

Guest commentary: suggestions for real education reform

By GOV. JIM MARTIN

When educators and policymakers talk about school reform, they agree that reform means restructuring. Dealing achievement test scores and increasing numbers of poorly prepared students point to one unpleasant conclusion: More of the same won't work anymore.

I believe we must fundamentally change the system to focus on the results of education, on the "outcomes," as the reformers like to say. That means changing the way we look at students, teachers, school administrators, and the role of government.

Now is the time to look at an idea that is gathering support around the country: a targeted grant program for schools that map the course for local schools. This new approach will mean challenging old principles of North Carolina public school management.

Heavy state regulation, however well-intentioned, does not work well. It does not encourage local solutions to local problems. Money flows from the state to the local school districts in 120 budget categories (or line items) and 20 federal line items. That money can be used only one way — the matter outlined in the budget description. There is no incentive for local creativity or local decision making.

The 1984 Basic Education

Program, heralded as a new day for North Carolina education, brought some change for good. The BEP has helped some poor school districts and exposed children to new and exciting ideas. When it overlapped with science and math education, for example, it offered real progress.

But it has problems. Too many non-teaching positions have been created and filled. The bureaucracy gets a boost, but how much good can more administrators do for children?

Under some BEP regulations, school districts are told to direct a teacher to lead classes in arts and foreign language curricula, for example. But the requested curriculum is so specific that no single teacher can handle the requirements. So the superintendents feel obligated to hire specialists to help with these courses even if the students are failing in reading and mathematics. The result is more people on the payroll, less emphasis on real-world job skills, and I believe, greater distance from local decision making.

We should change the tools that direct public school finance so that local control is guaranteed. I suggest we start by looking at four options. They range from total flexibility through the use of block grants to changes in regulations and procedures which would free up local educators under the

rules of Senate Bill 2. Option One: Allocate state money to school districts as block grants. Immediately, you have complete flexibility to spend the money. But accountability must co-exist in this system. To determine the grant award, use information from the Uniform Education Reporting System to determine average daily membership and average teacher pay. Through this change, reversions will be eliminated. A capital reserve fund would have to be created for emergencies, but it would inspire a more responsible and disciplined approach to financial planning. If dollars (not positions) are allotted, districts could opt to pay one teacher more than another. It will be controversial. But reforming schools will mean taking some heat.

Option Two: Distribute money to schools districts in three categories based upon average daily membership as determined from UERS. The categories are 1) personnel, 2) operations, and 3) special category funds. This option protects the teacher salary scale by authorizing positions rather than just money. But it would slow down the growth of support personnel by budgeting

for total dollars rather than positions. Local school systems would make choices based on their own needs.

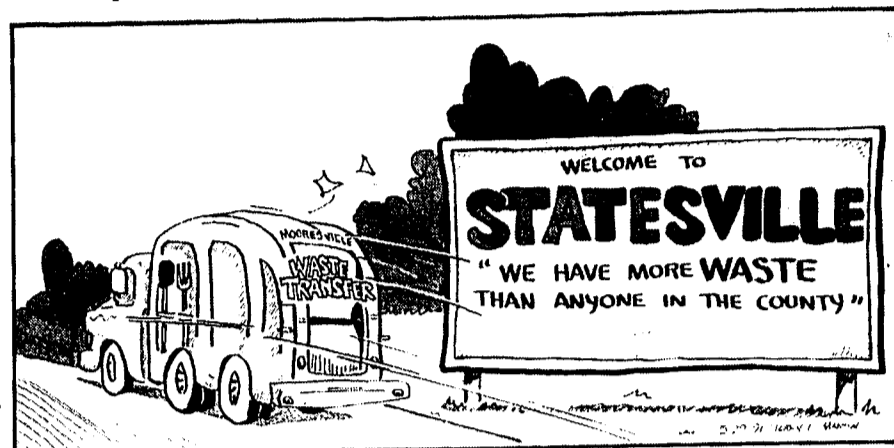
Option Three: Still using the UERS average daily membership standard, distribute the money in broad categories. Some examples are obvious: instruction and support personnel, general administration, instructional supplies and equipment, maintenance and transportation, child nutrition, etc. This option simplifies the current funding mechanism by consolidating budget categories. It is less restrictive, yet does not offer "block" funding.

Option Four: Proceed toward full implementation of Senate Bill

2. Encourage local control and flexibility in funding and remove restrictions not related to health, safety, racial balance, or accountability. Under this option, money will be provided for positions that best meet personnel needs in the district as determined by local leaders. Most important, the district leadership will be held accountable for student success.

These options represent only the beginning of our efforts. I present them as a way of starting the discussion.

Until we look realistically at the need to reform schools, and stand ready to accept criticism and controversy to effect change, we will be falling behind. It's time to be daring and creative.



Uncle Dan from Doolie says

New way to fleece taxpayers

It says here that reserch in Australia has come up with peel off wool. Instead of clipping sheep in the hormone experiment, ranchers pull off the wool like taking apart two pieces of Velcro. I don't know about sheep, but I passed this item along at the country store Saturday night for what it might be worth, which was not much.

Bug Hookum was quick to turn my report to fear that the Aussies have showed the world a way to take more of the pain out of fleecing. Watch out, Bug allowed, fer them hormones to show up in American taxpayers diet. And from some of the hospital bill horror stories he's been hearing, he went on, don't be surprised when a side order of hormones comes with the patient's breakfast to avoid a relapse at checkout time.

