

2008 NCAE Gubernatorial Candidate Questionnaire

(Please return this document to Susan Kane, NCAE Government Relations, P. O. Box 27347, Raleigh, NC 27611-7347. You may fax to Susan Kane at 919-829-1626. Please return by **August 21, 2007.**)

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(The NCAE Gubernatorial Candidate Questionnaire reflects the interests and positions of the North Carolina Association of Educators as described in the 2007-08 Legislative Agenda and other governing documents.)

1. *Briefly share with us your vision for public education in North Carolina.*

My vision is that the graduates of North Carolina's public schools will be the best-educated and most competitive in the world. The realities of the global economy demand these lofty aspirations. We have proven that we are capable of such success and have made tremendous strides, but we must do much more to ensure that opportunity is spread equally across our great state. The racial achievement gap is particularly concerning to me. It is simply wrong that disparities in educational performance and economic opportunity are still so prevalent.

We will only achieve this vision when we reduce the drop out rate and achievement gap, move our students out of trailers and outdated classrooms that lack modern technology, seek the input of school employees in educational reforms, and treat all those who work in our school buildings with the respect they deserve as the leading influence in our children's schools.

2. *What direct experience have you had with public schools during your lifetime?*

I am a proud graduate of J.F. Webb Public High School in Granville County, North Carolina. I am a seven-year member of the State Board of Education, where I work to ensure that every public school student will graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary education and will have the tools to compete in the global workforce. As a member of the General Assembly, I supported pay raises for teachers and put more money in the classroom for textbooks and other needs. As Secretary of Crime Control and Public Safety I served as a co-chairman of the 1999 Governor's Task Force on School Safety and Youth Violence, which implemented policies to keep our schools safer in the wake of horrific tragedies.

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3. *What do you see to be the greatest needs facing North Carolina's public schools, and what role will you assume in meeting those challenges if you are elected Governor of North Carolina.*

The greatest challenges facing our public schools are our overwhelming need for high-quality teaching professionals and reducing the dropout rate. As Treasurer, I am keenly aware of the effect that baby-boomer retirement is having on the ability to keep our teaching ranks full. When combined with the state's explosive growth, our needs are outstripping our ability to produce enough teachers. But salaries are not competitive enough to attract talented teachers from out of state or to encourage our bright, young college students to pursue careers in education. As Governor, I will use my budget proposal and the bully pulpit to focus the attention of the public and the legislature on raising teacher pay. We should have a competitive minimum starting salary for teachers and reduce the number of steps on the pay scale. We should treat teachers as professionals by allowing them to use their personal days without having the substitute pay deducted and by allowing their personal days to accumulate.

It is unacceptable that nearly a third of our high school students drop out. We need a curriculum that appeals to students with different interests and abilities, including expanded partnerships with local universities and community colleges. We should also explore raising the age at which students can drop out above its current level of sixteen.

4. *Do you support or oppose the use of public dollars to enable parents to send their children to private schools (so-called voucher programs)?*

I oppose vouchers. These programs take important resources away from our public schools, making improvement even more difficult. Our focus should be on improving public schools, not giving up on them.

5. *Should we continue the present cap on the number of public charter schools that may operate in North Carolina? Why or why not?*

We should continue the present cap on charter schools in North Carolina. The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research's recent study of our charter schools provided an invaluable analysis of our current system. Some of our charter schools are working as intended, serving our communities with innovative ideas that are reaching students. But too many of our current charter schools are failing to live up to high standards of academic performance and overall management. Until we can be confident that sufficient oversight and controls are in place, it does not make sense to raise the cap on charter schools.

6. *Do you support the continued designation of lottery funds to public education?*

Yes.

