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The right way to widen access to dental care

I write to shed some light on the issue of mid-level dental providers covered in your Feb. 9 article "Dentist wants help to broaden care." The quoted statement [by Dr. Steven Slott, a dentist] that "We have got to get something done in this state," while correct, is neither a new idea nor a position that has escaped the notice of the legislature or the N.C. Dental Society.

How to address the dental needs of our underserved poor and rural populations is a subject of paramount importance to our organization and has been the subject of recent major legislation by the General Assembly. The legislature established a new dental school at East Carolina University dedicated to graduating dentists trained to practice in underserved areas of our state and also expanded the facilities and class size at UNC to increase the supply of dentists admitted to practice in North Carolina. We have also made it easier for dentists from other states to move to North Carolina to practice.

Despite what other states have attempted, the N.C. Dental Society's concern for the public welfare in North Carolina requires that poor and rural citizens be provided high-quality dental care and not be subject to practices that may compromise their health.

That dangerous oral problems can lead to more serious disease and threaten overall health is not in question. The idea that mid-level providers could perform uncomplicated extractions and fillings currently performed only by dentists is dangerous and short-sighted, since even the most experienced dentist, with four to six years of additional training after college, can encounter complications in a seemingly ordinary extraction. A routine appointment for a filling may lead a trained dentist to detect early oral cancer, an abnormality likely to be missed by an untrained eye.

While it may seem expedient to create new dental provider classifications, stop-gap solutions that rely on undereducated practitioners are not the answer. The new and expanded dentist education programs are actively, responsibly and deliberately addressing the access to care problem and the N.C. Dental Society encourages a continuing discussion on the matter. Let's place our emphasis on patient safety and not sacrifice quality of care for a short-term fix.

Dr. Dan Cheek

President

North Carolina Dental Society

Raleigh

The length letter on letters was waived to permit a fuller response to the article.
Council will study eco-tourism opportunities

Eco-tourism focuses on low-impact, sustainable travels in natural settings. Camping, canoeing, hiking and wildlife tours are all examples.

BY KATHRYN KENNEDY
The Daily Reflector

A Greenville City Council member is hoping a new objective encourages city officials and residents to take full advantage of economic and cultural impacts of eco-tourism.

Councilman Calvin Mercer pushed his colleagues to approve an economic development objective supporting the growth of that industry at their Jan. 24 planning retreat. The City Council and staff will "explore the possibility for Greenville to serve as a hub or base for servicing the anticipated emergence of eco-tourism in eastern North Carolina."

Eco-tourism focuses on low-impact, sustainable travels in natural settings. Camping, canoeing, hiking and wildlife tours are all examples.

Just as national parks have seen a swell in attendance, so has eco-tourism, said East Carolina University sustainable tourism professor Pat Long. He attributes some of that to the affordability and proximity of nature-based vacations. The state also is home to an aging but still active population that enjoys the outdoors and wants to share that with their grandchildren.

Rather than being at the far edge of the

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state's oceans and estuaries, Mercer sees Greenville as a launching pad or gateway for eco-tourism and other sustainable events. Asheville plays a similar role in the western part of the state.

Mercer said much of what would be needed to take advantage of the industry's arrival already exists in the community: an airport, hotels, restaurants and businesses that would accommodate travelers on the way to or from eco-tourism destinations.

"It doesn't necessarily take a lot of investment or up-front money," he said.

Other things like hunting and fishing guide services or equipment outfitters could be cultivated by local entrepreneurs.

What the city needs to focus on now, Mercer said, is ensuring things like adequate access to the Tar River at the Town Common and other locations.

Mercer said he doesn't know all the ways to capitalize on eco-tourism, but he hopes the new objective gets a conversation started.

"This is not something the City Council will do by itself," he said. "We will be a partner with organizations, other cities, counties and the region."

Long agreed those partnerships are essential for the well-being of the region's economic development. He encourages anyone interested in eco-tourism to attend a 4 p.m. lecture on March 18 in ECU's Science and Technology Building, Room C-309, Martha Honey, co-director for the Center of Responsible Travel, will speak on "Eco-tourism and Sustainable Development: Who Owns Paradise?"

Contact Kathryn Kenney at kkennedy@reflector.com or (252) 329-9566.
Tough chore

Erskine Bowles will have spent five years as president of the University of North Carolina system when he retires at the end of this year. It may be more, depending upon whether the Board of Governors that chose him can move efficiently to pick a successor. (Bowles says he is willing to stay until that person is chosen.)

