

# Is North Carolina's Teacher Pipeline Beyond Maintenance?

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In the midst of high teacher turnover rates, glaring teacher shortages due to an unprecedented decline in students majoring in education, and the overwhelming frustration felt by our state's public educators, there is fairly condemning evidence that the majority of our state's legislature has looked the other way.

In the fallout of this year's budget and years' past—when the state government pushed an agenda of jobs and tax credits at the expense of the middle class— it was ironic, yet sadly not surprising, that public education experienced quite the opposite. We regressed; we lost teaching jobs despite unprecedented population growth throughout the state; we were deprived of state funding in lieu of private school vouchers, charter schools and online schooling; and we witnessed our state's decline in the national average for teacher pay, going from 23rd in 2008 to 46th in 2014-2015.

Proponents of this change might have had valid reasons for such regression. When our legislature is charged with the responsibility of a fiscal budget, cuts are required and feelings tend to get stepped on—that's life; however, *two legislative moves* were so antithetical to the tenets of education that they have resulted in damning ramifications that have ultimately put a kink in the proverbial teacher pipeline.

The first attack on the pipeline that was so utterly contrary to the essential purpose of education started in 2013 when the legislature decided that teachers with advanced degrees wouldn't be compensated. In the wake of this, I found myself asking comically, "How is *THIS* a thing!?" What precedent are we setting for future teachers? That furthering your education is frivolity? Our society is inherently reward-based, yet we set teachers aside as an exceptional class, immune from such influences? And we expect to recruit and obtain the best and the brightest using this model? Humor me for a second: would Advanced Placement enrollment drop if no extra point was given for students' grade point averages? This scenario is representative of the situation teachers are currently in — do more without expectation of reward -- and I can't help but dwell on the message that this is sending.

The second offense to the pipeline that my colleagues and I take umbrage at was defunding the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program despite its powerful effect on the teaching profession. Though the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program has had obvious success, the program was cut from the budget in favor of Teach for America in 2011, saving the state \$13.5 million annually. The graduating class of 2015 is currently the last cohort of North Carolina Teaching Fellows. While monetarily this decision makes sense for the politicians who want to spend less money, the track records of both Teach for America and the North

Carolina Teaching Fellows program show this decision to be troubling. Currently, there are more than 4,000 Teaching Fellows who are teachers, and more than 75 percent of Fellows remain in the profession longer than five years—a far cry from the 10 percent of Teach for America teachers (DeWitt, 2013). Although it cost more, the Teaching Fellows Program produced teachers whose goals were to teach as a career, not use their experience as a resume builder or stepping stone into politics or business; Teach for America teachers make up 0.5 percent of teachers in North Carolina. Instead of ensuring that the state had well-trained career teachers, our state legislature preferred the cheaper alternative as a cost saving measure, suggesting, yet again, that the majority of our legislature devalues education when it is in conflict with their bottom-line.

How can one look at our situation over the last 8 years and not surmise that the majority of our legislature devalues public education? Can you say with any confidence that the pipeline will always bend and never break? How can one not see that the state and its citizens will have quite the problem on its hands the day that there isn't a credible, effective teacher in the classroom for their son or daughter?