

Education Principles Our Children Deserve

Introduction

The Education Team of the People's Alliance (PA) affirms and promotes quality public education for all children. Our specific goals for each year are chosen by the Education Team steering group. You can find them at [our website](#).¹

We have written this set of Educational Principles Our Children Deserve to guide the decision making of the Education Team and the People's Alliance around specific issues that may arise as we work to promote the common good, create strong public schools, and lessen the effects of privatization on our public schools. The principles expressed are based on research, policy documents, debate among members of the Education Team, and the unique history and experience of Durham Public Schools.

This document is meant to be read with our [vision statement](#)² and our [statement on charter schools](#)³. It is not exhaustive, and does not yet include statements about meeting the needs of exceptional children and children whose first language is not English.

Principle One

Funding: PA supports a high level of funding for our schools. We support funding at or above the national average of per-pupil spending.

NC currently spends about eight billion dollars a year on K–12 public education. In spite of this seemingly large number, NC nationally ranks about 46th on per-pupil spending and 42nd on teacher salaries. Since 2013, school personnel at all levels have been cut. These cuts include 7,000 instructional assistants. Budgets for textbooks, supplies, and technology have been reduced by 75%, and no cap is in place for class size in grades 4–12. Right now, NC is spending \$130 less per pupil than it did at the beginning of the recession, 6 years ago. See [Fact Check: Senators debate education spending, constant dollars, fairy tales](#)⁴ and [Highlights of the North Carolina Public School Budget February 2015](#)⁵.

Since the 1930s the state of North Carolina has taken primary responsibility for meeting the operating costs of K–12 public education. Unfortunately, since 1970, the percent of the general fund that the state spends on K–12 has dropped from 52% to 38%. This precipitous drop has pushed more costs to the local level. However, the state has recently restricted the ability of local governments to levy taxes from a variety of sources, so they have to depend more and more on property taxes to support the schools. PA does not support this trend.

PA supports a level of funding that meets the needs of our school population, which is 25% Hispanic, 50% African American, and 18% white. Sixty-seven percent of

DPS students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. In addition, DPS is competing with near neighbors such as Chapel Hill and Wake County for teachers. DPS does not pay comparable salary supplements. Until the NC General Assembly decides to adequately and equitably fund all NC schools, Durham residents will have to take care of Durham's children.

Principle Two

Universal Pre-K: Because Durham's children deserve the best possible start in life, we support the building of a countywide preschool system.

Studies such as Early Education Gaps by Social Class and Race Start U.S. Children Out on Unequal Footing⁶ have shown that low socio-economic status correlates strongly to young children's readiness for reading and for doing math. A stack of research has also shown that the payoff for individual young children and for society from high-quality preschool is indisputable. Other cities and entire states have comprehensive Pre-K systems. The state of NC began building a statewide preschool program with More at Four (now NC Pre-K) and Smart Start, but these efforts have stalled.

Because Durham has about 4,000 four-year-olds in total, a high-quality preschool system may need to be phased in. Of those 4,000-four year olds, about 2,000 live in families at 200% below the poverty line. Of those 2,000, about 850 preschoolers are currently served. PA supports efforts to expand high-quality, developmentally appropriate preschool services, perhaps starting with serving all children in families living 200% below the poverty line.

Principle Three

Governance: PA supports participatory democracy to the maximum extent possible in public schools in Durham.

We support a public school system that is governed by a democratically elected board of education. We expect this board to set district goals and policies that maximize involvement by parents, teachers, students, and citizens, both at the district and school level.

We expect the board to hire and supervise a superintendent who adheres in practice to this ideal and creates a central-office staff that does the same. We continue to support a principal-selection process that allows meaningful input from the School Improvement Team (SIT), PTA, and Durham Association of Educators.

We believe that principals and teachers should welcome parents and community members to participate in setting goals for the school through a robust SIT, an active PTA, and the Durham Association of Educators. When new schools are being developed, the central office should guide a process that involves community input either from the attendance zone or for the theme of the school. To ensure that all

participants can be effective in governing the school, the district should provide ongoing training in the rights and responsibilities of the SIT.

Principle Four

***Teachers and Principals:* PA believes that being a teacher or principal is an honored profession. Durham should treat teachers and principals as professionals. Among other things, Durham should provide support for embedded high-quality professional development, for mentoring, and for pathways to share expertise and leadership.**

To ensure that DPS has the highest quality teachers for our public-school children, we support hiring teachers and principals with certification in their field and a long-term commitment to the profession.

