

## The Real Problem with Teaching in North Carolina, Part II

by Nancy Snipes Mosley

*Note: This is the second in a three-part series on teaching conditions. Part I looked the nature of teacher hours in North Carolina. Part III will consider solutions.*



The [North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards](#) manual begins, "For every student in North Carolina, a knowledgeable, skilled compassionate teacher...a star in every classroom."  
A star in every classroom.

What do stars need to shine? Science is my weakest subject, so I looked it up. The simple answer is energy. When all the elements that provide energy to the star are exhausted, it collapses.

Unfortunately, North Carolina is not providing the elements teachers need to fulfill the "New Vision of Teaching" laid out in our curriculum and standards. Because schools haven't been given enough resources to meet changing demands, teachers are increasingly pressured to coordinate and train each other. To achieve the highest evaluation ratings, teachers must agree to be exploited and work countless hours outside the classroom. It is exhausting to make so many changes in so little time and demoralizing to be held to such high standards without proper support and compensation.

To be very clear: I applaud the new vision of teaching and learning laid out by the state of North Carolina. I believe in the greater focus on diversity, critical thinking, collaboration, literacy, and other 21st century skills. If you want a teacher to advocate for this with great enthusiasm, just ask me to explain how much better this is for my students.

Here's an example of how my classroom has been revolutionized using my [Civil Rights unit](#) in American History II.

In the past, my students would read the textbook to chart different groups, events, and accomplishments. They would watch a documentary on the 1960s that included civil rights information, and then they would compare a few major leaders.

Now my students are given direct instruction through a PowerPoint with corresponding video footage of protests, riots, interviews, speeches, and debates. They are assigned a person from a

diverse pool - famous/grassroots, young/old, black/white, male/female, Republican/ Democrat, rural/urban, Christian/Muslim, gay/straight, nonviolent/militant. They partner up and compare perspectives. They analyze primary and secondary sources, participate in a seminar by debating from their person's point of view about strategies and government powers, create a museum display that includes written and artistic expression, and then go on a scavenger hunt to find others in the exhibit that compare to their person and themselves.

This took a lot of time and energy, but it was worth it.

While changing how I teach, I also increased involvement with colleagues to help implement changes in my department and school. I have led my PLT (professional learning team), joined the School Improvement Team, revitalized our Model UN team, given technology workshops, and mentored two student teachers. Though important and rewarding, it has also been a drain on my family time and a distraction from things I could be doing for my own students.

So, how is this reflected in my teacher evaluation? Let's consider just two of the six Standards. Despite the extra contributions I just listed, my *Leadership* rating has not increased much because the highest scores in that area are reserved for teachers who make a bigger impact on the whole school or district. For *Facilitating Learning*, my rating has gone up significantly over the past few years, but it has taken a toll and I still fall short in some areas. I have had long conversations with my administrator and believe my ratings are accurate and fair based on how the instrument is written. My issue is with the [rubric](#) and the message it sends.

For example, there are 50 checkboxes for Facilitating Learning. For **mastering** all of the things that take place with students **in your classroom** - like critical thinking and problem-solving, instructional methods, technology, and collaboration - you would receive mostly Accomplished ratings. Based on the formatting of the instrument, "accomplished" practice lands you right in the middle column of the form. Suddenly, accomplished feels very...average.

**Standard IV: Teachers facilitate learning for their students**

Observation	<b>a. Teachers know the ways in which learning takes place, and they know the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students.</b> Teachers know how students think and learn. Teachers understand the influences that affect individual student learning (development, culture, language proficiency, etc.) and differentiate their instruction accordingly. Teachers keep abreast of evolving research about student learning. They adapt resources to address the strengths and weaknesses of their students.				
	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Understands developmental levels of students and recognizes the need to differentiate instruction.  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	... and <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Understands developmental levels of students and appropriately differentiates instruction.  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Assesses resources needed to address strengths and weakness of students.	... and <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Identifies appropriate developmental levels of students and consistently and appropriately differentiates instruction.  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reviews and uses alternative resources or adapts existing resources to take advantage of student strengths or address weaknesses.	... and <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Encourages and guides colleagues to adapt instruction to align with students' developmental levels.  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Stays abreast of current research about student learning and emerging resources and encourages the school to adopt or adapt them for the benefit of all students.		
<b>b. Teachers plan instruction appropriate for their students.</b> Teachers collaborate with their colleagues and use a variety of data sources for short- and long-range planning based on the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. These plans reflect an understanding of how students learn. Teachers engage students in the learning process. They understand that instructional plans must be consistently monitored and modified to enhance learning. Teachers make the curriculum responsive to cultural differences and individual learning needs.					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Recognizes data sources important to	... and <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Uses a variety of data for short- and long-	... and <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Monitors student performance and	... and <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Monitors student performance and		

So, you might ask, what do I need to do to meet the highest level of performance as a classroom teacher? In order to be *Distinguished*, I must help train other teachers throughout the school on these practices. This means taking on extra, unpaid responsibilities like chairing a committee or leading a school-wide initiative.

This communicates that the “best” teachers do more and more outside of the classroom on donated time. An instrument that is supposed to be aspirational is actually demoralizing and draining. Going above and beyond feels expected, not appreciated.

Making North Carolina’s new vision of education a reality would be well worth the investment, and our students deserve it. But it will take greater investment in schools. Exploited teachers will eventually burn out. Give teachers the “fuel” to shine - more time and resources. And use an evaluation process that makes teachers feel recognized for their efforts. These changes will make their devotion of extra time and energy sustainable, and we will come closer to the goal of having a “star” in every classroom.