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Brody students tackle diabetes in Halifax County

ECU NEWS BUREAU
Special to The Daily Reflector

East Carolina University’s Brody School of Medicine has received a grant to help a small community in rural Halifax County address one of its biggest health concerns — diabetes.

Local health officials estimate that 40 percent of the population in Hobgood suffers from pre-diabetes or diabetes. The disease was named as a contributing condition in 38 percent of the deaths in Halifax County between 2001 and 2005, according to the North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics.

To help turn this tide, the College of American Pathologists’ Humanitarian Grant Program has awarded nearly $9,000 to the Hobgood Clinic, a diabetes testing and education program run by ECU medical students. The university has provided cost-share funds of about $2,300.

The money will be used to purchase better testing equipment and supplies for the free clinic, which is open twice a month.

Now, student-volunteers check the height, weight and blood pressure of their clients and use a glucose meter to test blood sugar levels. Clients with elevated levels are encouraged to see a physician or make lifestyle changes.

The new grant will pay for a more sophisticated method of testing, the Hemoglobin A1-C test, which measures the average of a patient’s blood glucose levels over a six- to 12-week period.

Clients also receive a visual “road map” of their progress relative to their goals. Some funds will be dedicated to attracting more clients and to doing follow-up home visits.

Tonya Johnson, a second-year medical student actively involved in the project, said the grant will benefit the community by bringing services to those who need them. The region is removed geographically from health resources, and some residents struggle to afford medical care.

“We hope to help 600 people, and it’s reasonable to think we could do that. But you know, if we help six people – or even one – and really make a difference, it will be worth it,” she said.

See ECU, B3

CONT...
**ECU**

Continued from B1

**Professor wins award for advising students**

David Batts, an assistant professor from the department of technology systems, was named Outstanding Chapter Advisor of the Year by the Phi Sigma Pi National Honor Fraternity.

Batts, who serves as an advisor for ECU's Phi Sigma Pi National Honor Fraternity, was honored Aug. 10 for his dedication and extra efforts to cultivate student leaders. Batts has received other advising awards from the Professional Fraternity Association and ECU.

"I am truly honored to be recognized for efforts to help build student leaders at ECU," Batts said.

"Service and service to our students is a major component here at East Carolina and I believe that being student-centered is what every person in higher education should strive to achieve."

**Events mark start of literary homecoming**

The first of several events leading up to ECU's fifth Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming are now scheduled.

At 7 p.m. Wednesday at the Tipsy Teapot, 409 Evans St., English professor Will Banks will lead a discussion about Jim Grimsley's book, "Dream Boy."

From 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., Sept. 4, at Pitt Community College, in 242 Reddick Building, a discussion about children's literature will be led by ECU library science professor Alan Bailey, and Sheila Mendoza, media coordinator at South Central High School. Other events will follow.

All Homecoming events, scheduled for Sept. 26-27, will be held at Joyner library. Workshops and panels will be offered this year.

Featured authors will include Clyde Edgerton, Margaret Maron and Randall Kenan.

All events, except for Saturday lunch, are free, but registration is required.

Visit the Homecoming online at www.ecu.edu/lithomecoming, call 328-1068, or e-mail lithomecoming@ecu.edu.

**Two from construction staff write book**

Members of ECU's construction management department have co-authored a book, "Quality & Construction: How to Develop a Quality Management System for Your Construction Firm."

Danny Morton, an instructor of construction management, and Katy Griffin, lab supervisor for the construction management lab, wrote the step-by-step book that outlines effective project management, administration and effectiveness in construction management.

Jack Patterson of Western Carolina University is a co-author.

The book (BNi Building News, 2008) focuses on construction companies but can be adapted by any company seeking to define and control its processes.

Used in ECU's construction management classes, the book will help students understand the importance of a quality management system in the construction industry.

**Music professor's grant aids strings students**

Greg Hurley, a professor of music, has been awarded a grant to help alleviate the shortage of public school orchestra teachers.

The Dana Foundation, through the National String Project Consortium, awarded Hurley a grant to train the country's next generation of string educators for undergraduate music education students.