Usual, the fellers perk up at scientific breakthroughs, special in agriculture, but Bug was ready to move the agender along. As fer cutting back on pain, he had read where a new career has opened up to help deal with layoffs and firings from the slowdown in sales and manufacturing. It is called out-placement consultant, and what he does is tell bosses how to fire workers and tell workers how to deal with getting fired.

It is said that diplomacy is the art of telling a feller to go to Hell in such a way he looks forward to the trip. Bug reminded, and he was of a mind that the out-placement consultant has got to have that kind of skills. His clipping said the key to firing and getting fired is being prepared fer it. The firer has got to understand the feelings of the firee, and he's got to accent the positive of severing pay and benefits. The firee needs to know losing a job ain't

The out-placement consultant has to be able to tell a feller to go to Hell in such a way he looks forward to the trip. — Bug Hookum

General, the fellers weren't buying the new career field. Zeke Grubb figured them that go into it have got fired and can't find work. Farthermore, Zeke said, it sounds to much like a good news-bad news joke. Putting a positive spin on getting fired is like the feller that ask his preacher if there is hell in Heaven. The preacher said he'd check. He got back to the feller and said the good news is, Heaven is full of great golf courses. The bad news is the feller had a 9 a.m. tee time the next day.

Actual, Zeke went on, there's a heap of these unusual spins around. He had read this piece about this feller that works clost to former President Carter in Habitat fer Humanity. The feller said they were nailing shingles on a roof one day when Carter ask about his politics. When he said he was a Republican, Carter kidded him about why he was involved in a liberal cause like building houses fer poor folks.

The feller told the former President that he's a "conservative Republican with a social conscience." The feller said Carter laughed and said that "one of them ox morons, like "honest lawyer" and "holly war." Final, Clem Webster picked up on the ox moron to note he had saw a new way to explain fast food. He had saw where a recent study shows that the average item of food in this country travels 1,200 miles before it gets eat. This means, Clem said, that our food gits around more than we do.

Your turn

On behalf of the Brawley School staff and student body, we would like to express our sincere appreciation to the 68 people who volunteered more than 1,300 hours to our school this school year. These people gave time, knowledge and talent to improve the quality of education in Brawley School.

We want them to know they are appreciated, that they are a vital part of our school and that the school needs their continued support. This has been a wonderful year for the Volunteer Program at Brawley. We welcome other volunteers who are willing to listen, to talk, to share life experiences. Everyone can help the schools in some way. Just call, we'll be glad to hear from you.

Brawley School, near Mooresville, is part of the Iredell/Statesville School system. Brawley School houses fifth through eighth grades. We are very proud that Duke Power Company has been a supporter of Brawley School. It has provided math and science tutors, judges for our science fair and helped our students through its "Power in Education" program. We commend Duke Power for its stand for quality education, and we challenge other businesses to show support for public schools by following Duke's example.

We encourage everyone to push for quality education and we thank everyone for all they have done.

Debra Holcomb
Nancy Statts
Brawley School
Parent Volunteer Coordinators

OUR COMMUNITY
IN OTHER YEARS
1936
55 YEARS AGO

Mr. C.W. Rose, of the Enochville community, celebrated his 86th birthday last Saturday when his children, grandchildren, other relatives and friends gathered at his home for a general reunion. The Rev. Mr. Peeler was there and made a talk. An elegant dinner was served. Mr. Rose is recognized as one of the best informed men in Rowan county. He is still very active and takes great pride in recording historical events. Among his possessions in a plate that has been in his family for 101 years. On Saturday, he was wearing socks that were 101 years old. The cotton was planted, cultivated, picked, seeded, carded spun and knitted by his grandmother, and he is quite proud of those old-time homemade foot warmers, which have stood the wear and tear of the whole century and more. It is only fair to say the socks have been worn only on special occasions. It was a grand day for Mr. Rose.

Mr. Bill Brawley has just returned to State College, and having spent the spring holiday with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. R.V. Brawley, Mr. Brawley had as a guest, Mr. Merton York, from Portland, Maine. Mr. Matthews, who is at the Veterans Hospital at Columbia, S.C., is still very ill.

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ALBERT FINNEY

class in the arts. It was all connected with art of bursting of a new kind of life, and enjoying and looking at life in a different way.

"Not too long before all this happened — and I should explain that at that time we only had the BBC television, and you couldn't work for them because they felt you wouldn't be understood in other parts of England unless you spoke a standard English. But it was also a way of the BBC to be a standard. Or, as we don't know."

The turnaround to which Albert Finney referred certainly opened the door to more people. Those from humble beginnings were not only accepted, but honored and made his or her origins anyone. Many actors had come out of lower economic backgrounds before the change, but they could put on dinner jackets and posh accents, and "pass" as members of the upper class.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know. My father is a bookmaker, so I guess I would have done that. As you know in Britain, we've always had bookmakers allowed on the race tracks although, until 1960, there was a basis in truth. It is possible then that the glorious things that happened in the night are real and that there are spirits in trees. Maybe it's true that everything has its spiritual part of some kind. It would be also a well, of course, there were those famous 'green man' in Sherwood forest who were all dressed in green. But really, I don't know," he said. "People get to a track to put down their bets. I'm quite sure the police not only knew that it was going on, but preferred having it where they could keep an eye on it. We were able to bring order and form to existence, so perhaps, we closed down this spiritual or mystic side of some way, you know the aboriginal beliefs about spirits still being with them. There are those who say that every myth has a basis in truth. 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