

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

What We Should Prioritize

Bryan Proffitt, Durham Public Schools Teacher, President of Durham Association of Educators

June 23, 2016

My mama had to see my mugshot. It was hard on her. I imagine that one of the most basic hopes a mother has is the one where she never has to see her son's mugshot. And if she does have to, I imagine she hopes her son looks a little less upset.

I thought about her when they took it. I thought about her and I thought about all of the people who would undoubtedly see it: My former students would see it. My educator colleagues would see it. Thousands of people I'll never know would see it on the internet and TV.

I thought about all of those folks, and I thought about smiling. After all, I wasn't struggling with what I had done. I had just been arrested because the Governor of the state I live in is committed to prioritizing:

- Ensuring that wealthy people get to keep more of their wealth
- Enabling corporations to poison our environment
- Legislating discrimination and the criminalization of human beings
- Privatizing our schools

And I believe that he should be prioritizing

- Fully funded schools
- A living wage for everyone
- Health care for all
- Clean air and water
- An end to the criminalization of and discrimination against my students, co-workers, friends, and family

I marched two days in the North Carolina summer heat to go see this Governor about what he's doing to my kids and their communities and make some demands. I marched over 20 miles to meet the man who was denying my people what they deserve.

He refused to meet with us. He refuses to recognize the crisis our state's young people are in. I, along with some of the most beautiful human beings I've ever had the privilege to know, sat down in the streets to say that we'd had enough and that people needed to be woken up a bit.

I wasn't struggling with my decision. Nope.

I also wasn't struggling because of poor treatment. Most of the police officers we dealt with were professional and courteous. Some of them reminded me of a few of the School Resource Officers I have known and respected, and the internal contradictions they must wrestle with every day, as my co-arrestee and friend Dawn (who used to be a police officer) shared with us. Others were unnecessarily rude and provocative, but they were the exception. Many of them expressed sympathy and support for our fight (their kids, after all, are in our classrooms every day). I have no doubt that my profession, my whiteness, my cisgendered straightness, and my relative class privilege shielded me from the dehumanizing treatment that many of my students know all too well. So it wasn't that. I had a team of folks in there with me. I had a team of folks holding me down on the outside.

I wasn't overly concerned about my well-being.

A smile might have allowed for more effective communications strategies later. The reason I couldn't muster it, however, is the same exact reason that I was in there in the first place.

As they loaded us into a police van, I could hear Freddie Gray's body banging around in my head.

As we got to the station, I watched a 16-year-old who could have been any kid I ever taught being taken out of a police car, alone and scared.

As I watched my co-conspirators be taken into search rooms, I thought about the vicious sexual assault that NYPD officers committed against Abner Louima.

As I watched my friend Carrol, who needs a cane to get around, be asked to walk across a room on her own with no support until one of her team stepped in to provide it or demanded that the police do it, I thought about what it must be like to be there alone and have health problems.

As I watched my comrade Kristin nearly pass out until she got access to her inhaler, I thought about my former co-worker Vicki's son, and how he died in jail because he couldn't get medical attention.

As I talked with the funny kid who connected with everybody in there and reminded Woody, Donald and myself of a kid we have in at least every class, I thought about the tragedy of wasted potential.

As I sat in rooms filled with people, Black, Brown, and/or poor, I thought about:

- How my students Kaaylon and Jaronte probably would have landed here had they not been murdered.
- How the people who murdered them have probably landed there or will, or won't get that far. And how they had been somebody's students too. And how I have students who have murdered people.
- The time when J tried to stop a fight in my room, got mixed up with a cop, assaulted by said cop, and then taken off to jail for a case that he could never win if he tried.
- How I used to look at the daily mug shot reports in the online versions of the local paper, but I had to stop because seeing my kids' photos every day became less grounding and sobering and more depressing and angering.
- My first week at Hillside when a fight I had broken up on my own between two girls ended with a 15-year-old screaming, bawling, and handcuffed through a face-full of pepper spray.

Jail wasn't particularly hard on me. But it felt particularly hard to be in a place that eats up the lives of millions of Black, Brown, and/or poor people, many of whom I know and love. My body felt heavy with the pain and alienation of living in a society that says that some people get to have stuff, but most people don't. Some people get to live good lives, but most people won't. And some folks, who never had a shot from the beginning, will be warehoused for their whole lives because the people who run our society can't imagine any function for most of us rather than the generation of profit for them. If you're not doing that, they have to hold you somewhere and dehumanize you and contain you so that you won't revolt.

So jail sucks. Or, rather, jails suck.

How about, instead of building more of them, we just give our kids the food, the shelter, the clothes, the nurses and doctors and counselors, the fun and laughs, the safety and knowledge, the skills, love, and opportunities to wonder and wander and learn self-discipline that they deserve?

We have to win y'all. We just have to.

#educationnotincarceration

#studentsdeservemore

P.S. We don't win on one day y'all; this is slow organizing and long-term strategy and work. Please support the work of the Organize 2020 Caucus of NCAE by checking out this [link](#) and a) getting on our listserv, b) joining the caucus, and/or c) contributing financial resources.