



The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research

Your voice for good government

Accomplishments in 2008

Improving Public Policy

This was another banner year for the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research in having our research affect public policy and improve citizens' lives in North Carolina.

■ **Helping Community Colleges Address Key Challenges Facing North Carolina** – In response to the Center's recommendations on the future of community colleges, the 2008 N.C. General Assembly:

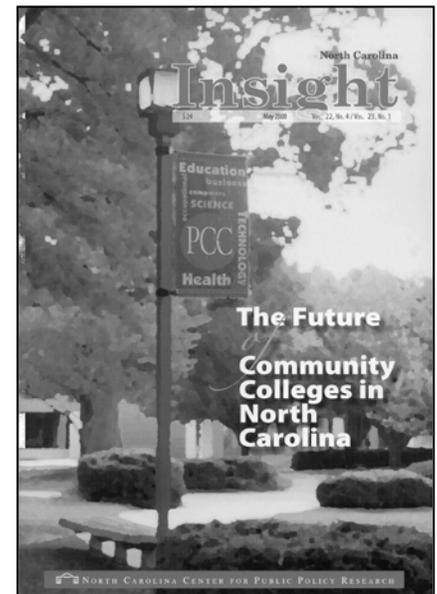
- Appropriated \$5 million to address the equipment shortages documented by the Center;
- Appropriated \$4 million for allied health programs to address work force shortages that we documented;
- Appropriated \$2.5 million for growth in enrollment to address weaknesses in the funding formula described by the Center;
- Appropriated \$985,000 for mentoring of minority males, a group that we identified as needing special attention; and
- Charged the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee to study changes necessary to improve financial aid for community college students, in direct response to the Center's findings and recommendations.

■ **Preventing High School Dropouts** – In February, Center staff testified before the Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation Rates about our study of ways to count and prevent high school dropouts. As we recommended, the 2008 legislature then appropriated \$15 million for dropout prevention grants and re-authorized the Commission. The legislature also mandated a new study of whether to increase the compulsory school attendance age as a way to reduce dropouts. And, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction is now using a more accurate method of counting and reporting dropout rates, as we recommended.

■ **Addressing Domestic Violence** – In February, we testified before the Joint Legislative Committee on Domestic Violence. And, for the fourth year in a row, the legislature enacted more of our recommendations to address domestic violence. This year, it enacted stiffer penalties for domestic violence offenders. In previous years, it has expanded family courts to more counties, allowed name changes to remain confidential to protect victims, required reporting on domestic violence homicides, and provided \$894,000 for community-based programs for domestic violence victims.

■ **Help for Eastern North Carolina** – Armed with our data on the plight of Eastern North Carolina, Democratic Congressman Mike McIntyre and Republican Senator Elizabeth Dole shepherded bipartisan legislation through Congress that creates a new Southeast Crescent Regional Commission that will aid poverty-stricken eastern counties in seven Southern states – much as the Appalachian Regional Commission has assisted poor mountain counties.

■ **Reviving A State Environmental Index** – The N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources announced that it will release online a new citizen-friendly, multi-color publication of Environmental Indicators documenting the status of the state's environment and progress or decline in the quality of the state's water, air, land, wildlife, solid waste disposal, etc. The Center first recommended a State Environmental Index in 1989. Gov. Jim Martin implemented it, but the publication later declined in quality and frequency. Now, Gov. Mike Easley has revived the idea in a way that implements the Center's original vision.



■ **Fostering Record Voter Turnout** – Following a Center recommendation, 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 November, North Carolina had the highest voter turnout (69 percent) since 1968, and more people voted early than voted on Election Day.

■ **Televising Legislative Sessions** – In 1993, the Center proposed a state-level C-SPAN to make the legislature’s work more transparent and accessible to the state’s citizens. Now, the 2008 legislature has created a study commission to consider televising legislative sessions of the state House of Representatives.

■ **Eliminating Disparities in Health Outcomes** – The 2008 legislature also appropriated \$3 million to eliminate racial disparities in health outcomes, as we recommended in our comprehensive 2004 study.

