people who have more business than pedagogical expertise.” Ravitch notes that “there are some highly successful charter schools. But many of these do not enroll as high a percentage of neediest students as public schools do.”<sup>1</sup>

Charlotte Divitci compiled the following information and critique, comparing charter schools with traditional public schools.

#### Public Schools vs. Charter Schools

We believe that every person is entitled to a free education, and we believe that education can best be provided to most people in the most effective way by the free Public Education System. Although the Public Education System has many flaws and failings, it is a constant work in progress that requires study, research, and adequate funding to provide the best education to the population in general.

We believe the recent trend to permit the development and funding of more Charter Schools is a step in the wrong direction. We believe the current arrangements and accommodations for Charter Schools allows for establishment of a two tiered school system that will result in further resegregation, not only by race, but by economic, social, and ability levels. Why would we believe that? A recent study by N.C. School Boards Association reveals this by contrasting the requirements and operating conditions of each system.

The following differences explain the reasons we believe Charter Schools have an unfair advantage over Public Schools and why they should not be publicly funded:

1. Charter Schools have private boards of directors that are not accountable to the public or any public official. They are not elected to office, nor do they have to be a resident of the county or even of North Carolina. North Carolina Ethics laws do not govern board members.

2. There is no limit on what the private company or its employees can be paid, and they can be fired by the company without any hearing rights.
3. 50% of high school and middle school teachers and 25% of elementary school teachers can be unlicensed.
4. There are no restrictions on how the money is spent.
5. State funds do not revert to the state at the end of the fiscal year.

Other differences include:

1. Charter schools are not bound by specific beginning or ending dates.
2. Charter schools have no limit on class sizes.
3. Charter schools have no standard curriculum requirement.
4. Charter schools are not required to provide transportation.
5. Charter schools are not required to provide meals or a free and reduced lunch program.
6. Students can be expelled or suspended without hearings.
7. Students can be asked to leave due to academic or behavior problems.

Without restrictions or required accountability, the Charter Schools have been given carte blanche. They do not have to endure bad behavior or poor performance. They don't provide meals or transportation, which means that disadvantaged children who were on free or reduced lunch in Public Schools or who lacked transportation likely could not attend these schools. We believe this system has built-in segregation and discrimination. We question the wisdom of using tax money for Charter Schools instead of using money to improve public schools.

Vouchers

Vouchers provide public funds to parents who can use the dollars to subsidize attendance of their children at private schools. They do not usually cover all private school costs, but enable middle-income parents, in particular, to leave the traditional public schools. Transportation is not provided ordinarily; so low-income parents most often can't take advantage of a voucher system; thus contributing further to a growing dual system of education and further segregation of students.

The LWV study points out that "large-scale studies of voucher schools have revealed little difference in student performance to public school students with similar backgrounds, and having vouchers has not raised the performance of the neediest students in public schools. (Rause & Barrows, 2009).... The fact that the private school could be religious has provoked a number of lawsuits challenging the use of public funds for church-sponsored institutions."<sup>1</sup>

A deep concern for citizens who feel that all Americans need to come together to form "a more perfect union" to keep our nation strong in the face of global competition and

economic and infrastructure needs is the *pulling away* from public schools. The further separating out of the financially able from the financially insecure – the isolation of poor children in high poverty schools – and the subsequent lack of association between families which occurs in traditional, integrated public schools is disconcerting.

## VI. Resegregation of Public Schools

One of the most difficult dilemmas for those engaged in public school advocacy and deliberations, over the decades since *Brown vs. Board of Education*, has been the tension between the demonstrated value of integrated schools and the difficulties experienced by families/students within the process of that integration.

With the mandate for integrated schools and its ultimate, delayed implementation, there developed much angst around districting plans, busing for racial purposes and other changes. Yet, many people and systems worked tirelessly, with hope for greater unity and equity for all Americans – through the vehicle of integrated public schools. The LWV research states that the “racial achievement gap narrowed, suggesting that federal policies and funding can have a profound effect on schools.... Year 1988 showed most progress in narrowing the gap between African American and Caucasian scores ever before or since.

While there were legitimate concerns about busing children away from neighborhoods, housing patterns were (and are) such that there were often no other viable options for meeting the mandate for and the value of integrated schools. Despite the problems and pain, progress seemed to be made in development of relationships between black/minority parents and students and Caucasian families. Even some housing patterns were seen as becoming more inclusive of multiple ethnicities.

