

Education Watch: Doing worse with less A fake “choice” is no choice at all



North Carolina has always been a state committed to a strong, vibrant, and proud educational system. Our commitment to educational excellence has made us a model for states across the country. Unfortunately, that stellar reputation has become tarnished in recent years, and not without cause.

Cuts Have Consequences

School funding in North Carolina is at an all-time low, following the year annual cuts we have seen since 2008. Our per-pupil spending is 48th nationally, and our average for teacher pay ranks a dismal 46th. The funding formula in North Carolina is such that it creates dramatic inequalities from one part of the state to the other, resulting in dramatically different needs among distinct, and increasingly segregated, schools. While the historical trends show a reasonable performance by North Carolina children, early indications are that we are beginning the negative impacts of the drastic funding cuts over the past five years.

We are also seeing an alarming trend toward disinvestment in public education, and the complementary channeling of public education dollars into private, often corporate hands. The narrative that accompanies this policy trend is that privatization is the civil rights elixir for all that ails our schools, or the “choice equals equity” argument. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Impacts Are Not Universal

This disinvestment from public education creates school failure for many children of poverty and color in the form of under-resourced schools, large class sizes, inexperienced teachers, massive public school closures that devastate neighborhoods, and an ideological shift away from the common good toward an individualism that is not worthy of our democratic ideals.

This individualistic approach leaves public schools as the schools of last resort for many poor children, particularly children of color. With it comes low achievement for African American and Latino young people and harsh disciplinary policies that contribute, along with an over-emphasis on standardized testing, to the school-to-prison pipeline.

A strong system of public education is the cornerstone of a strong democracy. Public funds must fund schools that well-serve all NC children, not a select few segregated by class, race, ideological enclaves.

Action NC is a non-profit grassroots community organization that empowers low to moderate-income communities to take action and win victories on issues of concern to our members. For more information, visit us at www.actionnc.org.