

Is there a Real Solution to the Problem with Teaching in NC?

The Real Problem with Teaching in North Carolina, Part III

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Red4EdNC

My parents used to “joke” that if I decided to major in education they wouldn’t pay for my college tuition. I took them seriously because my mother was a teacher and I saw up close the stressful nature of the job. I finally realized teaching was my calling, but only after I graduated and had to go back to school to change careers.

I almost decided not to be a teacher because it didn’t seem like a rational choice. Even though my mother was an inspired educator who loved her students, she sacrificed too much to meet both their needs and ours. After eleven years, my love for teaching students is stronger than ever. At the same time, I’m getting increasingly worried about the toll the job is taking on my family and myself.

My husband is also a teacher, so the chances that one of my children will feel called to the classroom is pretty high. Given how much I value and enjoy public education, this is something I should *hope* for...not fear. Will North Carolina start addressing teaching conditions more seriously, or will we perpetuate the family “joke” about not majoring in education?

[Part I](#) of this series focused on how North Carolina teachers are exploited by having to work too many extra hours without pay. [Part II](#) focused on how our evaluation process demoralizes teachers by sending the message that they are never doing enough. This last installment will identify top priorities for change and propose ways to increase teacher time, morale, compensation, and resources.

Time

- Hire more teachers, specialists, and assistants to decrease class sizes and provide more planning time for new teachers and teacher leaders. Students would benefit from more personal attention and increased time in special electives and enrichment/remediation programs.
- Add more optional workdays, especially at times when administrative tasks can eclipse lesson planning. When rolling out comprehensive changes to standards and curriculum, build in extra workdays for a few years to help with the transition.
- Start earlier so first semester ends before winter break. This would ease exam administration and transition to new classes on the block schedule. It would also help when there is inclement weather, helping protect workdays and professional development in the latter part of the year.

Morale

- Differentiate the evaluation instrument by grade level, discipline, and years of experience. The software could be set up to pull items for me that match: High School, Social Studies, 10-15 years experience.

Offer the chance to apply for a “teacher leader” status to provide a bonus and/or more planning time for taking on extra leadership roles.

- Stop moving assessment targets so that teachers never feel they’ve met the mark. Data should be used to identify goals, not to pressure teachers to conform to a magical formula for good test scores. Clarify the role of test data in evaluations so teachers feel free to take creative risks and capitalize on their strengths.
- Engage in more dialogue with administrators about [ways teachers can hold students accountable](#) for regulating their own behavior and success. Traditional consequences and incentives that no longer work need to be replaced with ones that do.

Compensation

- Restore or protect salary incentives for earning an advanced degree, National Board Certification, and longevity status. Traditional merit pay doesn’t work in an environment where collaboration is more valuable than competition and value is too difficult to quantify and compare. Teachers who put in an extra and long-term investment in our schools should be rewarded.
- Improve stipends for coaching, mentoring, and advising roles. For extra activities without stipends, allow teachers to accrue hours that could be converted into leave for optional workdays, medical/family emergencies, and retirement.
- Allow teachers to apply for summer or after-school employment for developing new instruction and initiatives for their school. This would address some of the unpaid overtime issue, incentivize more teachers to [take on leadership roles](#), and help schools make faster progress on improvement plans.

Resources

- Expand and integrate social, health, and academic services. Students cannot succeed academically if their needs are not being met, or if they are not in school. Teachers can expend a lot of energy with issues they are not best equipped to handle. For the early grades, bringing back teacher assistants is key.
- Invest in more administrators to help manage and lead the schools. They are even more overworked than teachers during the school year. This will benefit everyone who relies on their support.
- Make a meaningful commitment to technology in infrastructure, devices, and applications. This will mean less paperwork, more efficient communication between student and teacher, and more helpful data. Trying to teach for the 21st century with scarce or unreliable technology is a burden.

We deserve better pay, but we desperately need more time and resources to serve our students to the best of our ability without burning ourselves out. Our state needs to attract more inspired young educators who are willing and able to go the distance.

Public educators have little time for politics. But the nature of public education means that we have to convince the public that change is both *necessary* and *possible*.

There ARE real solutions to the problem with teaching in North Carolina. Progress will require the active involvement of invested educators and concerned citizens throughout the state. If you have made it all the way to the end of this article, I’m calling on you. Share your experiences with others, ask questions about proposed reforms, brainstorm ideas with teachers at your school, and help get out the vote in state/local elections.