

Why We Must Vote

For decades, North Carolina has been a leader in public education in the south. Legislators worked together across the aisle to recruit and retain quality educators not just from North Carolina, but from



across the country. Bipartisanship helped to pull North Carolina from near the bottom of national measures of education to the national average. Public education became the cornerstone for progress, attracting businesses and families from across the country to establish new roots and new beginnings, adding to the promise of North Carolina's future.

Republicans have typically been known as the "fiscally responsible" party – at least in relation to the Democrats. But education has also traditionally been a value for Republicans in North Carolina. An educated workforce is the cornerstone of a strong economy. When companies and businesses have a skilled pool of workers to choose from, innovation is the result. For decades, North Carolina has led the south in public education. Strong leadership in the governor's office and in the General Assembly has adopted this philosophy to attract companies and entire industries to our state.

But in 2014, North Carolina is falling behind our neighbors in public education and is losing businesses and industries to competing states that can offer a sound public education system with the promise for innovation and economic growth. Many things have been said recently regarding public education in North Carolina, but only the numbers cut through the rhetoric and get to reality. As John Adams said, "Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence."

Since 2008, the number of students enrolled in North Carolina Public Schools has *increased* by 2.3% but the number of teachers has *decreased* by 2.6% (a total of 2,510). This can only mean more students per teacher: 5% more (that is 1-2 students more per teacher). For decades, study after study demonstrate that smaller class sizes increase student learning because teachers can dedicate more time to each student. How do you make sure to recruit and retain teachers? Just like in any field, give them an incentive to enter the teaching profession or give them an incentive to stay once they have chosen to teach. Instead, North Carolina has chosen to do the opposite. Over the same time period (2008 to present) state funding for public education has decreased by roughly \$100 million. Are you asking yourself, "By how much is that number inflated? What has been the rate of inflation over that time?" An important question! Adjusted for inflation, the \$100 million is actually \$965 million in real dollars, a decrease of 13.6%! Per school, that amounts to a decrease of \$156,000 or, adjusted for inflation, \$838,000. Per student, \$1,300 inflation-adjusted dollars.

Why do our schools lag behind? Why is North Carolina racing to the bottom when it comes to public education? The state's choice to not adequately fund public schools is the opportunity cost for changes in the tax code geared to benefit private sector businesses and the wealthy. The General Assembly has eliminated the graduated personal income tax system in favor of a lower flat tax of 5.8% in 2014 and will be 5.75% in 2015; the wealthy, more able to contribute to the society as a whole, will shoulder less of the burden. Corporate income taxes have been cut from 6.9% to 5% by 2015 making NC more attractive to relocating businesses but when they seek educated and skilled labor they will be hard pressed to find it. North Carolina spends \$495 less per student than it did in six years ago and ranks seventh among 14 states in which 2014-15 per-pupil funding is more than 10 percent lower than in 2008 when the recession hit. ([Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#)). According to a [NC Justice](#)

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[Center report](#), the money spent this school year on public education falls **\$277 million short** of what is needed to maintain the same service levels in place two years ago. And Public Schools First NC's fact sheet, [Impact of the 2013-15 State Budget](#), notes that budget cuts have dramatically impacted the number of teacher assistant positions, classroom materials, and instructional supplies; textbooks are funded at an unrealistic \$20 per student.

While our government has decided that faceless businesses, some responsible for the financial collapse, are too big to fail, they have decided that our children are not. Billions of dollars can be spent to rescue businesses, but cuts continue when it comes to our children and their future. We must take a stand and let our representatives know that our children, their potential, and the potential for North Carolina are "too big to fail." North Carolina's future needs a bailout. It needs to be rescued from the grip of politics and special interests on Jones Street. That bailout will take the form of the votes from the people who are tired of the corruption in Raleigh. It will come from the votes of those who will go to the polls to take back their government and their political parties from the extreme factions buying our legislators and give North Carolina a chance to rise again as a leader in the region.

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