This fall, ECU String Project student teachers will instruct fourth- and fifth-grade violin, viola, cello and bass students, and participate in all other duties associated with teaching.

The program will supplement string offerings for those in public school programs and offer group instruction to those students who may not have access to a school music program.

In addition to teaching at ECU, Hurley also is the conductor of the Eastern Youth Junior Orchestra.

For more information about participating in the program, contact Hurley at 328-1245, or by e-mail at hurleyc@ecu.edu.

**Biology students' papers win top honors**

Two biology students received top awards for their research papers this summer at the American Arachnological Society.

Amy K. Stockman, a doctoral candidate, and sophomore Ashley L. Bailey were awarded top honors among 40 student competitors for the 15-minute oral presentation of their research.

Stockman won first place for her paper, "An Integrative Method to Delimiting Cohesion Species: Finding the Population-Species Interface in Trapdoor Spiders with Extreme Genetic Divergence and Geographic Structuring." It was co-authored by biology professor Jason E. Bond.

Bailey, a GlaxoSmithKline Women in Science Scholar, competed among doctoral students and won second place for her paper, "Evolution of Male Genitalia in the Trapdoor Spider Genus Myrmekeaphila," co-authored by Bond and Brent E. Hendrixson.

Both students received cash prizes and membership into the American Arachnological Society.
Local volunteers pitch in to package 250,000 meals

BY MICHAEL ABRAMOWITZ
The Daily Reflector

The forces of volunteerism in Greenville and Pitt County were marshaled at C.M. Eppes Middle School on Saturday for a record-breaking attempt at feeding the world's hungry.

The University Million Meals Event was a joint food packaging extravaganza produced simultaneously among several schools in the North Carolina university system, including East Carolina University. The event was held in conjunction with Stop Hunger Now, a Raleigh-based international hunger relief organization.

The most powerful force, however, was the gathering of more than 850 volunteers from Greenville and other communities throughout Pitt County and beyond. They represented churches, local service organizations, scout troops, families and individuals.

The event gave people an opportunity to do more than simply reach into their pockets and give some money to a worthy cause. At Eppes, gyms and cafeterias were transformed into stations where teams of energetic volunteers first trained, then rolled up their sleeves to put together an expected 250,000 packaged meals for distribution to some of the most destitute and hungry.

See MEALS, A7

Cont...
MEALS

Continued from A1

populations around the world, event coordinators said.

"We have two reasons for being here today," said volunteer Kirstin Yokel, a senior at ECU who heads the Healthy Pirates campus organization. "We want to give something to our community and we want to help feed the world's hungry."

Yokel's simple expression of the volunteer spirit echoed loudly through the cafeteria as enthusiastic teams were led by their hosts to tables that served as assembly lines, mass producing thousands of boxed meals to be loaded onto trucks behind the school for worldwide distribution. There were funnel stations operated by people from church groups like the Holy Temple Holiness Church, where rice, dehydrated vegetables and a flavoring mix fortified with vitamins were mixed and poured into plastic bags. The bags then moved to weigh stations and sealing stations manned by Girl Scouts from Troop 581 in Havelock, and others, then off to boxing stations where volunteers, including those from ECU Hillel, taped them shut and loaded them onto pallets for the truck.

"It shows the girls that there are many fun things that Girl Scouts can do to help others that are a very important part of growing up," said Tori Oakley, the Havelock Scout leader.

Delores Newton got her information about the event through an e-mail message to Holy Temple Church. She heads the church's youth group and realized it was a great opportunity for them.

"One of our church mottoes is to serve the community and we think the kids need to start learning about that at a young age," Newton said.

"People who have enough to eat have a lot of problems. People who are hungry only have one: finding something to eat."

Rick Kearney of Stop Hunger Now

Mike Grinshpon is the senior class leader of ECU's Hillel group, a Jewish service organization on campus. He saw the event as a great opportunity to demonstrate Hillel's values and meet other groups that share them.

"Part of being Jewish is to serve others and get involved with things larger than oneself," Grinshpon said.

