



## Governor Holcomb, Where are the Teachers on Your Teacher Compensation Commission?

By Educator Barnes – February 18, 2019

Teacher compensation has been a hot topic button across the country. In some states, teachers have even gone on strike leaving parents to scramble to find childcare while teachers fought for higher compensation and better benefits. Early in my studies as an education major, a professor said, “Teachers are in this profession for the outcome not the income.” Though I believe this is true, many teachers work second jobs to keep their heads above water financially. Now, the teacher compensation debate is front and center in Indiana.

It helps that Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb has committed to helping improve teacher pay. What is not so great is there are no teachers on his Next Level Teacher Compensation Commission, but unfortunately, I’m not surprised. Legislation gets signed into law that directly

affects students, parents, and teachers with little to no input from those stakeholders. It is not easy to have your voice heard by lawmakers, and I know from experience.

Last year, I went to give testimony for a school discipline bill. I had to take off work. I sat in the state house for three hours waiting to testify, but I did not have the opportunity. Once the bill was finally called to the floor, only one person was allowed to give testimony before the lawmakers called a recess which pushed the testimony to another day. I was told to leave a copy of my testimony, which I did, but I was not satisfied. I wanted to have my voice heard. I wanted the lawmakers to look at my face while I was telling them why this bill was needed.

Since I was determined, I took off another half day of work. I sat in the statehouse for about four hours before I was finally heard. Being there in person was important because the lawmakers were able to ask me follow up questions, which I was more than happy to answer. I doubt they are going to take the time to find you and follow up if all they get to do is read a written copy of your testimony.

Not only should a teacher be part of the commission studying teacher pay, but more than one teacher should be on this commission, so we have representatives from rural, urban, suburban, wealthy, and Title I schools. There is an advisory council that is supporting the commission that includes one teacher from Westfield High School. As a person that has been and currently is part of an advisory group, I can tell you that advisory groups don't have as much influence as the members would like.

This situation makes me think of lyrics from "The Room Where It Happens" in the musical Hamilton:

*We want our leaders to save the day*

*But we don't get a say in what they trade away*

*We dream of brand new start*

*But we dream in the dark for the most part*

*Dark as a tomb where it happens*

*I got to be in the room where it happens*

What compromises will be made when a teacher is not in the room, not part of the commission? Yes, teachers are glad the top leader in our state is taking up the issue of teacher pay, but how can decision makers know what is best for teachers without our voices being heard? What will it take for educators to be included in these decisions? Now, teachers wait. It seems that is all we do – wait for others to make decisions for us without us.

Click [here](#) to view a list of the commission members.