



PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

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June 3, 2008

Christopher B. Swanson, Director
EPE Research Center/Editorial Projects in Education
6935 Arlington Road, Ste. 100
Bethesda, MD 20814

Dear Dr. Swanson:

I am deeply troubled by your choice of data for making comparisons about cohort graduation rates in the *Diplomas Count* report. In the report, you use a chart that illustrates the gap between your CPI rate and each state's reported graduation rate for the class of 2005 that uses incorrect comparative data and offers misleading information about North Carolina's work to address the issue of high school dropouts.

North Carolina has reported an estimated graduation rate for our state since 1977. That rate, although not available at the individual school level, provided an estimate that historically has been similar to the CPI rate. This estimated rate has been reported annually (and publicly) in our *Statistical Profile* each year since 1977 and available online for the past nine years. For 2005, the rate reported in the *Statistical Profile* was 64.3, which is, in fact, below the CPI rate you report for North Carolina. Thus, when using a truly comparable cohort graduation estimate—which was available to you and your staff, but you either did not find in your research or you disregarded—North Carolina would actually be understating its cohort rate versus the CPI rather than overstating it. Moreover, North Carolina has reported a cohort graduation rate since 2006 for each school, school district, and for the state as a whole. This cohort rate for 2007, in fact, was 69.4 percent, which is in line with the CPI rate.

Yet, your chart continues to list the “on-time” graduation rate that North Carolina used in the years 2002–2005 only to meet the federal requirements that we report some rate at the school level. When No Child Left Behind began requiring that we report some rate of graduation at the school level, we sought the advice of the US Department of Education on how to be in compliance as we waited the four years required to accumulate a cohort rate. The “on-time” rate was suggested as an acceptable alternative to meet the letter of the law. As soon as we were able to do so, we dropped this placeholder “on-time” rate in favor of the more accurate cohort rate. This fall, we will report the cohort rate for 2008 – the third year we will have done so.

Your use of the “on-time graduation rate,” which was used to comply with federal law and which was never intended to be used as a cohort graduation measure, creates the false impression that North Carolina is not being transparent about the high school graduation and dropout rates in our state. This is not the case; in fact, North Carolina is one of only a handful of states that have begun to report a cohort graduation rate (as defined by the National Governors' Association Compact). It is for this reason that your choice of comparative data—from the data publicly available to you—is deeply troubling.

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY STATE SUPERINTENDENT

John B. Buxton, *Deputy State Superintendent*

6301 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-6301 | (919) 807-3430 | Fax (919) 807-3445

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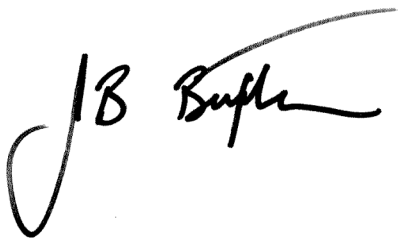
Were we given more than two days to review the report prior to its release, we would have brought these issues to your attention.

I request that you issue a correction to your reporting of North Carolina's data on the Web site on which you will post the data for those who will have read the print version. Further, I request that you correct North Carolina's data on the Web version to reflect the data I have presented.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter and for your understanding of the issues of integrity and transparency which this raises at a time when North Carolina is doing more than nearly all states to provide comprehensive data on graduation rates for all schools and school districts to the public.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at 919/807-3441 or jbuxton@dpi.state.nc.us, or Vanessa Jeter, director of Communications at 919/807-3469 or vjeter@dpi.state.nc.us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JB Buxton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop for the "J" and a long, sweeping underline for the "Buxton" portion.

John B. Buxton
Deputy State Superintendent

Cc: Howard Lee, Chairman, State Board of Education
June Atkinson, State Superintendent
Ann McArthur, Education Advisor, Gov. Mike Easley
Robin Johnson, Office of the Speaker, N.C. House of Representatives
Amy Fulk, Office of the President Pro Tempore, N.C. Senate

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