7. *What additional accountability measures should be enacted to assure quality performance by the public schools of North Carolina?*

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As a national leader in the accountability movement under Governor Hunt, North Carolina has collected information on educational performance for a decade. Yet little is done with that data. As Governor, I would direct the State Board of Education, Department of Public Instruction, and our university system to work together to examine the data that we have collected. From this analysis, we would be able to distinguish those programs, curricula, and techniques that successfully raised student performance from those that need improvement. Because of the accountability measures already in place, we have an unprecedented ability to learn from what we have done in the recent past. We should use that knowledge to guide any future policy changes.

8. *NCAE believes that North Carolina is no longer competitive for teachers. What is your assessment of why we face a shortage of 10-11,000 teachers per year in our state's schools?*

North Carolina faces a teaching shortage for a number of reasons: 1) the state is experiencing explosive growth, 2) baby-boomers are retiring in droves, 3) teacher pay is inadequate, 4) new teachers don't stay in the classroom and 5) teaching is no longer a highly respected career. When I was growing up in Granville County, teachers were revered and respected members of their community held in the highest regard. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case. Teachers are paid less than other professionals whose jobs require the same level of education and skill. We do not provide the support and mentoring that new teachers require. We hold teachers accountable for our students' performance, but we do not regard them with the respect that should command. Teachers should be treated as professionals in the laws, policies, and budgets adopted.

9. *As Governor, will you work with NCAE to develop and fund salary schedules for teacher assistants, school clerical personnel, and other school non-licensed support staff?*

Upon taking office as your state Treasurer, I recognized the need to listen to the members of our state's retirement system. How can you effectively administer the retirement future of 750,000 North Carolinians without sitting down with them on a regular basis to solicit their input? One of the ways I addressed that need was by creating the Retirement Roundtable made up of the associations representing the active and retired members of our system. NCAE's Marge Foreman and RSP's Pam Deardorff are two very active members of the Roundtable, which meets once a month or more with the deputy treasurer of the retirement system and our legislative liaison to offer guidance on how we administer the Retirement System and to plot a coordinated legislative strategy around retirement issues. I have met on a regular basis with NCAE leadership before the State Board of Education meetings to gather input on the agenda items before the Board. In each agency I have had the privilege to lead I have always sought the advice and support of those on the front lines and that will never change. I look forward to working with NCAE to further all compensation and working condition issues.

10. *Do you believe that Teacher Assistants are generally beneficial in the public schooling experience in North Carolina?*

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Yes, teacher assistants are an integral part of the classroom. Having a second educator in the classroom allows the lead teacher more time for individualized attention and provides additional support for students in need.

11. *What changes need to be made in the federal law, No Child Left Behind? What steps will you take to lead in this area?*

No Child Left Behind is a great political sound-bite for Washington lawmakers, but, in practice, is just another in a long line of under-funded educational reforms. Specifically, the law should be changed to focus on accountability that rewards improvement and growth, increase the number of highly-qualified teachers in our schools, and provide more support and less punishment to schools that are making a serious effort to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) standards.

As Treasurer, I have found success in Washington, D.C. and on Wall Street through coalition building. When I took on the issues of shareholder democracy together with the five other largest state pension funds, we started a revolution on corporate accountability. I will continue my coalition building approach by reaching out to other governors and making improvements to NCLB our top priority.

12. *What modifications, if any, would you like to see in North Carolina's ABCs program?*

I am looking forward to the findings of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Testing and Accountability in September, which will provide useful information and ideas on improving the decade-old ABC's program. Once this important study is complete, we must move forward with implementation of key findings. Raleigh has a long history of studying an issue and then not taking action. Early work of the Commission indicates we need to revise the current testing program to spend less time testing and more time teaching—allowing teachers to spend more time digging deeper into the curriculum.

13. *How as Governor will you work to provide adequate school funding for low wealth counties and/or small school districts?*

No matter where children attend school in North Carolina, they should have access to the best education available. I long supported taking the Medicaid burden off our counties because the spiraling growth in Medicaid costs was having the worst effect on our low-wealth counties. The recent action to relieve counties of this burden is an important step that will have significant long-term benefits for low-wealth counties that need to focus their resources on education and other priorities.

