The 2014 Midterm Elections & Education Policy
By Chris Harrison

Midterms tend to lack the bombast of presidential elections. Campaigning tends to be slightly less obtrusive in our day-to-day lives, the pomp and circumstance that accompanies the presidential horserace is dampened and turn-out tends to be far lower. That said, midterm years are still important. Political power across the states shifts, the dynamics of the U.S. Congress change and pundits rush forward to declare the results a referendum on the policies of the existing administration.

2014 proved to be no exception, in North Carolina or in Washington, D.C. At the state level, North Carolina saw competitive races in both houses of the General Assembly. In the end – despite substantial protest in the state – results did not seem to indicate wide-spread repudiation of the agenda moved forward in recent years by the legislature or Governor Pat McCrory. The Republican majority strengthened its hold on the Senate, for example – if only slightly, gaining a single seat after the election. Democrats fared a little better in the House of Representatives, chipping away at the Republican’s majority by winning back 3 seats. In the end, however, the North Carolina GOP maintained the historic majority that it gained in 2010.

The election proved to be far more consequential at the national level. North Carolina’s own incumbent Democratic senator, Kay Hagan, lost her seat in a tight race to the former speaker of the North Carolina House of Representatives, Republican Thom Tillis.

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The Case for Employment Protections for LGBT Educators – by Bud Harrelson

Since the Stonewall riots catalyzed the gay liberation movement and the modern fight for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights in the U.S. in 1969, rights for LGBT people have expanded. Even though the rights of LGBT people are growing, equal employment opportunity laws still do not protect them federally. Since 1974, a bill to extend workplace protections to LGBT people has been introduced in each Congress; each time the bill fails to pass both houses of Congress. With Republican majorities in the House and the Senate, the likelihood of this changing soon is low. As LGBT Americans win the fight for marriage equality, the focus of the LGBT liberation movement, policymakers, and advocates must turn to equal employment opportunities for sexual minorities and gender non-conformists. This is especially true for school districts.

Research shows that LGBT employees experience discrimination and harassment at work on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. No evidence exists that LGBT employees perform any differently than their heterosexual counterparts but America’s heterosexist culture - an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship or community - allows these inequities to continue. Heterosexism not only affects LGBT employees’ workplace performance, but also negatively influences the health of LGBT individuals.

Formal policies that address heterosexism help create a supportive work environment for LGBT employees. The presence of LGBT inclusive nondiscrimination policies is directly associated with increased job satisfaction, reduced job anxiety, and increased commitment to the organization and lowered intentions to leave. I argue that once a school district adds sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression to its employee non-discrimination policy, we can expect increases in student achievement.

Just as the extension of workplace protections to LGBT employees benefits the organization - more productive existing LGBT employees, higher quality applicant pools, and improved reputation within the LGBT community – we should expect to see similar results when school districts add sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression to their employee nondiscrimination policies.

Research indicates that teacher job satisfaction is directly related to student achievement. As job satisfaction and teacher motivation among LGBT teachers increases, student achievement will also increase. Additionally, with improvements in mental and physical health, LGBT teacher absenteeism will decrease; thereby decreasing the impact the LGBT teacher’s absenteeism has on student achievement.

In addition to increased student achievement, extending employment protections to LGBT educators benefits schools, districts, and LGBT students in other ways. First, LGBT employment protections, through their association with teacher turnover, save money. When a teacher leaves the district, the costs of recruiting, hiring, and training a replacement teacher are significant. Second, LGBT employment protections improve the district and school’s reputation within the LGBT community, which may lead to increased family involvement. LGBT employment protections communicate to the broader community that LGBT people are welcome. As LGBT marriage and adoption rights grow, schools will be challenged to create cultures that actively engage families with same-sex parents. Providing workplace protections to their LGBT employees is a first step in this process.

The need for LGBT employment protections is critical within the public school system. With no federal legislation to protect LGBT employees in the foreseeable future, local districts are obligated to include sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression in their employee nondiscrimination policies. All students, educators, families, and schools will benefit from extending workplace protections to LGBT educators.

Bud Harrelson is a PhD student in education at UNC

“If money is inadequate to improve education, the residents of poor districts should at least have an equal opportunity to be disappointed by its failure.”

--- Coons, Clune, & Sugarman (1970) ---

**Is there an education policy or issue in NC that we should highlight? Please contact the newsletter editor, John Wachen, at jwachen@unc.edu. EdInsights is published triannually.
On the Importance of Building Relationships  

**Practitioner Voices**

*CEPSA asked Jason Jowers, the 2014 North Carolina Assistant Principal of the Year and the 2011 Durham Public Schools Teacher of the Year, to share with us his approach to teaching and leading.*

Throughout my eight years as an educator, there has been one constant that is essential to my success as a school leader: relationships. I wish that I could say that I am one of the best instructional leaders or managers of personnel. I wish that I could tell you that I am aware of all the latest trends in education, and that I am doing a masterful job of ensuring that teachers within my school are implementing these trends effectively. Unfortunately, that is just not the case.

Truthfully, while I consider myself to be good in the aforementioned areas, my greatest strength has always been my ability to build positive relationships. I believe that it is the responsibility of every educator to always enter the profession with a heart for their students. Educators must believe that it is possible for every student to succeed. Without this belief, it is impossible to build sustainable relationships that truly affect change. As an educator that has worked exclusively in high needs schools, I find that unless the students believe in you, and believe that you have their best interest at heart, no matter how skilled you are at administering curriculum, instruction, and best practices, you will never engage and motivate students to perform at their best.

As a teacher, building strong, healthy, and sustainable relationships with my students gave me the confidence that no matter what content or concept I needed my students to grasp, we would always get there together. Even if they didn't understand the importance of needing to know what I was teaching, they still performed at high levels so that they would not disappoint me. As a former Durham Public Schools Teacher of the Year, I can honestly say that many of the strategies and practices I presented to my students were borrowed from colleagues. However, the reason why I was often more effective in practice was due to my ability to build positive relationships.

As I reflect on the primary factors that contribute to my success as an educator, I recognize the importance of my ability to develop positive relationships with students and adults. Best practices change, policies and mandates come and go. But the importance of building healthy, sustainable relationships transcends whatever variables may impact the field. Where you find a great educator, you will find someone that has established strong, positive relationships.

I also share these sentiments from the perspective of an administrator. My goal as an administrator has always been to be more than someone that merely does books, buses, and discipline. I have extremely high expectations of my students and I expect nothing but their best effort in everything that they do. Therefore, it is critical that my team and I effectively articulate our expectations to students, and put systems in place whereby they can thrive.

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*Jason Jowers attended NC Central University where he majored in history with a concentration in secondary education. In 2011, Jason was named Durham Public Schools Teacher of the Year, becoming the youngest person to ever receive the award. In 2012, he was recognized as part of the inaugural class of the NCCU 40 under 40. In 2014, Jason was recognized as the North Carolina Assistant Principal of the Year. Jason is an Ed.D. student at UNC.*