Greenville mayor Pat Dunn gave a pep talk to the crowd just before they started work, then rolled up her sleeves and joined one of the assembly lines for the morning production session.

"It's been my observation that when people are in need and reach out, Greenville responds to them. And the folks here had a good time and met people they wouldn't have met otherwise," Dunn said.

She praised what she called "ECU's great history of volunteering," saying it shows something about college students here and the entire community.

The local event was coordinated by Shawn Moore, head of ECU's campus volunteer organization, and by Rick Kearney, a representative from Stop Hunger Now who heads the Operation Storehouse program that trains and uses Moore's volunteers at Million Meal events throughout the state.

"The key to the success of an event like this, which brings so many organizations, churches and individuals together, is a unified purpose. They are all here because they are committed to ending world hunger," Kearney said.

He said his program gets people's attention because it strives to go beyond simply feeding people to ending the problem of world hunger.

"Let's not just feed someone today and solve today's problem; let's end it and make it no longer an issue," Kearney said.

Although an organization the size of Stop Hunger Now had the ability to gather all the volunteers it needed from the ECU campus alone, Kearney said it was Moore's plan to widen the scope of the effort to include the entire community.

"We have the people power to do something constructive, and my goal is to make everyone a lifetime volunteer," Moore said. "It was slow going at first, but toward the end we actually had to stop registration because we had so many people."

Kearney spoke to the volunteers about the importance of their mission and the difference between the fortunate who must deal with tough economic times and the truly hungry.

"People who have enough to eat have a lot of problems. People who are hungry only have one: finding something to eat."

More than 4,000 volunteers from nine regional universities and colleges came together with the expectation of packaging a record-breaking 1 million meals in one day. Stop Hunger Now set a 2008 campaign goal of packaging a total of 5.5 million meals to feed the world's hungry.

For more information about Stop Hunger Now, go to www.stophungernow.org.

Michael Abramowitz can be contacted at mabramowitz@coxnc.com and 329-9571.
University gets early voting location

The new polling place near ECU, open from Oct. 24-Nov. 1, is at the Newman Catholic Student Center, 935 E. 10th St.

BY GINGER LIVINGSTON
The Daily Reflector

An early voting location has been secured for the East Carolina University campus, an election official said Friday.

The Newman Catholic Student Center, 935 E. 10th St., is at the foot of ECU’s College Hill, next to the Brewster Building, a general classroom building.

“I think it is a better location, because it is close to the students and on a major street that a lot of people travel on,” said Dave Davis, Pitt County elections director.

The Pitt County Board of Elections voted Wednesday to accept the site as an early voting location.

The board has been working with Democracy North Carolina, an organization promoting election reform, to secure an early voting site on the ECU campus.

Initially, Democracy North Carolina officials thought they had worked out an arrangement to use the Willis Building, a university facility on First Street, but officials said the building wouldn’t be available, according to earlier news reports. That’s when the organization started looking at buildings adjoining campus.

The site will be open Oct. 24 through Nov. 1. Operation hours will be 11 a.m. until 7 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. on Saturday.

Newman center officials said they were happy to accommodate the Board of Elections.

“We believe in (giving) people a chance to participate in the process,” said Ryan Downey, the center’s associate campus minister, “We were approached by Democracy

See VOTING, A9

VOTING

Continued from A1

North Carolina with a problem because they had been locked out of their previous site and they were looking at a number of places, and they really liked our site, they found it very accessible.”

The polling place will be set up in the chapel in the rear of the building, Downey said. The center will not hold Wednesday night mass during the two weeks early voting is taking place, but will hold its Sunday mass, he said.

ECU officials agreed to provide parking for the site’s poll workers, Davis said.

“We’re delighted to participate in this additional venue for early voting in Pitt County,” said ECU spokesman John Durham. “We welcome voters to this site.”

With the addition of the Newman center site, the Pitt County Board of Elections will have six early voting sites, Davis said.

The other five locations are Jaycee Park, the Pitt County Agricultural Center, the Community Schools Building, Winterville Fire Station and the former Council on Aging offices in the Pitt County office building on West Fifth Street.