As governor, I will continue to advocate for full funding of the Low-Wealth Fund, which provides much-needed resources to our low-wealth school systems. We should work to ensure local control over this money, as school systems and school employees have the best knowledge about the areas of biggest impact and need. I will also continue to support programs that provide assistance to at-risk students in school systems across the state.

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14. *How do you ensure that we are attracting the best and brightest teachers and other school personnel to the more rural areas of our state?*

All children deserve highly-qualified teachers and other school personnel in their school, regardless of their location within North Carolina. One way I worked to address this issue as State Treasurer was to develop the Teacher Mortgage Program. We were able to buy down the interest rate the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency offered teachers on their first home in pilot counties, making home ownership more affordable for teachers. Programs such as this can help attract teachers and other school personnel to the more rural parts of our state.

Bringing accomplished teachers to rural areas can be achieved through incentives, but those incentives should not be limited to just some of the teachers in the school. It is important to foster a team environment amongst our educators, but that does not happen when teachers are rewarded differently. Our goal is to have highly-motivated, highly-qualified, and highly-compensated teachers in every classroom.

15. *Will you support as Governor a cost-of-living increase for retirees at least equal to the increase in the cost of living based on the CPI?*

The Retirement System Board of Trustees, on which former NCAE President Joyce Elliott serves, makes a cost-of-living recommendation to the Governor and General Assembly each year. The Board, which I chair, has voted for a COLA recommendation for the past seven years. I am proud to have advocated for COLAs on behalf of NCAE and all public employees. Because we cannot predict future inflation or economic growth, I will not sign any pledges as a candidate for Governor that bind my ability to offer a balanced budget, but my record of support for retirees is exceptionally strong, and I plan to continue my commitment to active and retired teachers.

16. *Will you work to increase the employer's contribution to the Teachers and State Employees' Retirement System?*

As State Treasurer, I have a strong record of pushing both the Governor and the General Assembly to increase the employer contribution to the retirement system. When I took office in 2000, North Carolina faced its worst budget crisis since the Great Depression, brought on by an economic downturn and increasingly reckless budget growth from the General Assembly in the 1990s. I have spent the last seven years educating both the General Assembly and the public on how important our Retirement System is to our bond rating, our economy, and our tax rate. I am very proud of making our Retirement System the second best in the nation. You will not find another candidate for governor or any other office with a better understanding of, or commitment to, what it takes to protect and improve your Retirement System.

17. *What is your view of pre-kindergarten education in North Carolina? Specifically, what is your vision for More at Four and Smart Start (the North Carolina Partnership for Children)?*

I plan to continue the tradition started by Governors Hunt and Easley of ensuring that all students are healthy and prepared when they enter our public schools. More at Four and Smart Start are critical to that goal and will receive full support from my administration.

18. *How would you balance the needs of the public schools with the needs of the community colleges and the state university system?*

Public schools, pre-K and higher education will not be competing for resources in my administration, but there will be a focus on cooperation and improving the whole system for students of all ages. We must envision North Carolina's education system as a seamless pre-K through higher education system deserving our full support at every level.

19. *Will you pledge support to the following two NCAE priorities?*

- *A professional teacher salary schedule based on a higher beginning salary and a reduced number of steps*

Yes.

- *Paid personal leave for those who cannot access annual leave on a student instructional day*

Yes.

- *Conversion of personal leave to sick leave*

Yes.

- *A salary schedule for Teacher Assistants and other non-certified school employees*

Yes.

20. *How would you advocate for improvements in the State Health Plan? What are your proposals for ensuring that employees do not incur declining benefits as a result of rising health care costs in the United States?*

My approach to the State Health Plan will mirror that of my approach to the North Carolina Retirement System. As the sole fiduciary for the 14th largest public pension plan, I took a no-holds-barred approach to negotiating better deals with lower fees. Knowing we would be facing record-breaking retirements, we developed an information technology solution rather than just throwing more money at the problem. We solicited the opinions of our members when

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developing our customer service initiatives. The State Health Plan is a very large consumer with a lot of market leverage and should be driving the best deals possible for its members.

