



GUILFORD EDUCATION ALLIANCE



Lift Every Voice: Adrienne Spinner

Today's contributor in our series to lift up voices from our alliance comes from an advocate and mother who works professionally in the policy arena, is on the advisory board for the NC Council for Women and on the board of directors for the ERA-NC Alliance.

Adrienne has been an active GEA volunteer and is a member of our Program Leadership Team, guiding our program and engagement work. A few years ago, if you asked Adrienne if she thought she would find herself in so many places of community intersection and influence, I think she might have laughed. And yet, each step she has taken out of her comfort zone to wade into the deep waters of thoughtful, hands-on advocacy for equity and justice has led her to new and impactful places. In her writing below, Adrienne helps us bridge from her personal experience to thinking about the kind of systemic and policy changes we need to make progress. I urge you to soak in her perspective. As I do, I learn much. --
Winston

Fighting for Better

By: Adrienne Spinner

My husband Justin and I can both work from home. During the pandemic, we have fallen into the routine of being on our laptops, in and out of Zoom meetings while our two kids spend their days in a constant rotation of snacks, workbooks, tea parties and screen time. It's not ideal - but we are fortunate and I fully acknowledge that.

The realization that this new reality would continue into the fall caused a wave of anxiety to wash over me. Questions have been swimming in my head. If I want my child to continue remotely will we be able to? Will we lose our spot in the magnet school she attends? What about my youngest? She is old enough - by 2 weeks - to start kindergarten. But we had decided a year ago to red-shirt her for another year. Without universal pre-K in North Carolina, we do not qualify for the limited spots that are offered. I no longer feel comfortable sending her to a private preschool for the next year, so what will my outgoing, energetic child do to prepare (academically AND socially) for kindergarten?

We are in the same boat as a lot of North Carolinians. I am in the same boat as a lot of women. In many aspects of society, women are bearing more of the burdens of COVID. Women carry a lot of the stress that comes with managing at-home work and children, and they are making up a large percentage in professions like teaching and nursing. Women of color, and namely Black women, face even more adversity during this pandemic, as our health is being affected disproportionately more than white counterparts. **COVID shines a glaring light on disparities that already existed in the Black community**, from higher rates of pre-existing conditions like diabetes and hypertension, to maternal and infant mortality.

I am part of a population that sits at the intersection of systemic racism and sexism; and these systems, along with COVID, all say that **my life doesn't matter the way that others do. It is a heavy weight**, especially when I often think of the suffering of others over myself; not just my family, but teachers and school staff in my community, medical and essential workers, and the parents that are not in a position - as I am - to work from home. These are the folks that I organize and advocate for. These are the folks that take priority in my mind. If you **elevate the most vulnerable of humanity, then all of us rise.** And, don't women have that magical distinction of nurturing all of humanity?

These times provide us with **an opportunity to rebuild systems** in an equitable way, to create a new normal that works for all of us - a very daunting task that will not be solved overnight, or even in our generation. The good thing is that women - especially **Black women - are built to fight, generation to generation**. In all of the devastation that society has seen from COVID, the optimist in me will never give up the fight to know better and do better.

North Carolina must join the efforts that other progressive states are leading to ensure that a recovery from COVID is comprehensive and just. When the pandemic results in a 13% uninsured rate due to job losses, we know we must expand Medicaid to achieve an immediate reduction of that gap. When the pandemic closes schools, we must provide paid family and medical leave. When care burdens are more likely to remove women from the workforce, universal pre-K, elder care, and disability care services are a must. Our essential workers must be paid a living wage, with access to affordable healthcare and the resources to protect themselves on the job. We must have **an intersectional approach that supports all marginalized populations**, like Indigenous communities, the

LGBTQ+ community, and those that are housing insecure or experiencing incarceration.

Racial justice must be the lens that we use in our work, and social and economic justice must be the driving force. The stains of systemic racism and sexism run deep in our society. But, I am hopeful that this is a movement - and not just a moment - of recovery and change that will make all North Carolinians better. I am ready to listen, learn, and work, and I am thankful for the many allies that are fighting for better. My kids are too young to ever remember this time as more than a crazy year of being stuck at home with mom, dad, online school, and Hello Kitty face masks. But **I pray that I will be able to show them how our world is better** because of the collective efforts of many, and how women led the way. Let's get to work.

**When we invest in women,
we are investing in the people who invest in everyone else.**
- Melinda Gates

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