



From The Center Out

The Newsletter of the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research ... A voice for good government
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SURVEY OF TOP LOBBYISTS SHOWS PERSONAL CONTACT IS STILL BEST FOR INFLUENCING LEGISLATORS

In an age of email, telephone banks, and television advertising to promote legislation, personal contact with lawmakers still is the most effective way to wield influence. These findings, published in the latest edition of *North Carolina Insight* magazine, come from a survey of the state's 48 top lobbyists, asking them to identify the tactics, technologies, and techniques that make them effective.

"This study teaches two important lessons," says Sam Watts, the Center's policy analyst and author of the study. "The first is that personal contact still works best when trying to influence legislation. The second is that the same tactics that work for the state's most influential lobbyists will work for the average citizen."

The Most Effective Tactics Used by Professional Lobbyists

For 11 consecutive legislative sessions, the Center has surveyed legislators, lobbyists, and capital news reporters to identify the most influential lobbyists. In a new twist, the Center added a follow-up survey of the most influential lobbyists to determine what makes them so effective. Forty-two of the 48 lobbyists (88 percent) named as the most influential in last year's survey responded, providing insights for citizens on how to be effective advocates in trying to pass, stop, or modify legislation in the N.C. General Assembly.

To find which tactics the state's most influential lobbyists think are most effective, the Center asked them to rate various lobbying tactics. Of the 12 tactics listed in the Center's survey, the three rated most effective are: (1) meeting personally with legislators, (2) using a coalition approach where different groups coordinate their lobbying, and (3) establishing a statewide grassroots network that can be activated to contact legislators.

Next most effective is (4) using a team approach in lobbying, where one or more members of a team lobby Democrats and one or more members lobby Republicans. Ranking lower on the list are tactics such as using telephone banks to help constituents contact legislators and buying television, radio, or print advertising to influence legislation.

Effective Tactics for Citizens To Use in Contacting Legislators

Professional lobbyists say that the same methods that work for them in influencing legislators are also the right tools for citizens to use if they have concerns about an issue. Asked to rank five ways for *citizens* to lobby legislators, the state's most influential lobbyists again say that personal contact with legislators is the most effective. Next in effectiveness is telephone contact, followed by a personal letter, a fax, and finally, email.

"Personal contact is effective," says Harry Kaplan, a contract lobbyist representing nine clients, including the N.C. Association of Health Plans, Cascade Auto Glass, and the North Carolina affiliate of the American Heart Association. He adds, "I've seen legislation based on a single conversation between one constituent and a legislator." Kaplan believes that legislators enjoy personal contact from citizens and that personal contact with legislators on issues is not as common as people generally assume. He also recommends that citizens invite legislators to visit or tour their local facility or program, thereby setting the stage for grassroots "in-person" contact during and after the visit. "Legislators like it because they want to be known in their district, and it makes your facility real to them," says Kaplan.

Predictions on the Future of Lobbying in the Legislature

As for the future, North Carolina's most influential lobbyists predict increased demands for lobbyists to participate in political campaign fundraising, increased diversity in the lobbying corps, and increased use of information technology in the legislative process.

Political analysts believe campaign costs are likely to continue to rise as long as the state's political parties remain nearly equal in their ability to elect candidates. "In business, competition drives costs down. In political campaigns, competition drives costs up," says John N. Davis, who tracks campaigns for a pro-business research group called NCFREE.

The N.C. General Assembly itself has seen a slow but steady increase in the number of women and minority legislators. Many lobbyists believe this trend also will show up in the lobbying corps as interest groups hire people who can more easily relate to a diverse legislature. "As diversity increases in the legislature, that will be reflected in the lobbying corps," says Mike Carpenter of the N.C. Homebuilders Association. Paula Wolf, lobbyist for the Covenant for Children (and pictured on page one of this newsletter) says, "There are more women lobbyists. Women can wear pants now."

Copies of the issue of *North Carolina Insight* containing the Center's research on what makes an effective lobbyist are available for \$20, which includes tax, postage, and handling. To order, write the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research at P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602, call (919) 832-2839, fax (919) 832-2847, or order through the Center's web site at www.nccppr.org.

