



Declaration in Defense of North Carolina's Public Schoolchildren

July 4th, 2018

Drafted by Teachers on the Red4EdNC Advisory Board and Board of Directors

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for the people of a state to confront a legislative supermajority that has consistently demonstrated over the course of seven 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 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 public education. We take as our standard, North Carolina's proud motto: "*Esse quam videri* – To be rather than to seem."

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 tradition 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 addressed members of the General Assembly in their offices in Raleigh and 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 which demonstrate not only the willful underfunding of our schools but the resulting devastating impacts on our state's classrooms. Despite those actions, state lawmakers continue to enact policies which harm our teachers and students.

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 failed to restore public education funding to pre-recession levels, 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 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 classes or regard for adequate physical space for those smaller classes.

- They have cut over 7,400 teacher assistants relative to 2008 levels, resulting in less supportive and responsive classroom environments, especially given the K-3 testing burden.
- They have slashed textbook funding to the point where many of our students are forced to do without.
- They have increased the volume of standardized testing--especially among our elementary students where least developmentally appropriate--and fostered a culture of fear and anxiety related to assessments that adversely impacts students and teachers alike.
- They have provided [3.5% fewer teachers](#) per student [than in 2008](#), increasing class sizes to a degree that teachers struggle to provide students with an orderly environment for learning and individualized instruction.
- They have shifted millions of dollars from support of traditional public schools to private schools. Schools funded by North Carolina taxpayer dollars via these [“Opportunity Scholarships” or vouchers](#), do not require state accreditation, teaching qualifications, or regulated curriculum and may intertwine church and state at will.
- They have lifted the cap on charter schools and allowed municipalities to finance them with local property taxes, actions which have resulted in and will continue to worsen racial and economic segregation in our state.
- They have enacted a "school report card" system where measures correlate more to wealth and poverty than to instructional quality.
- They have created salary schedules in North Carolina that compensate principals [at a level worse than the other 49 states as of the spring of 2018](#).
- They have directed millions of dollars to unaccountable charter schools, many of them with dismal records of academic performance but clear records of profit-seeking. This action has resulted in the resegregation of North Carolina’s children on the basis of race and class.
- They have created policies that, in their totality, have increased achievement gaps for low-income students and students of color dramatically since 2008.
- They have eliminated the Teaching Fellows program, a program with an excellent track record of creating high-quality teachers at a relatively low cost, and then replaced it with an emaciated version.
- 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 advanced degrees, and elimination of retiree health care benefits beginning with teachers hired in 2021.
- They have financed the creation of an evaluation regimen based on secret algorithms (Education Value-Added Assessment System) that precludes equitable and informed treatment for both teachers and students.
- They have consistently enacted salary schedules which leave North Carolina far behind the national average in teacher compensation. Salaries of veteran teachers have stagnated to the point where many of our most experienced teachers have left the profession before full and duly earned retirement pension and health benefits may be collected, resulting in a ‘greening’ of our teaching corps which adversely impacts students.
- They have consistently placed major education policy initiatives in budget bills rather than moving them through a deliberative committee process, eliminating the debate and public input so essential to the creation of effective policy.

- They have drastically cut corporate tax rates, crippling the General Assembly’s capacity to adequately fund the traditional classroom — \$3.5 billion has been lost in annual revenue and that figure will increase to \$4.4 billion beginning in 2019--despite business leaders’ stated desire for increased funding for public schools.

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

- ❑ An increase in per-pupil funding, adjusted for inflation, to pre-recession levels.
- ❑ Salary restoration, adjusted for inflation, to 2008 levels, and a move toward compensation which encourages our most experienced teachers to stay in the profession.
- ❑ Cessation of tax practices which favor individuals over the collective good.
- ❑ Elected representatives must return to a focus on removing poverty-related barriers to student success. We must adopt policies which promote racial and economic integration rather than policies which have the effect of segregating along racial and economic lines.
- ❑ 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, either because 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.
- ❑ 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.

We, therefore, the assembled teachers of North Carolina’s public schools, representing almost all 115 Local Education Agencies in North Carolina’s 100 counties, appeal to the voters and the lawmakers of North Carolina to reverse the harmful course outlined above and restore our state to its former position as a national leader in public education.

To accomplish this end, we hereby call for a representative body of North Carolina Teachers to form with all deliberate speed. Once assembled, this North Carolina Teacher Congress 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, to the citizens of North Carolina, and most importantly, to the children in our classrooms and the future of our state.

