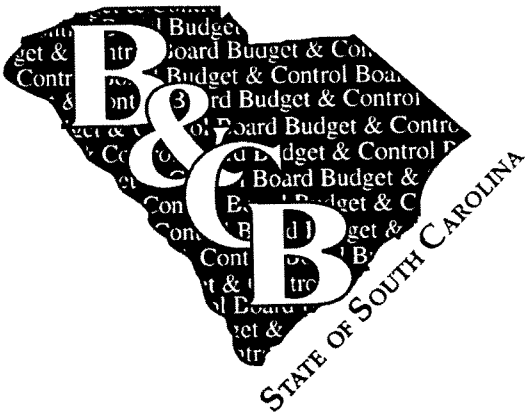
June 20, 2003

State Government News Summary



Prepared by the Budget and Control Board
Office of the Executive Director

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Story last updated at 7:15 a.m. Friday, June 20, 2003

Schools narrow racial, economic gaps in achievement

Report says 13 locally, 87 across state show improvement on standardized test

BY ALLISON L. BRUCE
Of The Post and Courier Staff

At Stono Park Elementary School in Charleston County, students are doing well on the state's standardized test regardless of race or poverty level.

For Marie Werner, who is not only the school's secretary but also the proud grandparent of children at the school, Stono Park's accomplishments are no surprise.

Stono Park is a small school, with about 350 children, that forms connections between teachers and students that last the entire time the child attends the school, she said.

"We have a real good rapport with parents in the neighborhood," she said. "We always have the welcome mat out."

The school stands out as one of 13 local schools and 87 schools across the state that have closed at least one student achievement gap in English or math on the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test, according to a report released Thursday.

At Stono Park, students do well on both the English and math portions of the test regardless of whether they are black or white or whether they qualify for free or reduced price lunch, a measure of poverty.

"We ought to be encouraged by these schools and learn from

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them," said Jo Anne Anderson, executive director of the S.C. Education Oversight Committee.

The committee set out to see how the state's schools were addressing the achievement gaps between black and white students and students who pay for lunch and those whose families have lower incomes. The result was the report released Thursday afternoon.

Race and poverty are closely intertwined in South Carolina.

There are about three white school children for every two black children in the state, but there are more than twice as many black children in poverty, according to S.C. Kids Count numbers used in the report. In 1999, the median family income of a black family in the state was $28,742,compared with $50,794 for a white family.

The report also says it's likely that the poverty of black students receiving free lunch is greater than that of white students receiving free lunch, and that family income also could be lower for black children who pay for lunch when compared with their white classmates.

This supposition could help explain why black children who pay for their lunch do about the same on PACT as their white counterparts who qualify for free and reduced price lunches.

A child's socioeconomic background can make a difference in the experiences they bring to school and the level of help they might need to catch up to their peers, said John Spagnolia, principal of Men-Riv Elementary School in Berkeley County.

"It's common sense if your parents have money at home where they can buy dictionaries and books and World Book encyclopedias ... (you're) going to be more prepared usually," he said.

But even parents who lack money for books can be involved in school and help their children learn, something that happens on a regular basis at Men-Riv, Spagnolia said. The school did well on the report, with its free and reduced price lunch students performing on the level in math and better than most students in the state for English on the PACT.

Spagnolia said an after-school tutoring program made a difference, as did scrutiny of test scores and other data to see which children needed help in which subjects.

While some schools made strides toward closing the gap, most schools across the state still had significant differences.

The study also looked at the gaps based on the report card rating a school earned based on its test scores. It found that gaps often were smaller in schools rated "below average" or "unsatisfactory," but for the wrong reasons.

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In those schools, the gap was less pronounced because all students scored lower on the tests.

"That's reducing the gap, but not the way we want to reduce the gap," said David Potter, director of research for the Education Oversight Committee.

On the flip side, the gap was wider in schools rated "excellent" when looking at students who scored at least "proficient." That gap was also a concern, because it showed that certain groups of students were doing extremely well, which often masks other groups of students who aren't performing as well on the tests when looking at overall data.

Rollings Middle School of the Arts in Dorchester District 2 not only received an "excellent" rating, but it also had its black and free and reduced lunch students doing as well or better than most students in the state.

