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WCPSS approves pay raises; seeks more charter-like schools.

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WCPSS Seeking to Add More 'Charter-Like' Schools

The "restart" model for high-needs schools will expand to 10 more WCPSS schools next year.

Last week, the state Board of Education approved the application submitted by WCPSS to restart five more elementary schools and five middle schools. All

of which are schools that need to improve their test scores.

The school system “relaunched” Walnut Creek and Barwell Road elementary schools last year under the state’s restart program, bringing “charter-like” flexibility in school start and end times, calendar, budgeting and hiring. WCPSS retains full control of the schools, however, and all teachers must still be actively certified to teach.

The restart model was so well received at those two schools, the WCPSS staff decided to add 10 more schools for next school year.

This is different than the Renaissance School Program implemented under former Superintendent Tony Tata. That model focused on human resource incentives such as offering signing and performance bonuses, hiring additional teachers, and adding more professional development all funded partly by federal Race Top The Top grant money. WCPSS ended that program two years ago when the grant money ran out.

The restart model gives principals, teachers, and parents the room to develop creative, data-driven solutions to the issues raised by the data at each school. The school system also gains flexibility for converting funds to pay for additional staff, and the schools offer an extended school day one day a week, parent academies, and additional family services that aren’t typically offered in schools.

To qualify, a school must be designated as “recurring, low performing” by the state based on its test scores in two of the last three years on a rolling basis.

Walnut Creek and Barwell are part of the 12-school Elementary Support Model group overseen by Area Superintendent James Overman. All 12 schools would qualify for restart status, but not all ESM schools are part of Wake’s application this time.

The school system submitted requests for a combination of elementary and middle schools, many of them magnet schools.

- Bugg Elementary School
- Carroll Magnet Middle School
- East Garner Elementary School
- East Garner Magnet Middle School
- East Millbrook Middle School
- East Wake Middle School
- Fox Road Magnet Elementary School
- Millbrook Elementary School
- Poe GT/AIG Basics Magnet Elementary School

- Wendell Middle School

Now that the State Board of Education approved the application for all 10 schools, each school will develop plans which may include extending the school day, extending the school year, changing the school calendar, adding family support services. Many changes will need to be approved by the WCPSS School Board.

State School Funding Changes Could Be on the Horizon

Big changes could be coming to North Carolina's educational funding system.

A recent [study](#) presented to the [Joint Legislative Program Evaluation and Oversight Committee](#) revealed inequities in the current funding formulas and made suggestions for entirely new ways to allocate money to the local school districts.

This has the potential to be the biggest change in the way the state pays for education since the School Machinery Act was signed into law in 1933 creating a state-funded school system.

Early reactions to this plan are mixed. Some say well-funded districts like Wake County will lose money, while others argue that counties with less local funding will suffer. It's too early to say who is right.

North Carolina is one of just seven states in the country that uses a "resource allocation" method of determining funding, which uses several different formulas for determining how much money school districts receive in state tax dollars. This method, the report stated, favors wealthy districts over poor districts. Additional details are available from EdNC.

After hearing the report's findings and the recommendations from General Assembly's Program Evaluation Division Principal Program Evaluator Sean Hamel, legislators voted to direct staff to draft a bill to be considered in the 2017 session that would create a task force on school finance reform.

The task force would present its findings in June 2018, which would mean any changes to school funding legislation wouldn't happen before 2019. No major changes are expected until after the task force completes its work.

Joint Committee Co-Chair Rep. D. Craig Horn advocated for moving ahead with establishing the task force.

“This is a huge lift. This is people’s lives we are dealing with here. This is not some arm-length concept,” Horn said.

Other committee members urged caution and encouraged opening the task force up to non-legislators.

“I understand the value of having and hope we find a way to include our superintendents and listen to them, but involve them in such a way that they don’t have to take the hit,” Horn replied. “I think we need a long-term strategic view. We’ve got to have a fundamental change in how we support education in this state.”

The full report is available [here](#), and the presentation slides are available [here](#).

Principal and AP Compensation Committee Hears from Experts Who Urge Paying for Professionalism

The path to a new formula for paying school-based administrators is proving to be hard to find.

At its first meeting in October, the Joint Legislative Study Committee on School-Based Administrator Pay reviewed a proposal to eliminate the current complicated salary schedule for school principals and the insufficient salary schedule for assistant principals in favor of a new system that would pay principals a base salary with a structure for locally chosen bonuses.