ECU employs more than 5,000 people and is expected to enroll more than 26,000 students this fall. Bob Hall, director of Democracy North Carolina, said with an employee and student population that surpasses many small communities, the university deserves special consideration to accommodate voters during an important presidential election.

“It took a while to get it all lined up but it was a good commitment from the chancellor and a strong interest from the local (elections) board. It was just a matter of getting all the details worked out,” Hall said.

“The devil is often in the details,” he said. “Here we have a nice religious organization overcoming those devils.”

Contact Ginger Livingston at glivingston@coxnc.com and 329-9573.
Duke tops U.S. News list of N.C. institutions

Staff, wire reports

Duke University remains among the nation’s Top 10 best colleges and universities while several other schools in North Carolina — including Wake Forest University and Davidson College — continue to improve their status, according to the latest rankings by U.S. News & World Report.

East Carolina University was listed as a tier 4 school along with North Carolina A&T State University.

“These annual listings are obviously quite popular,” said John Durham, spokesman for ECU. “We think one of the best rankings of ECU is where we stand with students.

“We are again the fastest-growing campus in the UNC system, and we will have more than 27,000 enrolled this semester.”

The report, which hit the magazine’s Web site Friday, has Duke sharing the No. 8 spot with Columbia University in New York and the University of Chicago. Davidson College topped the list of “up and coming” liberal arts colleges, which include 265 separately ranked schools that focus on undergraduate education and award at least half of their degrees in the arts and sciences.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill ranked fifth among the nation’s top public universities, but moved down slightly to 30th overall. Yet the university ranked No. 1 among public universities in the category of “Great Schools, Great Prices.”

Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem climbed from 30th last year to tie at No. 28 with Tufts University in Somerville, Mass. North Carolina State University was ranked 37th among public universities and 83rd overall.

See COLLEGES, B3

COLLEGES
Continued from B1

Duke Provost Peter Lange said that while he was pleased to see his institution’s faculty and students in Durham recognized, it remained important for potential applicants to look beyond the numbers.

“As always, we remind students and parents of the limitations of these and other rankings, which they should use as only one source of information as they engage with the college application process,” Lange said in a statement.

The ranking formula takes account of factors such as SAT scores, peer reputation, selectivity and alumni giving.

Harvard University claimed sole possession of the No. 1 spot for the first time in 12 years, making it the country’s oldest, wealthiest and most selective university. Princeton slipped to No. 2, ending eight straight years of at least sharing the top ranking. Yale follows at No. 3, and MIT and Stanford tie for fourth.

The University of California, Berkeley is the highest-ranked public university, at No. 21 overall. In a separate list for liberal arts colleges, Amherst moves up one spot to tie Williams, its rival just up the road in Massachusetts, for the top spot.

Davidson College, a highly selective private college near Charlotte, was ranked ninth among liberal arts colleges — the same position the 1,700-student school held last year.

The U.S. News’ rankings are often criticized but closely followed, and although traditional rankings typically get most of the attention, they rarely change much from year to year.

The magazine has been adding new categories to the rankings, including the debut of this year’s “Up and Comers,” which listed Davidson College as its top liberal arts school.

Colleges on the list are considered innovative institutions that officials identify as poised to move up in the rankings in the coming years.

The report will appear in the magazine hitting newsstands Monday.
HUNGRY TO HELP
College students gather to pack a million meals for needy people

BY DANNY HOOLEY
STAFF WRITER

outside, it was a lovely Saturday morning, but about 1,500 service-minded college students and other volunteers chose to spend a few hours inside N.C. State University’s Carmichael Gymnasium to make a dent in world hunger.

The daylong University Million Meal Event was organized and supervised by the Raleigh-based Stop Hunger Now organization, which held identical events Saturday at UNC-Chapel Hill and East Carolina University, drawing about 4,000 volunteers altogether.

In nine hours, the volunteers packaged more than 1 million meals, to be distributed to the destitute and hungry in El Salvador, Haiti and India.

Volunteer and NCSU sophomore Glenda Diaz, 19, of Charlotte said the issue of hunger is particularly close to her heart.