When Bowles got the job, he was part of a judicious selection process, but the truth is, his resume (head of the Small Business Administration, White House chief of staff for President Clinton, successful business career), his personality, his North Carolina background and his contacts made the process easier than it might have been with no clear front-runner. The only thing he lacked in terms of professional credentials was a career in academe. Time has shown that really wasn't much of a hindrance.

Should professional experience on campus be something the Board of Governors requires of a Bowles successor? Not necessarily. It makes sense that the individual chancellors of UNC campuses would need such experience, as they're called upon to make decisions pertaining to fields of study, academic appointments and so forth.

But the president of the UNC system deals with big-picture issues such as the direction and mission of a multifaceted system, funding via the General Assembly and the selection of top managers (chancellors included). A president has to be tough, focused, personable, devoted to the state and its people, clever and shrewd.

Bowles' immediate predecessor, Molly Corbett Broad, was an experienced academic administrator in the California higher education system, but her two predecessors (there have been only four presidents since the system's creation in 1971), William Friday and C.D. Spangler Jr., had different backgrounds. Friday was only 36 when he became the president of the smaller group of institutions that eventually grew into the current system, and had been working with his predecessor, Gordon Gray. Spangler had been chairman of the State Board of Education but was known primarily as a businessman.

Certainly a person may be found for the job who has a combination of the qualities of the previous presidents, and the next president must be devoted to the academic mission. That said, the job is a daunting administrative challenge, far more complex than running an individual campus, and there is little time for contemplating the specifics of academic programs and the like, a duty best left to individual campuses and their chancellors, anyway.

Experience in business or government or both would therefore be extremely helpful. Some connections to North Carolina also would be an asset. That may not mean the next president has to be active here currently, but knowledge of the state would both shorten the learning curve and be important in dealing with the legislators on Jones Street, many of whom have their own ideas about how the university should be run.
As Bowles has shown, prospective longevity in the job isn't the most important thing. In his relatively short tenure, he has dramatically trimmed administration, chosen able chancellors, improved the system's connection with lawmakers and faced down more than his share of crises. He has driven individual campuses to do better on everything from planning for the long term to providing services for students to scholarships. He has put some limits on how much tuition on campuses can be raised from year to year.

He leaves the university's "cause," in other words, in good order. The Board of Governors now will be charged with finding someone who will not just maintain, but advance it.
Plan Would Let Students Start College After 10th Grade

By SAM DILLON

In an experiment that could reshape American secondary education, high schools in eight states will introduce new courses next year, along with a battery of tests for sophomores, that will allow students who pass to get a diploma two years early and immediately enroll in community college.

Students who pass but aspire to attend a selective college may continue with college preparatory courses in their junior and senior years, organizers of the new effort said. Students who fail the 10th grade tests, known as board exams, can try again at the end of their 11th and 12th grades. The tests would cover not only English and math but other subjects like science and history.

The new system of high school coursework with the accompanying board examinations is modeled largely on systems in high-performing nations including Denmark, Finland, England, France and Singapore.

One of the goals of the program is to reduce the numbers of high school graduates who need remedial courses when they enroll in college. More than a million college freshmen across America must take remedial courses each year, and many drop out before getting a degree.

"That’s a central problem we’re trying to address, the enormous failure rate of these kids when they go to the open admission colleges," said Marc S. Tucker, president of the National Center on Education and the Economy, a Washington-based nonprofit that is organizing the board exam effort. "We’ve looked at schools all over the world, and if you walk into a high school in the countries that use these board exams, you’ll see kids working hard, whether they want to be a carpenter or a brain surgeon."

The 100 or so high schools participating in the initiative are pioneers in a pilot project that organizers hope will eventually spread to all schools in those states, and inspire other states across the nation to follow suit.

High school students will first begin the new coursework in fall 2011 in schools in Connecticut, Kentucky, Maine, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont.

Kentucky’s commissioner of education, Terry Holliday, said that high school graduation requirements there have long been based on having students accumulate enough course credits to graduate.

"This would reform that," Mr. Holliday said. "We've been tied to seat time for 100 years. This would allow an approach based on subject mastery — a system based around move-on-when-ready."

The new system aims to provide students with a clear outline of what they need to study to succeed, said Phil Daro, a Berkeley-based consultant who is a member of an advisory committee for the effort.
School systems like Singapore’s promise students that if they study diligently the material in their course syllabuses, they will do well on their examinations, Mr. Daro said. “In the U.S., by contrast, all is murky. Students do not have a clear idea of where to apply their effort, and the system makes no coherent attempt to reward learning.”

