



Red4EdNC

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What I Would Have Said

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I woke up at my usual 3:30 a.m. on April 5th, not to grade papers but to write out the statement below; I hoped to read it during the public comments at the Senate Education Committee meeting at noon. Due to a doctor's appt. at 9:00, requiring a sick day, it seemed like an opportune time to go to the General Assembly and try and inject my point of view as a member of the public, teacher, and parent.

Right as I walked in the door, my plan ran into problems. The bill I wanted to speak about, HB13 (a bill to ease the impact of unfunded class size reductions), was not in the Education Committee, as one would expect. It had been assigned to the Rules Committee. They were meeting at 5:15pm. I immediately started reworking my schedule for the day, trying to determine how I could remain downtown until that time.

I found out that Charles Rabon, from Pender County, is the Chair of the Senate Rules Committee. I located his office to check in about the 5:15 meeting. I was informed that the Rules Committee was meeting at 5:15pm, but they were not hearing HB13 and public comment can only occur on a bill when it is brought up on a specific day. That day could be any day, and it might not be known until 8am on that day. But this was not the day.

A quick mental calculation helped me realize that a classroom teacher's voice would rarely be heard in the public comment system that exists now. Paid lobbyists? Yes. Me? No. I have to plan weeks ahead to miss school, arrange a sub, write lesson plans and activate the plan. I can't exactly head down to the General Assembly after checking the day's schedule over breakfast. I'm sure most working people are like me.

Feeling defeated, I offered the legislative assistant my printed copy of my comments. Could she pass them on to the senator? Visibly annoyed, she said someone had already dropped off a paper about HB13. I told her that I had written these comments myself, and I might as well leave them with her as they now served no use. I left the paper on her desk. She seemed averse to touching it.

I don't think my comments were ever actually seen by an elected official. But here is what I would have said:

I want to talk today about HB 13 but not as a teacher. Without the passage of HB13, I am certain my high school social studies classroom will grow ever more crowded and there will not be enough textbooks. But that is not what concerns me most.

First and foremost, I am a parent and a citizen. My daughters, Campbell and Caroline, are 9 and 10 years old and attend Leesville Elementary School. They are doing amazing things at the school. They are

reading primary texts, finding textual evidence, and they are learning how to do math from the inside out. To be honest, they are being challenged and they are a little stressed a lot of the time. But there are two classes we hear about all the time, and the joy they feel about them is contagious.

Ms. Perricone is a reservist in the National Guard and let me tell you, she is fired up about fitness. She has dreamed up all kinds of ways to get kids excited about moving. The girls have persuaded me to buy them a step counter so they can compete in the inter-class competition to see who can move the most during PE class. My daughters demonstrate the LATEST core exercises to build strong bodies, let me tell you. They love PE. Ms. Perricone motivates and inspires them in so many ways.

Ms. Benner is their art teacher. Caroline right now is paired with Molly and they are figuring out how to make a huge sculpture using only recycled materials. They have decided to make a huge paintbrush out of soda bottles and tin cans, and cardboard, and I don't know what all, but I know Caroline is constantly problem solving and carting things out of the house to take to school for this structure. And she and Molly are learning to work together.

My point is this. If HB13 doesn't pass we may not have Ms. Perricone and Ms. Benner in our lives next year. My children will be devastated. I understand there doesn't seem to be enough money for lower class sizes AND art AND PE. But I want to know why not? This is the United States of America. Our children are our most important resource. And I want them to have orderly classrooms, and healthy bodies, and creativity and beauty. I am willing to pay more for that to happen for ALL our children. The state constitution says it is the state government's ultimate responsibility. I am a proud American and I want us to do better. I know we can. So, if you won't pass HB 13, pass something that will actually fund the class size reductions you mandated last year.

But, cutting PE and Art to staff K-3 class caps is not the answer.

Thank you.