

Connections



Teacher Sarah Rodgers, right, helps second-graders with handwriting at Fuller Elementary in Raleigh.

File photo

Public School Forum prepares for next decade of change

Ten years after being created to help strengthen education, the Public School Forum of North Carolina continues to work for reforms in school classrooms across North Carolina.

By TODD COHEN

Raleigh

To help explain the challenges facing American education, John Dornan likes to cite a finding from a study funded several years ago by the Ford Foundation. People with different levels of education were given the same test: Open a crate containing a brand new video cassette recorder, connect the device to a television and program it to record a TV show at a given time.

The people who fared worst in the test were those with graduate degrees. Those who did best were children under 12 years old, followed by high school dropouts.

"We're one of the few countries that don't offer courses in technical reading and writing," says Dornan, president of the Raleigh-based Public School Forum of

North Carolina. "We don't teach people to apply things. Our schools tend to prepare students to go to college, not to go to work."

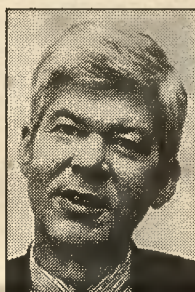
Yet in an increasingly global and competitive economy, says Dornan, the key to successfully preparing students to function in the real world is teaching them to apply the knowledge they acquire in the classroom.

A decade into the so-called "school reform movement" that ushered in a host of initiatives and gave birth to the Public School Forum, U.S. school still are struggling with how to prepare students to compete in the real world.

The Public School Forum, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary this month, was created to bring together groups concerned about education and to find ways to improve the state's schools.

The nonprofit is supported by foundations, corporations and government research contracts. Studies it has conducted have helped spawn a number of statewide initiatives, including a teaching

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JOHN DORNAN
president, Public School Forum of North Carolina

Leveling the field

Women confront lower pay

A recent N.C. Equity conference brought together women from throughout North Carolina to discuss achieving pay equity in the workplace.

By SUSAN GRAY

While women are entering the workforce in droves, they remain far behind working men in salary and status.

That was the topic of a recent all-day conference in Raleigh hosted by N.C. Equity.

More than 100 women from throughout North Carolina attended "Building Equity: an Economic Summit" at Meredith College on March 17.

N.C. Equity, a nonprofit policy and advocacy group for women and families, invited participants from small nonprofit groups and large government agencies, as well as storefront shops and major corporations, to brainstorm for a day about achieving greater pay equity on the job.

According to statistics cited by speakers at the conference, women make up 47 percent of North Carolina's workforce. But, according to 1990 Census figures, half of all employed white women in the state make less than \$10,700 a year.

Half of all employed African-American women are paid less than \$8,000. And Latino and Native-American women are paid even less than that, although specific figures weren't available.

"Why do we see the work of women who are at the core of life - really our keepers of the world - why do we see their acts and much of women's work as contemptible?" asked Gloria Scott, president of Bennett College, an historically black women's college in Greensboro.

Her question is echoed in studies that show women tend to be clustered in low-paying jobs.

According to N.C. Equity, three-fourths of the job categories in North Carolina are filled almost entirely -



Jane Smith Patterson and Gov. Jim Hunt spoke at the N.C. Equity conference.

95 percent - either by men or by women. And the predominantly female fields such as clerical work or child care pay significantly less than do predominantly male fields such as science and technology.

"Unfortunately, a lot has stayed the same," said Jane. Smith Patterson, Gov. Jim Hunt's adviser for policy, budget and technology. "Women are still earning less than men and the job of balancing career and family lands mostly on women."

"The message I want to give you is, we can change it. I don't care how tough it is. In North Carolina, we can change it."

Conference participants didn't come up with simple solutions to the problem of pay equity, but they worked on short- and long-term goals in workshop sessions throughout the day.

Topics included getting ahead in non-traditional and traditional jobs; creating business opportunities; building economic security, and balancing family responsibilities.

Goals included creating more mentoring partnerships between professional women and female students; organizing petitions to government leaders; using the media to broadcast women's achievements, and informing women about job opportunities.

N.C. Equity will issue a full report of conference conclusions and goals this month.

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Eyeing the charitable dollar

Poll finds public skeptical of nonprofits

Many North Carolinians lack confidence in nonprofits, the latest Carolina Poll has found. An advocate for nonprofits says organizations must better educate people about what they do.

By TODD COHEN

North Carolinians are slightly more likely than other Americans to give their time or money to charity, but people in the state also are highly wary of the use to which their charitable dollars are put.

Those are among the results of a survey of Tar Heel giving and volunteerism conducted by the Carolina Poll at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The survey, commissioned by the North Carolina Center for Nonprofits in Raleigh, finds that one of every

two people responding to the survey - or 50 percent - worked as a volunteer in the previous 12 months. That compares with 48 percent of all Americans who told the Gallup Poll recently they had worked as volunteers.

The Carolina Poll also finds that 79 percent of those responding made a voluntary contribution of money, property or other items to charity. That compares with 73 percent of all Americans, according to the Gallup Poll, which was commissioned by Independent Sector, the national coalition of nonprofits in Washington.

But the conclusion that North Carolinians are more charitable than Americans overall may not be as significant as it seems. The Carolina Poll, which consisted of phone interviews of 619 adults, has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percent.

RESEARCH

That means that if all adults with phones in the state had been surveyed, the findings could have differed from the poll's results by as much as four percentage points in either direction.

Making any comparison between the state and national surveys even more imprecise, the Gallup Poll had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent.

The survey was conducted between Feb. 26 and March 3 by the School of Journalism and Mass Communication and by the Institute for Research in Social Science, both at UNC-CH.

Another finding is that nearly four of every 10 people responding lack confidence that their donations to nonprofits "are put to proper use."

More than four in 10 are "somewhat confident," and more than one in 10 are "very confident" about the uses of those funds.

Leslie Takahashi, program director for the N.C. Center, says that nonprofits can gain public trust by publicizing the work they do.

"Our feeling is that the more people know about what nonprofits do with their funds, the more confidence they will have," she says.

Takahashi suggests that nonprofits give regular updates to all supporters about how their money is being used. She also suggests that nonprofits do a better job of educating the media about the work they do.

"The obstacle is that their story is competing with every other story that's out there," Takahashi says. "That's no reason not to build rela-

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