Though a magnet school, the middle school does not have testing or academic requirements for admission, said Principal Brooks Moore. He credits the students' success to determined teachers and to incorporating the arts across all subject areas.

"We're very proud that we're not only meeting the needs of the average and above student, but also meeting the needs of those students that have to strive a little bit harder to reach their fullest potential academically," Moore said.

The arts serve as a catalyst to motivate students to do well in school and help students to learn in different ways, he said. The report shows the results of all of those efforts.

"It sends a message that we are meeting the needs of all students, and that's what a school is supposed to do," Moore said.

As Werner noted with Stono Park, attitude makes a difference.

Though the schools highlighted in the study were similar to other schools across the state, one difference did stand out, Potter said. Parents, teachers and students in the schools with the highest achievement and smallest gaps were much more satisfied with the relationship between the school and home than other South Carolina schools.

The report notes that parents and teachers see those schools as "welcoming and positive places with a strong focus on learning." That strong focus is for high levels of achievement from all students.

"These schools are showing that that same target is appropriate for all," Potter said.

State students show skill on reading scores

Posted Thursday, June 19, 2003 - 8:59 pm

By Cindy Landrum
EDUCATION WRITER
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South Carolina students made more progress in reading than American students did as a whole on a test educators call "the nation's report card."

e-mail this story

But they still performed below the national average on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, according to results released Thursday.

"People often use college entrance exam scores to compare South Carolina to other states, but NAEP provides a more accurate picture," said State Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum. "We're not where we want to be, but we're making steady progress."

But that progress is being threatened by continued state budget cuts, she said. Schools have been hit with five cuts since May 2001.

"You can't keep cutting academic programs and not hurt academic achievement," she said.

Scores for the state's fourth-graders on the reading portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress rose five points from four years ago. South Carolina eighth-graders improved three points.

The national increase over the same period was four points in the fourth grade and two points in the eighth.

"All schools have an emphasis in reading now more than ever before and our teaching techniques have improved," said Patricia Booker-Christy, principal at Berea Elementary.

Catherine Stoddard, a parent of three school-age children from Mauldin, said the reading results are encouraging because students "really cannot excel at any subject if they don't have good reading skills."

The test was taken by students in 43 states and six other jurisdictions in 2002.

According to Gannett News Service, the nation's fourth-graders improved their reading scores after years of flat performance.

Experts said the gains show that a nationwide push to improve the literacy of young children is working.

But the results also showed a decline in reading skills among high school seniors — echoing a pattern of weak performance by the nation's 12th-graders on several recent federal tests. Only 36 percent of seniors read at the proficient level in 2002, and more than one in four had below-basic reading skills. Proficient means students can understand and master challenging material.

There was no change in the performance of eighth-graders. And while black and Hispanic fourth-graders improved their test scores, students in these minority groups continue to trail their white peers across the grades.

Education Secretary Rod Paige described the results as "cause for both celebration and concern."

The fourth-grade improvements show that "all children — despite their economic status or racial or ethnic backgrounds — can indeed learn," he said in a written statement. But scores have not improved enough in the last decade, he said.

South Carolina fourth-graders scored the same or better than 21 states and jurisdictions, including Georgia, California, Florida, Tennessee and Texas. Eighth-graders scored the same or better than 17 states, including Florida and Georgia.

Other NAEP findings:

— Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches significantly improved their performance between 1998 and 2002. Forty-three percent of those fourth-graders scored basic or better, up from 35. In eighth-grade, that percentage went from 48 to 54.

— South Carolina fourth-grade white students' average score of 225 was 26 points higher than black fourth-graders. White eighth-graders had an average score of 268, 25 points higher than blacks.

— Girls scored higher than boys in both grades.

Cindy Landrum covers education and can be reached at 298-4303.

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heraldonline

Drinking? Driving? Beware: As of Aug. 19, state DUI law gets tougher

By Andrew Dys The Herald

(Published June 20, 2003)

YORK -- Surrounded by police and legislators who lauded him for signing a tougher drunken-driving law Thursday, Gov. Mark Sanford heard from one lady who waited until the after signing ceremony to offer her thanks.

Quietly, Belva Howard approached Sanford at the York County Sheriff's Office in memory of her late husband, Allan -- killed in April 2002 by a repeat drunken driver.

