

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 10, 2023

The Honorable Michael L. Parson
Office of the Governor
State Capitol Building
201 W. Capital Avenue, Room 216
Jefferson City, Missouri 65101

Dear Governor Parson:

Education is one of the core foundations that supports the success and growth of our country. Well-educated students result in a prepared workforce, improved social and economic conditions, and engaged citizens. However, to maximize the potential of Missouri students and guarantee a robust education, we must make it a priority to ensure teachers across the state are adequately compensated.

For far too long, Missouri teachers have been overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated. We believe it is time they are paid commensurate to their value. In Missouri, teachers with a bachelor's degree receive a minimum starting salary of just \$25,000, and teachers with a master's degree receive a minimum starting salary of \$33,000¹ – nowhere near a living wage. According to the National Education Association's Teacher Salary Benchmark Report, which ranks all 50 states and the District of Columbia, Missouri is in 50th place for starting teacher pay and 51st for starting master's pay.² Even when comparing top salaries for educators with bachelor's and master's degrees, Missouri is ranked dead last for both benchmarks.² In fact, in NEA's five teacher salary benchmark categories – starting salary, top bachelor's, starting master's, top master's, and top salary – Missouri is in last place for all but two categories, where we are second to last.

Inadequate teacher pay does not only impact educators trying to make a fair living, but it also affects their students, too. When districts are unable to provide competitive salaries and benefits, they are faced with teacher shortages and, in what is becoming increasingly common, reduced instruction time. This school year, about one in four Missouri school districts have four-day school weeks.³ Missouri and our workforce are at a competitive disadvantage when students are spending less time in the classroom. In 2022, Missouri's nationally measured math and science assessment scores fell in both grades 4 and 8, according to data released by the National Assessment of Educational Progress.⁴ While this decrease in state scores aligns nationally from pandemic learning disruptions, Missouri is not keeping up with investments by decreasing class

¹ *Establishes Minimum Teacher Salaries* (2023) HB 189

² National Education Association. "Educator Pay and Student Spending: How Does Your State Rank?" *NEA*, 23 Apr. 2021

³ Kate Grumke, "Another Symptom of the Teacher Shortage: 1 in 4 Missouri School Districts Now Have a 4-Day Week." *STLPR*, St. Louis Public Radio, 8 Aug. 2022,

⁴ Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. "NAEP Releases Missouri's Scores on Nationwide Report Card." *News Release | Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*, 24 Oct. 2022

time. As teachers transition and adjust to the classroom post-pandemic, they must be adequately compensated to ensure quality education for our future leaders.

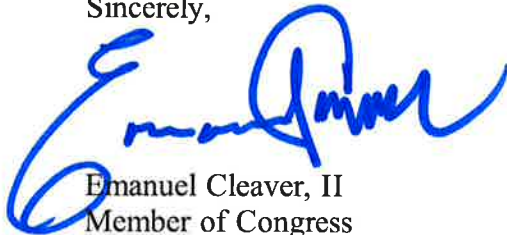
I urge your support and recognition for increasing teacher pay. Last year, your budget proposal projected a \$1.6 billion revenue surplus at the end of June 2023⁵. It is projected that Missouri will have another surplus this fiscal year, and that a larger share of the state budget can be committed towards investments in public education.⁶ In your 2023 State of the State Address, you shared your goals on increasing education funding and teacher pay. Specifically, your budget proposal would “continue the Teacher Baseline Salary Program that raised teacher pay from \$25,000 to \$38,000 per year.”⁶ Last week, the Missouri House passed legislation to raise the minimum teacher salary to \$38,000, and for teachers with a master’s degree and ten years’ experience, the minimum would be raised to \$46,000⁷. With these raises, Missouri’s national starting salary ranking would go from 50th to 40th place. While these increases are an important step in the right direction, I believe we can and must do more for our teachers. I urge you to use the state’s record-high revenues to support further expansion of the Teacher Baseline Salary Program so our educators can finally receive a dignified salary.

To be clear: I understand that the federal government has an important role to play in this effort, which is why I am proud to be an original cosponsor of the *American Teacher Act* (H.R. 882). This bill would provide teacher salary incentive grants to ensure teachers earn a minimum of \$60,000. Should this bill become law, it is my hope that Missouri school systems elect to opt into the grant to support their teachers. With the looming teacher shortage across Missouri, the four-year grant would provide an opportunity for Missouri legislators to increase teacher pay and strengthen our pipeline of qualified educators at the state level.

Our students deserve quality education, which can only be guaranteed by properly compensating educators. Our teachers must earn a dignified salary for their invaluable work caring for and teaching Missouri children. As elected Missouri officials, we must lead the way in supporting the professionals that train and prepare our future generations.

I look forward to further discussions on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress

⁵ Rudi Keller, “Record Surplus, Massive Federal Aid Mark Missouri Budget Set for Committee Work.” *Missouri Independent*, 14 Mar. 2022,

⁶ “Not Done Yet: Governor Parson Delivers 2023 State of the State Address.” *NOT DONE YET: Governor Parson Delivers 2023 State of the State Address* | Governor Michael L. Parson, 18 Jan. 2023

⁷ Nelson, A. (2023, April 7). *Missouri House passes plan to boost teacher pay, maximum annual school funding increase*. Missouri.net. Retrieved April 10, 2023,