



The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research

A voice for good government

Accomplishments in 2007

Improving Public Policy

This may be the best year ever for the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research in having our research improve citizens' lives in North Carolina.

■ **Preventing High School Dropouts** – The Center's study of ways to count and prevent high school dropouts resulted in the 2007 legislature appropriating \$7 million in dropout prevention grants and creating a new Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation Rates. The N.C. Department of Public Instruction also is now using a more accurate method of counting and reporting dropout rates, as we recommended.

■ **Reducing Domestic Violence** – For the third year in a row, the legislature enacted some of our recommendations to address domestic violence. In 2007, it enacted stiffer penalties for domestic violence offenders, allowed confidential name changes to protect victims, and required reporting on domestic violence homicides. The legislature also provided \$894,000 for community-based programs for domestic violence victims.

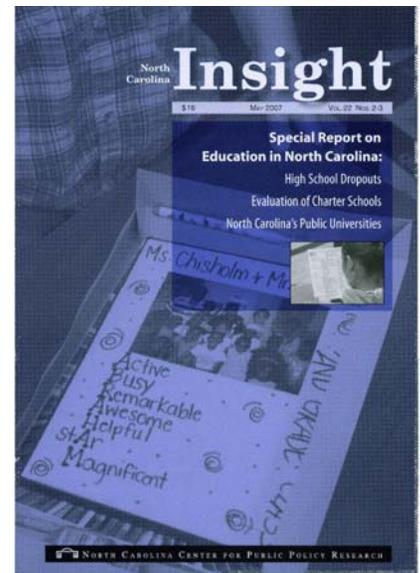
■ **Long-Range Planning by Public Universities** – In last year's award-winning study of higher education issues and governance of North Carolina's 16 public universities, we recommended that the UNC Board of Governors become more involved in long-range planning, as state law requires. Board Chairman Jim Phillips and UNC President Erskine Bowles responded with a UNC Tomorrow Task Force that held 11 public forums across the state to ask how the campuses could help solve public problems. We testified at one of these forums.

■ **Increasing College-Going Rates** – In that same study of higher education and in an earlier study of ways to reduce racial gaps in public policy outcomes, we recommended a new college scholarship program to increase North Carolina's college-going rates, especially for African Americans and Latinos. Gov. Mike Easley responded, and the 2007 state budget included a new debt-free college scholarship program called EARN.

■ **Addressing Racial Disparities in Health Outcomes** – The 2007 legislature appropriated \$2.5 million to address health disparities, as we recommended in our study of race, ethnicity, and public policy outcomes.

■ **Addressing the Shortage of Teachers** – Erskine Bowles, President of the UNC system, used our research on NC's teacher shortage in his Inaugural Address, saying that improving public schools – including addressing the teacher shortage – is one of his top priorities. The University System already has increased its output of teachers from 3,100 to almost 4,000.

■ **Increasing Voter Turnout** – As we recommended, North Carolina became the first state in the Southeast to allow registration and voting on the same day during the early voting period in the 2½ weeks before election day. In our 2003 study, the Center found that 6 of the top 11 states in voter turnout have same-day registration and voting.



■ **Helping Eastern North Carolina and Other Poor Counties** – The Center has devoted two entire issues of *North Carolina Insight* to the challenges facing Eastern North Carolina. Congressmen Mike McIntyre and Robin Hayes have shepherded bipartisan legislation through the U.S. House of Representatives that will create a new Southeast Crescent Regional Commission to aid poverty-stricken counties (and not just in the East) in seven Southern states – much as the Appalachian Regional Commission assists poor mountain counties.

Conducting Nonpartisan Research on Key Public Policy Issues Facing North Carolina

assessed who drops out and why, reviewed programs designed to minimize the number of dropouts, and recommended policies to address this pressing problem.