The new limit for blood-alcohol concentration drops from .10 to .08 effective Aug. 19 with the law that Sanford said, "Is about saving lives."

"Stupid is getting in your car when you have had too much to drink and endangering your life, or more importantly, somebody else's life," Sanford said.

"I don't want anybody to go through what me and my three children have gone through," Howard said. "My kids miss their daddy. That drunk driver took everything."

Some lawmakers and Mothers Against Drunk Driving had pushed for years to lower the limit, but it took a combination of lobbying plus the threat of losing $63 million in federal road maintenance money to push the new law through the General Assembly at the tail end of this year's session. Sanford's support of the lower limit was crucial to the Legislature finally acting, said MADD's Laura Hudson.

Donna Carter of MADD spoke for drunken-driving victims, calling Thurs-day "a victorious day."

Sanford said he picked York County for the signing because of the role played by several members of the county's legislative delegation to push through the lower limit. Five hundred ninety-one people died on South Carolina roads in 2001 in alcohol-related wrecks, Sanford said. South Caro-lina's drunken-driving fatality rate, at twice the national average, is the worst in the nation. Only a few states do not have .08 as the legal limit.

"When legislators are soft on DUI, we all pay for it," said Sen. Wes Hayes, R-Rock Hill. "We pay for it in health care and other costs. But most important, we pay for it in lives."

Sanford said he does not like the idea of the federal government bullying states to change laws by threatening to withhold money. But the new law, he said, makes South Carolina roads safer and will get the state much-needed cash for roads he described as "fairly deplorable."

Contact Andrew Dys at 329-4065 or adys@heraldonline.com.

What's next
The drunken-driving law signed Thursday by Gov. Mark Sanford lowers the legal blood-alcohol concentration limit in South Carolina from .10 to .08. The new law goes into effect Aug. 19.

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The State.com

Posted on Fri, Jun. 20, 2003

The State

New, lower DUI standard will make S.C. roads safer

SOUTH CAROLINA IS ABOUT to take a major step forward in our battle against drunken driving.

Beginning on Aug. 19, the blood-alcohol level at which we consider it unsafe for someone to get behind the wheel will drop from 0.10 percent to 0.08 percent. This is a remarkable step forward in a state that just three years ago was still telling jurors they should feel free to ignore blood-alcohol test results altogether and decide that the driver in question was able to hold his liquor and his steering wheel at the same time.

While reducing drunken driving is but one of many battles in the highway safety war, it's an important one: Drunken drivers are more responsible than any other group for our third-in-the-nation highway death rate, causing more than 10 percent of highway fatalities. We have the highest alcohol-death rate in the nation, and it's getting worse: The number of alcohol-related fatalities increased by 46 percent over the last three years, while the national average remained flat.

We wish it hadn't taken federal sticks to prod our General Assembly into taking this most rational step (we would have lost highway construction funds starting this fall had the state not lowered the standard), but we're glad that our more libertarian legislators were able to see past their anger over that point and agree to the change. As Gov. Mark Sanford said Thursday in signing the bill into law: "Personal freedom ends at the point where you start infringing on the freedom of others. Getting behind the wheel of a car after you've been drinking and then taking someone else's life is the ultimate infringement of personal freedom."

The biggest surprise in the Legislature's last-minute passage of this new law -- and one that turned out to be crucial for success -- was Senate President Pro Tem Glenn McConnell, a longtime critic of federal involvement in state laws and a skeptic of many highway safety bills, who shepherded the bill through the final tumultuous steps. Gov. Sanford also was crucial to the bill's passage, personally convening and refereeing the final negotiations.

The law will save lives, by reducing the number of dangerous drivers to whom the rest of us are exposed.

Federal laboratory research has shown that the ability to brake, steer, change lanes and use good judgment -- critical tasks nearly all of us could stand to improve even when sober -- drops by 60 percent to 70 percent when drivers reach a blood-alcohol level of 0.08 percent. Studies of actual highway results in states that have adopted the relatively new 0.08 laws have consistently shown reductions in alcohol-death rates.

The main reason such laws work -- the fact that most of us are law-abiding citizens -- is compounded by another psychological factor: Lowering the standard shakes up conventional wisdom; it changes people's attitudes about what, exactly, constitutes social drinking, and what crosses the line into dangerous territory.