Four years ago, a bipartisan panel of national education and other policy experts, assembled by the national center, recommended a far-reaching redesign of the American educational system, including the adoption of board examinations in high schools.

Other recommendations of the 2006 panel included giving states, rather than local districts, control over school financing, and starting school for most children at age 3. Mr. Tucker said that the board examination project was the broadest effort at putting the panel’s proposals into effect so far.

“One hope is that this board exam system can prepare students to move on to careers, to higher ed and technical colleges and the workplace, sooner rather than later,” said Howard T. Everson, a professor of educational psychology at the City University of New York, who is co-chairman of the advisory committee.

States that participate in the pilot project on board examinations will pick up to five programs of instruction, with their accompanying tests, for use by the participating high schools. Those programs already approved by the national center include the College Board’s Advanced Placement, the International Baccalaureate Diploma, ACT’s QualityCore and the International General Certificate of Secondary Education programs offered both by Cambridge International and by Pearson/Edexcel.
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Study Finds Public Discontent With Colleges

By TAMAR LEWIN

Most Americans believe that colleges today operate like businesses, concerned more with their bottom line than with the educational experience of students, according to a new study. And the proportion of people who hold that view has increased to 60 percent, from 52 percent in 2007.

At the same time, nearly two-thirds of those surveyed said that colleges should use federal stimulus money to hold down tuition, even if it means less money for operations and programs.

The study, a joint project of Public Agenda and the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, also found that most Americans believe that colleges could admit a lot more students without lowering quality or raising prices, and that colleges could spend less and maintain a high quality of education.

“One of the really disturbing things about this, for those of us who work in higher education,” said Patrick Callan, president of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, “is the vote of no confidence we’re getting from the public. They think college is important, but they’re really losing trust in the management and leadership.”

According to the study, “Squeeze Play 2010: Continued Public Anxiety on Cost, Harsher Judgments on How Colleges are Run,” a growing share of Americans believes that college is essential to success — 55 percent, compared with 31 percent in 2000. But at the same time, a dwindling share — 28 percent, compared with 45 percent a decade earlier — thinks college is available to the vast majority of qualified, motivated students.

“People are increasingly seeing themselves caught between these two trends,” said John Immerwahr, a senior research fellow at Public Agenda and an author of the report. “It’s a new kind of misery index. This is really important, and it’s really inaccessible.”

The report is based on a December telephone survey of more than 1,000 Americans. It has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.05 percentage points.

The report found some areas of optimism. Nine in 10 Americans say it is somewhat or very likely that their own high-school-age child will attend college, and the majority believe that almost anyone who needs financial help to go to college can get loans or financial aid.

But 83 percent said that students had to borrow too much money to pay for college.

In “Iron Triangle,” a 2008 study of 25 college presidents, Public Agenda and the center found that most saw an unbreakable link between the cost of running their operations, the number of students they can educate and maintaining educational quality.
To serve more students or offer higher quality education, the college presidents said, would require more money — and conversely, cuts in their budgets would inevitably translate into either a smaller number of students or diminished educational quality.

According to the new report, the public disagrees.

“It’s nice to think that we can have guns and butter, but it’s not that easy,” said Terry Hartle, the senior vice president of government and public affairs for the American Council on Education. “The public is not always right.”

While it is true that colleges and universities could provide higher education for less money, Mr. Hartle said, it would require cuts in areas that most people see as fundamental to quality.

“We probably wouldn’t have libraries open as much, we wouldn’t update I.T. regularly, we wouldn’t have small classes,” he said. “Running a first-class college or university costs money. It’s a very labor-intensive enterprise, in which it’s common to spend 70 to 76 percent of the budget on faculty and staff.”
Counselors have reservations about university waiting lists

CSU, UC may only be raising anxiety for students who have a slim chance of being accepted, advisors say.

By Larry Gordon

February 16, 2010

As California's public universities prepare to break with tradition and make broad use of waiting lists in their admissions decisions this spring, high school counselors and even some university officials worry about the emotional toll on students.

For an applicant, getting onto a favorite school's waiting list offers a glimmer of hope that a spot on campus might eventually open up. But because relatively few students ever make the jump from waiting list to enrollment, some experts say the lists merely increase anxiety and extend an already stressful time for college-bound high school seniors.

Concern about the lists has been rippling through California high schools since the University of California announced in January that for the first time, it will employ waiting lists extensively this spring for fall freshman applicants. Last week, officials specified that at least six of UC's nine undergraduate campuses will use the lists. UCLA and UC Merced will not and UC Berkeley has yet to decide.

