



Red4EdNC

July 29, 2017

Still Wondering: What Else Can I Do to Get the Resources My Students Need?

Angela Scioli, Wake County Public School Teacher

Since 2013, I have had no textbooks (yes, that is correct: no textbooks) for my American History classes. I've had age- inappropriate textbooks for my Civics classes (written for 7th grade, but my students are in 12th), and my AP Government textbook was written when George W. Bush was president. Suffice it to say that politics has changed somewhat since 2006.

The resources a teacher needs vary greatly according to grade, population, discipline and teaching style. Not all teachers need the same things, even if teaching the same grade at the same school. I would actually prefer textbooks, and I realize I might have lost you right there.

Textbooks have gotten a bad rap lately as outdated, biased and inefficient. You might assume I am "old school" and boring in my instructional approach; I assure you I am not. But textbooks make sense if you consider the courses I teach: American History, Civics and Economics, and AP Government and Politics. These disciplines are "content heavy"; students need to know basic information to master the course and do higher level critical thinking activities, collaboration, and problem solving at the center of our work.

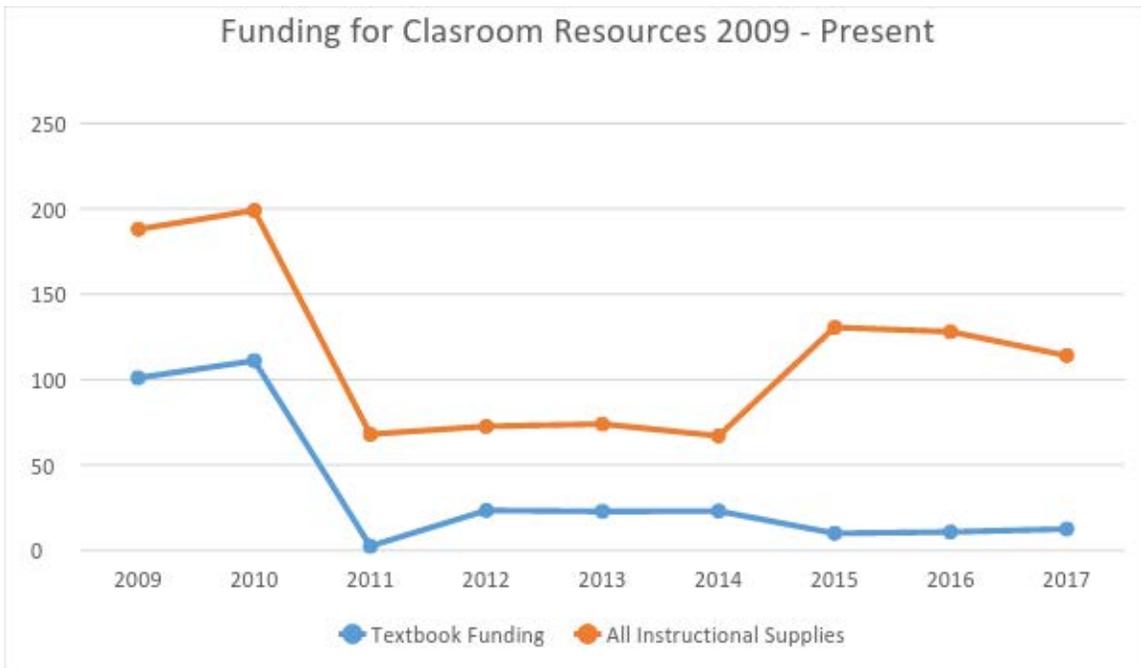
A textbook solves that problem quite nicely, even if it isn't perfect. First, assigning reading helps with reading comprehension and fluency, allowing me to teach the skill of note-taking, an important practice in any format, digital or otherwise. A textbook doesn't require a broadband internet connection at home; it is portable, "fixed" (so related assignments make sense), and written and edited by a cadre of professionals and experts in the field.

My second choice: computers. If I send each student home with a computer (or have them use their phones), I would need to collect and curate my own digital content for each course I teach, much of which would be video-driven. This option does not aid in reading comprehension, and there is less editorial control for bias/errors. Also, the incredible amount of time required to construct this content presents its own issue.

Like many teachers, I have tried various options to get the resources my students need. Most teachers reach into their own pockets first, but the resources I need far exceed my salary. I have funded supplementary books through Donors Choose (the GoFundMe of teaching), or gotten grants, but again, the need here is greater than those platforms typically provide. (This is why we pay taxes and collectively leverage resources for public education, the most ambitious, and expensive, public project we have ever engaged in as a collective body. It's bigger than well-meaning charities and grant opportunities). I have attended and organized others to attend protests. I started a statewide symbolic protest movement called [Red4EdNC](#) (like us on Facebook!) and we remind people weekly to Wear Red for Ed on Wed. I have marched 23 miles with other teachers to see if the Governor would meet with us (he did not, 14 were arrested). I have developed relationships with policymakers. I have had them as guest speakers in my classes – county commissioners, school board members, my state representative, my state senator. I have visited them in their offices. The Chair of the NC House Education Committee, Craig Horn, has spent hours in my classroom and met with me for hours in his office. My elected officials know me and greet me as a friend, as well as a constituent. I have spoken at public comment opportunities at school board meetings, county commissioner meetings, and state committee meetings. I have spoken to Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs. I have had a camera crew follow me around for a year for a documentary (that can be screened [here](#) until August 2nd). In the last election, I piloted a ballot project statewide: If you sent Red4EdNC your name and address, we would research your ballot's education-related races, and text you back an image of your ballot with our voting recommendations. Due to gerrymandering, it had little effect: our elected leaders are safe in their polarized districts.

It is four years later. The chart below shows you the budget, in millions, for textbooks and instructional materials. The numbers came from the DPI website [here](#). My students still do not have the necessary resources. I have ten laptop computers that students cannot take home, and I am grateful for that (thanks,

Wake County Commissioners!), but it does not solve the problem. When I ask the commissioners for (more) money, they remind me that the state constitution says the state bears the responsibility for guaranteeing each child an equitable public education. When I speak to my state senator, he says the county commissioners could raise property taxes to pay for books if they wanted. All my elected state officials say they have very little influence over the state budget. I sense just a few people actually do.



So, it's late July, and another school year is in sight, and I still do not have the necessary resources for my students. What else can I do? Time is running out. And my students deserve better. Please share your ideas in the comments.