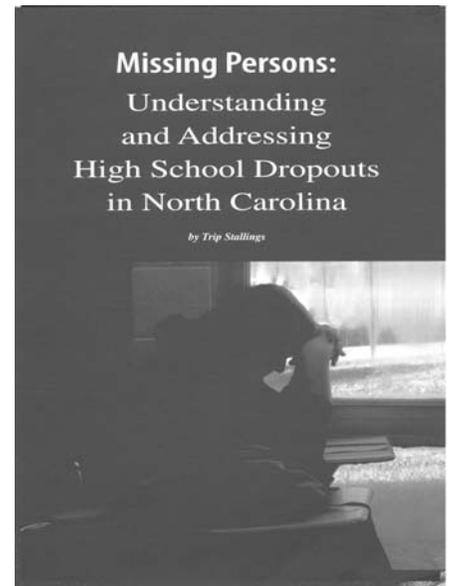
We found that the largest number of dropouts leave school between the 9th and 10th grades. By ethnic group, Native Americans have the highest dropout rates, followed in rank order by Latinos, African Americans, whites, and Asians. By gender, no matter the race or ethnicity, boys are more likely to drop out than girls. Among the many reasons that students drop out are external family and environmental pressures that “pull” them out of school, such as pregnancy or the need to become a family breadwinner. School experiences that “push” students to drop out are their perception of the relevance of the curriculum, a school’s willingness to accommodate students who learn differently, and the state’s compulsory attendance law, which allows students to drop out legally at age 16. The Center’s recommendations included:

■ That the N.C. General Assembly’s Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee study the impact of raising the compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 18. States such as Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin, which long have had a compulsory attendance age of 18, all have lower school dropout rates than North Carolina.

■ That the N.C. Department of Public Instruction (DPI) add more real-world elements such as service learning, internships, and career exploration to increase the relevance of the curriculum, which is currently weighted more toward college-bound students.

■ That the N.C. General Assembly require DPI to evaluate existing dropout prevention programs and provide funds for this evaluation. The Department then should require each local school system to develop a research-based dropout prevention plan that addresses the unique needs of its school population and incorporates resources available in its own community.

The results? The 2007 legislature appropriated \$7 million in dropout prevention grants and created a new Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation Rates. DPI also is now using a more accurate method of counting and reporting dropout rates, as we recommended.



“A new study shows North Carolina to have a huge dropout problem that it has neglected. The study comes from the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research. Its most damning finding is that the state can’t even answer the most rudimentary question about dropouts: How many are there?”

Greensboro News & Record

Center Wins National Awards

The Center won two more prestigious national awards in 2007 for high-quality policy research from the national Governmental Research Association (GRA), a nonpartisan group of 33 public policy nonprofits in 22 states. GRA organizations promote transparency in state and local budgets and provide information to citizens about the performance of government programs. **Most Distinguished Research** – The Center won this national award for its evaluation of the performance of charter schools in North Carolina. **Outstanding Policy Achievement** – This award honored the Center for its in-depth analysis of the problem of high school dropouts and the policy changes implemented in response by the legislature and by the N.C. Dept. of Public Instruction. We are really pleased to receive this year’s double recognition for high-quality research.

Evaluating Government Performance

Evaluating the Performance of Charter Schools – The latest issue of *North Carolina Insight* included a major study of charter schools which

found that charter schools need to improve their performance in these areas before the state considers raising the cap of 100 charter schools: low academic performance compared to regular public schools, lack of racial balance as required by state law, lack of transfers of educational innovations to public schools, and sometimes questionable management and financial compliance.

The Center's findings on charter schools led to a provision in the state budget that required the State Board of Education to examine charter schools' performance. The study group's draft report recommends stepping up the state's review of charter schools' performance and favoring charter applications in counties that don't have charter schools, as we recommended. Our study also effectively killed seven bills that would have raised or removed the cap on the number of charter schools.

Charter Schools Revisited:

A Decade After Authorization, How Goes the North Carolina Experience?

by John Manoel



“The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research hones in unerringly on why N.C. lawmakers should not raise the cap on the number of charter schools. Its new study shows charters, as a whole, don’t live up to their core mission stated in N.C. law – improving student learning and encouraging innovation for traditional public classrooms. Additionally, too many violate state law on diversity and several have been mismanaged.”

The Charlotte Observer

“Charter schools were first authorized in North Carolina in 1996, so the openings of the initial schools date back about 10 years. It’s a good time to take a breather and get some perspective... Those who want the cap lifted may make some valid points. But the problem is they tend to overlook or downplay pretty serious issues that have plagued more than a few charters, such as racial imbalance, underperformance on standardized tests and financial instability.”

