

My family grew up firmly middle class as my father worked for Middle Tennessee Electric for 30 years as a lineman, and my mother stayed at home to raise us. My parents worked and sacrificed so much so that my siblings and I could have a better life than they did. However, my salary is less than what my father made as a lineman, and I have a masters' degree. My husband and I both work, and we cannot afford to live in Williamson County.

I firmly believe in the value of our schools; therefore, my sons attend Oak View Elementary next door to Legacy Middle. Each month I pay \$320 for tuition for them to have that privilege. Not only do I pay tuition, whenever I have a meeting after school, I have to pay for SACC. Thankfully my husband can take my sons to school, and I can pick them up. However, when needed, drop in SACC charges are \$20 per child per day. When I have to come back to work, and students are out of school, I pay \$40 per day per child.

Because Oak View is such a phenomenal school, and my sons enjoy being a part of the community, they have joined after school activities such as basketball. Since we live far from the school, my children and I spend most of our time in traffic on I-65 driving to and from school. Even on the days that we leave immediately after school, we can still spend up to an hour in traffic driving home. The morning traffic heading north on 65 can take up to 45 minutes to an hour depending on whether or not there are accidents.

As you are likely aware our schools are facing many problems right now such as teacher, sub, cafeteria, bus, and custodial staff shortages. These problems affect us as teachers each day. On a good day my classroom is swept, and the trash is taken out. However, those "good days" have been few and far between this year. I cannot count the number of times I have had to come into my classroom in the morning and sweep the floor. Not only that, I clean the tables in my room for cleanliness and COVID prevention daily. I cannot think of any other professionals who have to clean their workspace before work.

Each day I come to work I do my best to work hard for my students and fellow teachers. However, this year has been particularly hard due to staff shortages. Some days I do not have a teacher or TA in my room to help my students with special needs. A TA at the top of the pay scale makes \$16 an hour. Anyone can go to Five Guys and make more than that and receive a free burger at the end of the shift. TAs work with our most precious and vulnerable students. Our school currently has two teachers on maternity leave without interims. We as departments and colleagues have had to sub for these teachers, create lesson plans, and help their students navigate through not having a teacher.

I am making this impassioned plea not only for myself but for my fellow teachers. We are losing three teachers at my school in December, and several more have stated that they will leave in May. If our district offered competitive pay commiserate to other districts, teachers would be enticed to stay here instead of moving to a district that pays more and has a lower cost of living. Furthermore, our district would be able to competitively recruit teachers. As of the writing of this letter, there are no applicants in the district's pool to fill the job vacancy left by our Algebra I/Geometry teacher leaving in December.

We as teachers will always step up for the students. We came to this profession because we love children and want to make a difference. We love the craft of teaching and are passionate about our subject areas. There is nothing better than seeing a light-bulb moment for students. On the other hand, the number of hours that we put in to create those light bulb moments is not equal to the pay that we receive. It is also not factoring in the amount of money that we spend in our classrooms as we only receive \$200 a year for BEP money. I buy pencils, tissues, Clorox wipes, markers, colored pencils, etc. Although students are responsible for bringing most of these items with them, many do not, and I will not impede student learning because a student does not have a pencil. I will simply provide the student a pencil and continue teaching.

I am asking for you to please consider a significant raise in teacher salary so that I may not only live in my home county but also have a salary that makes all of my parents' sacrifices worth it, and I in turn can make my children's life better than mine.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kind regards,

Leigh Anne de Melo