

Setting Funding Priorities to Work for Students and Teachers: Recommendations from Teach Plus Mississippi Policy Fellows

+++++ INTRODUCTION +++++

We are a group of 15 Teach Plus Mississippi Teaching Policy Fellows and current classroom teachers across the state who work to advance policy change on behalf of our students—all while continuing to teach full time. Through Teach Plus, we receive training on education policy in Mississippi and on the legislative process. Our belief is that when you give excellent teachers leadership over key policy solutions, great outcomes ensue.

+++++ CHALLENGE +++++

Mississippi educators are among the lowest paid in the nation. The topic of teacher compensation has risen to the top of the current legislative session, all the more so because teacher compensation is directly connected to teacher recruitment and retention. According to the Mississippi Department of Education, there are over 1,000 teacher vacancies across the state.¹ The Department also reports that in 2013, MDE licensed 3,447 teachers; in 2018, it licensed just 1,624.² With fewer teachers entering the profession, Mississippi faces a substantial crisis in ensuring that students have access to highly-effective classroom teachers.

It is critical that legislators institute policies that effectively address this issue, which starts with building and sustaining a strong teaching profession with competitive teacher salaries. We believe that if Mississippi teachers are compensated fairly, the state can begin to rebuild a strong, impactful, and well-supported teacher profession.

The legislature is currently considering SB 2770, authored by Senator Gray Tollison, which would provide a \$1,000 pay raise over two years for Mississippi teachers. As Fellows and current classroom teachers, we have carefully considered the language in SB 2770, and suggest the following changes to the language of the bill:

- + Ensure that teacher base salary is competitive with the neighboring states.
- + Include language in the legislation that supports a scheduled review of teacher pay.

A teacher pay raise is about making sure that the people who spend time investing in Mississippi's children are able to take care of their own.

— Mississippi Teacher Leader

RECOMMENDATION 1: ENSURE THAT TEACHER BASE SALARY IS COMPETITIVE WITH THE NEIGHBORING STATES.

The increase proposed in SB 2770 will not make the Mississippi base salary for teachers competitive with other states in our region. All of the surrounding states would still offer a higher average salary for teachers, even with the proposed increase.³ For Mississippi to actively and aggressively recruit and retain quality teachers in our state, it's important that the base pay is competitive. The legislature should consider an increase that is **at least** the average of the region, which is \$2,500 above the current base pay.

RECOMMENDATION 2: INCLUDE LANGUAGE IN THE LEGISLATION THAT SUPPORTS A SCHEDULED REVIEW OF TEACHER PAY.

The last increase in teacher pay was in 2014. In the last five years, educators in our state have not received a state-funded raise and salaries continue to lag behind the cost of living. SB 2770 only offers an incremental increase over two years. Teacher pay, like compensation in most industries, should be revisited often to ensure that pay is commensurate with cost of living, national and regional trends, and improved performance and outcomes. We therefore recommend that the bill include language that supports the legislature revisiting teacher pay on a **biannual basis**. This would make it mandatory for legislators to review teacher salaries on a consistent basis.

+++++++ **CONCLUSION** ++++++

To create a robust thriving teaching profession in Mississippi, our legislators must consider the value of teachers in improving education for all Mississippi children. Investing in teachers by increasing compensation is the first of many steps to improve the profession in the state and provide Mississippi children equitable access to excellent educators. We call on the lawmakers to listen to our recommendations, support our calls for additional funding, and fund programs that provide opportunities for professional growth.

+++++ **ENDNOTES** +++++

¹ Mississippi Department of Education (2018). Office of Teaching and Leading: Potential Strategies for Addressing Teacher Shortages [Slides 9 and 10]. Retrieved January 28, 2019 from https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.mpe.org/resource/resmgr/sbe-office_of_teaching_and_.pdf

² Mississippi Department of Education (2018). Office of Teaching and Leading: Potential Strategies for Addressing Teacher Shortages [Slides 9 and 10]. Retrieved January 28, 2019 from https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.mpe.org/resource/resmgr/sbe-office_of_teaching_and_.pdf

³ Map: A look at teacher pay across the United States in 2017 (2017). Retrieved February 21, 2019 from, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2018/a-look-at-teacher-pay-across-the-united-states-in-2017.htm>