North Carolina Earns Mixed Marks on *Quality Counts’* Tenth Review

North Carolina earned mixed grades on *Education Week*’s 10th annual state-by-state assessment standards and accountability, improving teacher quality, school climate and equity of resources. In addition to the state-by-state data, each year *Education Week* selects a theme to examine in greater detail (e.g., school finance, teacher quality, and early childhood education), and this year’s theme focuses on a decade of standards-based education policies and examines progress states have made and the challenges that remain.

In this year’s report, *2006 Quality Counts: A Decade of Standards-Based Education*, 100 indicators were examined and North Carolina receives strong marks for its standards & accountability and improving teacher quality, but school climate and equity of resources continues to be a source of concern (see table below). The state’s overall grade of C+ matched the national average, and the state earned a B (84) for the standards and accountability category, with a 36 out of 40 points for its standards; 18 out of 30 points for its assessments; and 30 out of 30 points for its school accountability. North Carolina was one of 23 states to earn a B for its standards and accountability (11 states earned A’s, 12 earned C’s, 4 earned D’s and Iowa earned a F). The state’s efforts to improve teacher quality received strong scores for its professional support and training (20 out of 20 points), teacher assessment (27 out of 30 points), accountability for teacher quality (14 out of 15 points), and teacher education and qualifications (25 out of 35 points). Four states earned A’s, North Carolina was one of 15 states that earned a B, 21 states earned C’s, and 11 states earned D’s.

Under the category of school climate, North Carolina received strong grades for its class size (10 out of 10 points), school facilities (8 out of 10 points), and school safety (18 out of 20 points). Engagement (11 out of 15 points), parent involvement (10 out 15 points), and choice and autonomy (14 out of 20 points) brought the state’s grade down in this category. This year’s C+ matches the US average, and are a marked improvement since the D- the state received in 2001. Eight states earned B’s, 23 states earned C’s, and 3 states earned D’s.

One state received an A (Nevada) in resource equity, 13 states received a B, 25 states (including North Carolina) received a C, 8 states received a D, and Vermont and Idaho received F’s. North Carolina’s score was brought down because of its low score on wealth neutrality (17 out of 33.3 points), which considers how much state and local revenue is related to property wealth of a district. A negative score means that poorer districts have more weighted funding than wealthy districts. North Carolina has the second lowest wealth-neutrality score in the nation (see “Funding Gap” article below).
Quality Counts (cont’d)

*Education Week* drew four major themes from their analysis of the past decade of standards-based reform: “reforms bring coherence, early adopters that held the course had success, gains for low-performing groups, and, most importantly, challenges persist. North Carolina was recognized for its progress on the NAEP math section. Since 1992 the state led the nation in progress on grade 4 math, with a 28.4-point improvement) and on grade 8 math, with a 23.4-point improvement. As part of this year’s *Quality Counts*’ report, five states that have been leaders in reforming their schools were used as case studies, including North Carolina. In their case study of North Carolina, *Education Week* notes the education progress made by the state and credits the ABCs program introduced in the mid nineties as part of the state’s success. North Carolina’s testing program permitted the state to have an easier transition to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind legislation. “The image of a statewide school system on the rise has persisted through political and economic shifts, including a new governor, turnover in the legislature, the exodus of a long-standing manufacturing base, the growth of high-tech and other business sectors, and the state’s largest-ever budget deficits. Through it all, student achievement has largely improved, teachers’ salaries have grown, and North Carolina’s reputation on K-12 education has shifted from one of disappointment to one of distinction,” *Education Week* observes.

### Quality Counts Annual Grades

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<td>B (7)</td>
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<td>B (5)</td>
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<td>D-</td>
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<td>Adequacy of Resources</td>
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<td>Equity of Resources</td>
<td>C- (37)</td>
<td>C+ (22)</td>
<td>C (27)</td>
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* not graded

Source: *Education Week, Quality Counts*
Wilson County Superintendent Finalist for National Superintendent of the Year

Wilson County Superintendent Larry Price has been named one of the four finalists for National Superintendent of the Year. Price has served as superintendent of Wilson County since 1998, and during his tenure end-of-grade test results and SAT scores have risen. The finalists were chosen using the criteria of leadership for learning, communication, professionalism, and community involvement. This is the second time in three years that North Carolina has had a finalist. In 2004, Bill McNeal of Wake County won the award. The three other finalists represent Georgia, New York, and Washington, and the winner will be chosen at the American Association of School Administrators’ annual meeting in February.

Funding Gap Grows

“Every year, thousands of American children enter school already behind. Most Americans are well aware of that fact. What they often don’t know, however, is that instead of organizing our educational systems to make things better for these children, we organize our systems of public education in ways that make things worse…In other words, we take children who have less to begin with and give them less in school, too,” observes The Education Trust in The Funding Gap 2005 report. In their fourth assessment of spending gaps between low-and high-poverty districts and low-and high-minority districts, Education Trust finds large funding gaps between districts with large numbers of poor and minority students and districts with small numbers of poor and minority students. This year’s gap averages $907 overall, with only 16 states spending more than a $100 on high-poverty districts. North Carolina’s gap is $331, up 68 percent since 2001.