The committee’s second meeting last week gave legislators a chance to hear from subject-matter experts within and outside of North Carolina.

Representatives from the Southern Regional Educational Board, BEST NC, NC Principals and Assistant Principals Association, the state Board of Education and one expert from the University of Illinois all testified.

The message from each: Great principals equal great schools.

Walk into any high-performing, high-achieving school, said BEST NC President and CEO Brenda Berg, and “you will find one thing they have in common and that is they have a high-quality principal leading that school.”

Like any industry, North Carolina can’t expect to have great principals if it doesn’t have at least adequate compensation. The state’s principal pay ranks 50th in the nation.

“We’re low, low, low in principal pay and I believe we can sell this package,”

said committee Co-Chair Sen. Jerry Tillman.

The current salary schedule is a complicated mix of years of experience and number of employees. And many assistant principals across the state are paid a teacher's salary to prevent them having to take a cut in pay when moving from the classroom to the front office.

The recommendations to improve the salary schedule are as varied as the current salary schedule, and they include several combinations of base pay, experiential or role-base differentiation, and performance incentives and bonuses.

There was hesitation when it came to bonuses, however. Co-Chair Rep. Hugh Blackwell said, "We're going to have think carefully about how we do performance bonuses."

State Board of Education member A.L. Buddy Collins, a former Forsyth County School Board Member, said, "I've never seen a situation where a bonus would make a teacher work harder or a principal work harder."

Andy Baxter from the Southern Regional Education Board began his comments to the committee urging caution for offering performance bonuses and incentives.

"This area of compensation has not been a road that many have traveled," Baxter said. Where incentives have been implemented, "the jury's still out if they're working or not. There's nothing wrong with that. At least they're trying."

The committee has more work to do. Rep. D. Craig Horn, who isn't a member of this committee, but serves on several education-related House committees, said the changes to school-based administrator pay will not be easy.

"I don't want anyone to go away from here thinking we are going to fix everything in one fell swoop," Horn said.

Its next meeting date was subject to the timing of the special session for Hurricane Matthew relief and cleanup.

WCPSS School Board Approves Pay Raises for Non-Certified Staff

Salary bonuses may be coming for thousands of essential Wake County Public Schools employees who haven't had a raise in years.

The school board recently reviewed a plan to pay a one-time \$500 bonus to hourly employees such as teacher assistants, custodians, child nutrition, bus drivers, office staff, and others using a combination of state and local funds.

The bonus was given by the state for employees who are in good standing and paid with state funds. The latter created a logistical issue for the school system because about one-fourth of the employees in these positions are paid with local funds, and it is different from school to school.

WCPSS Chief Operating Officer David Neter told the board that there may be a secretary at one school who is paid with state funds while a secretary at another school is paid with local money.

“That would mean that some teaching assistants at a school would get a bonus and some would not,” Board Member Monika Johnson-Hostler said.

The state-funded positions would get the bonus while the others wouldn’t, so the plan Neter presented to the school board members provided an option to make sure every qualifying employee in specific jobs would receive the bonus.

The state’s bonus also fell short of a \$500 gross amount, and Neter’s proposal included local funds to make up the difference for all employees. The bonuses will be subject to state and federal income taxes.

Even with these adjustments to make sure the same positions and roles receive the bonus, it doesn’t capture all of the school system’s non-certified staff. This was an important point for School Board Member Jim Martin who said the whole salary schedule for non-certified staff needs adjustment.

“If this is a budget issue, we should seriously talk about this because our employees shouldn’t be any different than county employees,” Martin said. “There’s about 8,000 non-certified in all, so only 4,300 are eligible.”

Other members agreed, suggesting the board needs to evaluate its hourly rates based on market indicators. Member Bill Fletcher said one thing to consider is what the average monthly rent is on an apartment and whether the hourly wages are enough to afford that.

Board Chairman Tom Benton said that almost 50% of non-certified staff earn less than \$15 per hour. Neter confirmed this and added that starting hourly pay for a teaching assistant is \$11.87, bus drivers earn \$12.55, custodians are paid \$11.75, and an entry-level accountant makes \$13.91.

Join us at World Cafe

WakeEd's World Cafe is an annual event that matches businesses with school teachers to collaborate on creating engaging, real-world lessons for students. This "time and talent" event is a great chance for businesses to have a lasting impact on classroom instruction.

World Cafe will be held on Wednesday, Jan. 11, 7-30 a.m. to noon. If you are a business leader who would like to participate, please contact Teresa Pierrie at tpierrie@wakeed.org.



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