



**NORTH CAROLINA CENTER FOR
PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH INC.**

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

N.C. CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH WINS 2 NATIONAL AWARDS

The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research has won two prestigious national awards for high-quality policy research from the national Governmental Research Association (GRA). The Association is a group of 33 public policy organizations in 22 states.

Award for Outstanding Policy Achievement

The Center won the top award for Outstanding Policy Achievement, which goes to the policy group whose research leads to “tangible improvements in public policy.” The Center was honored for its three-year effort to improve North Carolina’s laws designed to prevent and reduce high school dropouts.

In June 2007, the Center released its research on high school dropouts, which analyzed ways to calculate dropout and graduation rates, reviewed dropout prevention programs, and recommended policies that the state should consider as it tackled this pressing state problem.

The tangible improvements in public policy resulting from this work include:

1. The N.C. Department of Public Instruction now uses a more accurate method of counting and reporting graduation and dropout rates, as the Center recommended.
2. The Center’s staff presented its research findings and recommendations to the Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation. That Commission voted to strongly recommend that the State Board of Education move all 115 local school districts to develop annual goals to reduce dropouts and improve graduation rates, as the Center recommended, and to establish a long-term goal of a statewide graduation rate of 90 percent by 2015.
3. The 2007 N.C. General Assembly appropriated \$7 million for dropout prevention grants and more than doubled that amount to \$15 million in 2008. Even in this year’s state budget crisis, the 2009 legislature appropriated \$13 million for dropout prevention grants. In its testimony to the Joint Legislative Commission, the Center recommended evaluation of these grants, and in February 2009, an evaluation of the 2007 dropout prevention grants was released.
4. In response to a Center recommendation that the state stop using lack of attendance as a catch-all reason for students dropping out of school, the N.C. Dept. of Public Instruction refined its codes to collect better data on the real reasons that students drop out of school.



5. In response to a Center recommendation that the legislature study the impact of raising the compulsory school attendance age from 16, the 2008 General Assembly passed legislation authorizing such a study.
6. The 2008 legislature appropriated \$985,000 for mentoring of minority males, a group that the Center identified as needing special attention because they are at higher risk of dropping out of high school.
7. Most importantly, the dropout rate in North Carolina has declined from 5.24 percent, or 23,550 students in 2006-07 to 4.97 percent, or 22,434 students in 2007-08. This means that there are 1,116 fewer dropouts already in North Carolina. Research by Professor Cecilia Rouse of Princeton University shows that each dropout costs the nation approximately \$260,000 over his or her lifetime. With 1,116 fewer dropouts in North Carolina, the state already is saving more than \$290 million.
8. At the same time, the graduation rate has improved each year since 2006, and in 2009 the rate increased to 71.7 percent.

Award for Most Distinguished Research

The N.C. Center also received the top award for Most Distinguished Research for its study of *The History of Mental Health Reform in North Carolina*. The criteria used by the GRA for this award are that the research must address a subject of critical national concern, be useful to other states, incorporate innovative research methods, and be groundbreaking in nature. The Center's 83-page report featured an in-depth look at the 200-year history of the mental health system in North Carolina – from Dorothea Dix's leadership in the asylum movement in the 1840s to the community-based treatment movement in the 1960s to the U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1999 to this state's reform efforts in 2001.

In 1999, the U.S. Supreme Court's *Olmstead* decision upheld the right of individuals to mental health treatment in the least restrictive setting possible. The Court in effect set community-based treatment as the national public policy for mental health service provision. This decision, coupled with the need for mental health services by citizens across the nation and the rising cost of providing these services, has made mental health reform a critical state issue. The GRA award said the Center's research is useful to other states because it provides an analytical framework for thinking about the systemic issues that all states are facing as they reform mental health.



The Center found that ongoing reports of abuse, neglect, and deaths of patients in state mental health facilities are indications that problems remain in answering four systemic questions that have undermined reform efforts again and again: (1) What should the division of state and local responsibilities be? (2) How do you define mental illness and for what services should the government provide and pay? (3) Is there a high-quality work force available to provide mental health services? and (4) How will the necessary services be paid for? The Center said these issues were central to reforms in the 19th and 20th centuries, and they remain crucial today.

Mebane Rash, the editor of the mental health report, says, "Going forward, reform that addresses these four questions will have to be a state priority both in times of financial prosperity and during economic downturns. And, mental health reform has to be a sustained effort – not just on the front burner when there is a newspaper exposé or when a leader is committed to raising the profile of the issue."

Last year, more than 1.2 million North Carolinians (13.8 percent of the state population) were in need of mental health, developmental disability, and substance abuse services. Yet only one third of those in need were being served by the system.

Rash and Center director Ran Coble accepted the awards on behalf of the Center. This is the fourth year in a row that the Center has won GRA awards. Last year, its work on legislation to prevent and reduce domestic violence won the top award for achieving changes in policy, and its research on community colleges won awards for distinguished research and effective education of the public.

About the Governmental Research Association

The national Governmental Research Association is composed of 33 policy organizations in 22 states. GRA organizations span the country – from the Center for Governmental Research in New York and the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation to the Washington State Research Council, Texas Taxpayers and Research Association, and Citizens Research Council in Michigan. The GRA holds a national conference each year that focuses on key policy issues facing state and local governments across the country. It also publishes a newsletter and gives national awards, selected by independent panels, for policy studies that educate the public and improve public policy at both the state and local levels. GRA organizations promote transparency in state and local budgets and provide information to citizens about the performance of government programs.

About the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research

The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit research corporation created in 1977 to evaluate state government programs and to study critical public policy issues facing North Carolina. The Center is supported in part by the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation in Winston-Salem, with additional support from nine other private foundations, 137 corporate contributors, and about 500 individual and organizational members. The Center publishes a journal called *North Carolina Insight*, a citizens' guide to the state legislature, and in-depth research reports such as recent studies on the rising aging population in North Carolina and fraud committed against the elderly. The Center also has conducted studies on ways to prevent domestic violence and on governance of the state's public universities, both of which won GRA awards in past years. Upcoming studies will examine additional key issues facing the state's aging population, more on mental health reform, and financial aid for students in public and private colleges and universities, as well as community colleges.

For more information, call Ran Coble, executive director of the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research, at (919) 832-2839, send a fax to (919) 832-2847, or visit the Center's Website at www.nccppr.org.