

Your Honor, Members of the Court,

I write this testimony from personal experience and hardship in hopes to better the circumstances for future educators. I am writing this to advocate for a long-overdue change: student teachers should be compensated for their work. The harsh reality is that student teaching is a full-time job. This is not something that goes unspoken however, this is something that has plagued generations of teachers, often seen as a “rite of passage” into a career field that undervalues individuals who give their heart and soul to their profession. If we seek change in this profession, if we advocate for better working conditions for educators, and better teachers for students, it starts in the infancy of teachers becoming teachers.

Student teachers are expected, better yet, required to show up early, stay late, lesson plan, grade, manage classrooms, and engage in professional development—all without pay. For many of us, this creates unbearable financial strain. I speak from personal experience when delivering this testimony. While completing my student teaching, I had to work two additional jobs just to afford basic living expenses. On top of teaching full-time, I was also juggling coursework to complete my degree. I was fortunate that during this time my commute was short, but for many of my classmates they were tasked with commuting upwards of 45 minutes to reach their school that they were required to students teach at. Many communities across the state of Oregon that have some of the best universities for education are rural, meaning that their student teachers are left with no choice but to commute to get the experience they need to begin their own careers. As a now second year teacher, I could not imagine starting my career without the student teaching portion of my education, however, the sacrifices I had to make personally and financially should not be the cost of what makes me an effective young educator. In a field so desperate for quality employees, such little value is placed on the path that it takes them to get there.

To just name a few, some of the hardest sacrifices I had to make were working late nights to afford basic needs, forfeiting my position on my university’s track and field team due to my need to work, and the toll it took on my mental health trying to balance not just my required coursework, but also work to just survive. This should not be the case for aspiring educators who are dedicating themselves to shaping the next generation, rather student teaching should spur passion and show the beauty of pursuing a career that can change the lives of others and promote quality education for students across the state.

Student teaching is not an internship, it is a full-time job that requires dedication, skill, and immense responsibility. Yet, we are expected to perform this work without financial support. With these expectations, priority is not placed on excellence, effectiveness, or

quality, rather it is placed on the premise of “just getting it done” which is not satisfactory. If we hope to have these future educators change and shape the future of education, we must first change and shape their reality. Financial compensation should be the bare minimum if we seek such progressive change.

If importance was placed on providing pay to student teachers, many first and second year teachers would not enter the profession already burnt out. This would then support new educators to stay in the profession to help with the change that is so desperately needed. Not only does education have a funding problem, but it also has a spending problem. If states and districts were able to allocate money to the human beings that work tirelessly to educate students, perhaps our story would look a little different in the value of work and learning that is accomplished by students. In a time in our country where critical thinking is lost to mass hysteria and illiterate media consumption, the adequate education of our students should be top priority. This starts with the people who teach them.

It is time to recognize the merits of student teachers and provide them with the financial support they deserve, especially as they step into a field where, regardless of where you end up, there is tireless work that must be done. The gratitude I have for all the educators that came before me, that taught me, is immeasurable, and I know that with the wisdom they have bestowed upon me they would seek this change too. Paying student teachers is not just fair—it is imperative to ensure the future of our education system. Thank you.

Sophia Henke, Pacific University '23