

The TEACH Act

(Transforming Education, Access, Curriculum, and Honor)

Introduction: The Crisis in Our Schools

America promises every child a fair shot, but our public schools tell another story. Kids are learning in moldy buildings with broken AC, teachers are fleeing because they can't pay rent, and families are crushed under tuition debt that follows them for decades. This is not by accident. This is the result of decades of deliberate sabotage.

The Leandro Case: North Carolina's Broken Promise

In 1994, five low-wealth North Carolina counties — Hoke, Halifax, Robeson, Vance, and Cumberland — sued the state in what became known as *Leandro v. State*. Their claim was simple: our schools are so underfunded that our children have no path to a “sound, basic education,” a right guaranteed under the state constitution.

In 1997, the North Carolina Supreme Court agreed. The ruling was clear: the state has a constitutional obligation to provide every child with access to a sound, basic education, regardless of wealth or zip code.

Decades later, that promise is still unfulfilled. In 2022, the court ordered the legislature to transfer **\$1.75 billion** to fund the Leandro plan over two years. A later ruling showed at least **\$677 million** in obligations still unmet. In plain terms: North Carolina owes its kids billions, and the bill still hasn't been paid.

This is not just about numbers. It's about generations of children robbed of their right to learn, teachers starved of resources, and whole communities trapped in cycles of poverty.

The Reagan Era: When Disinvestment Became Policy

The betrayal of public schools didn't start in North Carolina — it started at the top.

When Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, he declared war on public education:

- He slashed federal education funding by nearly **\$1 billion** in his first term.
- Title I funds for low-income schools were cut by **25%**.
- Head Start was gutted, with proposals to cut over **500,000 kids** from the program.
- He even tried to count **ketchup as a vegetable** to slash school lunch requirements.
- He pushed to abolish the Department of Education altogether, calling it unconstitutional.

This wasn't about efficiency — it was about shrinking opportunity for poor and Black families. Every cut made sure that the Civil Rights gains of the 1960s would never fully come to life in classrooms.

The Decades After: Both Parties Carried It Forward

- **George H.W. Bush (1989–1993):** Pushed privatization through “America 2000,” emphasizing vouchers over real investment.
- **Bill Clinton (1993–2001):** Expanded charter schools in 1994 and signed the **Crime Bill**, putting police in schools and accelerating the school-to-prison pipeline.
- **George W. Bush (2001–2009):** Passed **No Child Left Behind (2002)**, forcing schools to “teach to the test” under threat of funding cuts. Poor schools were punished instead of

supported.

- **Barack Obama (2009–2017):** Expanded high-stakes testing and pushed **Race to the Top**, tying teacher pay and funding to test scores, and expanding charters at the expense of public schools.
- **Donald Trump (2017–2021):** Appointed Betsy DeVos, a billionaire who openly despised public schools. Pushed for vouchers and religious school funding while starving public systems.

From Reagan to today, Democrats and Republicans alike chose to disinvest in public schools, privatize education, and criminalize poverty.

The School-to-Prison Pipeline: Sabotage by Design

When kids lose resources in school, they don't just lose opportunity — they're pushed into punishment.

- After-school programs were cut, leaving kids with nowhere to go.
- Free and reduced lunch programs were underfunded, deepening child hunger and stigma.
- Truancy laws criminalized students who couldn't afford transportation or had to work.
- Police were placed in schools, while counselors and social workers were cut.

The result was predictable: poor kids, Black and Brown kids, disabled kids, were suspended, expelled, arrested, and pushed out of classrooms. Dropout rates climbed. Addiction and poverty deepened. And prisons — both public and for-profit — filled their beds.

Inside those prisons, corporations cashed in on constitutionally protected slave labor. Companies, from fast food to telecom, hired incarcerated people for pennies an hour while selling the value of their labor for thousands. America's schools became pipelines to America's prisons, and America's prisons became pipelines to corporate profit.

This is not a broken system. It's a system working exactly as designed.

Where We Are Now

Today, the United States spends **more per capita on healthcare and incarceration than any developed nation**, while our schools remain starved. Teachers are leaving in record numbers, students are falling behind in literacy, and college debt has passed **\$1.7 trillion**.

In North Carolina, the Leandro mandate is still ignored. Students in poor and rural districts are still learning in underfunded classrooms, while state legislators fight to expand school vouchers that funnel public money into private schools with little accountability.

The bottom line is simple: for decades, we've treated public education not as a right, but as a battlefield. Politicians and corporations starved it, sabotaged it, and profited off its collapse.

Why We Need the TEACH Act

The TEACH Act is not just an education policy. It's a restoration of what was stolen. It makes good on the Leandro promise and reverses decades of Reagan-era sabotage. It guarantees tuition-free public education, dignified teacher pay, real after-school programs, modern facilities, and curriculum that teaches kids to think, not just test.

And it locks every dollar in a corruption firewall so profiteers can't gut it from the inside.

This is how we end the sabotage. This is how we give every child in America not just the right to an education on paper, but the reality of one in practice.

Core Pillars of the TEACH Act

T — Tuition-Free Public Higher Education

- All public universities, trade schools, and community colleges are tuition-free.
- Federal funding guarantees families never need to take on 5- or 6-figure student debt for education.
- Middle-class families, often excluded from aid, will finally have fair access.