"I come from Puerto Rico," Diaz said. "I know a lot of people from South America. I have a lot of friends that come to here, and their families still live starving."

The gym was packed with about 500 students and volunteers from local businesses for each three-hour shift. Besides the three host schools, volunteers also came from Meredith College, Peace College, Duke University, N.C. Central University and St. Augustine’s College.

Inside Carmichael Gymnasium, sacks of rice and soy protein were piled along one wall. They were opened one by one at long tables where volunteers lined up shoulder to shoulder to pack four basic ingredients — textured soy protein, dehydrated vegetables, a vitamin mixture and rice — into plastic bags.

The bags were weighed and heat-sealed to have a shelf life of three to five years, then boxed and rushed out to a waiting truck. Each time 10,000 bags were packaged, NCSU volunteer Candace Jones hit a gong, which sounded every few minutes.

"Most of the meals we package are for school feeding programs," said Stop Hunger Now president Ray Buchanan. He cited studies that show school feeding programs increase enrollment, most dramatically for girls. That correlates with lower birth rates and less infant mortality.

Buchanan founded Stop Hunger Now 10 years ago, and this is the third year it has staged the university event with the help of Mike Giancola, director of NCSU’s Center for Student Leadership, Ethics and Public Service.

The first year, volunteers packaged 150,000 meals. The second, that number was doubled. Buchanan and Giancola decided to try to top that in a big way. So they recruited other universities to reach the 1 million meal goal, and their ambitions keep growing.

Stop Hunger Now has six packaging facilities in Goldsboro, Charlotte, South Hill, Va., and Lynchburg, Va.

"In the next year, we’ll be opening five or six more," Buchanan said. "In the next five years, we’ll have over 60 locations nationwide."

This year, the overall goal is to package between 5.5 million and 6 million meals. Five years from now, Buchanan wants to package 100 million meals annually.

Along with the manual labor, students and sponsors raised money for Stop Hunger Now — a total of $8,500 at NCSU and UNC. Meredith College sophomore class president Natalieh Timberlake, 19, brought in a $200 donation from her school, as well as about 150 of her fellow students for the packaging work. She organized a canned food drive and a lunch on the lawn to coincide with the day’s events.

"I figured if I got involved, my other classmates would kind of follow," Timberlake said.

It wasn’t all work. Rock and hip-hop blasted over the public address system, prompting a little hip-shaking along the assembly lines. "Desperate Housewives" actor Jesse Metcalfe visited the UNC and NCSU campuses during the day to offer thanks and encouragement.

But mostly, it was about working in the community and learning about leadership, Buchanan said.

"It’s about showing them what they need to be as leaders in changing the world," he said.

"You don’t know which one of these students here today might be a congressman, or a senator, or the president in 15 or 20 years."
What Every Freshman Needs to Know

If you’re about to start your freshman year in college, you’re likely fretting over the homework load and how to avoid embarrassing yourself in front of your classmates.

Meanwhile, your parents’ fears as you take this major step toward adulthood are running as rampant as their imagination will allow.

But now that the first tuition bill is paid, the one thing likely neither you nor your parents is focusing on is money. You should. Here’s one reason why: Almost one-fourth of undergraduates had credit-card debt in excess of $3,000, according to a study of students’ credit histories in 2004 by loan provider Nellie Mae.

That’s a chunk of money to owe on an entry-level salary, and worse if you’re paying off student loans, too.

To start your adult life on the best financial footing possible, consider these 10 rules while you’re in school.

1. Be specific.
   Talk with your parents about who is paying for what, and how. When David Robinson, who teaches a personal-finance class at the University of California at Berkeley, asks students who is paying, for instance, for their semester of study abroad, many college students have no idea.

   Not knowing details can lead to unrealistic expectations. Parents, if you’re struggling with your own finances, discuss your situation with your student. Don’t worry about looking bad. She already knows you’re not perfect.

2. Create a budget.
   Come up with categories, estimating a monthly spending amount for each. Note to parents: Help your kids with this, but don’t be judgmental. “It’s really helpful for them to come up with their categories,” says Susan Bruno, a personal financial specialist in Rowayton, Conn.