The state's other public university, the Cal State system, said it too will expand its use of freshman waiting lists this year to include many of its 23 campuses and will place transfer students on some lists.

UC and Cal State admissions officials say that they need the lists as a tool to help them hit enrollment targets at a time when state budget reductions are forcing them to cut the number of new freshmen. As a result, thousands of students and their counselors will soon have to deal with a practice more commonly associated with selective private colleges. Many are not happy.

"It is such a tumultuous year for our kids already, with the budget cuts and announcements that UC
Counselors have reservations about university waiting lists - lat...

and Cal State will be accepting fewer students. So to add the waiting lists right now feels so unstable, so unfair to the kids," said Natalie Hamilton, a counselor at Irvine's Northwood High School.

Hamilton said she worries that students put on UC or Cal State waiting lists will focus on the slim possibility that a higher-choice school will admit them, ignoring a school that already has. "They need to be able to move on and focus on the positive," she said.

Brandi Bakewell, counselor at the Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, a magnet school in the Los Angeles Unified School District, agreed. "The universities are doing the best they can, but I think it is going to create more anxiety for students and families," she said. She too urged students to "go for the sure thing" and send an enrollment deposit to a school that accepted them even if they are on waiting lists elsewhere.

Colleges use waiting lists to achieve an admissions sweet spot: filling every open seat without overcrowding their classrooms and dorms. In general, colleges create three applicant groups. Those in the accepted or rejected categories are notified by early April, or sooner for many public universities. Those in the middle are invited to wait for spaces that might open in May, after accepted students send in deposits.

A survey last year by the National Assn. for College Admission Counseling confirmed that students should not pin too much hope on waiting lists. It found that about a third of all colleges use the lists and that 78% of selective colleges -- schools that accept fewer than half of applicants -- employ them. Of students who decided to stay on such lists, only about 30% on average nationally were offered enrollment, the survey showed. At selective schools, that figure was 13%.

At the handful of Cal State campuses that have used waiting lists in the past, the statistics are often grimmer.

San Diego State last year offered waiting list spots to 5,564 freshman applicants and 1,368 chose to stay on it. However, not one was offered admission. "We had no room left when all was said and done," said Sandra Cook, the school's assistant vice president for academic affairs.

To help implement large enrollment reductions when applications are at record highs, Cal State's central administration has recommended that all its campuses prepare waiting lists this year, although some, including Cal State Northridge, say they don't plan to use them. If more state money becomes available, more students on waiting lists will be offered enrollment, said Allison G. Jones, the Cal State system's assistant vice chancellor for student academic support.

The UC system previously used the backup lists only in an experiment last year at UC Irvine. Their much wider use this year, officials said, will help UC achieve its goal of reducing fall's total freshman enrollment to about 32,700, down about 1,500, or 4%, for a year when the number of applicants rose 2.4% to 100,320.

Susan Wilbur, UC director of undergraduate admissions, estimates that a total of several thousand applicants could be on lists established by at least six UC campuses and that some students might be
offered a spot on more than one list by late March.

Any admissions offers from the lists will be made by June 1.

That may produce stress and "a certain amount of churning" if, for example, a student who sent an enrollment deposit to one UC campus is accepted from another's list, Wilbur acknowledged.

If the student switched, he or she would forfeit the $100 enrollment deposit at the first campus.

But Wilbur said the lists will give some students a chance at a favorite campus. "In this way, we are extending this opportunity more broadly, and we think that's a good thing," she said.

Four-year-old UC Merced won't participate because it has room for all its qualified applicants.

UCLA, which in recent years has received more applications than any other college in the nation, also won't, because it long has met enrollment targets without one, said Vu Tran, UCLA undergraduate admissions director. "In addition, wait lists tend to increase the anxiety for prospective students and their families, something that we would like to minimize whenever possible," he said.

UC officials say they are trying to ease the process.

At UC San Diego, admissions director Mae Brown said it would not be fair to keep waiting lists open into the summer, as some private universities do.

"Our intent is to notify them as early as possible in May so they can start summer vacation with a clear sense of where they are going to college," she said.

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University of Maryland President C.D. Mote to step down in August

By Daniel de Vise
Washington Post Staff Writer
Tuesday, February 16, 2010; A01

C.D. Mote Jr., who has led the University of Maryland on a 12-year journey into the top tier of public universities, will resign in August, he said Monday, confident that "the place is in good shape" and that it is time for someone else to take charge.

In a single generation, U-Md. has gone from being a safety school to the highest level of public higher education, not far behind the University of Virginia and the University of California at Berkeley in academic pedigree. Mote didn't begin the transformation, colleagues said, but he completed it.

