



Indiana Teacher Pay Commission: “We are tired of telling you how to fix teacher pay.”

By Educator Barnes – August 20, 2019

Instead of staying after school yesterday to prepare for the next day, teachers from across the state filed into the Ivy Tech Culinary and Conference Center to raise their voices yet again about the importance of raising teacher pay and to provide solutions for consideration to make

that happen to Governor Holcomb's Next Level Teacher Compensation Commission. No one questioned the need for improving teacher pay in Indiana; however, how to improve it in a sustainable way was up for debate with some ideas rooted in philosophical or political beliefs.

Before comments were heard, the commission's chairman Michael L. Smith informed attendees of the following:

We have been at this task for more than six months meeting regularly with colleagues. Together we have reviewed extensive amounts of data, gathered from national sources, from adjacent states, sources from our Indiana repository. We met individually or as a group with the state superintendent of instruction, several members of our legislature, educators from across the state and have received input from hundreds of other concerned Hoosiers. In fact, we have received more than 2,000 suggestions from close to 800 teachers and other members of the public who have posted their thoughts and suggestions on our website. Each idea has been read carefully and many have resulted in further review and research that will add to our actionable recommendations that will be included in the commission's report.

The first person to provide public comment was music teacher and Indiana State Teacher Association President Keith Gambill who in addition to providing a rationale for the need to improve teacher pay also took the opportunity to attack public charter schools and the voucher program. "The state has been reckless in its allocation of education dollars funding unproven, pedagogically unsound, and ethically corrupt systems. Over 90% of Hoosier families support our public schools and our budget should reflect that."

A sea of red shirts, teachers in the state union filled the room. Like the ISTA president, they echoed concerns about charter schools and vouchers. Unfortunately, they ignored this comment from the commission's chairman, "We have not been asked to reform K-12 education; we have been asked to help ensure that the compensation of our teachers is competitive." Charter schools are not going away and neither is the voucher program. Some educators do not seem to care about Hoosier families who choose other options or even those educators that choose to serve in those schools. This should not be a majority rules situation.

As the meeting continued, teachers identified the changes in policy that have restricted teacher compensation. Music teacher and state representative Melanie Wright shared:

During that time, we all progressed down the regular salary schedule; we really don't have a regular salary schedule per se. Starting around 2010-2011 laws were passed to restrict collective bargaining and also tied student test scores to evaluations. This was three years after property tax caps came in which really limited the local fiscal opportunities that were given to the schools.

Other teachers also mentioned how the property tax cap is problematic and forces communities to beg for referendums to be passed to raise revenue. This also causes concerns about sustainability since referendums only cover a period of time.

When it came to accountability, educators were split. One suggestion touted was using the millions of dollars used for standardized testing to improve teacher compensation. Other educators stated they were not against being held accountable but questioned the way accountability was being handled in the state.

Another theme of the evening was the impact of low teacher pay. In 2010, a former Purdue employee decided to become an English teacher. She shared a conversation she had with a colleague from Purdue who teaches aspiring math teachers. "How many will you have graduating this year? The number, four. Four teachers able to teach math at the secondary level graduating in 2020 from Purdue University home of STEM." This comment pointed out how the current compensation model is discouraging educators from pursuing education as a profession in Indiana. Why go to Purdue University to become a math teacher, when you can major in just math and make twice as much upon graduation?

Some educators have taught in other states and provided suggestion from those teacher compensation models. A teacher, who was part of the California foster care system, mentioned the importance of improving teacher pay because of the impact educators have on children especially him when he was considering ending his life as a child. He also explained compensation in California.

In California, we had full bargaining rights. We had a step and column system where as a holder of a master's degree, I was paid for having that master's degree. Every year, I got a raise based on the fact that I stayed within my district. One of the things about moving around is that you are cut off at about seven years. So at year eight, year nine, year ten, I would lose money to leave, and that is why we saw teachers with 20, 30 years at schools because we made it financially beneficial for them to stay.

President of the Indianapolis Teachers Society highlighted an issue that was emphasized by other veterans educators, “Teachers who started after me are making more than \$2,500 more than me right now.” Because of the teacher shortage, incoming teachers are many times given \$5,000 signing bonuses or brought in under a different pay scale.

Insurance was another issue. This was not an issue the commission could address but educator shared it to emphasize the need for more money. A supporter who did not speak said, “She is only paying one dollar!” in response to an educator from Pike Township that mentioned only pay one dollar for insurance when other educators mentioned paying over \$200+ per paycheck towards insurance. Many times, those educators with high insurance premiums bring home less after a raise because the insurance premiums increased higher than the raise they received.

Two Stand for Children parents spoke in support of teachers. The first parent, Shawanda Tyson, suggested having a fund for teachers in need. “My son actually had a teacher who was working two jobs – lights were cut off. A parent, me, had to lend a hand. She shouldn’t have to go through that with 13 years in education.” The second parent offered the teacher career ladders as an option. Justin Ohlemiller, Stand for Children Executive Director, further elaborated on that point. He spoke of Opportunity Culture in IPS where teachers earn an additional stipend on top of their salaries and the TAP model that was grant funded in Perry Township.

There was no shortage of frustration expressed or suggestions given. Even one educator mentioned looking into the Hoosier lottery as an option.

Regardless of political beliefs or organizations educators support, what was resoundingly clear is teachers are tired. They are tired of being paid poorly, tired of explaining why they need more compensation, and tired of begging for more compensation.

If you missed the first opportunity to give public comment, there are two more opportunities.

- **Saturday, August 24, 10:00 a.m. CT** at
Central High School auditorium,
5400 First Avenue, Evansville, IN 47710
- **Tuesday, August 27 at 7:00 p.m. ET** at
Concord Jr. High Cafeteria,
59397 County Road 11, Elkhart, IN 46517

The public can also submit comments directly on the Teacher Pay Commission's [webpage](#).

Although Indiana is not the lowest paying state for teachers, it is last in teacher compensation growth. Time will tell if a meaningful change will come to help support Indiana educators so they will stay in the classroom and teach Indiana students.