CENTER'S STUDY OF WAYS TO IMPROVE VOTER TURNOUT SPARKS LEGISLATIVE DEBATES AND MEDIA COVERAGE

The Center's most recent newsletter summarized the findings of a major study of ways to increase voter turnout and improve the administration of elections, published in the April issue of *North Carolina Insight*. One of our recommendations was for the State Board of Elections and N.C. General Assembly to take steps to close the gap between the close of registration and election day, with the ultimate goal of adopting election-day registration by 2006. Currently, if you want to vote in North Carolina, you have to register 25 days before election day. Six states have election-day registration, and six of the top 11 states in voter turnout have same-day registration or no registration at all. A bill (House Bill 756) to implement "same-day registration" at early voting sites was introduced in March, and *Insight* editor Mike McLaughlin testified in favor of the bill, which was held over for consideration in the 2004 session.

In June, the General Assembly enacted state legislation to comply with the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA). This legislation will help move the state in the direction of another Center recommendation that the state move toward a uniform system of voting by 2008. The HAVA legislation will help replace outdated mechanical lever machines now used in four counties and punch card machines used in eight counties, and it will bring the state's centralized voter registry into compliance with federal requirements. It also will improve voter education and increase training for poll workers, another Center recommendation.

Besides playing a role in legislative debates, the Center's study also was publicized in the print and broadcast media across North Carolina. This coverage included an Associated Press wire story and articles in the state's three largest newspapers in Charlotte, Greensboro, and Raleigh, with favorable editorials in Brevard, Charlotte, Greensboro, and Salisbury. *Insight* editor Mike McLaughlin discussed the Center's research on the 90-station N.C. Radio News Network and on "OpenNet" — a statewide cable TV program produced by the N.C. Agency for Public Telecommunications — with State Board of Elections director Gary Bartlett, Rep. Martha Alexander (D-Mecklenburg), and Sen. Hamilton Horton (R-Forsyth). Center director Ran Coble appeared on statewide public television's "North Carolina Now" program to review the study's findings and recommendations, and he and McLaughlin also discussed the study on live radio call-in shows on WPTF-AM in April, May, and June. A lengthy article in *County Lines*, the publication of the N.C. Association of County Commissioners, also focused on this Center study.

Coming Soon from the Center!

October: *North Carolina Insight* theme issue on areas where race, ethnicity, and state government intersect

November: *The University of North Carolina Board of Governors: Selection, Powers, and the Board's Relationship to Campus Boards of Trustees*

10 KEY ISSUES IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

By Ran Coble

What are the key issues facing public education over the next few years? As an insert to your newsletter from the Center for Public Policy Research, here are a few thoughts about the significant challenges ahead.

1. **Accountability**: The public is very interested in the issue of accountability for student performance in public schools. How do we know students are learning more? The state's own ABCs testing and accountability program is about to cross paths with the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which carries strict accountability requirements of its own. Under the federal law, academic progress is measured using the state's end-of-grade reading and math exams. But the federal act also requires measurement of academic progress for subgroups within a school along lines of race, family income, and other factors. A school meets federal standards only if each subgroup makes the academic progress necessary to get 100 percent of the students at grade level by 2014. In the first evaluation released in July 2003, less than half of all schools in North Carolina met the federal standards. Will these separate state and federal evaluation programs be compatible? Some "Schools of Distinction" under the state program will be labeled "needs improvement" under the federal program. This could confuse the public and erode support for the public schools. Another question here is whether the federal government will keep its promise to pick up the tab for the extra costs associated with No Child Left Behind. A look at Congressional history says it's not likely. For example, 30 years ago, Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and promised that the federal government would pay 40 percent of the cost. Last year, Congress provided only 16 percent of the IDEA costs, which was the highest amount ever, but still far short of the federal promise.

2. **Equity in Educational Opportunities and Funding Among School Districts**: Questions of equity surround rich and poor districts, rural and urban districts, and large and small districts. There are broad differences in ability to pay and spending patterns among N.C.'s school districts. According to a 2003 Public School Forum report, the top spending counties spend an average of \$2,096 on current school expenditures, compared to the bottom spending counties, who spend an average of \$550 per child. This gap has increased 8% since last year and 75% in the past decade, according to studies by the Forum and by the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research in 1984, 1985, 1989, and 1997. This issue is in court now in what is called the *Leandro* case, in which the state Supreme Court ruled in 1997 that every child has a right to a "sound basic education." The original lawsuit was filed against the state in 1994 by five poor and largely rural school systems that claimed inadequate funding. The state currently is appealing an order issued a year ago by Wake Superior Court Judge Howard Manning Jr., who said the state is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the neediest students have an opportunity for the "sound basic education" guaranteed by the state's constitution. This case is key to sorting out equity issues in the state's public schools.

