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Education News

Aaron Fleming, Longtime Former NCACTE Leader, Moving Up: Congratulations to Aaron Fleming, past chair of NCACTE's Legislative Committee and a leading player to the Speaker of the House. Fleming, education policy adviser to House Speaker Tim Moore, recently stepped down from that post to become interim Superintendent of Harnett County Schools.

Fleming, who also served as CTE director for the Lee County Schools, in a Jan. 31st post on Facebook, wrote:

Thanks for the messages, calls, and texts today. I also apologize to those of you that have no clue what is going on and sent messages of concern. Beginning tomorrow for approximately five months, I will begin my next opportunity as Superintendent of Harnett County Schools. This is an interim role while the school board does a search. I appreciate the school board's support and confidence in allowing me to do this. While my goal is to learn, I also want to lead the efforts in making great things happen for the students, teachers, staff, and community in Harnett County. I have been blessed to have a great "boss" in our Speaker of the House. Speaker Moore has been extremely supportive of this move and I appreciate him allowing me to serve in his office. We have a great crew, and I have learned a lot from them. Since tonight is a school night, I need to get to bed early. Tomorrow will be packed with school visits, meetings, and a bus ride or two!

On behalf of NCACTE, we wish nothing but the best to Mr. Fleming, one of the strongest advocates and friends of career technical education in North Carolina.

Teacher Pay: Average teacher pay in North Carolina this school year falls slightly below the \$50,000 mark heralded by state lawmakers and former Gov. Pat McCrory last fall, according to the N.C. Department of Public Instruction. The actual level is \$49,837. Still, critics say that gap points to bigger problems with how state and local governments pay educators.

Historically, teacher pay has been a hot issue for North Carolina politicians, who need to keep classrooms staffed and satisfy voters who consistently rank education as a major priority. Since

the 1990s and a major push to increase average educator salaries, North Carolina has long been ranked in the bottom quarter of states concerning teacher pay.

"Teachers know better than anyone that political rhetoric in Raleigh doesn't always match up with reality. It's time to get serious about raising teacher pay, and I'm working with members of both parties to get it done," said Gov. Roy Cooper, a Democrat who took office on Jan. 1.

Background: In the past four years, McCrory, a Republican, and GOP allies at the General Assembly pledged to reverse the decline by increasing minimum salaries for classroom teachers up to \$35,000 and then last year setting a goal of making the average teacher salary \$50,000. McCrory and GOP lawmakers campaigned on that pledge. Meanwhile, some teachers countered that the \$50,000 figure didn't apply to many teachers, especially those in poorer school systems or those without enough seniority to move up in the pay scale.

Sen. Jerry Tillman, R-Randolph, a strong CTE supporter and former principal who took a lead role on education issues last session, said lawmakers had already set their sights on new salary goals for teachers. "If it's not there, we need to get it there, and not only that, we need to get it to \$55,000," Tillman said, according to WRAL News.

State Superintendent Welcomes Lawmakers: North Carolina Superintendent of Public Instruction Mark Johnson welcomed dozens of lawmakers to the state education building last week. Johnson encouraged them to "please, seriously, don't be strangers" as he launches a statewide listening tour to learn about education issues. Johnson, who defeated longtime Superintendent June Atkinson in November's election, told lawmakers he wants to make "big," "bold" improvements to the state's education system and said he plans to "bring a sense of urgency" to the job.

DPI Exodus: The DPI is experiencing several retirements and resignations this month, leaving some key jobs unfilled. Deputy State Superintendent Rebecca Garland is retiring after serving 21 years in the department. Chief Financial Officer Philip Price is retiring after 35 years at DPI and three years at the legislature's Fiscal Research division. Human Resources Director LouAnn Phillips also is leaving for another state job, according to Board Chair Bill Cobey.

Garland said her husband's failing health was key to her retirement decision, adding that she wanted to stay into February to help Johnson, the new state superintendent, with his transition. The News & Observer reports that Price said he was mulling retirement before the election.

Under a new law, now in limbo in state court, Johnson would have had sole authority to fill those three jobs. But since the people who hold those positions continue to report to both the State Board of Education and the superintendent, board members will have important roles in choosing successors.

Meantime, Rachel Beaulieu, the department's lobbyist, is leaving to revive her education-related law practice, and will join the Public School Forum of North Carolina as a senior policy adviser. Beaulieu has been at DPI for four years, and Cobey said she works for the board.

Other News

School Poll: A recently release statewide -- coming at the end of "National School Choice Week," which promoted the charter-school movement -- says that 70 percent of respondents believe that North Carolina "lawmakers need to do more to expand educational options for families." Conducted by the Civitas Institute, a conservative-leaning, Raleigh-based think tank, the poll also found parents have strong interest in children learning from someplace other than traditional public schools, according to The Insider.

Parents of school-age children were asked in the survey: if resources were not an issue and you could select the best school for your child, what type of school would you select for your child? According to Civitas, the poll found 44 percent replied traditional public schools, 35 percent private schools, 11 percent charter schools, 8 percent home schools and 2 percent virtual schools.

"These results confirm what we've long known to be true -- parents want access to the best educational options for their children," Civitas education policy analyst Dr. Bob Luebke said in a news release.

Charter Schools Renewals: The State Board of Education last week renewed 29 charter schools, allowing the non-traditional public schools to stay open for as many as 10 more years. There are 167 charter schools open in North Carolina this school year.

Cabinet Confirmations Update: With the state Senate's first Cabinet confirmation hearing looming, Gov. Roy Cooper last week said the series of meetings should be delayed until a three-judge panel can review his lawsuit challenging the process. Cooper said his Cabinet secretaries will meet with legislators informally and will attend routine committee meetings as necessary. But he said his lawyers think they will succeed in blocking the expanded role the Senate has taken on following the defeat of Republican Gov. Pat McCrory.

The Democratic governor said he met with Republican Senate leadership on Friday without resolving the issue. The co-chair of the new Senate Select Committee on Nominations, Sen. Bill Rabon of Southport, said recently he doesn't expect the Republican-controlled committee to be hostile to Cooper's appointments. Each will be judged on abilities to perform their jobs and avoid potential conflicts of interest and whether they are willing to follow the law, he said.

Local News

Buncombe County Class Size Flexibility: Facing possible cuts to music and art teachers, Buncombe County school board members are asking state legislators to provide class size flexibility for schools. Board members formally adopted a resolution last week asking the General Assembly to approve legislation "as early as possible" to provide relief from new class size requirements set to take effect in kindergarten through third grade in the next school year.

The state took away districts' flexibility concerning class size in kindergarten through third grade. Districts have used that flexibility with funding allotments to hire art, music and other teachers not funded with separate allotments.

Quotes of the Week

"You know, I'm glad that some people in Greensboro got to see us play."

- UNC basketball coach Roy Williams, following his team's 83-76 win over Notre Dame on Sunday at the Greensboro Coliseum. The NCAA tournament games that would have been played in Greensboro next month have been moved because of HB-2, a bill the coach has called a "stupid law" (The News & Observer, 2/05/17)

The Falcons were up the entire game and went into the fourth quarter with a 28-9 lead. Then the Patriots got it together. Wide receiver [Julian Edelman made this crazy catch](#). Running back James White [did OK too](#). And the Pats forced the Super Bowl into [OT for the first time ever](#). Now, Patriots QB Tom Brady has more Super Bowl rings than any QB in history. Falcons QB Matt Ryan has the [NFL MVP title](#) as a consolation prize. Meanwhile, Lady Gaga used her halftime performance to [audition for Spider Man](#).

- The [Skimm's](#) take today on last night's Super Bowl

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