   Your budget may change once you’re on campus, so revise as needed. Send a weekly email update to your parents—it’ll help you track spending.

3. Set up accounts.
   And pay attention. Create a checking and savings account—even if the balances are low—to get the hang of balancing a checkbook. Once a week, before your daily visit to Facebook, visit your accounts online. Check to ensure that transactions are yours—sad to say, but identity theft happens, and young adults “friends” often do the stealing.

4. Learn from mistakes.
   It’s inevitable: You will trip up with your finances—just ask your parents!—and those errors may cost you money. Don’t beat yourself up. Figure out where you went wrong and move on. Credit-card late fees are a common problem.

   Gerard Soman, a senior at Loyola University, Chicago, solved it by setting up automatic payments from his bank account.

5. Practice with plastic.
   First off, realize that it’s possible to live without credit cards. Many people do. That said, if you decide credit cards are a good idea—for emergencies or to create a credit history—then start slowly. Craig Watts, spokesman for Fair Isaac Corp., creator of the FICO credit score, says his three teenagers started with gas cards (the type that work only for gas). “They had to pay those bills. That teaches kids in a hurry,” he says. Or, become an authorized user on a parent’s account, with an agreed-upon maximum limit. (Note that the latest FICO model gives fewer “good credit” points to piggyback users, Mr. Watts says.) Or, get your own card with a low limit to ensure you don’t overspend. Pay your full balance monthly.

6. Work part time.
   It’s nice if the job is somehow related to your career goals, but even if it isn’t, work anyway. “It gives them a little structure it teaches them some responsibility and gives them some experience handling money,” says Gary Buffone, founder of a family-wealth consulting firm in Jacksonville, Fla. Some universities advise freshmen to delay employment, so check with your adviser first.

7. Educate yourself.
   If your school doesn’t offer a personal-finance class, then take an accounting class. Mr. Soman says doing so “taught me about balancing assets and liabilities.”

8. Just say no.
   There will be times—when friends head out for a nice dinner, say—when you will want something you cannot afford. Practice resisting the urge to spend anyway, says Mr. Robinson, the University of California lecturer. He has students imagine their friends going to Lake Tahoe for a weekend. “I get 250 kids to stand up and say out loud, ‘I’m sorry, that sounds lovely but I just can’t afford it.’ ”

9. Start a Roth.
   If you work, ask your parents whether you can borrow $4,000 to fund a new Roth IRA. Then pay them back over time, says Linda Lubitz, a financial planner in Miami. Note that you can’t put more than your taxable compensation into a Roth, up to $4,000 a year.

10. Learn how to cook.
    Eating out is one of the fastest ways to bleed money, so learn to cook. Mr. Soman’s dad taught him over the phone how to barbecue food. “Ever since then I’ll buy food early in the week,” he says. “I’ll do one big BBQ of steak and chicken and it’ll last me about a week.”
NCSU gets Defense contract

Cooperative Extension will build online system to test recruits’ money smarts

BY VICKI LEE PARKER
STAFF WRITER

The Department of Defense has turned to the N.C. Cooperative Extension at N.C. State University to help educate recruits about personal finance.

The Defense Department awarded the Cooperative Extension a $364,000 contract to build an online financial assessment system that will be used by the military to test the financial knowledge of new service members.

Carolyn Bird, the director of the project with the Cooperative Extension, said that her Navy background and her financial educator experience probably helped to win the contract.

Bird said the assessment system is important because many service members are working their first full-time jobs while they are separated from their support networks.

"These service members are very attractive to marketers ... they must have the knowledge they need to make sound financial decisions," Bird said.

Bird said that the military already trains recruits on personal finance issues. Some topics include understanding financial institutions, consumer credit, purchasing vehicles and insurance.

This online tool will take that training one step further, she said.

"After the training, they can take the certification test to know how much information they have retained."

If the service member fails the test, the program will automatically review material relating to the missed questions. After the review the service member will be allowed to take the test again.

