

spotlight

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PUBLIC SCHOOL HIRING FRENZY *As Personnel Increases, So Does Bureaucracy*

S U M M A R Y : Neither enrollment increases nor federal and state mandates can account for the 19 percent increase in school personnel over the last eight years. The glut of public school personnel hiring is evident in counties that have a declining student population. Despite losing nearly 10,000 students in eight years, these school districts added 819 employees. This shows that school districts actively maintain their bureaucracy even as the amount of work declines.

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between 1998 and 2005, 36 North Carolina school districts lost nearly 10,000 students, but the number of school district employees increased by 819. How can the work performed decrease (number of students taught) but the number of workers increase (administrators, teachers, and other school district personnel)? This phenomenon is not unique to school districts. It is a general characteristic of all bureaucracies.

C. Northcote Parkinson noticed that from 1914 to 1928 the number of admiralty officials in the British Navy increased by 78.45%, while the number of ships decreased by 67.74%. This observation led him to coin Parkinson's Law, which states that work "expands as to fill the time available for its completion."¹ In other words, there is no inherent relationship between the amount of work that must be done and the size of the staff assigned to do the work. As senior administrators hire subordinate administrators, the administrative operation produces work for itself, usually in the form of added bureaucracy. In this way, the net rise in the number of school district officials has nothing to do with improving the education of students and has everything to do with the maintaining the school district bureaucracy.

School Personnel Growth Outpaces Statewide Enrollment Growth

In North Carolina, school districts are hiring more administrators, teachers, and other personnel than ever before. Last year, over \$8 billion of local, state, and federal funds were set aside for the salary and benefits of nearly 175,000 public school employees, an increase of nearly \$1 billion and 9,000 employees from just two years ago.²

The increase is not entirely a result of statewide school enrollment growth.

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Table 1. School Personnel Change Among Declining Enrollment in 36 School Districts, 1997-98 to 2004-05

School District	Enrollment Change	Admin. Change	Teacher Change	Other Personnel Change	Total Personnel Change
Anson County	-119	+6	+13	-16	+3
Ashe County	-112	+1	+13	+58	+72
Asheville City	-428	-3	+2	-9	-10
Avery County	-176	+1	+3	+34	+38
Beaufort County	-236	+5	+41	-52	-6
Bertie County	-460	+4	-27	-7	-30
Carteret County	-295	-5	+53	+69	+117
Caswell County	-236	-1	-9	+3	-7
Columbus County	-506	-2	-2	-50	-54
Craven County	-278	+11	+63	+68	+142
Edenton/Chowan	-117	0	+20	+23	+43
Edgecombe County	-204	+7	+8	+9	+24
Gates County	-13	+2	+28	+5	+35
Halifax County	-1187	0	-31	+6	-25
Hertford County	-686	+1	-27	-32	-58
Hyde County	-132	+2	+2	+18	+22
Jones County	-164	0	-2	+15	+13
Lenoir County	-375	-2	-27	+4	-25
Lexington City	-59	+3	+16	+41	+60
Martin County	-526	-3	-29	-32	-64
Mitchell County	-98	+2	+4	+70	+76
Mount Airy City	-141	-2	+12	-8	+2
Northampton County	-631	+1	-9	+6	-2
Pamlico County	-192	0	+13	+18	+31
Perquimans County	-212	+2	+3	+3	+8
Roanoke Rapids City	-190	+6	-12	-14	-20
Rutherford County	-115	+5	+40	+101	+146
Scotland County	-227	-4	+15	+29	+40
Stanly County	-167	+1	+92	-87	+6
Transylvania County	-196	+7	+1	+24	+32
Tyrrell County	-164	-2	-5	+6	-1
Warren County	-144	+2	+2	+17	+21
Washington County	-463	+10	-5	+94	+99
Watauga County	-267	-4	+39	+61	+96
Weldon City	-80	-1	+1	+10	+10
Whiteville City	-116	+2	+31	-48	-15
TOTALS	-9712	+52	+330	+437	+819

Over the past eight years, personnel increases have outpaced increases in student enrollment growth. Since the 1997-1998 school year, enrollment in North Carolina's public schools increased by 11 percent. During the same period, there has been a 19 percent increase in total school district personnel, bolstered by an 18 percent increase in administrators and an 18 percent increase in teachers.³

The increase is also not the product of federal or state mandates. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements were integrated into the state's existing accountability program, leaving much of the program's administrative burden at the state, not local, level. Furthermore, this increase in personnel began well before 2002, the year that Governor Ea-

sley mandated class size reductions in grades K-3. Thus, external reform measures played a negligible role in increasing school district personnel in North Carolina.