3. **Sources of Revenue for Public Schools**: The big problem here is that the local share of public school funding heavily depends on the property tax, which is the most unpopular tax with the public. Seven poor mountain counties are unable to afford any local teacher salary supplements, while some urban school districts add as much as \$5,000 to teacher salaries. The Center for Public Policy Research previously has suggested four options for modernizing local revenue structures, including that the state legislature authorize a menu of revenue sources for counties to choose among.

4. **Teacher Shortage**: Currently, North Carolina employs 84,000 teachers in its public schools. However, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction estimates the state will need 100,000 new teachers over the next 10 years. This is due to (a) the sharp increase in projected school enrollment as the children of the Baby Boom generation reach school age, (b) Governor Mike Easley's efforts to reduce class size, and (c) migration into the state. Though we'll need 10,000 teachers a year over the next 10 years, teacher education programs at the state's public and private colleges and universities combined now produce only 3,300 teachers a year. Of these, only 2,100 ended up teaching in North Carolina. However, North Carolina's problem is not only one of recruitment and training, but also retention of teachers. The average teacher turnover rate each year is 12.5 percent, and 45 percent of our teachers leave within their first five years of teaching.

5. The Public's Confidence in Public Schools: According to a study in the April 2002 issue of *North Carolina Insight*, the number of students in the state's public schools has increased by 19 percent over the last 10 years – less than the 24 percent increase in the state's school-age population over the same time period. Meanwhile, enrollment in alternatives to public schools has increased exponentially. Home schooling has increased by 720 percent, while enrollment in private religious and secular schools has grown by 68 percent. And, new kinds of public-private partnerships – charter schools – have come on the scene, enrolling 15,833 students in 98 such schools since 1997. There is strong evidence that the public still supports its public schools – as indicated by increasing confidence in public schools expressed in opinion polls in North Carolina and the fact that three-quarters of the 91 bond referenda proposed for school construction were approved by voters between 1991 and 2001. Yet, the state may be approaching a tipping point where support for public education could erode rapidly, leading to flight from the public schools for those who have other options.

6. Race in Education: A recent Harvard University study has documented the resegregation of the public schools at the same time that increased attention is being brought to bear on the gap in achievement test scores between the races. The Harvard research findings indicate that African-American students perform better in racially balanced schools and that performance of white students does not suffer, yet the return to racially segregated schools continues apace in much of North Carolina.

7. The Politics of Pre-School Programs: Gov. Jim Hunt pushed his Smart Start early childhood initiative in all 100 counties, while Governor Mike Easley has gained expansion of his More At Four program for at-risk four-year-olds. But these pre-school programs face political challenges because they have been the centerpiece programs of two Democratic governors. As Republicans gain ground and possibly eventual control in the legislature, there may be efforts to cut, consolidate, or eliminate Smart Start and More at Four. In the 2003 legislative session, the legislature cut Smart Start for the second year in a row, but approved an \$8.6 million expansion of More At Four.

8. N.C.'s Record in Sustaining Public School Reforms: Of 10 state efforts in school reforms from 1983-2001, the Center's research indicates that the state abandoned or failed to implement half of these reform efforts before evaluating or fully funding them. The ABCs program represents the best sustained effort so far, but Superintendent of Public Instruction Mike Ward is not running for re-election, and former State Board of Education Chair Phil Kirk – a champion of the ABC program – already has stepped aside. And, 51 of the state's 170 legislators were freshmen in 2003, so they do not have the institutional memory of state efforts to develop reforms that work and maintain public support. These changes in education leadership and turnover in the legislature pose a challenge for sustaining current reforms.

9. The Courts are making public policy and setting budget priorities almost as much as the executive and legislative branches of government: Over the last few years, the state has lost court suits on the intangibles tax, taxing of retirement benefits, an auto finance case, and disposition of money from fines and forfeitures. Altogether, these suits cost the state about \$1.3 billion in revenue. And, more suits have been filed on issues such as redistricting, school finance (see *Leandro* above), transfers from the Highway Fund during the state budget problems, and the state's withholding of local government reimbursement funds.

10. Demographics: The Baby Boomers' children and their children (the "Baby Boom echo") are fueling huge growth in the state's school-age population. The U.S. Department of Education says North Carolina will have the fourth largest percentage increase in grades K-12 enrollment of any state by 2010. This will create an additional need for teachers. In addition to the growth in the number of students, the state's school population is becoming more diverse. The 2000 Census revealed a 394 percent increase in the state's Hispanic/Latino population over the last decade. That foretells an increase in the need for teachers of foreign languages and of English as a Second Language.

For all of these reasons, the Center said public education policymakers will face political, budgetary, and leadership challenges in the coming decade.

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