



**Red4EdNC**

## **Why the Middle and Bottom of Your Ballot Matters Most**

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Let me start by stating that I'm a social studies teacher. As a group, we tend to be cheerleaders of civic engagement. We hold voter registration drives, we have "current events sharing time" during class, we draw connections between historical and current issues, and we play whatever "Rock the Vote" music video is all the rage during the current election season.

Regardless of the awareness level or interest of my students about global current events, I can say that every one of them has an opinion about Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. One thing I have the hardest time trying to explain, though, is the importance of local and state races. I rarely have more than a handful of students in a class who can even name our governor, let alone a single member of our General Assembly, city council, or school board. I tell them that state/local races affect their lives on a daily basis far more than the POTUS does. How?? \*crickets\*

How about that science class that still doesn't have a teacher because they can't find someone to fill the position? So you're on your 4<sup>th</sup> sub in four days and trying to learn chemistry from 15-year-old textbooks and doing worksheets. What about that art class that you loved but that got eliminated? Or your Civics class with 42 kids crammed into a classroom that's already barely bigger than a closet and literally cannot hold enough desks, so you end up sitting on the floor with your notebook as your "desk." Or that AP teacher who hasn't graded your essay yet because he has 3 preps and 215 students on his class lists. These are realities because of the decisions being made by our state/local politicians.

Now to my fellow adults. Most of us have been following the recent Presidential election (whether we choose to or because it inundates every aspect of our lives from the news cycles, to friends' social media posts, to late-night comedy shows). **But how many of us are just as closely following the races for our state and local governments? You should be!** Whether you are a teacher or a parent or merely a conscientious citizen, you should be aware of what is happening to public education in this state.

## **Low Salaries –**

“But the average teacher is making over \$50,000!” NO, we are not. Most aren’t even close, and those that are close are likely 25-year veterans or only making that because of county supplements, not from policies of our state government.

“But this year was the biggest pay raise percent in history!” Only because they froze pay for years, and last year was just a tiny “bonus” (they made a big deal about it in the media, then taxed it higher and since it wasn’t salary, any increase this year looks even bigger).

“But your pay was frozen under Purdue and the Dems...stop blaming Republicans!” True. Perdue put the freeze in place due to the crisis of the Great Recession hitting our state. Most of us teachers understood and believed it to be temporary. Now, the salary schedule has been dismantled for a new 5-year increment pay scale, AND thanks to inflation, I am making approximately 13% LESS money than I did when I started teaching in 2003.

Also, the average increase is largely a result of first and second year pay increases. Since they make less, the percentage increase is higher with less money actually used. Their salaries increased by double-digit percentages, while veterans saw little or no pay increase. But the “average” still looks good. It’s all smoke and mirrors, y’all!

## **Longevity Pay –**

Gone. This was an added bonus that teachers received if they remained in the field for 10 years. Keep in mind that studies show that 10% of teachers don’t come back after even one year, and as high as 50% do not make it 5 years. By the way, the loss of longevity pay gave them money to work with to give raises. So they were actually robbing Peter to pay Peter.

## **College Teacher Prep Programs –**

Not only has the General Assembly made cuts to our renowned UNC system overall, but they have also cut vital teacher prep programs. The Teaching Fellows was one of the most popular teacher prep programs in the state and became a model across the nation. Teachers could get a full 4-year scholarship if they committed to working in NC public schools for 4 years. It was actually a great investment by our state that cost very little money given the benefit. It was also a program that effectively prepared teachers for the classroom and provided support both during college and beyond. That is gone.

Other teacher prep programs have also been reduced, mostly due to decreased enrollment. It doesn’t help that our state also cut additional pay for post-graduate degrees, so what’s the incentive to become highly certified and earn a Masters? Just to show how much this reduction is happening, I spoke with someone yesterday about our mutual experiences in the MAT program at UNC (a master’s program to train high school teachers). When I went through the program in 2002-03, there were approximately 70-80

people from all subject areas...17 just in social studies. The woman I talked to just finished the program this year, and there were 6 people...total. All subjects. SIX.

### **Teacher Shortages -**

When veteran teachers begin retiring en masse (which is what the General Assembly wants because they cost more, hence veterans taking the brunt of these policy changes), there will be no trained teachers to fill those positions. Remember that science class with no teacher? That's a true story at my school. We are already beginning to see the effects of these cuts and the overall assault on teachers and our public education system. If we don't change things SOON, we will be facing a massive teacher shortage in our state.

Which brings me back to voting. **You NEED to care about our state elections**, and you NEED to vote! Whether or not you are a teacher and whether or not you have kids in the system, public education is vital to maintaining our cherished democracy. Our entire state benefits from a well-educated population, and this cannot happen while teachers and public schools are under attack. **Everyone is following Trump vs. Clinton. But perhaps even more important will be McCrory vs. Cooper, Barefoot vs. Johnson, and Dollar vs. Ferrell.** If you don't know these names, please look them up (or the names of those running in your district). Please educate yourself on the candidates. It's not just our own livelihoods at stake, it's the future of education in this great state...we owe it to ourselves and to our children to take these races seriously and get out there and vote! (Insert Rock the Vote video here ☺)

## **Red4EdNC's Teacher Voting Recommendations Request**

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Want to support stronger public schools but those "down ballot" races are confusing? Let the teachers at Red4EdNC help! We know that the following races are the KEY to restoring per pupil funding to 2008 levels: Governor, State Superintendent, State Senate, State House, County Commissioners and School Board races.

Fill out [this](#) quick google form and just tell us your name and county. We will find YOUR ballot, make our recommendations for just those races, and TEXT it back to you before November 8th!