In a few weeks, the line in South Carolina will be crossed when a 170-pound man drinks about four beers or a 135-pound woman drinks about three beers in an hour. There's a compounding effect that means that man can't drink four beers in one hour and four more the next and still expect to be a safe driver. Anyone who thought he could doesn't need to be on the road under our current law, but as the statistics show, plenty are. This new law might not affect them, but it'll affect most people who think about driving after drinking: Fewer will. And the rest of us will be safer.

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Growth a chance to show clout, Hispanics say

Posted Thursday, June 19, 2003 - 8:59 pm

By Jason Zacher
STAFF WRITER

Hispanics are now the largest minority group in America, and they remain a small but growing part of Greenville County and the state.

e-mail this story

Upstate Hispanics and demographic experts said the federal government's declaration Wednesday was proof of something they've believed for some time. Now comes the question of what Hispanics can do with their new-found status.

"It brings new challenges because we have a lot of things to do," said Juan Castellanos, 37, who owns Diria Tawi Painting in Simpsonville. "We don't have a lot of (educational) skills. We don't have all the benefits of schools and college."

According to the 2000 census, there were 14,300 Hispanics in the county and 95,076 Hispanics in the state.

Oscar Garcia, 27, who owns the Los Garcia Super Markets in Berea and Mauldin, said he was proud of the new designation, but said while small in numbers, Greenville's disparate Hispanic communities need to unite for more power.

"Right now, Latin is hot," he said. "Hopefully this will wake up South Carolina a little more and show that we have buying power."

Buying power that can eventually translate into political power here, he said. Rachel Mayo, an associate professor of public health at Clemson University, also said access to quality health care needs to be addressed.

In a state with limited resources, Castellanos and Garcia worry that South Carolina's need could escalate tensions between Hispanics who are seeking more services, and African-Americans who may see the Hispanics as a threat.

"There will be tensions because there's a change," Mayo said. She said the problems that affect Hispanics and blacks in South Carolina are universal to poverty, not unique to race or ethnicity.

USA TODAY reported that black civil rights groups were quick to emphasize common ground rather than differences.

"They keep trying to pit the African-American community against Hispanics when indeed we have a lot more in common than we have in disagreement," Hilary Shelton, who handles government affairs for the NAACP told the newspaper. "It's also disingenuous not to recognize that the Hispanic community is made up of very many different racial

groups. African-Americans are still the largest racial minority group in the country."

William Rodriguez, 38, an Easley resident who is VF Corp.'s transportation coordinator for Mexico, said he doesn't think there will be tension here. Greensboro, N.C.-based VF Corp. owns clothing brands like The North Face, Wrangler and JanSport.

"We're becoming more accepted in today's society and I think we're equal in many ways," he said. "Hispanics have proven that we're hard workers and loyal to our employers."

While the Hispanic population is growing quickly, it has a lot of ground to cover before it will be the largest minority in South Carolina.

According to the 2000 census, less than 5 percent of Greenville County residents were Hispanic, compared to 18 percent who were black. The gap is even wider statewide: Of the 4 million residents in South Carolina, less than 3 percent are Hispanic and nearly 30 percent are black.

Hispanics numbered 38.8 million as of July 2002. That was an increase of almost 10 percent, or 3.5 million, since April 2000, the Census Bureau estimated Wednesday. During the same period, the national population rose 2.5 percent, or 6.9 million people, to more than 288 million.

The term "Hispanic" is used to describe people from nearly two dozen countries, meaning many Hispanics don't see themselves as a single group. They see themselves as Mexican or Colombian or Honduran.

Mayo also said many of the new Hispanics in the Upstate are first-generation immigrants.

"This is the first, largest population of non-English speaking immigrants to ever come to this state," she said. "We're not adequately prepared."

In addition, many have not gone through the arduous process of becoming U.S. citizens, like Garcia did. Without that citizenship status, they can't vote.

It took Garcia five years to become a citizen.

"My parents are just residents," he said. "They don't want to take five years to go through the process, but if they'd started five years ago, they'd be citizens today."

Still, there is the allure of the American Dream.

"If there's an opening there, we'll do the best we can," Rodriguez said.

