



# LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER

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**Wake School Board Changes Guards:** Democrats regained control this week of the Wake County Board of Education, quickly installing former Chair Kevin Hill to replace lame-duck GOP Chair Ron Margiotta. The Democratic majority also voted to oust Republican Vice Chair John Tedesco in favor of incumbent member Keith Sutton.

The leadership changes followed similar moves made by incoming GOP leaders in 2009. They departed from previous boards' procedure of waiting until June after fall elections to elect new leaders and instead acted immediately. Margiotta, who lost re-election in October, was replaced Tuesday, but the outspoken Tedesco could have remained in his post.

Hill said the board's move on the vice chairmanship mirrors the way many North Carolina school boards elect both officers at the same time after elections. Tedesco said the action was the same as the GOP's 2009 takeover, for which they caught Democratic flak for not seeking consensus.

While largely ceremonial, the swearing in of a new panel and leaders represented a major sea change. New members discussed focusing on improving education for Wake's 146,000 students, listening to the families and trying to go beyond the 5-4 votes on major issues that took place over the past two years, including a contentious school bussing issue that garnered national attention. "If this board comes together with the common denominator of all children, all schools, we'll continue to have a very successful 16th largest school district in the nation," said Hill, a retired Wake teacher and principal and now a professor at N.C. State University.

**Calendar Days Update:** The State Board of Education recently delayed action on requests by local school districts to opt out of the new law requiring an additional five instructional days to the school calendar. State board leaders say they support the longer 185-day school year mandated by the legislature. But it will be tough to implement given limits on start and end dates that are written into state law.

Increasing the school year from 180 days to 185 days also will add costs to tight transportation budgets. Chair Bill Harrison said he will appeal to lawmakers to make adjustments that would ease the impact on local districts. "I believe wholeheartedly in the 185 days; that doesn't change," said Harrison, who earlier this week indicated the board should deny the local districts' requests for waivers. Of the state's 115 school districts, 69 requested full or partial waivers, as did four charter schools.

Meantime, it appears that GOP legislative leaders may be at odds over the law. Speaking at a town hall meeting Monday in Matthews, House Speaker Thom Tillis said lawmakers are likely to revoke the change passed earlier this year that would lengthen the school year to 185 days. "My guess is that will likely come off the books next year," Tillis said. "I'd put the odds at 70 percent or 80 percent."

But Sen. Jerry Tillman, R-Randolph, and a Senate education budget writer, said he wants to keep in place the five days and that he suspects other Republican senators do as well. School districts have complained the extended classroom calendar would require higher costs for school bus fuel and classroom utilities. Tillman said the state budget projected higher bus fuel costs than currently required, so there should be some savings to pay for extra days. He said more instructional days are needed to narrow the gap with school systems overseas, according to The Charlotte Observer.

**State School Board Superintendent Race:** Republican David Scholl of Union County announced Tuesday he's running for state Superintendent of Public Instruction. Scholl, a member of the Union County school board since 2008, said more control over education should be returned to local school systems.

"One size does not fit all, and our State Department of Instruction needs to acknowledge this," Scholl said in a written statement. "It must adjust its vision to encourage innovative school systems and principals to lead their schools, based on the needs of their students and community."

Scholl heads up Vista Ridge Business Services, which advises small businesses in using technology. He has a bachelor's degree in finance from Miami University and a master's degree in instructional technology from East Carolina University. Democratic Reps. Rick Glazier of Fayetteville and Tricia Cotham of Charlotte have said they will run if Democratic incumbent June Atkinson decides not to seek reelection. Among Republicans, Wake County School Board member John Tedesco is considering running. Ray Martin, a teacher in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro School System, had previously announce his candidacy.

Meantime, Progress North Carolina, a liberal advocacy group, is taking aim at Democratic state schools Superintendent Atkinson for what it claims is her silence on the issue of school budget cuts. For months, the group focused on GOP state lawmakers -- particularly House Speaker Thom Tillis -- for cutting education funding by \$400 million, cuts that led to teacher layoffs.

**More Legislators Leaving Posts:** Rep. Tim Spear, one of five House Democrats who voted for a GOP-penned state budget, is not seeking reelection, The Daily Advance reported Monday. Spear, who represents Chowan, Dare, Hyde and Washington counties, has decided to step down after his third term expires at the end of 2012, the newspaper reported. The 59-year-old former Washington County Clerk of Superior Court said he wanted to spend more time with his grandchildren and help his aging parents

Spear's home was drawn into the district of Republican Rep. Bill Cook in the latest round of redistricting approved by the General Assembly this summer. Nine-term Rep. Bill Owens, an Elizabeth City Democrat who also voted for the GOP budget, already announced he wouldn't run again in 2012

Meantime, at least three people are vying to replace Sen. Debbie Clary, R-Cleveland, when she steps down from her seat at the end of the month. They are former state Sen. Dennis Davis, outgoing Shelby Mayor Ted Alexander and former Cleveland County GOP Chairman Wes Westmoreland, who made an unsuccessful bid for the seat in 2006. Wayne King, the state's GOP vice chair, had said he was interested in being a senator. However, he announced on his web page and his Facebook page Monday that he would not seek the seat. King said he thinks the state GOP needs young leadership. "I think I can bring something to the table of the party," King said. He said no date has been set to select the replacement. It will be held sometime in January, King said. GOP executive committees from Cleveland and Rutherford counties will select Clary's replacement, according to M2M POLITICS.

**Quote of the Week:** *"The comment is: there is no comment."*

- Democratic Gov. Beverly Perdue, when asked to give a comment about last week's indictment of three figures connected to her 2008 campaign (The News & Observer, 12-6-11).



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