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## Public Education: Is it the great equalizer?\*

**Jessica Benton, Wake County Public School Teacher**

**June 18, 2016**

When I first started teaching, I was under the impression that public education was the great equalizer. That with a sound education, my students had more choices about how they wanted their lives to play out. All they needed was to stay focused and learn, and the world would be theirs. After 11 years in the public school system, I began to realize that wasn't that simple.

Some schools had more because the folks living in those neighborhoods had more. Some kids had more because their families had more. Some families had more because the world we live in thinks that they are entitled to more. It began to dawn on me just how unequal our equalizer really was.

We have been saying it over and over. Our students deserve more, but what does that really mean? We have to understand that our students' lives don't end at the classroom door.

Some of our kids are not getting what they need when they leave our school buildings. Their parents are working multiple jobs just to get by, so that means less time helping with homework and projects and catch up. Some of my kids are not receiving the healthcare they need, and they literally stay sick from October to March. My kids of color live in a world that criminalizes them and their families based on the color of their skin, even in 2016. Some of our kids are even being yanked from school bus stops and detained because of their immigration status. Some of our kids are being subjected to highly polluted air and water because the poverty they're living in doesn't protect them from toxic living environments. And y'all, 49 people were just massacred in Orlando, FL because of their sexuality. And I am not talking pie charts and statistics here. I am talking about real people and real stories.

So when we say **students deserve more** we're really saying that it is going to take more than just education to get our kids where they need to be to live self-directed, fulfilling lives. Lives that they deserve like any other. They need healthcare, protection from criminalization, clean water and air, economic stability and education. And it's going to take all of us, including Governor McCrory and the General Assembly, to get our kids these truly basic needs.

And I am sorry. I know teachers are not paid nearly enough to make it themselves. I know our teachers deserve more too, but just talking about teacher pay raises isn't enough. That's only one piece in a much larger problem. We need to be demanding more for ourselves and our families. We are a team. We are that village we so often like to refer to that's raising these kids. **And our students deserve more.**

I just marched from Durham to Raleigh with over 50 educators, parents and students. Twenty miles over two days to meet with McCrory and ask for the more **our students deserve**. We have been asking for three things: 1) to expand Medicaid immediately, 2) to fully fund our schools, and 3) to repeal HB2.

I know this doesn't cover everything. This isn't everything our students need, but it's a good place to start.

Don't get me wrong. I know we have all been asking for more. This is not our first request. How many of you have written an OP-ED? How many of you have called or emailed your legislators? How many of you were lobbying today for more? And what has it changed? We are still fighting to no avail. We're drowning.

As teachers, we don't get to give up. We don't have that option. When our students deserve more, we find ways. But we've been dipping into our own pockets, giving our own time, expending our own energy to get more for education and nothing has changed. And it's clear the political leaders are not listening. The time has come for us to be heard. I don't know about you, but I am done being ignored while I sit back and watch my students and their families struggle.

It's time we make our leaders listen. It's time to be heard. Let's see if they can hear us. Repeat after me in your biggest teacher voice: **Students deserve more. Students deserve more.**

**\*Speech given June 15, 2016 at the Students Deserve More Rally in Raleigh, N.C.**