Two recent studies (⁷2013 and ⁸2014) on the effectiveness of teacher-preparation programs compare a variety of these programs. The 2014 study concludes:

Through our study of the distribution, quality, and persistence of teachers in North Carolina public schools, we found that teachers' preparation prior to entering the profession has significant effects on student achievement, evaluation ratings, and persistence in teaching. Notably, the traditional undergraduate teacher preparation programs at UNC system institutions are a valuable source of teachers to North Carolina public schools. UNC undergraduate prepared teachers are outperforming some of the largest sources of teachers in North Carolina, while underperforming smaller, more specialized sources. The UNC system should continue their use of evidence based policies to (1) increase productivity where they perform particularly well (and where other large portals perform poorly); (2) improve programs where they perform less well; and (3) develop, pilot and evaluate innovations in their programs, modeled on particularly successful portals such as TFA.

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Teach For America corps members are the most effective source of early career teachers in North Carolina public schools. They perform well across grade levels and subject areas and have significantly greater odds of being rated above proficient on all five NCPTS. However, TFA corps members represent a very small percentage of the teaching workforce in North Carolina (0.5%) and demonstrate very low levels of persistence in North Carolina public schools. Therefore, they are not a widespread replacement for traditionally prepared teachers. Instead, the TFA model provides an opportunity to identify highly effective recruitment, selection, and support practices that can be scaled up to a university, district, or statewide level.

We support policies that bolster teaching as a noble profession, such as reinstating due process and providing state salary increases for all teachers to at least the national average. Teachers should be afforded quality professional development, including ongoing coaching in race and class bias. We support expansion of the teacher-mentoring program, restoration of master's pay, and restoration of the Teaching Fellows Program.

Principle Five

***School Discipline:* Disciplinary policies and practices that feed the school-to-prison pipeline should be eliminated.**

The goal of a code of conduct is to support building a school climate in which everyone in the school community is respected and valued. All people in the school—including administration and faculty, staff, parents, and children—are part of the community. All work on discipline should be a community effort.

Discipline must be administered without discriminatory policies or practices.

When members of the community are not able to respect and value each other, the community needs to respond in ways that foster self-discipline and an increased understanding of how to be a positive member of the school community. Such practices, such as restorative justice, are preferable to a policy of suspensions for small infractions. These suspensions result in too many students of color dropping out of school and becoming involved in situations and activities that lead directly to incarceration. For a detailed discussion of this issue, see the list of publications on the website for [Youth Justice North Carolina](#)⁹.

Teachers, support personnel, and administrators need to forge strong bonds with parents so that they can work as a team when disciplinary issues arise. Teachers, especially in their early years, need support and coaching on classroom management. All DPS personnel need continuous learning and coaching regarding race and class bias.

We recommend that schools adopt [evidence-based strategies](#)¹⁰ that are successful at improving school discipline. We also recommend that the district provide the necessary support to implement and evaluate these strategies.

DPS has provided ¹¹[a detailed report on discipline issues in Durham Public Schools](#) by Jacob Vigdor, and an update on DPS's current work on this issue.

Principle Six

***Testing and Assessment:* The goal of all tests should be to assess student learning and to improve instruction. A single test should not be coupled with high-stakes decisions such as grade retention or teacher remuneration or removal. Furthermore, we believe that using a single data point to rank schools only serves to identify which schools serve large numbers of poor children or middle-class children.**

Although standardized testing has been around since the mid 20th century, both the numbers and consequences of these tests grew exponentially after the launch of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the 2001 reauthorization and revision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the biggest federal program in K–12 education. NC started statewide standardized testing in 1982. Standardized testing and its uses evoke a variety of strong feelings. Some parents and teachers feel that the tests serve to shine a bright light on the progress or lack thereof among students, particularly among low income students and students of color. These advocates

assert that the needs of such students have been hidden and neglected in the past. Other parents and teachers strenuously object to the number and consequences of testing programs, and to the time spent on preparation for testing. They feel that we have reached a point where the time spent in testing and test preparation unacceptably reduces the time available for instruction and enrichment. They are frustrated about the lack of transparency about the time spent on test “prep” and on testing.

Concerns also arise about how these test scores are being used to punish rather than assist both low-performing students and low-performing schools. In 2013, the NC General Assembly mandated that 3rd graders who do not read on grade level attend summer school or be retained. In 2015 the GA mandated that schools be labeled by A–F grades, which are derived by calculating a score based 80% on “proficiency” and 20% on growth as demonstrated by test results from year to year. Many in Durham feel that these grades are simplistic labels that mostly track the level of poverty among students in a school and disregard student learning growth.

Principle Seven:

Student Attendance: PA supports a strong set of school-choice options within DPS that maximize racial and economic diversity. At a time when racial and economic school re-segregation in urban areas is a national phenomenon, PA supports high-quality, diverse schools. We prioritize neighborhood schools with attendance zones that promote diversity. We also support the use of socio-economic status (SES) as a filter for magnet options.

