



Are We Satisfied?

When Red4EdNC launched the “Wear Red for Public Ed on Wed.” movement, I hoped to one day call off the protest. With our legislative leaders boasting of passing the largest *single-year* teacher raise in history, it’s time to assess that aspiration.

To attract businesses, to keep property values consistently high, to raise the health and economic security of all North Carolinians, every NC community needs high quality public schools. We also want to avoid students and educators leaving public schools for charter and private schools. A two-tier school system will create a permanent underclass as well as sacrifice the promise of the American meritocracy (hard work pays, opportunity exists).

To have great schools, we must have great teachers. Last week 700 Wake County community members gathered - parents, elected officials, and area leaders. They selected teacher quality and retention as the most important priority of the school system, by a wide margin. Meanwhile, school systems statewide report record numbers of resignations and struggle to fill open positions.

To attract and keep the best teachers, school systems must offer competitive salaries, a challenging and supportive work environment, adequate resources, professional growth opportunities, and autonomy.

Now, with 21 years of teaching experience, I lost over \$9,180 dollars of expected income when salaries were frozen. Next year, my paycheck will be over \$3900 higher, thanks to the new state budget. But, I will lose about \$2000 of longevity pay. My net gain before taxes is about \$2000. These raises are created from non-recurring funds, which means next year, I might lose my raise and still not get a longevity check. So I could be in the red \$2000. Sounds like some elected officials are trying to get through an election year, and then there will be some very difficult choices to make.

NC teachers have a challenging work environment. Our students’ diversity entails ability, socio-economic status, ethnic background, and family support, among other concerns, and we must differentiate instruction to meet their needs. Public schools serve every student, not just those whose families have the transportation or funds to be there. Furthermore, the state legislature’s decision not to automatically increase funding with increased enrollment means hiring will likely take place last minute, making classes more crowded than necessary, more crowded than effective. Pre-K funding for low-income kids will not catch up to demand anytime soon, and we struggle to meet the annually growing documentation and assessment requirements.

Human and physical resources dwindle in NC public schools. Charlotte-Mecklenburg cut 90 teacher assistant positions. At my school, we lack textbooks for our history students, and the 10-year-old ones we do have are falling apart. I flipped my classroom (put all my lectures on YouTube) to help eliminate that shortage, but I can’t sustain that practice because my laptop’s operating system is too outdated to run the video software we cannot afford. Two grant proposals I wrote were turned down; the granting agency had fewer funds to disperse. For the first time in my 21-year career, I cannot progress in my instructional practices because I lack resources.



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Opportunities for professional growth have been all but eliminated: no pay raises for master's degrees or to pursue costly National Board Certification going forth, anemic professional development funds, even in "good" school systems, and minimal, if any, pay for mentoring new teachers.

As for autonomy, the courts have ruled that teachers who have tenure/career status (meaning they cannot be fired without due process) will retain it. But tenure has been eliminated for all teachers entering the profession. Retaining good teachers will be harder as they will lose their autonomy. Peter Greene's article, "It's Not the Firing, It's the Threatening," perfectly articulates this reasoning: "The threat of firing is the great 'Do this or else...' It takes all the powerful people a teacher must deal with and arms each one with a nuclear device. Give my child the lead in the school play, or else. Stop assigning homework to those kids, or else. Implement these bad practices, or else... The threat of firing coerces her into doing the job poorly." Great teachers don't like doing anything poorly.

Principals tell me that dismissing bad teachers in NC really isn't that hard. Keeping the great, smart, experienced, dynamic ones though? That's tricky. Terminating career status (tenure) only worsens that scenario.

So, is it time to call off the protest? I've weighed the variables, and I'm making another trip to the thrift store where everything is sorted by color. Guess which rack I'm heading to?

Please join me. Wear Red for Ed on Wed. Subscribe to the PSFNC newsletter, like us on Facebook, and be an advocate for change among your peers. And vote November 4th! The future of NC is at stake.

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