E — Elevating Teacher Pay

- Teachers from pre-K through higher education must earn dignified wages.
- Pay floors:
 - Pre-K through 5th grade: at least 20% above cost of living in each state.
 - Middle and high school: at least 30% above cost of living.
 - College and university professors: scaled from 40%–60% above cost of living.
- Annual federal adjustments to keep wages above inflation.
- School support staff — bus drivers, cafeteria workers, janitors, aides — guaranteed living wages and benefits.

A — Access to After-School & Youth Programs

- Robust funding for extracurriculars: sports, arts, STEM, music, vocational training.
- Focus on low-income districts to keep kids safe, engaged, and developing skills instead of being pushed toward incarceration.
- Mandatory partnerships with local organizations to ensure programming reflects community needs.

C — Curriculum Overhaul for Real Learning

- Replace “teaching to the test” with civic education, political literacy, and critical thinking.
- Literacy benchmarks: every child must leave 3rd grade reading at grade level or better.
- Civic & legal literacy: all students graduate understanding how government works, how to vote, and how to advocate for themselves.
- Curriculum must reflect real history — inclusive of marginalized communities.

H — Holistic Investment in Schools & Communities

- Infrastructure rebuild: billions invested to modernize schools, eliminate mold, lead pipes, and crumbling facilities.
 - Nutrition: free, high-quality school meals for every student. End to processed, low-quality lunches.
 - Accessibility: every school required to meet standards for disabled and neurodiverse students.
 - School-to-school pipelines, not school-to-prison pipelines.
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Safeguards & Enforcement: Making the TEACH Act Untouchable

The TEACH Act is designed to uplift communities, not feed corporate greed. These safeguards ensure every dollar goes to public education, every teacher is respected, and no loophole can be exploited.

1. No State Redirection Loopholes

- States cannot siphon or redirect federal TEACH Act funds away from public schools.
- Misused funds will be clawed back and redirected straight to districts.

2. Public Funds Stay Public

- Private schools are banned from receiving TEACH Act funding.
- Charters allowed **only under strict rules**: public oversight, public records, equal access, basic infrastructure.

3. Equity First Rule

- Marginalized and historically underfunded communities (rural, Black, Brown, Indigenous, immigrant, disabled, and low-income students) must receive priority funding.

4. Corporate Profit Firewall

- No for-profit corporations can own or profit from TEACH Act-funded schools or services.
- Contracts must go first to small businesses, co-ops, and family-owned companies.

5. Lockbox Protection for Funding

- Federal trust fund for education, protected from budget raids.
- Requires two-thirds Congressional vote to cut.

6. Transparency & Public Oversight

- Online database tracks every dollar.
- Whistleblower protections expanded for teachers and staff who report fraud or misuse.

7. Accountability in Curriculum & Staffing

- No federal money for standardized testing scams.
- Schools audited every 3 years for progress in literacy, civic education, and equitable staffing.

Corruption Firewall: Protecting the People's Money

We know what happens when big money and politics get too close: schools crumble while corporations cash in. The TEACH Act makes sure that never happens again by putting locks on every door corruption usually walks through.

1. Federal Trust Lockbox

All TEACH Act money is held in a dedicated education trust fund. It cannot be raided for other purposes without a two-thirds vote of Congress.

2. Open-Book Spending Database

Every contract, every receipt, every bid is posted online for the public to see. Families and watchdogs can track every dollar down to the school building level.

3. Small Business First Rule

Local small businesses, co-ops, and family contractors get first shot at construction and service contracts. No more monopoly handouts to giant corporations.

4. No Pay-to-Play

If a company donates to a politician, they are disqualified from TEACH Act contracts. No exceptions.

5. Community Oversight Boards

Each district forms a board of parents, teachers, and local leaders to oversee funding. They can veto spending that doesn't meet community needs.

6. Independent Audits With Teeth

Federal auditors check compliance every three years. Fraud or misuse means frozen funds, canceled contracts, and immediate clawbacks.

7. Whistleblower Rewards

Teachers and staff who expose fraud are protected and rewarded financially when their reports save public money.

8. Equity Clause Enforcement

Funding must prioritize marginalized communities first. States that try to funnel funds to wealthy areas will see those dollars clawed back and redirected.

Funding the TEACH Act

- Timeline: Implemented after the People's Healthcare Rescue Act, once tax reforms and healthcare savings free up revenue.
 - Revenue Sources:
 - Restored corporate tax rates.
 - Wealth surtax on billionaires.
 - End of carried interest and offshore tax loopholes.
 - Defense budget cuts from waste and contractor price gouging.
 - Profiteer taxes from healthcare, pharma, and insurance corporations.
 - By sequencing after healthcare, the TEACH Act ensures the funding base and oversight mechanisms are already in place.
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What the TEACH Act Delivers

The TEACH Act means teachers finally earn dignified wages that reflect the value of their work. Families save tens of thousands of dollars because tuition debt is gone for good. Schools in every neighborhood, not just the wealthy ones, become safe, modern, inspiring places where kids actually want to learn.

Every child eats healthy meals and has real opportunities to grow through arts, sports, and STEM programs that keep them engaged and out of harm's way. Literacy, civic knowledge, and honest history empower the next generation to lead this country with confidence and clarity. And for once, not a single public dollar is wasted on profiteers or funneled into unaccountable private schools.

This is what dignity in education looks like. This is how we restore pride in our schools, respect for our teachers, and hope for our children. The TEACH Act is not just an education policy, it's a promise that America will finally invest in its people instead of selling them out.