



# *Declaration in Defense of North Carolina's Public Schoolchildren*

**July 4th, 2018**

**North Carolina Teacher Congress**

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for the people of a state to confront a legislative supermajority which has consistently demonstrated over the course of six years a hostility to the premise, the constitutional promise, and the provision of a high-quality public education for all, a decent respect to the citizens of that state requires a comprehensive list of the injustices which that supermajority has inflicted upon its children and its teacher corps, as well as coherent vision for restoring that state to its former prominence as a leader in the arena of public education.

We hold that the following truth is evident, moral, and pragmatic — that North Carolina students are guaranteed a sound basic education by the North Carolina Constitution, in Article IX, which states: “Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools, libraries, and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.” We further hold that the citizens of North Carolina have an economic stake to see that the children of the state are well-educated lest we fail to develop a workforce capable of sufficiently providing for themselves and fail to create new generations of citizens who can contribute to and advance our state, nation, and world.

North Carolina has a long history of vigorous, bipartisan support for public education. However, beginning in the spring of 2011, the leadership of the majority party, especially in the upper chamber, departed from this over century-long position and moved to underfund and stigmatize K-12 public education, crippling these long-cherished institutions while simultaneously bolstering unproven, experimental and frequently profit-driven replacements, many of which have had the effect of resegregating North Carolina's children.



We have attended town halls, and we have visited members of the General Assembly in their offices in Raleigh as well as in their home districts. We have marched in the streets by the tens of thousands. We have provided comprehensive and empirically irrefutable data to representatives and senators comparing the present to the era prior to the Great Recession, demonstrating not only the willful underfunding and understaffing of our schools but the devastating impacts on our state's classrooms.

We have relayed anecdote after anecdote about what we and our students confront in these abysmal conditions only to be contemptuously dismissed, or told to be patient, or to be told that "more money isn't the answer." We have been called "union thugs" and "whiners" with unconcealed contempt and frequent misogyny. We are consistently provided with disingenuous cherry-picking of data designed to place the General Assembly's recent policies in the most favorable light while, in turn, the ruling majority repeatedly refuses to examine and confront the broader context of the subpar conditions left in the wake of the Great Recession, conditions where our students are expected to become "career and college ready".

We hold that the following facts are incontrovertible when it comes to the actions taken and policies adopted by the General Assembly since 2011:

- They have taken significant steps to de-professionalize the teaching profession in North Carolina, including the revocation of career status, the termination of compensation for holding a relevant advanced degree, the termination of funding professional development, and have eliminated health care benefits for retirees beginning with teachers hired in 2021. All of these actions have not only damaged professional morale but have throttled the teacher pipeline — enrollment in NC Schools of Education is down 30% from 2010.
- They have cut over 7,400 teacher assistants relative to 2008 levels, exposing our children to less supportive and responsive environs than they were accustomed and for what is necessary for a high-functioning classroom, especially given the K-3 testing burden. Further, the elimination of teacher assistants has accelerated the burn-out of teachers in those critical early grades, resulting in even greater instability in those schools and communities.
- They have excessively relied upon poorly-constructed standardized tests and created a culture of fear and anxiety related to testing which undermines the immediate and long-term well-being of our children.
- They have enacted a "school report card" system where "success" and "failure" are more correlated to wealth and poverty than actual shortcomings in instructional quality. We leave it to the citizens of North Carolina to ascertain the motives for such actions.



- They have financed the creation of a bonus and promotion scheme based on inscrutable, non-transparent, “value-added” set of secretly held and constructed algorithms (Education Value-Added Assessment System) which precludes equitable and informed treatment for both teachers and students.
- They have shifted millions of dollars from support of traditional public schools to private schools. Ninety-three percent of voucher dollars go to sectarian, religious, private schools; many do not have a viable curriculum when compared to the public school in a clear breach of the separation of church and state. Schools funded by North Carolina taxpayer dollars via these “Opportunity Scholarships” or vouchers, have no requirement of state accreditation, have no defined curriculum, and have no defined qualifications to be a teacher.
- They have directed millions of dollars to exceptionally unaccountable brick and mortar charter schools and virtual charter schools, the latter having a particularly dismal track records of poor academic performance, but clear records of profit-seeking. The demographic attendance patterns of brick and mortar charter schools indicate the undeniable effect, if not the motive, of resegregating children in North Carolina on the basis of race and class.
- They have burdened local government with unfunded mandates for class-size reductions in early grades with no clear protection for art, music, physical education, technology, and foreign language teachers and classes, or regard for adequate and appropriate physical space for those smaller classes.
- They have advanced legislation lifting the cap on charter schools and allowing municipalities to finance charters with local property taxes, retreating from North Carolina’s historical accomplishments of being a leader in proactive integration.
- They have slashed textbook funding to the point where many of our classrooms cannot permit a student to take a book home, if there is presence of an outdated book in the classroom to begin with.
- They have devised schemes in the creation of education legislation and policy that lack transparency and have the effect of confusing the public, undermining deliberative processes, and silencing their opponents.
- They have failed to restore public education funding to pre-recession levels, despite a decade’s time passing, compelling county commissions across the state to either raise local taxes or allow educational services to degrade, both paths leading to a state of educational haves and have-nots, reinforcing destructive income inequality trends.



