

## **Maybe not such a blue moon: The substantial phenomenon of teacher moonlighting in North Carolina**

Dr. Paul G. Fitchett

Dr. Tina L. Heafner

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Matt teaches 8<sup>th</sup> grade math during the school day. On the weekends, and maybe one weekday night, he works as an assistant manager at the local big box department store down the road from his school. He loves his students, but he also loves the extra money that his store work provides and he appreciates the professional freedom that this second job offers. Does this sound familiar? Change out the big box store for a myriad of other jobs, summer camps, and babysitting gigs and you can probably name an educator or two. This phenomenon is referred to as “teacher moonlighting.” While it is not new to the profession, the proportion of teachers who moonlight in North Carolina is significant and concerning. For many reasons, moonlighting can have a negative impact on teachers’ professionalism and their daily instructional preparation.

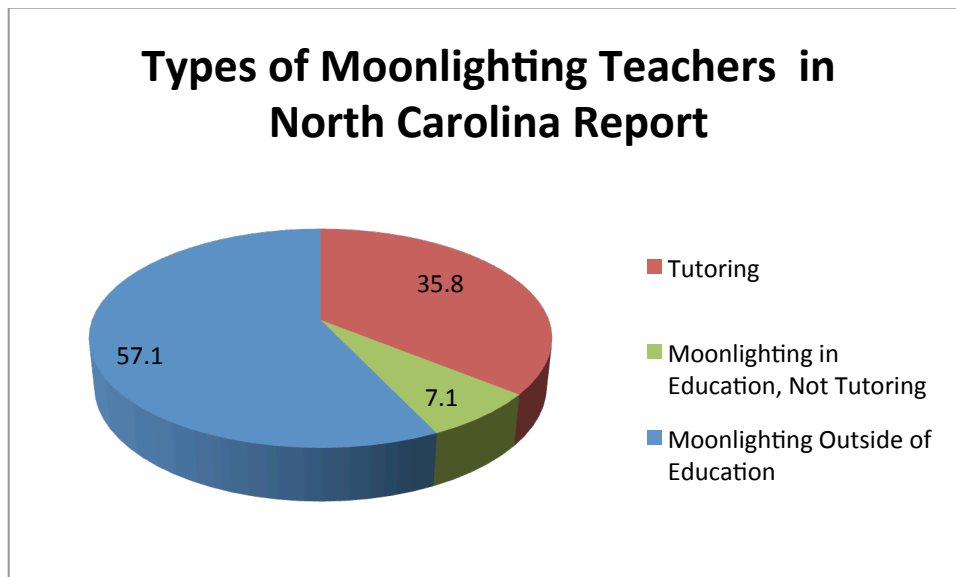
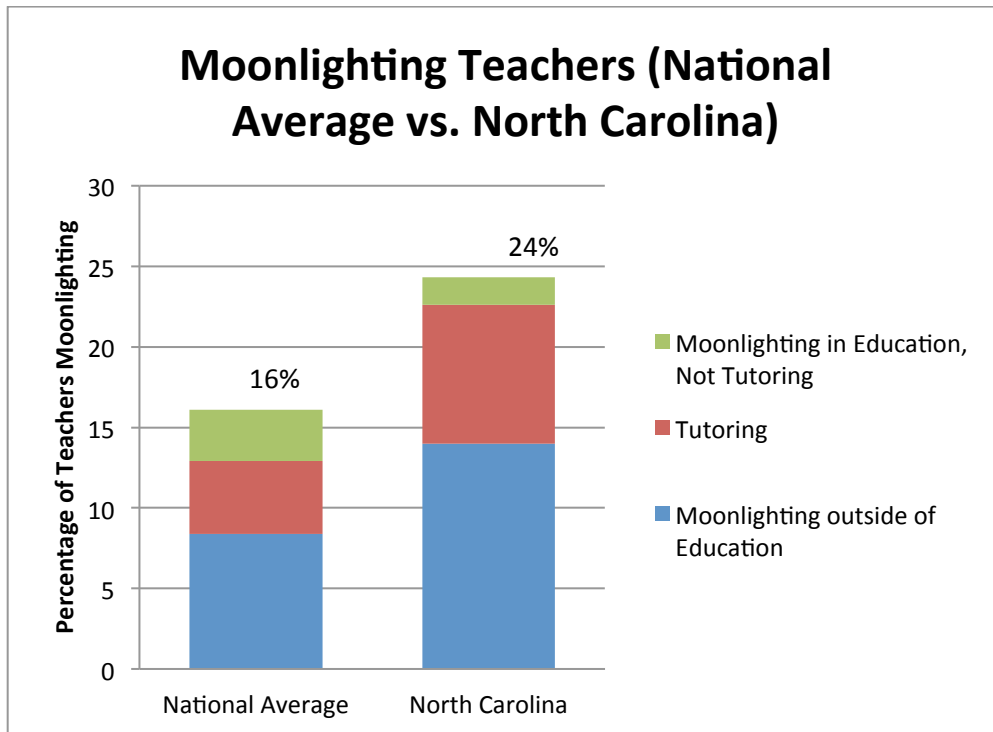
First, we should consider why teachers would choose to moonlight. Intuitively, one might believe that these teachers are taking on other jobs in order to supplement their meager income. As has been pointed out in numerous editorials and news headlines, North Carolina teachers are among the lowest paid in the country hovering in between 46<sup>th</sup> to 48<sup>th</sup> depending on the analysis. However, pay, while a powerful motivator in numerous studies on this topic is not the sole driving force behind teacher moonlighting. Although some teachers moonlight within the field of education, others find secondary employment in other industries. Research conducted by our colleague at Western Carolina University, Dr. Ellie Hilty<sup>1</sup>, suggests that many teachers take on these second jobs for professional fulfillment, specifically to find more autonomous and rewarding employment opportunities. Stymied by constrictive policies and byzantine pay-for-performance schemes, teachers choose to moonlight to escape the workplace hostility and restrictive environments present in many of today’s schools. Thus, in an ironic twist, the various educational reforms bent on professionalizing teachers might actually be doing the opposite. Efforts focused on measuring teachers’ additive value and increasing student learning outcomes are creating climates of de-professionalization and workplace intensification that indirectly undermine reform goals.