Our school district, like others across the US, offers a plethora of choices, which can cause parents to scramble each year to obtain the “best choice” for their child and neglect the possibilities in their zoned school.

DPS offers a mix of neighborhood schools, magnets, year-round, and other specialty schools. Although the school board has attempted to create diverse schools through attendance zones and choice schools, 13 neighborhood schools and 11 magnet/specialty schools are hyper segregated, serving at least 90% children of color. While the school board has not abandoned the goal of racially and economically diverse schools, given that the school population is 25% Hispanic, 48% African American and 18% white and that 67% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, this goal proves elusive.

PA urges the school board to take a fresh look at attendance zones, especially as residential patterns are shifting.

Principle Eight

***Unified System:* Support for a unified system of public schools that includes charter schools that meet the Expectations of Charters Schools in Durham¹², which was passed by the PA membership in March 2012.**

While the intent of the original charter-school legislation in NC was to have a “lab-type” school in each county, we now have what amounts to a growing number of mini-school districts within each county, with new charters competing for students from other charters and from traditional public schools. Currently, NC is home to 147 charter schools; 11 more will open in the fall of 2015. A statewide database¹³ on A-F grades also lists the F/R lunch for each school and each charter school:

Durham now has 11 charters; two more will open in 2015-16. Based on available data for 10 charters, we have found that six charters have F/R lunch above 49%. These charter schools overwhelmingly serve children of color. All of them received D or F on the A–F grading system.

In DPS schools, there are 39 (of 53) schools with F/R lunch above 49%. Of those 39, 27 or 69% of these DPS schools received a D or F. One received an A; one, a B; and 10 got Cs.

Four charters have F/R lunch percentages ranging from 6–12%. Of these charters, one received a grade of D; the other three each received a B.

For DPS schools, only one school, the Early College, has a F/R lunch percentage under 12%, and it received an A. The next lowest F/R lunch in Durham, the middle college at 15%, also received an A.

In other words, using the loathed but mandated A–F grading, we can infer that charter schools located in Durham perform no better than DPS schools, even though DPS schools have higher percentages of low income students.

In addition, recent research led by Dr. Helen Ladd¹⁴ at Duke reveals that charter schools are hyper-segregated and that they accelerate segregation within the home district.

For this reason, we do not support any increase in charter schools in Durham at this time. Instead, we would like the school board and charter schools to enter into a good-faith dialogue about the ways in which current charters can meet the expectations laid out in our March 2012 paper **Expectations of Charters Schools in Durham** and about what advantages could accrue to both charters and the system as a whole if charter schools become part of the DPS system. We also encourage DPS to consider allowing more charter-like flexibility in traditional public schools.

Principle Nine

Privatization: We oppose all state and national initiatives that promote privatization of public education.

Educating children in the US has become a contentious battleground. Ideals and institutions focused on public goods that work for everyone are pitted against market ideas of privatization. Because K–12 Public Education is a \$700-billion-dollar-a-year investment in the US, it has become an attractive market for private-sector businesses that seek to make a profit at public expense. And, supporting this agenda fits perfectly with neo-liberal efforts to discredit government services and dismantle public goods.

The actions of the NC General Assembly have been part of this anti-government, pro-privatization agenda. In the past four years, the GA has worked at lightening speed to catch up with other states' privatization efforts. Private and for-profit companies are beginning to eat into an already anemic public-school budget.

These privatization trends in NC include:

- **Vouchers:** The state currently allots \$10 million a year to be spent on vouchers. The NC Supreme Court has ruled that NC's voucher program is constitutional. Though the current program contains income guidelines, those guidelines will be loosened next year. Other states have consistently loosened income guidelines and expanded their voucher programs to middle income families¹⁵. NC legislators talk about expanding spending for vouchers to up to \$40 million.
- **Virtual Charter schools:** The NC General Assembly mandated that two virtual charters be set up in NC in the 2015-2016 school year. The State board has approved the only two applicants, Connections Academy and K12. The latter's track record is so bad that the state of Tennessee recently halted its contract with K12, and the NCAA does not accept course credits from K12¹⁶. The state intends to subsidize the schools, but local systems also have to forward funds for each student in the district who enrolls in the virtual school.
- **For-profit charters:** Although, technically, charters in NC are non-profit, the board can contract with Education Management Organizations (EMOs) to manage their school. EMOs can and do make a profit, and half of latest round of approved applications for charters in NC are run by this kind of organization.
- **Loose oversight of all NC charters:** Due to lack of staff and loose regulations, we are seeing some charters abruptly close, with hundreds of thousands of dollars of public funds missing. Some charter operators rent buildings to charters they found and contract with their own companies for school supplies¹⁷.

