



LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER

October 24, 2016, Issue 648

What's Up

Revenue Brightens by \$158M: North Carolina revenues are ahead of what was forecast to date this fiscal year to fund the state government budget. Economists with Gov. Pat McCrory's budget office and at the General Assembly say collections of taxes, fees and other revenues are \$158 million above projections through the first quarter of the year (ending Sept. 30).

That means revenues are 3 percent higher than predicted. McCrory's office attributed the uptick to wage growth and employment gains. That translates to more money coming from tax withholdings from employee paychecks. The first quarter is usually among the most stable in each year's budget cycle, with more risks around the April tax filing season and uncertainty until the returns are in. Lawmakers last summer approved the \$22.3 billion budget.

School Hours: According to new research into the sleeping habits of the state's high school students, beginning school after 8:30 a.m. reduces absences and suspensions for economically-disadvantaged students. "We found that sleep is a relatively cost-effective way to improve student performance," Kevin Bastian, the UNC-Chapel Hill Education Policy Initiative's research director and author of the report, told the House Select Committee on Education Strategies and Practices last week.

The study analyzed exam scores, absences and suspensions at North Carolina middle and high schools with later bell times, a growing trend. Bastian said that in 2009, only 228 schools started after 8:30 a.m. with that number in 2014 growing to 396. Researchers said they were curious to study the Durham Public Schools, which just moved the starting bell from 7:45 a.m. to 9 a.m.

While researchers found later starts had a marginal effect on EOC and ACT scores, the impact was more pronounced on absences and suspensions. Both decreased for economically-disadvantaged students during the time period examined. "There is a stereotype that teenagers stay up too late and get up too late," Bastian said. "But it is not that simple. Teens experience biological changes that make them need 8.5 to 9.5 hours of sleep."

Early Voter Turnout: As the Nov 8th election day approaches, the number of ballots cast in person on the first day of early voting in North Carolina is about the same as four years ago. The State Board of Elections said 164,207 ballots were cast Thursday at early-voting sites in all 100 counties. That compares with 166,943 ballots on the first day of early voting during the 2012 presidential election. There are about 200,000 more registered voters now compared with the same time four years ago, or about 6.8 million Friday. Early in-person voting continues through Nov. 5. About 56 percent of the votes cast in the 2012 election came in early voting, according to news reports.

Skills Gap & Other News

From NC Chamber on Closing the Skills Gap: Lew Ebert, President & CEO of the NC Chamber, in an Oct. 21 email to Chamber members, wrote in part:

Advanced technology is continuing to take a firmer hold in workplaces around the world, and around our state. For job creators in North Carolina, that means supporting a new generation of workers with the skills needed to adapt and evolve will only become more imperative with each passing year. To that end, the GSK Kenan STEM Fellows program is one example of an innovative partnership between business and education leaders that is working to help North Carolina nurture a world-class talent pipeline and begin closing its skills gap.

GSK Kenan STEM Fellows comprise six middle and high school teachers in Wake County who have been given the unique opportunity to work alongside nanotechnology researchers at N.C. State University's ASSIST Center. There, these fellows work directly with researchers to develop novel lesson plans based around cutting-edge design processes for wearable nanotechnology. It's a unique hands-on research experience that allows these teachers to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the same innovative science concepts they are tasked with teaching to students in the classroom.

"Research shows students benefit when teachers engage in authentic science work experiences," said Elaine Franklin, director of the Kenan Fellows Program for Teacher Leadership, the program responsible for overseeing the experience of the GSK Kenan STEM fellows, and which offers similar experiences to teachers in three other North Carolina counties. "By partnering with researchers, teachers are able to deepen their content knowledge. As a longtime supporter of our program, GSK recognizes the value of research experiences for teachers. GSK's leadership level of support helps teachers create relevant learning experiences for students and inspires curiosity in science and math."

Socioeconomic Placement: The Charlotte Observers reports that consultant Michael Alves sees Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' emerging magnet plan as a model that can refine the way schools across America view diversity and equity. Its immediate impact will be felt by thousands of students expected to participate in the 2017 assignment lottery in January. For now, it's

under scrutiny from parents trying to determine whether it will help or hurt their kids and their schools. They're posing questions about a new system that requires families applying for magnets to report their income or face a penalty. Such questions include whether the system is intrusive and will parents stack the system.

Background: CMS currently uses a lottery to place students in magnet programs when there are more applicants than seats. About 30,000 students a year participate, Superintendent Ann Clark said, with the most popular schools ending up with hundreds of students on waiting lists.

The proposed new lottery, which is up for a vote on Nov. 9, uses socioeconomic status, known as SES, to award seats. The CMS plan starts by rating each of Mecklenburg County's 568 Census blocks as high, medium or low SES, based on average household income, home ownership, single-parent families, English proficiency and adult educational levels.

Jobless Rate: The state's jobless rate in September rose 0.1 percentage point to 4.7 percent from August, the N.C. Commerce Department reported recently. The September unemployment rate was 1 percentage point lower than in September 2015.

The number of people employed rose 7,559 over the month to 4,596,364, and increased 98,277 over the year. The number of people unemployed rose 5,671 over the month to 227,377, and declined 42,158 over the year.

Where the Jobs Are: Nonfarm industry employment rose 9,700 to 4,337,300, seasonally adjusted, in September. The major industries with the largest over-the-month increase was construction at 3,300; trade, transportation and utilities, 3,100; professional and business services, 2,700; other services, 2,500; financial activities, 1,600; and government, 1,500. There was a loss of 3,300 leisure and hospitality services jobs, along with 900 in manufacturing, 700 in education and health services; and 100 in information, the Winston-Salem Journal reports.

Quote of the Week

"If you're going to mandate it, by golly give us some money to do it."

- Johnson County Schools Superintendent Ross Renfrow, on a bill passed by the General Assembly that requires local school systems to offer free or reduced-priced driver's education programs (The News & Observer, 10/23/16)