

A group of educators marched from Durham and North Raleigh to the State Capitol on June 14-15, 2016, asking to meet with governor. Fourteen members of Organize 2020 were arrested on June 15, 2016 after blocking a street when the governor chose not to meet with them. These teachers believe that our students deserve more. Here are their reflections on the 23-mile march, the rally at the legislature and Capitol, and their arrests for civil disobedience.



Red4EdNC

The Measuring Stick of Education

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My son's father served in the military for 11 years. When I met him in 2000, I was a teacher to math students at Fuquay-Varina High in Wake County. I loved it. But I also loved him, so when he joined the military in 2003, I joined him as he moved from base to base for the next decade plus. When he left the military in 2014, we wanted to put down roots for ourselves and our son, so we settled near family in Durham and I returned to teaching math students, this time at Southern School of Energy and Sustainability.

With that move, we went from living as a three-person, one-income household funded by taxpayers via the military to living as a three-person, one-income household funded by taxpayers via public schools. Changing that one word from "military" to "public schools" was quite the stark contrast. For example, we gave up no-deductible, no-copay, comprehensive health care. My son, at age 4, had to go to the emergency room when he took a stick to the eye. An eyelid surgeon stitched up his eyelid and we paid that surgeon two more follow-up office visits, but not a single cent. Neither my teacher's salary nor my health benefits could cover such an accident today. Actually, neither my teacher's salary nor my benefits can meet the needs of our family of three at all. We lived well on one income in the military. Now that I am a teacher, we cannot make ends meet without other sources of income.

State tests take all the living and learning that happens in our classrooms throughout the year and reduce that to a single number of "proficient" students. So too, we could take my lived experience of different standards of living, quantify it and reduce it to a single data point. Some folks might then want to claim that single data point is a measure of how poorly our culture values teachers. But my lived experience tells me that the truth is much more complicated. For example, I receive the same kinds of

thanks and praise when people learn I am a teacher as my son's father did when he was military. Many of my lived experiences suggest our culture believes that teaching is a noble profession, that teachers offer a valuable service. To better understand my decrease in standard of living, we must hold wealth's measuring stick out and look at the far end. There you will find a good number of my students whose family members work as many if not more hours than I do, but bring home less money with no health coverage and no thanks for their work from the community at all. One of my brightest seniors this year worked 40 hours per week outside of school to contribute to her family's income because her mother was sick and could not. Neither her potential to learn the math nor my ability to teach that math made any difference, because she was so exhausted she often didn't make it to school and when she did, she fell asleep. If we want to better understand my decrease in standard of living, we must also look at our jails which house so many of our children. In the detention center after my arrest, in every room that I sat, I sat jailed with jailed children.

Every day of the school year I sit with young people at the hard end of wealth's measuring stick. Young people who, if judged by their fierce resilience, would surpass me by far. Young people I am privileged to know and love. I am learning from them that their lived experiences reveal what the data is actually pointing to: we have failed as a culture to value the lives of our poor students and students of color. The struggles that public school teachers face making ends meet--these struggles are just the collateral damage in the systemic devaluing of my student's lives. If you truly want to support teachers in their work, you must love and support their children and their children's parents. You must provide for their health and wellness.

McCrory talks of raising teacher pay but stands in the way of our students' and their parents' access to Medicaid. He wants to sock away the surplus while school nurses are split between buildings, while school resource officers far outnumber school social workers, while my son's first grade classroom has over 20 students and no teacher assistant. We are calling him on this. We marched 23 miles to make clear to those in power that our students deserve so much more than our state currently provides for them. And when I say, "those in power" I mean McCrory and other elected officials, but I also mean the public at large. Because what we discovered when we arrived at the capitol with our plan for raising per pupil expenditure and expanding Medicaid was that McCrory did not care enough about us or our students to even greet us. But we also discovered that you, the public at large, did care. You met us with food and shelter at resting spots during our march. You asked us questions and wished us luck. You honked your support and drove alongside us. You not only greeted us along the route we took, but you took the streets with us to clear traffic in protest so that 14 of us could safely lock arms and remain in the street as the symbol of our collective insistence that students deserve more, that we as a body of people are also powerful and that we intend to use that power to get the resources our students need.

While McCrory tries to paint those 14 of us as fringe, his constituents continue to show their support for our message and our plan. He would do well to listen to his constituents. While McCrory slanders us by claiming that we are working for Roy

Cooper, he reveals how divorced he is from the way that true public service functions. I work for my students. I walked for my students. I stood blocking traffic and took arrest for my students. The governor's job is to work for us—the public at large, who stands with public school teachers and their students--and we will hold anyone in that office now or in the future accountable to our children. They, unquestionably, deserve that.

#studentsdeservemore