

SILENCE SPEAKS 1,000 WORDS

Protestors take stand over state education cuts

BY CHANEL DAVIS
THE CHRONICLE

Local members of the North Carolina Association of Educators and the North Carolina PTA held a silent protest Aug. 13 in front of the Forsyth County Government Center to bring attention to state budget cuts they say have adversely affected students and teachers.

During the 30-minute demonstration, some participants, including children, held signs that read, "I Stand up for Public Education."

Gov. Pat McCrory signed a budget into law on Aug. 7 that included an average 7 percent raise for teachers, but critics say the raise is anything but. Tenure stipends have been stripped away for veteran teachers, and the new pay scale will mean that the raises won't be given



Petitjean



Dunn

across the board.

North Carolina fell to 46th in the nation in teacher pay in 2012-2013, according to the National Education Association, and out-of-state districts, most notably Houston, Texas, have begun recruiting fed up North Carolina teachers.

"We have been in the news a lot lately, and it looks like our biggest concern is our pay," said Ann Petitjean, a local teacher and president of the Forsyth County Association of Educators, a NCAE affiliate.



Photos by Chanel Davis
Protesters stand silently holding signs outside the Forsyth County Government Building.

(Right) Teacher Assistant Elisa Rainey (left) stands with Rhonda Gordon, a social worker in the school system.

"Of course, we care about our pay, everyone should, but what we really care about is the reduction in funding for public schools and public school children in North Carolina."

Similar protests were held across the state; participants were encouraged to spread the message by posting protest photos on social media sites.

Petitjean said that while some teachers will get raises, it won't equate to the extra burden they are being asked to shoulder as a result of ballooning classroom sizes.

"We are expanding and our money is not. Our children deserve to be educated. It is in our state constitution that they get a free, quality and public education. We want to make sure that that's happening," she said.



N.C. PTA President Donald Dunn said parents should take notice and be concerned.

"There are too many deep cuts that will not only impact the teachers but the students in their academic performance," said Dunn, a Winston-Salem resident.

Pat Rhodes has been paying attention. She took part in the demonstration out of concern for her grandchildren.

tions to deal with state cuts. Elisa Rainey is a teacher assistant at Whitaker Elementary. At last week's protest, she said she fears the cuts will harm students who need the most help.

"Public education is key to the education of our children. Every child is not receiving the same quality of service," Rainey said. "We want to be able to make sure every child has quality public education, regardless of background, race, religion and anything of that nature."

Petitjean hopes the protests and other efforts being planned by educators get lawmakers' attention.

"We hope that the community will come stand with us at different events, writing letters or speaking with their legislatures to let them know how important education is to the community," she said.



Rhodes

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