

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

No Chicken Soup for the Soul

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They picked me up last.

They tied my wrists together behind my back, and scooped me up by the elbows.

When I was a child, I'd seen my grandmother pick up hens that way, gathering their wings into one hand, with speed and force, before she made them into soup for dinner.

There was no more space in the two vans they'd sent for us, so they pushed me into a separate police car by myself. My crime was that, along with 13 other educators from all across the state, I'd formed a human chain that, for 20 minutes at rush hour, cut diagonally through the intersection of Wilmington and Fayetteville Streets, in front of Governor McCrory's office.

When the governor, again, failed to prioritize my students' suffering, I blocked traffic in protest.

When, despite a well-publicized request, our governor disrespected our profession by refusing to meet with leading educators in a civil dialogue about the wellbeing of our state's children, I stood in protest.

I stood in protest of the neglect Governor McCrory has continuously shown our children. Repeatedly refusing to address kids' most urgent needs, and returning, unbothered, to campaigning for another term in office, was an unconscionable reality to me - so I refused to move.

(I didn't start in that intersection.)

Over the past 4 years, I'd spoken out many times about the alarming conditions my students have to fight their way through in order to learn.

When I say our schools lack basic supplies, I mean paper - both printing paper and toilet paper - , whiteboard markers, working computers, science lab materials, equipment for art or gym class.

We don't have textbooks in history class.

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I've taught World and U.S. history without a textbook for the past 4 years.

My students can only receive medical care if they get injured Tuesday morning between 9 and 12 because we have a part time nurse.

My students need school counselors and psychologists to teach them how to process their emotions in healthy ways during the overwhelming time of their adolescence; they don't need armed guards in uniform to throw them around and dehumanize them.

A week before the day Mr. McCrory had me arrested, I'd spoken to the press about the suffering of thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of our students. I'd listed conditions of abject poverty, and of continued loss of resources, stability and security in the daily lives of our youth.

Alongside many other professional educators in my state, I'd asked for an hour of the Governor's time, and promised that we'd march on foot from our classrooms to his office to prove our dedication to meeting with him and working together in the interest of our students.

We did exactly as promised.

60-some people of all ages, from all over North Carolina, took to walking along highways, in the high heat of mid-June, to meet with our Governor.

I walked next to incredible people - law-abiding, polite, compassionate educators and parents.

I walked beside a 23-year classroom veteran teacher.

I walked with a 14-year old former student.

I walked next to a dear colleague and her 12-year old son who marched every single mile his mother and his teachers marched and never once complained.

I walked beside many people who are so important in the lives of many younger folks, and I carried with me the names and memories of many of my students.

Along the way, cars stopped to thank us, churches opened their doors and blessed us with good food and beds overnight, friends called, emailed or texted us with words of support and gratitude.

None of that support and none of the richness we carried with us mattered to Governor McCrory at 5 on Wednesday. He didn't come. He didn't invite us in for a glass of water the way Southern hospitality would have anyone treat people who have journeyed on foot for 23 miles in the summer heat.

Instead, Mr. McCrory locked his doors before 5. We know because we knocked on every single one.)

When they put me in the arrest car, my body was shaking.

I felt guilty for being nervous because, unlike so many others, I had a team -- my child was cared for and safe, and they had not used force to subdue my body or spirit.

But I could not stop shaking. I could not stop my handcuffs from cutting into my twisted wrists. I could not stop from feeling like my existence was only a subject of good fortune -- not a guarantee, not a right.

I felt the way I do at takeoff on a plane - that no matter my accomplishments, my intentions, my talents, the only thing that matters is gravity: if we fall, we fall, and there's no defending against it, there's no argument to be made for my life.

Inside the jail I was first to go through fingerprinting and searches.

The officer who processed me said that what I'd done sounded like the noblest thing anyone's been arrested for. The officer next to him whispered that his mother and sister were both

teachers, and he thanked me in their name. I teach their kids. We love the same people. And here we were, forced to stand on opposing sides of a wall, all of us feeling none of this was just.

I sat down next to two girls. They were my students' ages. At 16 and 17, they had just finished their sophomore and junior years in high school, and they could've been my students.

We talked and they thanked us for standing up for them.

They were scared. They were alone. They'd been picked up for something stupid, they said, for something they were embarrassed to tell me about. They were humble and sweet, honest and young.

I asked them if they felt they had everything they needed to learn in their schools. One of them laughed at the question, the other hung her head, shaking it softly in resignation.

They told me how they can't study at home because there are no textbooks, and they don't have wi-fi. They told me how their teachers point them to the public library, but how nobody seemed to understand they didn't have reliable transportation.

That's why I'd gotten arrested - because these kids didn't belong here. Because they were only here for being poor and Black in a state where their existence is only a subject of good fortune - not a guarantee, not a right. Their lives were being attacked, and they were being punished for believing what they'd been taught - that they didn't matter, that they didn't deserve. They had been given no chance to defend their lives, no chance to argue for the value of their lives.

They had been scooped up by the tips of their wings, with haste and force, and they'd been thrown into this place, to be made into nothing.

I saw them again, on my way to the the magistrate's office in the jail. They were sitting next to each other, more tired and colder now, alone in that freezing room with metal benches, hungry and scared of being abandoned, unable to reach anyone who could come free them. I felt so helpless and so angry at my helplessness. These were my students, my kids, and I would block 100 intersections to get them the warmth and food and books that they deserve.

Why, Governor McCrory - why is it so controversial to argue that [#StudentsDeserveMore](#) ? Why do you paint us as dangerous when the only thing we want to do is teach our students so that they can learn?

