

Dear Friends…An Invitation to Advocate

By Jessica Shore, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools Parent & Volunteer

Friends, I (not Al :) am writing to you on behalf of the 1.5 million children enrolled in public schools in North Carolina. I am also writing to you on behalf of all North Carolinians, because those 1.5 million children are our future.

Those children will be among the leaders of our community. They will be among those who work the businesses that fuel our economy, who teach our grandchildren, and who are caring for us at our hospital bedsides. Sadly, they will also be among those who overuse the emergency department, depend on government subsidies for food, housing and healthcare, strain our judicial system, and some will even live on the streets of our city. Strong public schools are absolutely necessary if we want a strong community.

Community resources are flowing in a way that puts the future of North Carolina's children in jeopardy, and most people don't know.

From 2015 to 2023, the NC Opportunity Scholarship program provided tax-dollar-funded scholarships for private school tuition. From the start there were two constraints: family income less than two times the poverty level and previous enrollment in a public school.

In 2023, the NC legislature removed the income cap and the enrollment requirement.

The program is growing exponentially. In 2015 it started with $11 million. This year, more than $625 million was allocated in the budget. More than $1.6 billion has been spent on the program in total. The program is expected to reach $1 billion per year in the next decade.

Last year, $136 million NC taxpayer dollars were awarded to scholarship recipients with family income between 119,000-268,000 and $62 million was awarded to families who earn over $268,000. Many private schools require families to apply for the scholarships, which is a logical business decision, but the repercussions are alarming.

This increase in funding private schools has occurred while our state ranks between 48th-50th in public education funding level. NC ranks 46th in the country for teacher pay. We are choosing to subsidize private schools before fully funding public education.

If you talk to anyone in public education in Forsyth County, they can tell you what the effects of underfunding look like.

Even more importantly, however, are the effects we cannot see yet.

Our collective decision to underfund public education jeopardizes the flourishing of our whole community– publicly and privately educated individuals–for decades to come as the children of today become the adults of tomorrow.

My invitation is for you to consider doing one or all of the following four action items:

1. Tell someone about the downsides of Opportunity Scholarships. Most people are unaware. You may forward this letter.

2. Contact your NC legislators. Tell them why you want to see public schools fully funded before they fund the Opportunity Scholarships. This would be especially powerful if your family has chosen private school in the past or present. You can find and contact your legislators here: Find Your Legislators

3. Invest. There has been at least one example of a private school family who received scholarships but then redirected those funds towards public schools. Various public school families have indicated an interest in supplementing this process with their own funds. We'd love to have further conversation with you about these efforts.

Thank you for reading and for considering public schools, the children and families they represent, and the future of North Carolina.

Please read more here: Public Schools First NC Report



Public Schools First NC

The views and opinions expressed in guest blog posts are those of the guest bloggers and do not necessarily represent the views of Public Schools First NC, its affiliates, or staff.

publicschoolsfirstnc.org * info@publicschoolsfirstnc.org
Instagram: @publicschoolsfirstnc * Facebook.com/publicschoolsfirstnc *
Bluesky: @publicschoolsfirstnc.org *TikTok @publicschoolsfirstnc