

President's Report
Dr. R. Scott Ralls
State Board of Community Colleges
Thursday, January 14, 2010

In the year I was born, 1964, Congress passed the Civil rights Act and approved the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The Beatles appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show, and the St. Louis Cardinals won the World Series. The North Carolina Community College System was one year old, and one of my predecessors, Bob Scott, was elected Lieutenant Governor.

Also in 1964, 79% of the jobs in the United States required only a high school degree or less. In fact, high school dropouts in the 1960s still had a 50-50 shot of making it to middle class.

But the world has changed greatly, and for too many underperforming students, brutally, in the past almost 50 years. In 2007, 59% of the workforce held jobs that required some college education, an amount that is expected to increase to 62% by 2018. By that year, it is expected that there will be 30 million new and replacement jobs in the United States that require some college education. It is also expected that the rate of job growth for Associates degree holders will be almost twice that of the average national job growth, an amount that will exceed even the growth rate for bachelor's degree holders.

It is for this reason that there is an economic urgency to Governor Perdue's statement to the Joint Boards of Education yesterday that, "Every kid – no matter where he or she lives in North Carolina – must graduate from high school with what it really takes to succeed in a career, in a two- or –four-year college or in technical training."

For those of you unable to attend the meeting and hear Governor Perdue's education priorities at the North Carolina Research Campus in Kannapolis, she said that we must make sure that all students are **ready** and ensure that they come to school healthy and can all read, write and do math by the end of grade three.

She said all students must be **set**, meaning that with the help of high standards and accountability, they will be prepared with a basic core of reading, writing, math and communication skills. To be set, she noted her optimism in the development of the National Common Core State Standards. North Carolina is one of 49 states that recently agreed to adopt these standards once they are fully developed.

Finally, she said all our students must **go**, meaning that not only must every student go onto a college or a rewarding career, but she said we also must "increase the number of students graduating from colleges, universities and community colleges to truly innovate and affect NC's economic future." She said they must be ready to "Go the distance" and must leave with a degree, certification or diploma. She said North Carolina must pay as much attention to graduation rates at higher education institutions as we do to those at our state's high schools.

The Governor's remarks not only provided affirmation to the work we have outlined through SuccessNC, our effort to develop new guiding goals focused on improved student success and completion, increased student access and enhanced program excellence, but her remarks also provided a strong dose of urgency to our work.

In fact, in a call I had with her last week, the Governor talked about the urgency with which she hopes to see the education sectors and respective boards addressing these issues over the next several months, and I assured her that the North Carolina Community College System had its sleeves rolled up and shoulder to the wheel.

While the Governor's education priorities add urgency and affirmation, the truth is we are already hard at work in so many ways. Remarkable efforts are being made to break down silos and to do things differently not only across colleges and programs within our System, but very importantly across the different sectors of education in our state.

In the breakout session in which I participated yesterday, I was gratified to hear a representative of a local school system comment that he already had noted that things are different because of the obvious deep discussions and partnerships that are taking place across the education sectors in North Carolina.

As the "seam" in seamless education, North Carolina Community Colleges have a particularly important role to play in the Governor's Career and College -- Ready, Set, Go! agenda in terms of both education and economic development. As leaders, it is crucial that we ensure that we, our colleges and our students are not only in the blocks for the race but are also fostering the momentum and fortitude it takes to make it across the finish line. Because in the North Carolina of today compared to the North Carolina when I was born, the economic consequences of not finishing the race are huge.