Raleigh News & Observer

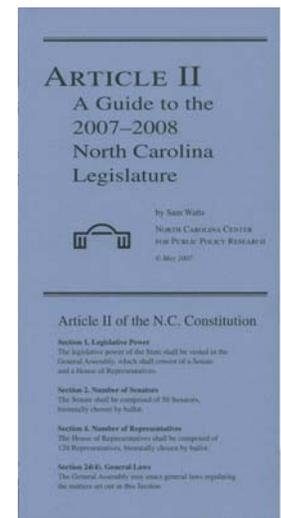
Enhancing Government Accountability

Citizens' Guide to the Legislature – We published the 16th edition of *Article II: A Guide to the N.C. Legislature*. It contains photos, addresses, and biographical information for all 170

legislators, as well as their committee assignments and counties in their districts. It lists five bills they introduced, their votes on 12 bills of statewide interest, and their rankings of attendance, roll call voting participation, and effectiveness.

Blank Bills – The Center released a study recommending that the legislature permanently ban the use of blank bills. When blank bills are introduced, they have a title, but no text. Then they are held in committee, and the content is not added until later in the session. This means there is little opportunity for public debate or analysis by the media. Our study of blank bills received coverage in 46 newspaper articles across North Carolina, on the 90 radio stations in the N.C. News Network, on statewide public radio, and on commercial TV stations from Greenville to Raleigh to Asheville. Our recommendation for a permanent statutory ban on blank bills was endorsed in editorials across the state from Brevard to Greensboro to Raleigh to Fayetteville.

The 2007 House passed a rule prohibiting blank bills, and the Senate also sharply cut back the number of blank bills.



“Occasionally you hear a suggestion that makes so much sense you wonder why it hasn’t already happened. So it is with a proposal to ban the bizarre legislative practice known as ‘blank bills.’ As the Center for Public Policy Research recommends, blank bills should be banned.”

Durham Herald-Sun

“This week the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research released a study recommending that the legislature permanently ban the use of such [blank] bills. It’s an idea whose time has come.”

Asheville Citizen-Times

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Looking Ahead to 2008

Key Issues Facing Community Colleges – North

Carolina has 58 community colleges enrolling more than 800,000 students. About 75 percent of these students are enrolled in programs to prepare them for direct transition from community college to work. For example, the colleges train almost all public safety officers – police, fire, and emergency medical staff. Sixty percent of the state's nurses are produced by community colleges, and about one-third of our teachers start out there. The other 25 percent of community college students are enrolled in programs that will allow them to transfer to public and private colleges and universities. The Center is studying six key issues facing our community college system: (1) the community colleges' role in job training and economic development; (2) their role in meeting work force needs in fields of shortage such as teaching, nursing, and biotechnology; (3) their role in remediation; (4) ease of transfers from community colleges to public and private four-year institutions; (5) community college faculty pay; and (6) governance of community colleges.

"The Future of Community Colleges in North Carolina" – On Wednesday, February 6, 2008, the Center will host an event examining "The Future of Community Colleges in North Carolina." This event will be held at The Umstead Hotel in Cary and is co-sponsored with the N.C. Cable Telecommunications Association and Time Warner Cable. We hope you'll join us.

Significant Issues Affecting the Aging – The Center will examine key issues affecting the elderly as North Carolina's elderly population is expected to double by 2030. We will examine the demographic trends that are most important for focusing state policy on services to the elderly. Our research also will look at shortages in nursing and other health care professions. And, we will examine state Medicaid policies affecting the elderly.

Legislative and Lobbyist Rankings – We'll continue our efforts to enhance government accountability and educate voters by publishing the 16th edition of *Rankings of Effectiveness, Attendance, and Roll Call Voting Participation for Members of the N.C. General Assembly* and the 14th edition of *The Most Influential Lobbyists in the General Assembly*.

Policies on Student Financial Aid in North Carolina – The Center also is working on an analysis of policies on student financial aid in higher education. The report will explain our current financial aid system and look at its structure, programs, and outcomes in the context of current national trends and the changing demographics of the state. And, the report will describe innovative approaches in other states and discuss policy options for state policymakers.

Your Ideas

We welcome your suggestions for topics on which the Center's independent, nonpartisan research could make a difference. To make a suggestion or order a publication, please write us at P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602, call us at (919) 832-2839, fax to (919) 832-2847, or visit our web site at www.nccppr.org.

Our Mission

The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to the goals of a better-informed public and a more effective, accountable, and responsive government. The Center identifies public policy issues facing North Carolina and enriches the dialogue among citizens, the media, and policymakers. Based on our research, the Center makes recommendations for improving the way government serves the people of this state.