

# Testimony

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## **Opening:**

Good morning. My name is Mary McCray. I am an elementary teacher of 5<sup>th</sup> grade here in Charlotte Mecklenburg. I am also the president of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Association of Educators. CMAE is an affiliate of the North Carolina Association of Educators and the National Education Association.

I thank you for the opportunity to give the perspective of my colleagues, classroom teachers, who are on the front lines in CMS every day.

Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools lost 843 educators last year, nearly ½ of those were classroom teachers and a quarter was teacher assistants. With instructional support personnel counted, Charlotte Mecklenburg cut 710 educators from the classroom out of 843 total cuts. That is 84% of all cuts coming from children's teachers and teacher assistants.

Before we talk about innovation, before we begin any discussion on experiments, Charlotte Mecklenburg and the state of North Carolina needs to master the most elementary requirement for schools: It needs a qualified teacher standing before ready-to-learn students. Innovators and academics can present all the studies and talk about all the new ideas at any given conference. We can create programs, we can bring in technology, and we can shift our paradigms, and think outside the box. However, it always comes back to a teacher standing in the classroom, teaching children who are ready to learn.

Innovation is nothing new to schools, especially in Charlotte Mecklenburg. We have large numbers of students who earn college credit in high school, strategic staffing along with pay for performance in our hard to staff or low performing schools, we've implemented the New Schools Projects with some success on the campuses of 2 of our high schools- that is considered "schools within a school", and many more examples. But the reality is that there are teachers who are teaching nearly 40 children in a classroom that only seats 30 students and has 25 textbooks. We are preparing children for universities, careers, and military service with fewer resources than we've had in a generation. Our teachers are also innovating at home as we deal with furloughed pay, higher health care premiums for our children, and an ABC pay-for-performance testing program that hasn't paid us for our performance in 2 years.

Please do not misunderstand me. Public schools require innovation. In an economic climate that has left K-12 public education without the needed resources to provide a constitutionally required sound basic education, we need innovation now more than ever. I propose that we create a tax system in North Carolina that produces the resources required to put 1 teacher in front of a classroom with no more than 22 students. I propose that we transition our current tax system in North Carolina from an agrarian based tax system to one that recognizes that we are an economy based on services and technology not bartering and manufacturing. Let's also create a baseline funding system for K-12 public education that recognizes the limitations of local funding capabilities.

The federal government can play this important role in protecting the 5500 education jobs that were cut in North Carolina last year. I ask that this administration and the Congress invest in public schools and its students during this critical time. Now is not the time to divest, privatize or devise gimmicks.

To promote innovation in public schools we must think beyond creating more charter schools. Charter schools are only one strategy to afford innovation in a community. Schools that have proven track records based on multiple indicators should be allowed educational flexibility to try innovative strategies. In NC we have a variety of innovative school models; magnet programs, language emersion programs, Learn and Earn, Early and Middle Colleges. Another innovative approach might be creating Learning Lab schools with Universities to implement research-based innovations that impact student achievement.

Additionally, new and innovative approaches for public schools must entail reviewing the manner in which we assess students, evaluate teachers and fund innovation.

**We must provide students ways to show what they have learned:** As ESEA is reauthorized the focus can not be on more assessments/testing, but better assessments to allow students to show they can solve problems, think creatively, and work in teams. There must be multiple ways that schools can demonstrate success. Success is not just a passing test score!

**We must Elevate the Profession:** North Carolina has an edge on supporting effective educators with the Principal and Teacher Evaluation Process. This new evaluation process has created in most schools; climates of collaboration, self reflection, and professional learning communities where instruction is data driven to maximize student

success. The evaluation of educators can not be solely based on a student test score. There are many ways that a teacher or principal impacts a student's growth. To elevate the most noble profession, we must have policies in place that help create more respect for educators and stop the divisive policies that create barriers for collaboration; such as merit or differentiated pay. To be an educator, one needs to have skills as well as knowledge and training. Saying anyone can come and teach if they have the desire to make a difference does not create professional respect. The federal government does not need to tell states how to evaluate educators nor does the federal government need to set policies on who schools should hire. Each state and each community has different needs and ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL.

**We must Provide Equitable Access to Education:** The competitive grant process will create more have and have not schools. It is noble to provide opportunities for schools to apply for extra funds, but many schools that need extra funds will have too many barriers to access the needed funding. Before extra funds are granted the Federal Government must fully fund Title I and IDEA programs without the current caps.

As we push forward for innovation we must remember that every child has equal rights to a quality public education and fully funding that education is a baseline for student success. I appreciate the opportunity to be a witness today and I look forward to continuing this dialogue in the hopes for a better and brighter future for all of our students.