Jason Zacher can be reached at 298-4272.

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[redacted]

Fuel cells hold vast potential

Posted Thursday, June 19, 2003 - 10:04 pm

Research designation could deliver

jobs and investment for USC,

the Midlands and our entire state.

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The University of South Carolina's designation as a national center for fuel-cell research could be the state's most significant economic development acquisition since BMW. If this state does become the international center of expertise in an emerging technology that many scientists think could change the face of business, manufacturers will, inevitably, gravitate toward South Carolina and its wealth of expertise, infrastructure and supporting companies.

That would mean jobs and growth that could change the Midlands, if not the state.

For much of the past decade, South Carolina has gradually bought the concept that its economic future lies in developing a knowledge-based economy, where expertise in the sciences drives job creation.

The seemingly limitless potential of fuel-cell research is an example of why this state has a vested interest in supporting wider research efforts by its three research schools. Specifically, the state must find a way to build the proposed USC research campus and Clemson University's graduate school of automotive engineering in conjunction with a Greenville automotive research park.

Fuel-cell technology is not a new concept, but its commercial application is budding. Fuel cells use hydrogen to create electricity. The technology is already being used to power cellular towers. Eventually, it could be used to power everything from laptop computers to cars.

President Bush is convinced it could relieve some of our dependence on foreign oil, as fuel-cell technology could mark the end of the combustion engine. In his State of the Union address this year, he urged Congress to devote $1.2 billion in fuel-cell research "so that America can lead the world in developing clean, hydrogen-powered automobiles."

Of course, that science is years away. But it is an indication of this technology's promise.

USC, which has been researching fuel-cell technology for a decade, has been working with the prestigious National Science Foundation for the past few years on its fuel cell research center designation.

USC is the NSF's only Industry/University Cooperative Research Center on Fuel Cells

in the country. USC's 11 industrial partners, which include both American and offshore corporations, are all donating funds to the research effort. As the technology emerges, those companies may consider building here to take advantage of the academic and research talent this designation will attract.

Austin, Texas, home of the University of Texas, benefited from a similar research designation with semiconductors. Eventually, companies began moving to Austin to draw from the talent pool that had collected there around UT's research. It was a boon to the local economy, transforming Austin into an international leader in new and developing technology.

The same fate could await South Carolina.

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The State.com

Posted on Fri, Jun. 20, 2003

Attorney General rules lobbying group did not offer bribe

Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. - A lobbying group that fought to limit awards in many civil lawsuits will not face criminal charges stemming from bribery allegations, Attorney General Henry McMaster says.

Rep. Shirley Hinson, R-Goose Creek, accused South Carolina First of offering her campaign money in exchange for her support of a bill the alliance of business organizations was pushing.

The group apologized to Hinson for sending out postcard linking her to Bill Clinton, but denied it tried to bribe her to get her to change her mind.

Members of South Carolina First were not charged because they did not break a state law prohibiting offering or promising anything of value to a public official with the intent to influence the discharge of his or her responsibilities, McMaster said.

"It was not an offer of a personal gratuity, or a specific monetary contribution but one of political support, provided Hinson favored the legislation," McMaster said. "We believe the action in question would likely be deemed by the courts not to be a bribe, but rather a generalized offer to expend time, effort and resources through the political system to obtain a political goal."

The investigation was requested by the political watchdog group Common Cause. Director John Crangle at least wanted to see the issue put before a grand jury.

"I think you can make an argument it was attempted bribery," he said.

South Carolina First said the decision was vindication.

"My friends and I were accused of something and we were innocent," said Cam Crawford, the organization's executive director. "While we appreciate the fairness of the attorney general, we fully expected to be vindicated."

Hinson begged to differ.

"I certainly feel there was wrongdoing," she said. "However, I understand that it's not prosecutable because it would be hard to prove (what their intentions were). I think it's a broad interpretation of the law."

Information from: The Post And Courier

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Story last updated at 7:20 a.m. Friday, June 20, 2003

Sen. Knotts' wise second thoughts

We're glad Lexington Sen. Jake Knotts has reconsidered fighting a ticket for animal neglect for leaving his little dog Boom Boom in his car on a hot day in Columbia last week. Clearly the senator now understands better the dangers of letting an animal stay in a parked vehicle in the South Carolina heat.

