

The north carolina teacher dilemma: a broken system

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All across the country, teachers are laying down their pens and raising their voices. They fight for higher wages and better funding for public schools.

As the daughter of a special education teacher, I know the fight for funds firsthand. At my public high school, teachers must buy their own school supplies because there simply isn't enough money, and our textbooks are kept together by prayers and off-brand duct tape. Teachers are underpaid, overstressed, and underappreciated for all they do. Teachers educate the future, is this how we're going to invest in the future? I live in the Tar Heel State, a state that's great for diversity and beautiful scenery but not so good for teachers. North Carolina ranks thirty-fifth for teacher pay and forty-third in per-pupil spending (" NC ranks 35th in nation for teacher pay; 43rd in per-pupil spending WRAL").

The lack of spending shows up in nearly everything, from having thirty kids in a class meant for twenty, one custodian per two or three buildings, science textbooks older than most kids, and cut jobs and curriculum. The annual mean pay for secondary teachers in the United States is \$58, 260, compared to North Carolina's measly \$43, 510 (" Average Teaching Salary in North Carolina" | teachingdegree). It's no wonder there has been a mass exodus of NC teachers fleeing the state or profession. The state teacher attrition is 13. 45%, meaning 12, 750 teachers quit or left NC public schools, and 8.

65% left the teaching profession (" How many teachers are leaving North Carolina's public schools?" newsobserver). Just stop for a moment and think about those numbers. It's absolutely crazy! You don't need a diploma to see

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that's a sign the system is broken. The pay for teachers cannot follow the high cost of living and many of my own teachers supplement their paychecks by working second jobs directly after school, on weekends, and over the summer. Approximately 25% of NC teachers supplement their paychecks with second jobs, but if you include extra jobs ? nside the school system that number changes to about 52%. Christina Burchett a NC teacher who works a second job said: " When students ask me if I can tutor them after school and I'm not able to be there for them, it just kills me.

I know I could be a better teacher if I had more time in the classroom, but I have to pay the bills" (" In North Carolina, Teachers Work Second Jobs to Make Ends Meet" huffpost). Teachers are unable to give students their full attention, hurting students in the long run. North Carolina teachers are almost helplessly at the mercy of politicians as well, because NC is one of five states that don't allow collective bargaining for educators and prohibits strikes by school employees (" Teacher's Unions Collective Bargaining: State and Local Laws" Findlaw). Lawmakers know that the system is shattered, but they stifle teachers from protesting their thoughts. Teachers know that the teaching life isn't one of fame and illustrious wealth, but does that mean lawmakers should oppress them? Absolutely not. Teachers have some of the hardest jobs in the country (watching rash students for over seven hours a day isn't a challenge for the faint-hearted).

They aren't glorified babysitters; they're trainers, educators, moms and dads, coaches, everyday people. It's about time somebody stood up for them. This is the generation of change, we are the generation that will

change the world, so let's start with the people who dedicate their lives to us.