Conclusion

It is not surprising that parents in Durham express a desire for both lower taxes and better schools. The forces that support privatization play on these conflicting desires to support a larger agenda of dismantling government and making a profit in the process. In this environment of manufactured scarcity for the majority of Americans, Durham's residents need to stand in unity for a strong system of free public schools open to all.

Endnotes

Introduction

¹Specific goals for the People's Alliance Education team: <http://www.durhampa.org>

²The vision statement of the People's Alliance:

http://www.durhampa.org/vision_statement

³PA's Statement on Charter Schools:

<https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/durhampa/pages/289/attachments/original/1435344707/ChartersinDurhamPA2012-1.pdf?1435344707>

Principle One

⁴ Fact Check: Senators debate education spending, constant dollars, fairy tales:

<http://www.wral.com/fact-check-senators-debate-education-spending-constant-dollars-fairy-tales/14731177/>

⁵Highlights of the North Carolina Public School Budget February 2015:

<http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/fbs/resources/data/highlights/2015highlights.pdf>

Principle Two

⁶Early Education Gaps by Social Class and Race Start U.S. Children Out on Unequal

Footings: <http://www.epi.org/publication/early-education-gaps-by-social-class-and-race-start-u-s-children-out-on-unequal-footing-a-summary-of-the-major-findings-in-inequalities-at-the-starting-gate/>

Principle Four

⁷UNC Teacher Quality Research: 2013 Teacher Preparation Program Effectiveness Report:

http://publicpolicy.unc.edu/files/2013/11/UNC_TQR_OverallProgramReport_Final.pdf

⁸ UNC Teacher Quality Research: Teacher Portal Effectiveness Report:

<http://publicpolicy.unc.edu/files/2014/06/Teacher-Portals-Effectiveness-Report.pdf>

See especially the conclusion, pp 21–22.

Principle Five

⁹Youth Justice North Carolina publications: <http://youthjusticenc.org/publications/>

¹⁰Evidence-based strategies that are successful for improving school discipline: <https://www.ednc.org/2015/04/17/instead-of-suspension-alternative-strategies-for-effective-school-discipline/>

¹¹A detailed report on discipline issues in Durham Public Schools by Jacob Vigdor, and an update on DPS's current work on this issue: [http://www.dpsnc.net/pages/Durham Public Schools/District/About DPS/Reports and Publications/DPS provides early progress re](http://www.dpsnc.net/pages/Durham_Public_Schools/District/About_DPS/Reports_and_Publications/DPS_provides_early_progress_re)

Principle Eight

¹²Expectations of Charter Schools in Durham:

[http://www.durhampa.org/expectations for charter schools in durham county](http://www.durhampa.org/expectations_for_charter_schools_in_durham_county)

¹³Statewide database on A-F grades, which also lists the F/R lunch for each school and each charter school:

<http://media2.newsobserver.com/static/content/multimedia/interactive/schoolperformance/schoolperformance.html>

¹⁴Segmentation in charter school populations:

<https://www.ednc.org/2015/04/16/the-growing-segmentation-of-the-charter-school-sector-in-north-carolina/>

Principle Nine

¹⁵On the expansion of vouchers to middle-income families:

<http://www.prwatch.org/news/2015/07/12869/alec-school-vouchers-are-kids-suburbia>

¹⁶On K12's problems with Tennessee and the NCAA:

<http://www.tucsonweekly.com/TheRange/archives/2014/09/10/a-slow-motion-implosion-at-k12-inc>

¹⁷Non-profit charters that siphon off public dollars to private individuals and businesses: <http://www.newsobserver.com/incoming/article10098587.html>

Other useful articles:

On exceptional children's funding:

<http://www.newsobserver.com/opinion/op-ed/article25015870.html>

Redlining schools in low-income communities:

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/darling-hammond-why-is-congress-redlining-our-schools/2012/01/16/gIQAP3BI4P_blog.html

On how well NC charters meet their goals:

<http://www.newsobserver.com/opinion/op-ed/article13130276.html>

On the need for monitoring charters:

[http://www.salon.com/2015/03/02/education reformers new big lie charter schools become even more disastrous/](http://www.salon.com/2015/03/02/education_reformers_new_big_lie_charter_schools_become_even_more_disastrous/)

For percentages of different racial groups in traditional and charter schools see: NC
DPI Statistical Profile, 2014 and 2015:

<http://apps.schools.nc.gov/pls/apex/f?p=1:1:0>

Proven benefits of early childhood education:

http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9145.html