Initially, Sen. Knotts not only challenged the length of time the police report said the dog was in the car but was upset with the citizens who had sounded the alarm. We don't doubt for a minute that the senator would never have knowingly placed his Maltese in the slightest amount of danger. He clearly believed that the time he was gone wasn't long enough to be of concern, particularly not with windows rolled partially down. Sad to say, that's what veterinarians hear all too often from grieving owners whose pets weren't as lucky as Boom Boom.

In announcing this week that he would pay his fine, the senator also said he would donate money to a local animal facility, according to an Associated Press report. He also was quoted as saying: "In reflection, I can see where a pet left in an automobile for any length of time should not be condoned." That comment was his greatest service to the cause of animal welfare.

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State bill would not affect school site choice

BY IAN LESLIE, *Special to The Packet*
Published Friday, June 20th, 2003

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The Beaufort County School District's search for a place to build a new north-county high school will not be affected by state legislation that would eliminate the state's minimum acreage requirements for school sites.

A bill waiting for Gov. Mark Sanford's signature would eliminate the state's minimum acreage requirements for school sites, now at 30 acres plus 1 acre for every 100 students for high schools.

But the state's school-siting law is only applicable when a county doesn't have its own regulations, Jim London, professor of city and regional planning for the Strom Thurmond Institute, said Wednesday.

Because Beaufort County's zoning regulations require that a high school be placed on a lot no smaller than 50 acres, the school district still would need to abide by local regulations despite the pending change in state law.

"I think what the legislation is saying is that if the locality like Beaufort County has a strong ordinance in place and they want to keep that, then the state government won't override the local regulations," London said. "Here is one case where the legislature seems to acknowledge that, in general, local land-use decisions should take precedent. Often legislation isn't sensitive to that."

He said state legislators changed the law because the site limitations were forcing school districts searching for adequate land to build schools in rural areas where infrastructure, development and sprawl soon followed.

"This (bill) is taking away a provision that encourages sprawl ... but at the same time not taking away home rule," London said.

County planning director Tony Criscitiello, who did not work for the county when the zoning ordinance was written, said the county's 50-acre minimum probably came from professional design standards or previous state standards.

Planners typically use nationally accepted design standards as a source when writing zoning ordinances, he said.

Criscitiello said he has not considered a change to the county standard because the potential change in state law came up so recently.

Skeet Von Harten, chairman of County Council's Land Management Committee, said Tuesday the county's acreage requirement for schools should be flexible.

"Each circumstance needs to be considered on its own merit," he said. "I don't think 50 acres set by me or anybody else should be a hard and fast thing."

Where a new high school will be built in the northern part of the county continues to resonate as a controversial topic in the area.

District and school board officials say they fully support a 70-acre site at Keans Neck Road and U.S. 21 for a new $28.7 million high school. The school will be paid for using money from a $120 million school-building bond referendum approved by county voters in 2000.

But a plan to build the school at the Keans Neck site was withdrawn by district officials last year after county staff expressed concern over a local zoning ordinance that prohibits building sewer treatment plants, like the one proposed to serve the school site, in rural areas for the purpose of new development.

However, school district officials say they plan to submit applications for the Keans Neck site in the next two weeks.

Island Packet staff writer Ashley Fletcher contributed to this report.

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The State.com

Posted on Fri, Jun. 20, 2003

The State

College admissions need continued benefit of affirmative action

By NINA BROOK
Associate Editor

AS EARLY AS Monday, the U.S. Supreme Court could determine what equal protection under the law means when it comes to college admissions. The issue at hand is race -- whether the University of Michigan discriminates against white applicants by awarding points toward admission to minority students. The outcome could determine the face of college student bodies for years to come. The worst possible outcome would be one that sets integration back by generations in our country.

On a more individual level, the case is about disappointment. The plaintiffs and their individual experiences have been widely chronicled in recent days. Jennifer Gratz, now 25, was the subject of an hour-long documentary on NBC this month. Her story is no doubt one that has played out in many homes. A successful, bright and involved high school student, Ms. Gratz had always dreamed of attending the University of Michigan's most prestigious campus at Ann Arbor. However, her experiences, grades and test scores taken together were not enough to make the cut. That surely was a disappointment. But what happened next is also troubling. Ms. Gratz told NBC her first reaction was to look at her father and say, "Can we sue them?"

