

N.C. Officials Back 17 Charter Schools

By ALEX KAPLUN
Staff Writer

North Carolina education officials recently approved 17 new charter school applications, providing N.C. public school students with additional alternatives to traditional public education.

The N.C. State Board of Education approved the new schools on Thursday, increasing the total number to 97 in the state. North Carolina is now only three schools short of the maximum allowed by a 1996 state law.

Only one of the new schools is located within the Triangle area. Most are located in rural N.C. counties that have had few charter schools until now.

All but one will be open for the 2000-01 school year. The other school, Arts-Based Elementary, will open in fall 2001.

Richard Clontz, N. C. Charter School Office consultant, said the new schools would be at capacity at 2,650 students.

He said there were already 12,691 students enrolled in charter schools but that number would likely increase.

Clontz said he expected around 17,000 students in charter schools by the beginning of the next school year.

Charter schools are financed through public money but run by private, non-profit corporations. This gives schools more flexibility over both the administrative process and the curriculum.

But the state could revoke a school's charter if a state evaluation determined that it failed to meet its stated goals.

State Board of Education member Kathy Taft said charter schools were created to give both parents and students an alternative for their education.

"The purpose of charter schools is to

give parents a choice and to let them be free of some of the rules and regulations of traditional public school," Taft said.

Taft said it was too late to approve three additional charter schools for next year, and it was too early to tell if the law would be changed to allow for more than 100 charter schools. "There has been some talk of adding more charter schools, but we first like to see what's working and what's not," she said.

Taft said the charter school system had existed in North Carolina for only three years so it was too early to tell if the system was a success.

But founders of some charter schools have seen the schools as an opportunity to provide an alternative type of education to students.

Patsy Sheppard, Tar Heel Charter School Board of Trustees member, said schools officials wanted their students to learn in a smaller environment.

Sheppard said officials in Bladen County, where the new school would be located, were moving to a system of large, centralized high schools.

She said the charter school was a response to the consolidation. "We want to put smaller schools in the community," Sheppard said.

Similarly, Elaine McCollum, head mistress at Bethany Community Middle School said children needed to be taught in a small environment.

McCollum said children needed to feel a sense of family and a sense of being a part of a community in their education.

"The benefit of small school schooling is you have more of a family atmosphere."

The State & National Editor can be reached at stntdesk@unc.edu.



Top Stories From the State, Nation and World

IN THE NEWS

Hillary Clinton to Run For U.S. Senate in N.Y.

PURCHASE, N.Y. - With the president beside her and 2,000 supporters chanting her name, Hillary Rodham Clinton formally launched her campaign Sunday to be U.S. senator from New York, a state she has lived in for only a month.

The race for the seat being vacated by fellow Democrat Daniel Patrick Moynihan is likely to pit Clinton against New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in what could be one of the most flamboyant political campaigns in memory.

No other first lady has ever run for public office.

"I am honored today to announce my candidacy for the U.S. Senate from New York," Clinton said as shouts of "Hillary! Hillary!" rang through a university gymnasium not far from her new home in the suburbs north of New York City.

"I may be new to the neighborhood, but I'm not new to your concerns," she said, while President Clinton, her mother, Dorothy, and daughter, Chelsea, sat beaming behind her.

Clinton Gets Criticism For Cigarette Tax Hike

RALEIGH - Sen. John Edwards

called the Clinton administration's plan to raise the excise tax on cigarettes and to fine tobacco companies for teen smoking "a two-bit bad idea."

"I strongly support efforts to reduce teen smoking, but piling additional taxes on the backs of North Carolina farmers and workers is not the right way to help our young people," Edwards, D-N.C., told leaf growers Friday at the annual meeting of the Tobacco Growers Association of North Carolina in Raleigh.

He pledged to fight the proposed pack tax increase.

"I don't need to tell you what a bad idea this tax is," Edwards told the tobacco farmers. "I've fought it every time it comes up, and I will fight it again."

The plan calls for raising the federal

excise tax on cigarettes by 25 cents a pack and fining cigarette makers \$3,000 each year for each underage smoker if youth smoking is not cut in half by 2004.

The penalty could cost the industry an estimated \$6.5 billion in 2004.

9 Passengers Released After Airliner Hijacking

MOSCOW - The Afghan passenger airliner forced by hijackers on a tense journey across Central Asia and Europe left Moscow early Monday after nine passengers were freed.

The plane's destination was not immediately known, but a spokesman for Russia's Federal Security Service said the hijackers had demanded European

flight maps before leaving.

There was no immediate indication of why the nine passengers were released, security service spokesman Alexander Zdanovich told reporters at Moscow's Sheremetyevo-1 airport. He said the hijackers had made no political demands. Similar releases took place at the plane's previous refueling stops in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

None of the people aboard the Boeing 727 belonging to Afghanistan's Ariana Airlines had been harmed, Zdanovich said, although it remained unclear how many people were aboard. Russian news reports said there were 131 passengers and nine crew before the release in Moscow, but other sources said there were as many as 160 aboard.

- Associated Press



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Dear Students:

As you may now be aware, there was a residence hall study lounge fire Tuesday morning at 12:45 am. With that in mind, we are again reminded of the important role that fire safety equipment, evacuation, and emergency procedures play in our daily lives.

Throughout this year there have been a number of concerns regarding fire safety and evacuation procedures in the residence halls. Most of you are cooperative, responsible, and follow all fire safety procedures, and we have been fortunate that these recent incidents have not resulted in personal injury.

I want to assure you that, through heightened hall security and other preventative measures, we are going to do our part in responding to this problem. We are also expecting you to take an active role. In fact, while the leading cause of fire is arson, the causes of many if not most fire alarms are accidental and preventable. More awareness of and caution regarding what cause an alarm would significantly improve the situation.

Note, however, that starting a fire, pulling a fire alarm without due cause, tampering with smoke detectors, falsely reporting a fire emergency to the police or fire department, and the unauthorized use or damage of any emergency or safety equipment, are considered serious violations.

We also think it is important to remind you, as a member of our community, of your individual obligations to be helpful during a crisis and/or emergency situation. While some alarms appear to be an inconvenience, these alarms serve an important purpose. In the event of a fire alarm, ALL residents and their guests must evacuate the building completely and immediately. North Carolina State Law prohibits interference with or non-compliance with emergency evacuation procedures. Your obligation is to quickly and efficiently evacuate the building whenever an alarm sounds, and wait for further instructions.

The Office of Public Safety will be issuing a citation to any or all students who do not evacuate a building when a fire alarm sounds, as identified by observation or random room checks after a fire alarm has sounded. This citation will result in a misdemeanor charge to your record and a monetary fine. We will also forward all names of those in violation to the Honor Court for campus disciplinary action.

Fire safety and prevention is of paramount importance in a residence hall living environment. Clearly, our safety in this community is at its best when all members understand their individual and collective roles.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sue Kitchen, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

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