Declining Enrollment, Increasing Personnel

The glut of public school personnel hiring is evident in counties that have a declining student population. Out of 115 school districts statewide, 36 districts had a declining student enrollment over the last eight years (see Table 1). While these districts saw a six percent decrease in enrollment, as a group they increased the number of administrators by five percent, increased the number of teachers by three percent, and had a four percent increase in the total number of school district personnel.⁴

In all, 23 of the 36 school districts with declining enrollment had a net gain in personnel over the last eight years. Three school districts, Carteret, Craven, and Rutherford, added over 400 personnel positions despite losing 688 students between them. Carteret County Schools lost nearly 300 students over the last eight years, but still added 117 personnel. Craven County added 142 personnel, despite losing 278 students over the last eight years. Rutherford County Schools added 146 personnel over the last eight years, but lost only 115 students. Along with Rutherford, Gates County and Lexington City Schools each hired more personnel than students lost (see Table 1). In eight years, Gates County added 35 personnel and lost 13 students, while Lexington City added 60 personnel and lost 59 students.⁵

An excellent way to evaluate the performance of a school district is to assess how efficiently it provides educational services to a community. The number of administrators is a strong indicator of efficiency because declining student enrollment significantly decreases the administrative workload for these school districts. In total, the 36 school districts with declining enrollment added 52 administration positions, despite losing nearly 10,000 students. During an eight-year period, only 11 of the 36 school districts eliminated any administrative positions. Furthermore, no single school district eliminated more than five administrative positions. Thus, as a group, these school districts have become less efficient over the last eight years, which is a disservice to the taxpayers in these communities.

Declining Enrollment Should Mean Less Personnel

Four of the declining enrollment school districts added a small number of personnel over the last eight years, most of them teachers. Anson County added three positions, Mount Airy City added two positions, Perquimans County added eight positions, and Stanly County added six positions. Although each of these school districts lost over 100 students over an eight-year period, none of these counties hired an egregious number of personnel (see Table 1). These hires were likely the result of small-scale initiatives or class-size reduction efforts. Nevertheless, they can do better.

Two school districts did an admirable job of eliminating personnel during a period of declining student enrollment. Columbus and Martin Counties cut personnel in all three of the personnel categories (administrators, teachers, and other personnel) over the last eight years. In fact, these two counties account for over one-third of all personnel cuts within the group of declining enrollment school districts (see Table 1).

Conclusion: Control the Bureaucracy by Having Funds Follow the Student

The Department of Public Instruction, which funds the vast majority of public school personnel, uses allotment formulas to allocate funds to school districts for administrators, teachers, and support personnel. Although the formulas are designed to maintain a consistent ratio of students per teacher and students per administrator, school districts typically hire additional administrators and teachers using local funds, grants, or funds from state and federal programs.

Few school districts will voluntarily reduce their bureaucratic organization. For this reason, the best way to reign in school districts is to attach funding to the student, not the school district. In this way, schools would receive funds necessary to educate each child and nothing more. Furthermore, the Department of Public Instruction should be required to issue detailed personnel reports on the North Carolina School Report Cards website. This would allow local parents and taxpayers to hold school districts administrators accountable for district hiring and personnel spending.

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Notes

1. C. Northcote Parkinson, *Parkinson's Law or the Pursuit of Progress* (London: John Murray, 1957): pp. 4-15.
2. Department of Public Instruction (DPI), "Statistical Profile 2003," p. 29; DPI, "Statistical Profile 2004," p. 44; DPI, "Statistical Profile 2005," p. 29; and DPI, Financial and Business Services, "2004-05 Selected Financial Data," p. 4.
3. Another way to look at the increase of school personnel is to compare the ratio of personnel to students. During the 1997-98 school year, there was one administrator for every 220.0 students, one teacher for every 15.7 students, and one school district employee for every 8.2 students. During the 2004-05 school year, there was one administrator for every 206.7 students, one teacher for every 14.7 students, and one employee for every 7.6 students.
4. The ratio of school personnel to students reflects this trend. During the 1997-98 school year, the 36 districts with declining enrollment had one administrator for every 167.7 students, one teacher for every 14.8 students, and one public school employee for every 7.6 students. By 2004-05, the ratios had dropped significantly. The school districts had one administrator for every 149.7 students, one teacher for every 13.5 students, and one employee for every 6.9 students. Despite losing almost 10,000 students, these school districts added over 800 personnel.
5. *Op.cit.* at note 2.
6. For current allotment formulas, see Department of Public Instruction, Financial and Business Services, "Highlights of the North Carolina Public School Budget," February 2006, pp. 7-8.
7. See <http://www.ncreportcards.org/src>