Again, from the League study – and local observations, “in the 90s, 50 years after the *Brown* decision, resegregation began. The courts released many school systems from desegregation mandates; lawsuits began to focus on adequacy of resources rather than equity....”<sup>1</sup>

Grave questions have arisen over long years in this regard. Early on, in Horace Mann’s *Common Schooling Concept*, (1837) “One of his most distinctive principles was that this education will be best provided in schools that embrace children from a variety of backgrounds.” Likewise, the 1965 Coleman Report (*Equality of Educational Opportunity*) and later updates and related research by Professors Gary Henry and Charles Thompson (February 2008) indicated that student background and socio-economic status are as or more important in determining educational outcomes as differences in school resources. This research was cited in the February 5, 2010 paper: *Common Schooling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: What Future for American Education* by Jack Boger, dean of UNC law).<sup>18</sup> This is particularly disturbing in light of the current incidence of many very high poverty schools. In these schools, almost all students are African American or of new immigrant status, coming within the federally determined

poverty guidelines – qualifying for free and reduced meals and living in low-income housing. As privatization strategies enable more and more middle income families to opt for private or charter schools, the specter of dual school systems – with further separation of citizens according to race and financial lines – looms large.

The substantive lecture by Jack Boger, referenced in the above paragraph, was developed for the 20<sup>th</sup> Festival of Legal Learning. It examined “the waning public appetite for racial, ethnic and socio-economic diversity in the nation’s public schools and explores changes in student assignments policies presently underway in North Carolina’s two largest school districts, Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Wake, that reflect these shifting attitudes.”<sup>18</sup> Boger ends his intricate, analytic observations with the following quote from Thurgood Marshall: *“In the short run, it may seem to be the easier course to allow our great metropolitan areas to be divided up, each into two cities – one white, the other black, but it is a course, I predict, our people will ultimately regret.”*

At the height of school integration, the trend was that different segments of communities were “coming together” – getting, at least, to know each other; but the trend now seems to be a “pulling away” so that there is less communication between different segments. Not a good sign – as the nation needs the strength and understanding of all – to meet the competitive thrusts of major developing countries.

At a recent “Access to America” forum at Central Piedmont Community College, former Governor Jim Hunt “got applause when he talked about reversing economic segregation and boosting teacher pay.... *“I grew up in segregated schools. I didn’t understand how wrong it was then,”* Hunt said, in response to an audience question about the concentration of poor and minority students in some CMS schools.... *“Even when segregation isn’t created by law, concentrations of poverty doom teachers and students to frustration,* Hunt said. *‘Desegregated schools work better.’ ”<sup>19</sup>*

Much food for thought as we continue to hope for the best for the nation and public schools!

### **A Teacher’s Observations**

Mary Miller, a former, experienced Guilford County public school teacher and participant in “our group” summarized her observations this way:

*Our nation’s well-being relies on a high quality public education system for all students. Some ways that can help to achieve highest quality are:*

- *Funding should be equitable with the understanding that equity does not mean equal since some populations are more expensive to educate than others and some localities have specific needs.*
- *Cease over reliance on high stakes standardized testing (in state and federal accountability systems) which is undermining educational quality and equity in our schools by hampering educators’ efforts to focus on the broad range of*

*learning experiences that promote the innovation, creativity, problem solving, collaboration, critical thinking and deep subject matter knowledge that will allow students to thrive in a democracy and global society and economy.*

- *Place an immediate cap on the number of charter schools. Otherwise we return to a two-tier school system which existed before desegregation.*
- *Recognize that teachers are not the total influence on students in schools and in society and, therefore cannot be held totally responsible for testing outcomes.*
- *Recognize that not all students want to or need to attend a traditional college or university. Career and Technical education can benefit many students and perhaps prevent some dropouts. This is not the old “shop” education. Some examples would be the aeronautics proposed school in Guilford County and two science and medical related high schools in South Texas that were recently lauded by NEWSWEEK as outstanding. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics less than a quarter of new job openings will require a Bachelor of Arts degree.*

### **Closing Thoughts**

In searching for ways whereby we, as citizens, can successfully advocate for strong public schools, it is important for us to pay close attention to the following ending paragraphs of “our white paper.” We recognize that we must be open to changing needs and new opportunities for strengthening public education; but, at the same time, knowledgeable and staunch in our opposition to approaches that will weaken it. We must always be aware of its importance to our democratic way of life – even as our country embraces major changes in technological advances and global competition.

The LWV research notes that all governmental levels – federal, state and local have vital roles to play in producing excellent public education. The research quotes educator Linda Darling-Hammond as suggesting that the following needs be met “*in order to build a more equitable system....*”

- Secure housing, food and health care, so that children can come to school ready to learn each day,
- Provide supportive early learning environments,
- Equitably fund schools which provide equitable access to high-quality teaching,
- Provide well-prepared and well-supported teachers and leaders,
- Support standards, curriculum and assessments that focus on 21<sup>st</sup>-century goals, and
- Encourage schools to be organized for in-depth student and teacher learning. <sup>1</sup>

She points out that Finland has made great and heralded progress in public education by focusing on equitable funding for schools and extensive preparation for teachers – with publically financed measures.