We are facing a health care crisis that is not limited to those in the State Health Plan or the State of North Carolina, but the country as a whole. The way to ensure employees do not continue to bear the brunt of the increasing costs is to focus on improving the health of our workforce, negotiating better deals, and stretching our dollars by ensuring we get the right care at the right time.

21. *Many believe that teaching is no longer a respected profession. Do you concur? What would you propose as steps that could enhance the image of the profession?*

Everyone who works with our children in our schools should be revered and respected. There is no more important career than shaping the minds of our children—the next generation of North Carolinians. Respect starts in the school building. School employees should be involved in the planning and decision-making at their school and in their district. Governor Easley started the Teacher Working Conditions Survey, and I would continue the program and implement its findings as governor. Teachers and all school employees should be able to take a personal day without having the substitute teacher’s pay deducted from their paycheck. Respect is conveyed. As Governor, I plan to spend much of my time in classrooms across North Carolina talking about the role our school employees play in the future success of North Carolina and demonstrating the amount of respect I have for all you do.

22. *Please share with us any additional thoughts that you might have about public education in North Carolina and the steps you would take to improve it.*

As Treasurer, I have made significant improvements to the State’s 401(k) plan. We drove down fees, offered better investment options, and grew the fund into the largest public 401(k) in the country. Competitive benefits, which include health care, retirement, and other insurance products – as well as salary – are increasingly important as we work to recruit and retain high quality school personnel. As Governor, I would explore opportunities to further improve the overall benefit package offered to public school personnel by offering an employer match or direct contribution to the supplemental retirement plans offered by the State.

Serving as a co-chairman of Governor Hunt’s commissions on juvenile justice and school violence while I was Secretary of Crime Control and Public Safety provided me with in-depth knowledge about the needs of at-risk youth, the dangers posed by school violence, and the potential to have a positive impact on these issues. I realized that North Carolina could do a much better job of identifying children that need help and offering them and their families the support that they want and deserve. Reaching at-risk children early and giving them the opportunity to succeed will be a focus of my administration.

23. *Over the course of your career, how have you worked with NCAE?*

I am very proud of the partnership I have enjoyed with NCAE over my career as a public servant. In my combined role as a member of the State Board of Education and as sole trustee

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for the pension fund of every public school employee, my relationship with NCAE has been incredibly important. Despite smaller and smaller contributions from the General Assembly and record numbers of retirements, we have made our retirement system the second best in the nation according to *Standard and Poor's*. Despite having nearly 400,000 more members of the retirement system and 13 fewer employees than its average peer retirement system, our Retirement System continues to increase its high level of service that has become standard over the past several years. This success is due in large part to the Retirement Roundtable, of which NCAE is an integral part. The Roundtable has lobbied successfully for funding to improve the system. We are very proud that public employees and retirees can now go online to access their retirement account through one of the largest information technology projects in the state's history—which was on time and on budget. Stretching our resources and demanding accountability are hallmarks of my administration, as every dollar we spend on the Retirement System is a dollar *from* the Retirement System.

Together, we asked the Board of Trustees, which I chair, to adopt COLAs and accrual rate adjustments to the Retirement System and had them approved. Together, we went to the General Assembly and lobbied on behalf of the 750,000 members of the retirement system. Unfortunately, the General Assembly has not always done right by the System. Over the last seven years the General Assembly only once adopted a COLA that rivaled the recommendation by the Board of Trustees. They have not done right by the System in the employer contribution category either, appropriating nothing to the System in 2002. But thanks to our conservative investment strategy, the fund remains the envy of 48 other state pension funds.

Candidate Signature: The handwritten signature of Richard H. Moore is written in black ink. The name "Richard H. Moore" is written in a cursive, flowing script.