- They have eliminated the Teaching Fellows program, and replaced it with an emaciated version. In so doing, they have derailed a teacher development program with an excellent track record of creating high-quality teachers at a relatively low cost.
- They have reinforced and perpetuated student poverty through regressive tax schemes, failed to expand access to affordable health care such as that created by Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). When health care for children is undercut, their capacity to learn and thrive is dramatically diminished.
- They have cut corporate tax rates to an extent which cripples the General Assembly's capacity to adequately fund the traditional classroom — \$3.5 billion has been lost in annual revenue and that figure is poised to jump to \$4.4 billion beginning in 2019- despite business leaders' stated desire for increased funding for public schools.
- They have provided 5.3% fewer teachers per student compared to 2008.
- They have slashed per pupil spending to 39th in the nation, 12.2% below 2008 levels.
- They have held teacher salaries to 5.6% below 2008 levels, 37th in the nation and 16% behind the national average.
- They have consistently proposed and enacted salary schedules intended to stagnate or flat-line the salaries of our experienced teachers, indicating a clear lack of appreciation for the collected wisdom, knowledge, relationships, and community engagement of career educators. These salary schedules have been so structured by the legislative majority that many experienced teachers have felt compelled to leave the profession before full and duly earned retirement pension and health benefits may be collected by teachers. We leave it to the citizens of North Carolina to ascertain the motives for such actions.
- They have created salary schedules in North Carolina that compensate principals at a level worse than the other 49 states.
- They have created policies that, in their totality, have increased achievement gaps for low-income students and students of color dramatically since 2008.

In direct contrast to these harmful actions, the NC Teacher Congress offers the following restorative vision:

- ❑ A retreat from the aforementioned negative policies, and, at minimum per pupil funding levels, adjusted for inflation, commensurate with 2008.



- ❑ Salary restoration, adjusted for inflation, commensurate with 2008 levels, especially for teachers with 15 years or more experience. North Carolina should be on track to be at least at the national average for teacher pay if we are going to attract high-quality educators necessary for high quality education.
- ❑ Major education policies should be crafted and debated openly in committee settings and on the floor of representative legislative bodies. Policymakers must develop processes that allow consistent input from educators, agency personnel, and subject experts.
- ❑ Elected representatives must return to serious policymaking and a focus on removing poverty-related barriers to student success. All North Carolina children deserve the opportunity to learn from great teachers in clean, adequately-supplied classrooms. They all deserve to enter each school day healthy, free of hunger, and focused on learning, as a result of a supportive home life, or because adequate supports are in place to address afflictive childhood experiences and trauma.
- ❑ Assessment regimens should be developmentally appropriate, informed by best practices in terms of span and focus, and should authentically assess mastery. Assessment should inform future instruction rather than determine bonus pay for teachers and principals.

We, therefore, the assembled teachers of North Carolina's public schools, representing almost all 115 Local Education Authorities in North Carolina's one hundred counties, appeal to the voters and the lawmakers of North Carolina to reverse the course which was undertaken in the spring of 2011 in the arena of public education. We are Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians, Greens, and Independents, joined in a united front to restore greatness to our classrooms. We are committed to leading the General Assembly to this position or replacing individual Representatives and Senators with members who are committed to this restoration and advancement of public education in our state to a position of national prominence.

To accomplish this end, we hereby do call for the formation of a representative body of North Carolina Teachers, heretofore to be called the North Carolina Teacher Congress, to form with all deliberate speed. Once assembled, the North Carolina Teacher Congress will remind us how deliberative, representative, democratic discernment for the betterment of the general welfare can proceed, and will determine a course of action that will return us to the conditions to which we are accustomed - those that, when it comes to educational opportunity in our state, embrace the state motto: "Esse quam videri: To be rather than to seem."

We are mutually pledged to each other, the good citizens of North Carolina, and most importantly, to the children in our classrooms in this collective vision.