In a powerful paper entitled A Vision of Public Education in North Carolina, Edward B. Fiske and Helen F. Ladd write that “great states and great education systems go

together....” They go on to describe a “vision of a renewed state education system for the 21<sup>st</sup> century” saying that such a system will:

- “have high standards consistent with knowledge and skills needed tomorrow.”...i.e. being familiar with other countries and cultures; respecting how technology is impacting society,
- be inclusive and value diversity – “not only tolerate, but also celebrate...growing diversity...in the school age populations”
- be flexible “...the industrial era notion that there is ‘one best way’ for meeting every educational challenge must be given a respectful burial.” “An updated public school system for North Carolina will offer a broad range of content.... It will also embrace a wide variety of delivery systems. For example, it will recognize the value of virtual learning and its potential to enhance and improve instruction.... It will support charter schools but only as long as they are held accountable to the same standards as regular public schools, are accessible to students of all backgrounds, and do not unduly interfere with the ability of other public schools to deliver a full range of educational offerings to students not choosing to attend charter schools.”
- be transparent and held accountable for public funds. At the present time, significant forces are pressing to assert the primacy of private interests over public ones by means such as starving public schools of resources, turning the management of schools over to private interests and asserting that, while privately operated schools are entitled to receive public funding, they need not be transparent and accountable to these taxpayers for how they are spent.”

*“The good that we want for our public schools is a mirror of the good that we seek for our society. **The great challenge of our time is to restore the meaning of ‘public’ in public education.**”<sup>4</sup>*

Along these same lines, many years ago, founding father John Adams wrote, “*the whole people must take upon themselves the education of the whole people, and must be willing to bear the expenses of it.*”

### Our Call to Action

How can **we** act to cause these our hopes for excellent public excellent education to become reality?

- I. By being informed ourselves and informing our colleagues and interest groups as we learn, through the newspapers, internet and conversations about actions being taken at the various levels of government which impact Pre-K-12 public schools and higher education.
- II. By sharing our thoughts, questions with elected officials.
- III. By volunteering in our area schools – for first hand experiences there.

- IV. By recognition that Elections Matter and by attending forums with candidates and being prepared with questions which will provide insights to their positions re: public education.

The following are a few general suggestions for possible questions:

Appropriate questions for Congressional Candidates might include:

- a. Will you expand Title I funds – given the % of poor children now in U.S. public schools?
- b. Will you pay close attention to educational research re: the impact of Pre-K and early childhood care on later school performance and fund those programs accordingly?
- c. What is your position on Student Loan availability and rates?

For Legislative Candidates:

- a. Same question re: availability of adequate, excellent child care programs and Pre-K classes.
- b. Will you re-instate Governor's School funding and the Teaching Fellows Program?
- c. Will you become knowledgeable about cuts over numerous years, of the declining percentage of funding to Pre-K-12 schools and consider reversing that trend?
- d. How do you propose keeping North Carolina's public Universities strong, given the cuts to higher education and the lack of adequate financial aid for prospective students?
- e. What do you see as the relationship between public education and the economy?
- f. Do you consider it important that public school students have I-Pads and/or other technological equipment? How would you fund such equipment?
- g. Will you stop the advance of charter schools?
- h. What is your opinion about tenure for teachers and evaluation based on student outcomes?

And for County Commissioners:

- a. Will you carefully study the local Board of Education's Legislative Agenda and join the Board members in advocacy to the General Assembly members for those issues that impact both the commissioners and school board members?
- b. Will you help to advocate for necessary state funding so that local property taxes will not be impacted when counties have to fund necessary dollars to schools – "as the payers of last resort?"

- c. Will you take a careful look at the County Tax Base with so many properties excused from taxes? (Also public schools are currently the only public entity having to pay sales tax.)

A wonderful article in the May 12, 2012 *New and Record* beautifully expresses the reason we care so strongly about public education and its role in our country. The article was written by Richard Barber for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his class at A & T State University. He spoke of his and his fellow students' backgrounds, coming out of a segregated nation, but emphasized their joy at having their college experience. "We embraced the 'cause of education' in the words of Horace Mann and the "promise of America' in the words of Thomas Wolfe."

*Mann Wrote:*

If ever there was a cause  
If ever there can be a cause  
Worthy to be upheld by all the toil  
or sacrifices that the human can endure,  
It is the cause of education.

*Wolfe Added:*

To every man (and woman) his chance;  
To every man regardless of his birth,  
his shining golden opportunity;  
To every man the right to live,  
to work, to be himself;  
To become whatever his manhood and  
decisions combine to make him,  
That is the promise of America.

*Aren't we proud to be public school advocates?*



## Acknowledgements

### Individuals contributing to this paper and group discussions

*Kay Doost*  
*Glenda Clark*  
*Margaret Arbuckle*  
*Mary Miller*  
*Helen Wolfe*  
*Elizabeth Foster*  
*Donna Fairfield*

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