Conducting Nonpartisan Research on Key Public Policy Issues Facing North Carolina

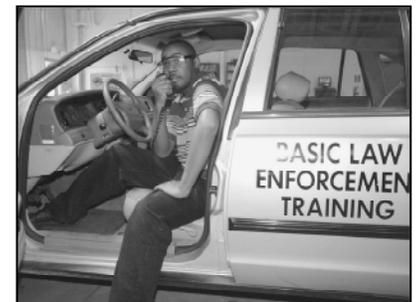
The Future of Community Colleges in North Carolina – In the spring, we released our research results on key issues facing North Carolina’s 58 community colleges. The community colleges educate about 850,000 students each year, train workers, and in the process help transform our state’s economy. The Center highlighted three key challenges:



Challenge #1: Rapid Enrollment Growth – Over the last decade, the system’s full-time equivalent enrollment grew 54 percent. State funding for community colleges is allocated according to the prior year’s enrollment. So when enrollment rises quickly, the system is obligated to serve students for whom no state dollars are available. To meet this challenge, the Center recommended changing funding formulas to enable community colleges to receive funding for all the students they actually serve.

Challenge #2: Low Faculty Salaries – The average full-time faculty member at the 16 public universities is paid \$81,000, ranking us 13th among the 50 states. The average public school teacher makes \$46,000, ranking the state 27th. The average full-time community college faculty member earns \$41,000, ranking North Carolina 46th in the nation. To meet the challenge, the Center recommended that the General Assembly move community college faculty salaries to the national average.

Challenge #3: Flawed Funding Formulas – The community college funding model has significant flaws. It does not: (1) account for differences in program costs; (2) include enough resources to start or expand new programs, or (3) address equipment needs adequately, already forcing the elimination of 98 programs with expensive equipment needs. To help community colleges be more nimble in responding to work force shortages, the Center recommended that the state provide differentiated funding for higher-cost, high-demand programs leading to high-paying jobs, such as health science. We also recommended increased funding for community college equipment, saying we cannot train tomorrow’s work force on yesterday’s equipment.



This study received incredible statewide news coverage in 125 articles in 64 newspapers, with 58 editorials praising our work and endorsing our findings and recommendations. The study also received coverage on 384 radio broadcasts and at least 9 TV stations. The television coverage included statewide public television on “North Carolina Now” and cable TV stations statewide on “Open/net,” a program of the N.C. Agency for Public Telecommunications.

“A timely study by a credible policy nonprofit puts its finger on several areas where the state must fix its community colleges to meet needs in North Carolina’s not-so-distant future Speedy work to address the Center’s recommendations is just the kind of support the new guy [new Community College System President Scott Ralls] needs.”
The News & Observer of Raleigh

“The first thing legislators should do is read the Center’s exhaustive report” *The Winston-Salem Journal*

“Laurels to the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research for its in-depth study of the state’s community college system which is used by many but fully understood by few”
The Salisbury Post

Center Wins National Awards

The Center won three more prestigious national awards in 2008 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. **Award for Most Effective Education of the Public** – The Center won an award for our special issue of *North Carolina Insight* on the future of community colleges in North Carolina. **Most Distinguished Research** – The Center won another national award for our groundbreaking study of financial aid for students in community colleges. **Outstanding Policy Achievement** – And, the Center won the top award for Outstanding Policy Achievement, which goes to the policy group whose research leads to “tangible improvements in public policy.” We were honored for our four-year effort to improve North Carolina’s laws designed to prevent and reduce domestic violence. We are really pleased to receive triple recognition this year for high-quality research.

Educating the Public

Center Events Open to the Public – For the first time ever, the Center linked the topic of our biennial event to a major study and publication. Scott Ralls, the new President of the N.C. Community College System, and three other top leaders discussed the future of community colleges at the our biennial policy forum in February. Ralls was joined by Hilda Pinnix-Ragland, Chair of the State Board of Community Colleges and an executive with Progress Energy; Patricia Skinner, President of Gaston College in Dallas and President of the N.C. Association of Community College Presidents; and Tony Zeiss, President of Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, the largest of the 58 community colleges. Our event was co-sponsored by the N.C. Cable Telecommunications Association and Time Warner Cable. Following the February event, we released our study on the future of community colleges in May and June.

