



# PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION Howard N. Lee, *Chairman*

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION June St. Clair Atkinson, Ed.D., *State Superintendent*

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February 3, 2009

The Honorable Marc Basnight  
President Pro Tempore  
North Carolina Senate  
16 W. Jones Street, Room 2007  
Raleigh, NC 27601-2808

The Honorable Joe Hackney  
Speaker of the House  
North Carolina House of Representatives  
16 W. Jones Street, Room 2304  
Raleigh, NC 27601-1096

Dear President Pro Tempore Basnight and Speaker Hackney:

In asking Cumberland County Schools' Superintendent Dr. Bill Harrison to serve as Chairman of the State Board of Education and Chief Executive Officer of Public Schools, Governor Perdue did what she thought was best for public education. Having worked with Dr. Harrison for over 20 years, I know that he has made and will continue to make significant contributions to public education in his new role.

He deserves a chance to make a difference; and I, with more than 30 years of dedicated service and experience in the education field, deserve a chance as well.

Twice I have stepped forward and offered my service and leadership, and twice I have been denied this opportunity. I attribute this denial to the current governance structure as outlined in legislation.

Every State Superintendent since 1995 has coped with the confusion caused by the current governance structure. It seems logical that an elected official would be able to select, organize, and run his or her state agency. You can rest assured that the over 2.1 million voters who voted for me think that I have the authority to run the Department. To think otherwise would discount the voter.

Prior to 1995, the State Superintendent had the authority to run the Department of Public Instruction. Now state law gives that authority to the State Board of Education "subject to the direction, control, and approval of the State Board of Education, it shall be the duty of the Superintendent to . . . organize and establish a Department of Public Instruction. . ."

The time for clarity is now and I am calling on the General Assembly to provide that clarity once and for all. Your action will have implications for other Council of State elected officials and how state agencies are run in North Carolina.

## OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT

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AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

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In re-examining this issue, I ask you to consider if a State Board of Education is needed, and if so, also consider how members of the State Board of Education are appointed, the duties and selection of the State Superintendent, and the role of the Governor.

The people of North Carolina need the General Assembly to address the governance issue in its entirety, not just in a piecemeal fashion. Now is the time to decide to restore authority to the State Superintendent, issue a constitutional referendum or to give Governor Bev Perdue total authority of education. North Carolina deserves your final decision.

Regardless of whether I have the authority to advocate for the Department or to actually run the agency, I will take pride and comfort in knowing that many of my colleagues in the Department of Public Instruction and in public schools across the state recognize that during my last term, I played a significant role in influencing efforts to make public education better.

No matter what happens, I can assure you that I will work collaboratively with Dr. Bill Harrison and Governor Bev Perdue to do what is right for North Carolina's 1.4 million public school students and approximately 190,000 full-time personnel.

Sincerely,



June St. Clair Atkinson

c: Governor Beverly Perdue  
Lt. Governor Walter Dalton  
General Assembly Members  
Dr. Bill Harrison  
State Board of Education Members