

Implications of the Elimination of Master's Pay for Teachers in North Carolina

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Beginning next month (June 2014) teachers in North Carolina will no longer receive a raise in salary for holding an advanced degree (master's degree or doctoral degree).¹ Previously teachers received a 10% increase in their annual salary. Master's pay was eliminated by the state legislature and Governor McCrory in the state budget passed in 2013. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, this makes North Carolina the first state to eliminate master's pay increases for teachers.² This policy change contradicts research related to providing incentives for teachers to pursue quality professional development, advance their careers, and remain in the classroom.³

Graduate Education as Powerful Professional Development

Years of research has demonstrated that effective professional development for teachers must be prolonged and sustained, relevant to the daily work of teachers and their subject matter, and focused on student learning.⁴ One-day workshops led by outside facilitators are largely ineffective. In contrast, graduate education for teachers, especially Master's of Education (M.Ed.) degrees, provide teachers with "ongoing self-improvement, a commitment to working together collegially, and a focus on student learning"⁵ while also "support[ing] the risk taking and struggle entailed in transforming practice."⁶ Graduate programs in education provide teachers with access to educational research and the necessary guidance and support to integrate research-based practices into the classroom. A focus on graduate education for teachers is a widely held, core tenant of educational improvement around the world. In Finland, for example, teachers receive three years of intensive, graduate education in teaching. Graduate programs around the world provide opportunities for teachers to work with university-based, educational researchers.

Implications of Eliminating Master's Pay

According to Darling-Hammond's study of state educational policies, North Carolina's earlier educational reform efforts, launched in the mid-1980s, were multifaceted, and included a "career development program that rewarded teachers for greater education and for achieving National Board Certification"⁷ as well as other reforms in "early childhood education, reduced class sizes, teacher salary increases, teacher education upgrades, and extensive professional development."⁸ These reforms positively impacted student achievement over the last decades. The outcomes are especially obvious when comparing North Carolina to Georgia during the same period.⁹ The current policy decisions of the North Carolina legislature, including the elimination of the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program, the elimination of career status for teachers, increased class sizes, decreases in funding for textbooks and curricular materials, and decreases in funding for professional development, reverse most of the previous work done.

Teachers in North Carolina interested in pursuing career advancement and salary increases must now decide to leave the classroom to pursue another role garnering higher wages (e.g., school administration) or to leave the profession altogether. Recently Wake County Public School officials announced: “As of April 9, 2014, more than 600 teachers have left their jobs since the beginning of the school year on July 1, 2013, an increase of 41 percent over the same period last year.”¹⁰ According to a recent survey, “98% of teachers and administrators surveyed believe that the removal of financial incentives for pursuing advanced degrees will have a negative effect on the quality of teaching and learning in North Carolina’s schools.”¹¹ The survey results also indicated “nearly three-fourths of all respondents are now less likely to pursue an advanced degree” and those that are currently pursuing an advanced degree are considering leaving the state. These results make sense when you consider the demographic of teachers most likely to pursue advanced degrees. For teachers with 3-4 years of experience, often with young families, the opportunity costs of pursuing graduate education do not make sense. Yet, these are exactly the teachers we should be most concerned with supporting and retaining.¹² Their years of experience, plus advanced, graduate-level study of content and pedagogy, could ensure their continued success in the classroom, provide both stability and growth for the teaching ranks, and positively impact student outcomes.

The one remaining opportunity for teachers to advance their careers is to pursue National Board Teaching Certification. However, this opportunity too seems to be at risk as LEAs are increasingly unable to cover the high application costs and support networks formerly in place, such as the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching (NCCAT), are being defunded or eliminated.

The North Carolina General Assembly will reconvene at noon on May 14, 2014 for their short session. Only “certain measures may be introduced and considered during the short session.”¹³ The budget bill is one of the measures that may be considered. However, according to Becki Gray of the John Locke Foundation, legislators are unlikely to revisit their 2013 budget decisions.¹⁴ This is despite the fact that House Speaker Thom Tillis acknowledged “the law ending the master’s supplement was wrong.”¹⁵ More information is available about the short session at the North Carolina General Assembly website: <http://www.ncleg.net/>. The decisions of the North Carolina General Assembly over the next several weeks will be important ones for the future of education in our state.

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End Notes & References:

¹ In February 2014, the *News and Observer* explained “the legislature would pass a law giving the pay supplement to teachers who had completed coursework in a graduate program by July 1, 2013.” See: Bonner, & Stancill (2014, February 10). McCrory seeks to raise teachers' starting pay. *News and Observer*. Retrieved from

<http://www.newsobserver.com/2014/02/10/3608266/mccrory-increase-teachers-base.html>.

² Banchemo, S., & Rutland, M. (2013, July 3). North Carolina ends pay boosts for teacher master's degrees: Tenure for elementary and high-school teachers also eliminated. *Wall Street Journal Online*. Retrieved from:

<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887323971204578630312785220612>.

³ Johnson, S.M. (1986). Incentives for teachers: What motivates, what matters. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 22(3), 54-79.

⁴ Darling-Hammond, L., & Bransford, J. (2005). *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass. Darling-Hammond, L., Wei, R., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009). *Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the US and abroad*. Dallas, TX: National Staff Development Council. Retrieved from

<http://www.learningforward.org/stateproflearning.cfm>.

⁵ Tom, A. R. (1999). Reinventing master's degree study for experienced teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 50(4), p. 247.

⁶ McLaughlin, M., & Talbert, J. (1993). *Contexts that matter for teaching and learning*. Stanford, CT: Stanford University, p. 15.

⁷ Darling-Hammond, L. (2000, January 1). Teacher quality and student achievement: A review of state policy evidence. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 8(1), 1-44. Retrieved from <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/392/515>, p. 15.

⁸ Darling-Hammond, (2000, January 1), p. 16.

⁹ Darling-Hammond, (2000, January 1), p. 20.

¹⁰ Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) blog (2014, April 17). Wake teacher resignations up significantly. Retrieved from <http://www.wcpss.net/blog/2014/04/wake-teacher-resignations-up-significantly/>.

¹¹ Imig, S., & Smith, R. (2013). Listening to those on the front lines: North Carolina teachers and administrators respond to state legislative changes. Retrieved from <http://people.uncw.edu/imigs/documents/SmithImigReport.pdf>.

¹² Frase, L. (1992). *Maximizing People Power in Schools: Motivating and Managing Teachers and Staff*. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

¹³ North Carolina General Assembly (2013, September 16). Bills eligible for consideration by the General Assembly during the 2014 Regular Session of the 2013 General Assembly (the "Short Session"). NCGA Memorandum. Retrieved from: <http://www.ncleg.net/documentsites/legislativepublications/Research%20Division/Eligible%20Bills/Bills%20Eligible%20for%20Consideration%20for%202014%20Session.pdf>.

¹⁴ Carolina Journal Staff. (2014, March 21). Friday Interview: N.C. General Assembly Prepares for 2014: JLF's Gray assesses top priorities for short session that starts in May. *Carolina Journal*. Retrieved from http://www.carolinajournal.com/exclusives/display_exclusive.html?id=10912.

¹⁵ Bonner & Stancill, (2014, February 10).