



North Carolina school vouchers drain public schools

By Tom Campbell

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North Carolina's budget allocates \$705 million for private school vouchers, which critics say diverts funds from public schools.

The state ranks 50th in the nation for per-pupil funding, despite having the ninth-largest GDP. Recent teacher pay raises have been implemented, but the state's starting salary and long-term pay scale remain a concern.

Corporate and personal income tax rates in North Carolina have been steadily cut, reducing potential state revenue.

That's correct. The tax dollars you pay to North Carolina are being used to pay tuition costs for students to attend private schools.

Seven hundred and five million dollars of the current year's state's budget has been allocated for private school vouchers. Based on prior years, at least 64% of those vouchers go to white students. In fact, 88% of those vouchers go to kids who never attended a public school. And while it is difficult to ascertain exact numbers, the majority of those private school attendees come from middle to upper income homes.

They call it the “school choice” movement. But it’s not my choice to subsidize wealthy kids to go to private schools. It is the choice of our legislature.

These shocking numbers exploded in clarity after listening to a presentation by Tom Oxholm, the retired VP of Finance for Wake Stone Corporation, a CPA, and head of Education is Everybody’s Business, a grass roots coalition of business executives advocating for more support for our state’s public schools.

Why are vouchers bad? Every dollar paid to a private school is a dollar taken from public schools. Nobody can claim private schools do better at educating children because we don’t know. They aren’t accountable to report their achievement results. Private schools don’t have to provide transportation to and from school for students, and many don’t provide them meals. They aren’t required to have special education instruction (which we require public schools to provide up to age 23). Further, they aren’t required and most often don’t have social workers or counselors.

The numbers don’t lie. According to the Education Law Center’s December 2025 report, Making the Grade, our state ranked 50th in per pupil funding at \$12,193. We formerly thanked God for Mississippi, but even they spend \$13,559. Virginia clocks in at \$15,815 and South Carolina spends \$17,698.

North Carolina has the ninth best GDP of all states yet pays the lowest starting pay for teachers in the Southeast. Prior to the recently passed budget, starting pay for our teachers was \$41,000, lower than Mississippi, Georgia, West Virginia, Tennessee, South Carolina, Alabama, or Kentucky at \$48,038.

Here’s what stunned me. After starting at \$41,000, 15 years were required for teachers to earn \$53,880 in yearly pay. And there are no more pay increases until after a teacher has put in 24 years and reaches the top pay of \$55,950.

Our lawmakers are beating their chests and bragging about giving teachers an average 8% pay raise. Want to know how this translates into dollars? A starting teacher now will receive \$48,000; after four years \$49,000; after eight years \$51,000; and after 15 years \$56,820. Then only one more raise to \$59,000 after 25 years.

No business or profession has such a ridiculous pay scale. Many who love the prospect of teaching young minds are asking themselves if they can afford to be a teacher.

All education research says the most important single element in getting a great education is the quality of the teacher in the classroom. Tell the truth: would you advise a young man or woman to enter such a profession in North Carolina?

And whenever anyone approaches legislative leaders about raising teacher pay or providing better funding for public schools the answer is almost always, “The budget is tight. We just don’t have the money.” Really? They have stockpiled over \$4 billion in rainy day funds!

North Carolina likes to brag about ranking first (or second) in attracting new businesses, and part of the reason for this attraction is easy to understand. In 2013, the corporate tax rate in our state was 6.9%. When Republicans took charge of state government, they began a steady and deliberate cut of corporate taxes to the current rate of 2%, and they have already codified their intent to cut it to zero by 2030.

Lawmakers have done the same cutting with personal income tax rates. But, as Paul Harvey used to say on his radio broadcasts, here's the rest of the story.

For every 1 percent we cut corporate income tax rates our state loses \$750 million in potential revenues. And for every 1 percent cut in personal income tax rates the state loses a potential \$4.2 billion.

In the past, the leaders of our largest corporations were also the biggest champions for public education. Today's leaders are notably silent. Many privately acknowledge that our state needs to do better, but they also say they are concerned that if they speak out, they or their corporations will face retribution. That is sad!

The bottom line is that North Carolina has a leadership problem. We have a chance to do something about that on Nov. 3.

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