

# Tabor-Loris Tribune

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12 PAGES TODAY

## Her mission: Restore Teaching Fellows

By DEUCE NIVEN

Santana Batten wasn't born when North Carolina lawmakers funded the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program.

A quarter-century later, the Tabor City native and rising junior at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke is taking up the fight to restore the program, killed as part of cost-cutting measures adopted by the state General Assembly earlier this year.

She's articulate, and passionate, and says more than 500 Teaching Fellows still working their way through college, and count-

less others who have made careers in the public schools as a result of the state aid, are joining the battle.

Lawmakers have already heard from Teaching Fellow students and graduates, and Batten said that grass-roots level lobbying is just getting started.

State Rep. Dewey Hill, a Columbus County Democrat, said that's just the right attitude, and activity.

"The legislature needs to hear from people," Hill said. "It makes a difference."

Hill said he was opposed to budget provisions slashing the Teaching Fellows program. There will be no Teaching Fellows schol-

arships awarded for high school grads in 2012 under the current budget.

Lawmakers will be back in session Sept. 12, but Hill said restoring funding for the program this year would be a long-shot.

### Teaching mentor

Batten, a 2009 graduate of South Columbus High School and the daughter of Irene Batten, said her desire to become a teacher came early.

Amy Wright, Batten's fifth grade teacher at Tabor City Elementary School, cemented that desire after reading a competitive essay she had written for the

D.A.R.E. (Drug Awareness Resistance Education) program.

"I didn't think I could write," Batten said. "She said 'Santana, this is brilliant.'"

Batten was one of the essay contest winners that year.

Still, Batten recalls her transition between elementary school and middle school as an uneasy one. She soon thrived, finding her niche in the classroom and as a cheerleader.

Cheerleading made the transition to high school, three years later, easier.

"I had been out to South Columbus because of the  
(Continued below)



Santana Batten

cheerleading," Batten said. "I knew my way around."

A Stallion cheerleader, Batten was the squad leader her senior year. But her eye was on the classroom.

### Affordable education

Envisioned as a full scholarship when lawmakers approved the Teaching Fellows program in 1986, its \$26,000, spread out over four years, won't cover all of the college expenses required for a

degree. But Batten said it's a big help.

"At UNCP, it covers about 70 percent of my costs," Batten said. "If I was going to Chapel Hill, it would probably be more like 30 percent."

For students, the payback hasn't changed in 25 years. Teaching fellows commit to teach in the public schools of North Carolina for four years after earning their degree.

That's no chore for Batten, who

said she wants to teach middle school math, and hopes to come back to Tabor City.

### Continuing obligation

It's her desire to see others with the chance to become Teaching Fellows Batten sees as her most pressing obligation.

"It is my mission," she said. "My obligation. I feel like they are making a bad decision. You look at the studies. It costs \$31,000 a year to house one inmate in

prison. A teacher's salary is that much."

Teaching Fellows have, on average, SAT scores of 1100 or better, rank in the top ten percent of their high school graduating classes, and are more likely to remain teachers longer than those who have not had the experience.

"It's a big motivation," Batten said. "You know the importance of education."

Teaching Fellows, following their freshman year, spend part

of the summer touring the state, from the mountains to the coast. Batten said the "discovery tour" gave her invaluable inspiration, as she saw how some of the poorest people in North Carolina live.

"You have to ask yourself, 'how are you going to make them feel safe and make this a warm environment in the classroom?' It's important, because education is the key to success."