Where do North Carolina teachers stack up nationally in teacher moonlighting? Using data from the nationally-representative National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) Schools and Staffing Survey for 2012, we examined the proportion of full-time public school teachers who

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<sup>1</sup> Hilty, Eleanor B. "Teacher moonlighting in North Carolina: Implications for the profession." *North Carolina Association for Research in Education Conference, North Bern, NC, February 2008.*

moonlight. As the tables below illustrate, NC teachers were more likely to moonlight than the national average. They ranked third in the percentage of moonlighters (24%). The state also ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the proportion of all teachers moonlighting outside of the education profession (16%). Among the state’s moonlighting population, 57% of all NC teachers with secondary jobs were working outside of education. Simply put, one in four teachers in North Carolina is moonlighting and have less time to complete teaching related tasks outside of the school day. Moreover, over half of all moonlighting teachers in the state are working outside of education.



Why does this matter? Research out of Auburn University suggests teachers who moonlight spend (on average) approximately 1 hour less per week lesson planning than non-moonlighting teachers. Over the course of an academic year, this lack of planning can substantially impact the quality of instruction that teachers provide students and the learning opportunities for our students. This is particularly troubling considering that a majority of the teachers' moonlighting in North Carolina tend to be working outside of the education field.

From a policy standpoint, these findings offer a conundrum for lawmakers. Restricting teacher moonlighting is quite likely to drive more teachers out of the profession or to neighboring states with better pay and incentives. Moreover, studies show that some of the highest qualified teachers are the most likely to moonlight. Pushing these individuals out of North Carolina public schools does not serve the best interests of the state. However, if left unabated, moonlighting outside the profession will continue to undermine efforts to professionalize teaching and quite possibly negatively impact student learning.

Instead, we suggest a third option—providing more opportunities for career growth within the field of teaching. Teachers, unlike most other occupations, have to leave their fields in order to be promoted or receive a substantial raise. The most common route for teachers seeking promotion and a higher wage is school administrator. But what about the dedicated teacher who loves teaching and is a gifted educator, yet does not want to be an administrator? Should they remain public martyrs to the “calling” of teaching? Should they just concede to a stifling system and pick up additional shifts at the local food chain restaurant? We argue emphatically, “No.” Teachers should have job-related opportunities to expand their professional growth and get reasonably paid for it too. Highly successful teachers offer underutilized expertise that could be tapped outside the classroom and used to positively reform and improve education.

In North Carolina, numerous proposals have been put forward on how to address the issue of teacher pay. Sadly, the majority of these proposals will pit teachers against each other. This is no way to instill a career ladder for teaching in our state. Instead, we suggest creating professional leadership opportunities that are both merit and career-tracked based. These opportunities should push teachers professionally and reward their efforts with sustained raises and real promotions. Pilot schools in Boston and other parts of the US have experimented with models that give greater professional control of schooling to the teachers; thereby, increasing teacher workload, but also encouraging teacher autonomy. These policies do not continually ask educators to do more with less, but instead compensate teachers for augmented expectations and associated outcomes. North Carolina policymakers should consider measures that create similar “in-house” moonlighting opportunities for teachers in order to provide alternative professional opportunities that can improve the educational atmosphere rather than potentially take away from it. Otherwise, teachers like Matt might be working two weekday nights a week.