This was the seventh public event the Center has co-sponsored with the N.C. Cable Telecommunications Association and Time Warner Cable since 1996. Five of the programs have won national cable TV awards. This year’s program, titled “The Future of Community Colleges in North Carolina,” was videotaped and *aired at least 119 times on cable TV stations across the state.*



“Open/net” Programs on Cable TV – The Center also has partnered with the N.C. Agency for Public Telecommunications in a collaboration where the Agency uses Center studies as the topics for its hour-long “Open/net” programs broadcast statewide on cable TV. “Open/net” is picked up by 53 cable TV systems across the state and can be viewed by anyone with a satellite dish. The program also is streamed live over the Internet. These programs serve our goal of educating the public on state-level policy issues and help raise the Center’s visibility.

Enhancing Government Accountability

Rankings of Legislators’ Effectiveness, Attendance, and Roll Call Voting Participation – In April, the Center continued to enhance government accountability and educate voters by publishing the 16th edition of rankings of effectiveness of all 170 members of the N.C. General Assembly. In recent years, we have added rankings of legislators based on their attendance and on their participation in roll call votes. The attendance and voting participation rankings tell citizens and voters how often their legislator was there to represent them. The effectiveness rankings tell citizens how effective their legislator was when he or she was there. Both help citizens assess their legislators’ performance.

Rankings of the Most Influential Lobbyists – In August, the Center released the 14th edition of this resource. These rankings help citizens understand which key interests and organizations have clout with legislators. They also shed light on what is often an invisible process and show changes and trends in the lobbying profession.

Rankings of Effectiveness, Attendance, and Roll Call Voting Participation for the North Carolina General Assembly

Rankings of the Most Influential Lobbyists in the North Carolina General Assembly



A report by

The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research

*Sam Watts
August 2008*

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Looking Ahead to 2009

Issues Affecting the Aging – The number of people 65 and over will explode in 2011 when the first Baby Boomers (born in 1946-1964) turn 65. By 2030, North Carolina's 65 and over population will likely more than double to almost 2.2 million and constitute almost 18%

of the population. We will examine shortages in nursing and other health care professions. We'll also explore issues in long-term care, in-home care, preventive care and health behaviors, and patterns of fraud committed against the elderly. And, we'll look at the impact of the increasing elderly population on the state budget.

Reforming Mental Health Reform – The cost of caring for the mentally ill has doubled since 2001, when the legislature ordered a shift away from treatment in the state's mental hospitals and shifted treatment toward private community providers. All four state mental hospitals have been threatened with a cutoff of federal funds (Medicare and Medicaid) because of concerns about quality of care and mistreatment of patients. We want to compare our mental health reforms to reforms in other states and make recommendations to make mental health reform work better in North Carolina.

State Water Policy – As our state's population grows at an unprecedented rate, so does our demand for water. Since mid-June 2007, citizens have become more interested in water policy as all 100 counties have been under some level of drought classification. And, South Carolina has sued North Carolina in the U.S. Supreme Court on the issue of inter-basin water transfers. North Carolina needs to move from crisis management of our water resources to creating a lasting water policy the state can use to manage water quantity, water quality, inter-basin transfers, and infrastructure.

Financial Aid for Students in Colleges and Universities – This comprehensive study will analyze financial aid for students in public and private colleges and universities. The report will explain our current financial aid system and look at its structure, programs, and outcomes in the context of national trends and the changing demographics of the state. The report also will describe innovative approaches in other states and discuss options for state policymakers that would increase access to higher education in North Carolina.

Citizens' Guide to the Legislature – In 2009, we'll publish the 17th edition of *Article II: A Guide to the 2009-2010 N.C. Legislature*, the most comprehensive legislative guide available. *Article II* contains biographical and voting information for each of the 170 legislators, as well as their committee assignments and counties in their districts. For legislators who served in the previous session, the guide will list five bills they introduced in 2007-2008, their votes on 12 bills of statewide interest, and rankings of attendance and roll call voting participation, as well as a history of their effectiveness rankings.

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 website at www.nccppr.org. Thank you for caring about improving public policy and enhancing the quality of life in North Carolina.

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.