The No Child Left Behind legislation calls on states to spend 40 percent more for low-income students. For example based upon revenue data from the US Department of Education, North Carolina spends $6,475 on its low-poverty districts. If the adjustment is added, it should spend $9,065 on its high-poverty districts, but the state falls short of that target by $3,166. Education Trust factors this weighted funding adjustment into their analysis of state and local spending, and finds that 38 states, including North Carolina, don’t meet this criterion. The gap ranges from $1,622 more from high-poverty districts in Alaska to $2,265 less in high-poverty districts in New York. Education Trust has issued four reports on this subject and since then 22 states have narrowed the spending gap (see chart below). Education Trust concludes this year’s report:
**Funding (cont’d)**

“Shortchanging schools and districts educating the greatest numbers of students growing up in poverty has always been immoral. Perpetuating these funding gaps also has become untenable in the face of changes in the economy and the demands of the 21st-century workplace….It is unfortunate that the debate over education funding is dominated by extreme views— with some claiming that money doesn’t matter at all, and others claiming reforms are impossible without additional dollars. Neither argument makes sense. And both postpone the day when we will give poor students and students of color the education they deserve and need.”

**How Much More Funding Low-Poverty Districts Receive than High-Poverty Districts**

For a copy of the report, go to www.edtrust.org

**New Survey Reports State Fiscal Conditions Improving**

Findings from the National Governors Association and the National Association of State Budget Officers’ (NASBO) most recent survey, *The Fiscal Survey of the States*, shows that the states have largely recovered from the budget crises that tied legislators’ hands for nearly five years, but spending pressures will confront lawmakers as they convene for the 2006 legislative session. “Remembering how quickly revenue declined in 2001, states are cautious. While revenue increased strongly in fiscal 2005, the estimates in fiscal 2006 enacted budgets are for more modest growth. Expenditure pressure is high: the pent-up demand of programs that were cut, the budgetary strain of Medicaid, and looming issues such as pensions, demographic shifts and infrastructure all are competing for a piece of the state budget pie,” according to NASBO.
Fiscal Conditions (cont’d)

Data from the survey reveals that state revenue growth is strong. In every state, fiscal 2005 collections of sales, personal income and corporate income taxes either met or surpassed estimates. Additionally, nearly all state revenue sources performed well during the first quarter of FY 2006, according to National Conference of State Legislatures’ (NCSL) State Budget Update: November 2005. Collections were above forecasted levels in 42 of the 49 states with revenue performance information available. Collections were on target in six states and below in one – Rhode Island. Personal and corporate income taxes came in strong in most states, and five states noted high estate tax revenue.

Sales taxes were not as strong as expected, with seven states reporting collections below forecasts. Despite this problem in the first quarter, the overall revenue outlook for the rest of FY 2006 is positive. Twenty two states have optimistic forecasts, 26 states have stable outlooks, Rhode Island budget officials are “concerned.” and Louisiana officials are “pessimistic.” At the low point in 2002, 29 states were concerned about revenue performance and nine were pessimistic.

NCSL’s survey asked legislative fiscal directors to name the top three fiscal issues lawmakers in their state would debate. Medicaid, the fastest growing component of states’ budgets, is top issue again, with 23 states naming it as one of the top three. Education is another priority, with 15 states putting it high on their lists. Taxes will top discussions in 14 states, with seven ready to explore property tax relief or reform. Tax and expenditure limits will come up in six states, and 10 will consider funding for transportation and other infrastructure projects. Corrections issues are high on the agenda in five states, and hurricane recovery in two. “Every issue is really a fiscal issue,” said NCSL Executive Director Bill Pound. “That’s why when state economies suffer, state services follow suit. States have climbed out of their budget deficits, and now they’re working on the service deficits.”

Forum News . . .

Seeking Jay Robinson Award Nominations

The Jay Robinson Leadership Award was established by the Public School Forum Board of Directors in recognition of outstanding leaders in the field of public education. The award may be given to anyone who has displayed innovative, creative, effective leadership for the public schools of North Carolina. Past winners include Laura Bilbro-Berry, the first Teaching Fellow to be named North Carolina Teacher of the Year; Tom McNeel, superintendent of Caldwell County schools; Jim Causby, two-time state Superintendent of the Year and executive director of the NC Association of School Administrators, Robert Bridges, former superintendent of Wake County Schools and former chair of the state’s Raising Achievement and Closing Gap Commission, Superior Court Judge Howard E. Manning, Jr., the trial court judge in the Leandro school finance case. The nominations
Robinson (cont’d)

must be postmarked by March 1, 2006. Nominations postmarked after that date will not be accepted. The award ceremony will be held on June 5, 2006, at the Raleigh Crabtree Marriott Hotel. Admission will be by invitation only. The honor includes a $5,000 award sponsored by Progress Energy.

To obtain an application, contact Kyrin Perez (kperez@ncforum.org) at 919-781-6833 or you can download a copy at www.ncforum.org.

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Drive-In Symposium on Impact of Domestic Violence on Student Performance

Registration: 8:00 am to 9:00 am    Symposium: 9:00 am to 4:00 pm
Greenville Hilton, Greenville, NC
Thursday, February 9, 2006

Registration Fee of $25.
Fee waived for past and present Progress Energy Leadership Institute Participants.
To register, contact Melissa Churchwell at mchurchwell@ncforum.org
Seating capacity is limited. Acceptance is on “first come, first served” basis.

Co-Sponsored by
The Public School Forum’s
Progress Energy Leadership Institute
& East Carolina University College of Education

Endorsed by
NC Association of School Administrators
& NC Schools Boards Association

Presenters include Rep. Marian McLawhorn; ECU Dean Marilyn Sheerer; Attorney Peter Romary, Certified Mediator & Arbitrator; Will Polk, Attorney General’s Office; Allison Schafer, NCSBA Attorney; Tracey Turner, NC Assoc. of County Directors of Social Services and others. A special guest will keynote.

Name of Person Submitting Registration/s____________________________________________________________
Name of School System____________________________________________________

Persons Wishing to Participate
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Return By FAX to Melissa Churchwell at 919-781-6527 or
By E-MAIL to mchurchwell@ncforum.org.
Please make check payable to Public School Forum.
Write PE Symposium on the “For” line and
Send to the Attention of Melissa Churchwell.