"I don't think the university could have had a better president for these 12 years," said Clifford Kendall, chairman of the Board of Regents of the University System of Maryland. "He's moved it more dramatically than I can imagine anyone else could have moved it."

Mote, 73, will take a one-year leave and then return to the university to participate "in any way that is helpful to the campus," he said in an e-mail to the university community. He will retain his status as an engineering professor.

In an interview, the Berkeley-educated scholar said that his chief accomplishment at Maryland might have been "to create an expectation of excellence. . . . That's the most important thing you can do. We have been working on that night and day since I came, and I think people have that now."

Colleagues said he has also created the reality of excellence. Matriculating U-Md. students have never had higher grades or SAT scores, and freshman admission is at its most competitive level. The average grade-point average of this year's incoming class was 3.93, half a point higher than 12 years ago. Freshman applications have nearly doubled during Mote's tenure.

Mote hired the university's first Nobel laureate. The school's rank in U.S. News & World Report among public research universities has risen from 30th in 1998 to 18th this year. And research funding has more than doubled and exceeds $500 million annually.

Mote also led the two largest fundraising campaigns in U-Md. history and established the university's first independent foundation and governing board.

"It's a badge of honor now to get admitted to College Park," said William E. Kirwan, chancellor of the
University System of Maryland and Mote’s predecessor as president.

"Students here feel like they're at a world-class institution," said Steve Glickman, 21, student body president.

The university has not been without controversy during Mote’s tenure.

Three months ago, several hundred students marched to the administration building to protest the firing of the school’s popular diversity officer and the dwindling number of black students. The screening of a pornographic film last spring bruised relations between the school and some state lawmakers. And even with tuition frozen, students chafed at diminished services and rising fees.

But those skirmishes seldom touched Mote.

"He hasn't really had problems with students in the last few years," Glickman said.

The College Park campus was abuzz Monday over Mote's departure, which appeared to have no external cause. Mote said that he had simply been in the job long enough and that 12 years "is actually longer than what I thought was a long time."

"The place is in good shape," he said. "It has a spirit that I think is unstoppable." He said, too, that it would be nice to go out on top: "You always want to leave the party before it's over."

Tough times are ahead for Maryland's higher education system, which will abandon a four-year tuition freeze this year with a 3 percent increase for in-state students. But the flagship university's academic currency has never been higher.

Kirwan, who started on the Maryland math faculty in 1964, recalled an era when "admissions officers would go out to high schools and admit students on the spot." State leaders resolved in the 1980s that Maryland had enough public universities and that U-Md. could afford to trade quantity for quality. They organized a university system and designated U-Md. the flagship, shrinking the freshman class to raise the caliber of instruction.

Kirwan organized a new generation of rigorous programs, including a restructured honors program, to rival competitors such as the private Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and to make the large university feel smaller. Dwindling state funds in the 1990s drove Kirwan out.

Mote, a mechanical engineer who had become vice chancellor at Berkeley in a three-decade career, was hired for his scholarly credentials and fundraising prowess. He has excelled as a fundraiser at Maryland, leading a $1 billion Great Expectations campaign. He has also overseen an unparalleled boom in construction that has included a performing arts center, engineering building, sports facility and alumni center.

And Mote has taken advantage of what he calls the "unfair advantage" of proximity to Washington, building a 130-acre research park and an international business incubator and positioning the university as a leader in the burgeoning field of national security.

"Certainly, the university's stature across the board has grown tremendously," said Thomas Cohen, a
U-Md. physics professor. "It used to be that there were a few strong departments. And now there are many, many strong departments and relatively few weak ones."

Under Mote, the university has attained a stature in its community that few other universities can match, colleagues said, one that is on a par with flagships in North Carolina and Texas.

Fourteen national championships in intercollegiate sports have helped. But Mote also built the Terrapin brand with Maryland Day, an annual community outreach event that draws more than 75,000 people.

Two-thirds of freshman seats are reserved for Marylanders, and although admission is no longer a sure bet, the school has not suffered the same community backlash as U-Va. for rejecting local applicants.

"It's still a university that the people see as theirs," said David Shulenburger, vice president of academic affairs at the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities.

Mote said that the timing of his announcement gives the school time to complete a thorough search for his replacement. Kendall, the board chairman, said Mote's accomplishments will make it easier to recruit capable candidates.

"I would assume that this would be one of the premier, sought-after jobs in the country," he said. "It's so much easier to keep going when you have something good."

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