The challenge is based solely on Ms. Gratz's argument that had all other factors about her been equal, and she were black, she would have been admitted to the college of her choice.

Ms. Gratz is likely right about that. However, there also are factors aside from race that could have helped her get into Michigan, including higher test scores. Other white students with lower GPAs than Ms. Gratz were admitted. Michigan's policies also give credit toward admission for nonacademic factors aside from race, including family members who attended the university, outstanding athletic ability or residence in the remote areas of Northern Michigan. And yet, when President Bush chose to weigh in on Ms. Gratz's behalf, he chastised Michigan for maintaining "a quota system that unfairly rewards or penalizes prospective students based solely on their race."

Race is the one admissions characteristic singled out for derision because it is the one that engenders the most fear and suspicion in our society. Unfortunately, a decision in favor of the plaintiffs will further such division.

Michigan and numerous other institutions in our society give some applicants some consideration based on race. And they should. It's been proven time and time again that this is the only way -- sadly, still -- to integrate some populations. A lot of us wish things had progressed farther on that front than they have by now; the worst thing would be to abandon a system that is responsible for some progress.

Georgia offers an example of what can happen when colleges are barred from using affirmative action in admissions. Two years ago, a federal appeals court barred the University of Georgia from using racial preferences in admissions. Recently, The Associated Press reported that black enrollment at UGA has fallen from 6.2 percent in 1988 to 5.5 percent in a state that is 29 percent black. UGA is spending more money now to recruit minorities, with less success. Experience shows that black applicants seek schools with a healthy percentage of black students enrolled -- the University of South Carolina being a prime

example. Sixteen percent of the students at USC are minorities.

Michigan admissions officials say this critical mass of minority students is important because no one wants to be the sole representative of his or her race all day, every day. It's also important for the exposure that it brings all college students, whatever their race, to diversity. One of the most troubling aspects of our K-12 education system these days is the way school populations have resegregated. If colleges begin to perpetuate this problem, it bodes ill for our ability to get along well in a fully integrated society.

Ms. Gratz and the other plaintiffs argue they were denied equal protection of the law -- denied a spot at Michigan because they are white. That has prompted outrage all the way to the Oval Office. But where is the outrage for equal protection for the minority children all around our country who are being denied an adequate, basic education to prepare them for college admission?

On an individual level, it is difficult to reconcile some of Ms. Gratz's actions. She was offered a spot on the waiting list for Michigan's Ann Arbor campus, but declined. She opted to study at the University of Michigan at Dearborn instead. She says she decided not to pursue her ambition to attend medical school after her self-confidence was shaken by Michigan's rebuff.

Does equal protection ensure each of us admission to the college of our choice on our own terms and timetable? Hardly. It certainly has not yet done what this provision was inserted in the Constitution to do in the first place -- ensure than black Americans enjoy the same benefits as the majority.

People sue for equal protection based on race because it's the one, hot-button characteristic they believe they can use to win. Let's hope they're wrong, or a half-century of hard-won progress in integrating our colleges and universities could be lost.

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Budget Cuts Paint Dreary Picture For State Arts Funding

By Mike Clements
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Amid an ongoing state fiscal crisis, arts agencies have fallen on hard times, with state lawmakers cutting arts funding more than 20 percent over the past two years and further cuts planned this year, according to the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA).

Officials in several states, including New Jersey, Arizona, Colorado, Oregon and Missouri, said they had even considered proposals to completely eliminate state funding for the arts, although in most states proposed and enacted cuts have been less severe.

"There is a national crisis in state budgets, and in some states the impact on state art agency funding has been devastating," said Jonathan Katz, chief of the NASAA in a statement.

State art funding, which was $447 million in fiscal year 2001, drop to $353.9 in fiscal year 2003, according to a NASAA study. And judging by the several dozen state budgets passed this spring, state art funding will be even less in fiscal year 2004.

The impact of this funding drop is sure to be far-reaching, because state arts agencies support 28,000 grants and programs in 5,600 communities across the nation, according to NASAA.

