

## Opinion: NC Lawmakers Constructing “Trojan Horse” to Sell Out Public Schools

Written by David R Phillips  
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Lawmakers in Raleigh are about to destroy NC’s public school system with a set of bills that ignores sound educational research and enacts the exact opposite policies instead. With another set of bills they plan to redirect your tax money into private charter and religious schools that are held to a much lower standard and that have a 1/3-failure rate. Ignore the names on these bills that suggest they will “Improve Education” or create “Excellent Public Schools.” You must look inside the bills to discover the lawmaker’s destructive intent.

Both the Excellent Public School Bill (SB 361) and the Education Improvement Bill (HB719) increase class sizes and further weakens teacher compensation (now 48th in the US), thus chasing the best teachers away to better paying places. They are also cutting 3,000 teacher assistants and are about to enact a school grading system that will currently give 68% of NC high schools an “F.”

Meanwhile, the NC Charter School Bill (SB 337) removes the existing requirements for Charter Schools to have at least 50% of their teachers certified. The bill also eliminates any requirements for their teachers to be a college graduate or to pass a background check. Most troubling, the bill creates a separate board to oversee charter schools other than the State Board of Education so that it can establish a different set of standards for itself. The current lawmakers also get to hand select the new board members and there are no restrictions to prevent board members from profiting as a result of their positions on the Charter School Board.

The final nail in the “Trojan Horse” is the Opportunity Scholarship Grant Bill (HB 944), which would allow parents who were dissatisfied with their child’s “failing” public school to use a \$4,200 voucher of taxpayer money to send their child to a private charter or religious school instead. Do you see the Trojan horse? First they destroy the public school system by increasing classroom sizes, chasing away the better teachers with lower pay, and creating a grading system in which the majority of schools “officially” fail. Then they create a way to fund an alternative private school system by offering parents taxpayer money to send their child to a school that can’t “officially” fail, even though it is allowed to operate under much lower standards.

Our lawmakers are saying that the new voucher proposal will offer the best educational opportunities possible for our children and grandchildren. This simply does not represent the truth. Increasing classroom sizes, removing teacher assistants, and chasing away the most experienced teachers is not offering the best educational opportunities possible. We should not be fooled into thinking that private schools, with unqualified teachers and a 1/3-failure rate are going to be better for our children. Our representatives need to be held accountable for the false information they are feeding us about the “failure of public schools” and the “success of charter schools.”

There are much better models to choose from that are not only cheaper, but far more effective. Take British Columbia for example, where I just moved after teaching science in North Carolina for 20 years. NC currently spends about \$8k/student, pays its teachers an average of \$46k/year, and ranks 25th in a nation that scores 15th internationally. BC spends about

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\$7k/student, pays its teachers \$70k/year, and ranks 3rd internationally. (The US\$ and CA\$ are nearly equal.) The typical classroom and quality of teacher are nearly identical as well. The teachers in BC have more time to give each student the individualized instruction they need because they don't need a second job to make ends meet, like the majority of teachers I used to work with in NC.

British Columbia has shown me that my first principal, Arbie Rhodes at Valley Springs Middle School, was right. Her philosophy for an excellent school was to hire good teachers and let them do their job. Her wisdom produced one of the top-performing schools in NC and her philosophy still works here in BC today. In both NC and BC, principals have done an excellent job over the years hiring qualified, hard-working and heart-driven teachers. Studies show that teacher pay is the best way to improve education. Canada and the other top scoring nations of the world prove that. Both American and Canadian schools ranked about the same internationally before “No Child Left Behind” was enacted. Since then the US switched its primary focus to accountability testing and has consequently dropped to 15th. On the other hand, Canadian schools rose to 3rd by keeping their primary focus on individualized instruction for the whole child and by paying their teachers enough to live on.

Don't allow our lawmakers to pass these “Trojan Horse” Educational bills that will eliminate what actually works and enacts the exact opposite instead. The only way to stop this pending legislation is to contact your members of legislature directly by phone, email, or written correspondence. Our children need to see our generation stand up for NC's future and demand what actually works. Our children need to see how DEMOCRACY is about doing the most reasonable thing for the majority of people, rather than doing what is most profitable for a charter school special interest group. Our children need to learn that they have a voice in a democracy and that they can make a difference. Please contact your members of the legislature to voice your opposition to this legislation before it is too late. Get your kids to send in a letter as well to teach them how they can help shape their own future in a democracy. You can submit your democratic voice online at [www.ncleg.net](http://www.ncleg.net)

/ . Or you can call the two chairs on the Education Committees. You can reach the Senate Co-Chairman, Dan Soucek, at 919-733-5742 and you can reach the House Chairman, Linda Johnson at 919-733-5861.

David R Phillips  
Former NC Science Teacher--Watauga High  
Victoria, BC, Canada