Bird said the program is expected to be completed within the next two years.

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Teacher vacancies are rare this year

BY T. KEUNG HUI, KINEA WHITE EPPS AND SAMIHA KHANNA
STAFF WRITERS

The sour national economy is turning into a boon for Triangle school districts filling teaching and support staff positions before the start of the school year.

Many school districts across the country are laying off employees and leaving positions empty due to budget problems and declining enrollment. As a result, Triangle school officials say they've had an easier time recruiting people this year and are in good shape for the first day of classes at traditional-calendar schools on Monday.

"Veteran teachers are returning to the classroom," said Maurice Boswell, Wake County's assistant superintendent for

SEE SCHOOL, PAGE 11B

BACK TO SCHOOL

On Monday, thousands of Triangle students return to traditional-calendar schools. Read about the issues that could affect your child and get key contact information in a special Back to School report that starts today and runs through Tuesday:

TODAY: The impact of teacher and support staff vacancies on Triangle schools.

SUNDAY: How do teachers rate your child's school? Read the story in The News & Observer and check out the interactive database that lets you compare how teachers rate Triangle schools at www.newsobserver.com

MONDAY: High fuel prices have Triangle school officials bracing for an increase in bus ridership. Also, read about the issues affecting your school district.

TUESDAY: A by-the-numbers look at the first day of classes.

Cont...
human resources. "The downtown in the economy has helped us."

Triangle school districts are reporting fewer vacancies than normal for this time of year.

In Wake County, Boswell said there were 21 full-time vacancies out of more than 9,250 teaching positions as of Friday morning. There were 34 openings at that same point last year.

If they can't fill the vacancies soon, Boswell said they'll head to Florida with employment contracts in hand. Several Florida school districts have laid off teachers over the summer.

**Durham's count**

Durham schools are also in good shape. Of about 2,300 teaching positions, roughly two dozen were vacant the week before students were set to come back, said Fred Williams, Durham's executive director of teacher recruitment and retention.

"This is clearly showing an improvement over previous years," Williams said.

Johnston County was down to just five teacher vacancies by Friday afternoon, with three of them expected to be filled before students report to class Monday.

"In all my years since 1989, this is going to be the best opening in terms of preparation," said Joyce Wade, Johnston County's associate superintendent for human resources.

Orange County and Chapel Hill-Carrboro school system have filled all their classroom positions.

It's even easy this year finding drivers for school buses, traditionally difficult jobs to fill due to the low pay and unusual hours.

Don Hayden, Wake's chief facilities and operations officer, said there are 20 openings for bus drivers. They normally have 65 or more at this time of year.

Chapel Hill-Carrboro, Durham, Johnston and Orange counties have filled all their bus-driving positions. In fact, there's a waiting list in Durham for people who want to become bus drivers.

Most years, it's much more of a challenge filling positions.

State officials estimate that 10,000 new teachers are needed in North Carolina each year, but the state's universities turn out only about 3,900 annually.

School officials say they've been helped by the fact that fewer teachers left at the end of last school year, reducing the number of new teachers hired.

Last year, for example, Wake hired 1,100 new teachers to keep up with student growth, retirements and resignations. This year, just 950 were needed.

Wake recruited teachers this year at job fairs in 32 states. School officials said they were approached by more veteran teachers than usual.

"We've had our strongest applicant pool in the past five years," said Joan Kister, Wake's senior director for recruitment and retention.

Kister said about half of the new teachers are from outside the state. She said they're hiring many teachers from Michigan, Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio and Indiana.

"There are no teaching jobs in Michigan," said Amber Clark, a newly hired seventh-grade science teacher at Wendell Middle School.

She and her husband, Seth, relocated from Marshall, Mich. Seth will be teaching Spanish at Holly Springs High School.

Wake has also recruited new teachers from within the state.

Fuquay-Varina High School math teacher Terrance McCotter, a graduate of N.C. Central University, said he had considered other careers, but was always drawn back to teaching.

"All of my experience has been working with youth. I saw a need and the need for more black male teachers," he said. "Teaching just never left my heart."

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