"Those groups hit the worst will be small-to mid-sized theater and art groups that are starting to move forward and create some momentum," said Anthony Radich, executive director of the Western States Arts Federation, a nonprofit arts organization in Denver, Colo., that serves artists and arts organizations.

"It will take them years to recover, "he said in a telephone interview.

One such small theater company is the Greeley Rodarte Dancers in Greeley, Colo., a group that performs Aztec, Spanish and Mexican dances. The group offers free dance instruction to financially disadvantaged children.

"It helps build their self-esteem," Ruby Jimenez, executive director of the group, told *Stateline.org*. "I hate to see the dance group go, but if we don't have funds to run it, the families don't have the money to keep it going. I don't think we would exist anymore."

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Ruby Jimenez, Greeley Rodarte Dancers

The dance group could lose up to $10,000, or half its budget, because of state budget cuts. The state legislature has reduced funding by 80 percent to the Colorado Council for the Arts, which is the state governing body that distributes money to groups such as the Greeley Rodarte Dancers.

The Colorado Council on the Arts took another hit recently when Gov. Bill Owens (D) ordered it to reduce overhead costs to $40,000 a year, said Renee Bovee, acting director of the agency in an interview.

"He was concerned that administrative costs were eating up too much of the $200,000 allocated to the state art council," Bovee told *Stateline.org*.

As a result of these cutbacks, the council is vacating its office space and will trim its staff from seven to two, she said. Staff reductions include the firing of long-time executive director Fran Holden, whose salary the council could no longer afford, Bovee said.

The cuts in Colorado constitute an extreme example of rollbacks of art funding in the country but the cuts are not unique in kind.

The Oregon Art Commission has seen its state funding suspended until the end of June. At that time, the Oregon legislature is supposed to restore some of the agency's money, albeit at a lower level, said Christine D'Arcy, executive director of the Oregon Art Commission. Come June, funding is expected to drop from $2.2 million to $1.7 million, D'Arcy said.

"We've cut to the bone," she said in an interview. To cope with an expect drop in funding, the organization will likely roll back grant money for arts organizations across the state, she said.

In New Jersey, Gov. James McGreevey (D) originally proposed to eliminate the state's Council on the Arts by cutting its entire $18 million budget to help close the state's $5 billion deficit.

Elimination now seems unlikely because state lawmakers are currently debating a Democratic budget proposal that would restore the Council's budget to $13 million, said Jeff Woodward, executive director of ArtPride New Jersey, an art-lobbying group that represents more than 200 art organizations across the state.

"We're not happy about the proposed cuts," Woodward told *Stateline.org*. "But we're also in a much better place than we were six months ago."

"We've cut to the bone."

Christine D'Arcy, Oregon Art Commission

In Arizona, Gov. Janet Napolitano (D) last Tuesday (6/17) signed a fiscal year 2004

budget that cuts state art funding to $1.8 million, a reduction of 24 percent since fiscal year 2002.

However, in a victory for the state art program, the governor restored the commission's $7 million endowment for the arts, which legislators had originally taken to fill budget holes, said Shelley Cohn, executive director for Arizona Commission on the Arts. The Commission receives much of its funding from interest generated by its endowment.

Earlier this year Missouri removed its arts council from general revenue funding, meaning the council will receive none of the $3.9 million it did last year, said Norree Boyd, executive director of the Missouri Arts Council. Just two years ago, the council received $5.3 million from the state, she said in an interview.

Despite these cuts, the arts council has not yet been forced to drastically cut its operations because it is partially funding by the Missouri Cultural Trust, an endowment for the arts funded by an income tax on non-resident athletes and entertainers, Boyd said.

The trust money could dry up within three years, however, because the state legislature is using the athlete and entertainer tax revenue to fund other state programs in an attempt to close the state's estimated $1 billion deficit, Boyd said.

Even though most states are scaling back their arts funding, the news is not all doom and gloom. At least one state, Tennessee, has even been able to raise its level of art funding for fiscal year 2004, despite statewide fiscal problems.

The Tennessee Arts Commission's overall budget will increase to $5.25 million, up nearly 17 percent from fiscal year 2003, said Fran Wilson, director of administration for the commission. This increase is possible because the commission relies on non-taxpayer funded revenue from the sale of specialty license plates, she said.

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