

**From:** [Shane Lee](#)  
**To:** [Lisa Diesslin](#)  
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Good Morning.

My name is Shane Lee and I am a teacher in Wheaton Minnesota. I taught for 6 years in Edgeley, ND before relocating to Wheaton in 1998. I moved my wife and 4 children 6 and under to Wheaton because I'd grown up in southeastern ND, and Wheaton was close to my family. Also, I thought Minnesota had a superior standard for education and educator compensation. I have never regretted the move.

Like many young people, I wasn't thinking about retirement. I also wasn't thinking about longevity. I knew I'd make more money at that moment, and my wife was in need of a better paying job which the larger community of Wheaton was sure to offer. Unfortunately, though she did find employment in her field of dental assisting, the pay was abysmal and when the Dr. took vacation, she simply got 2 weeks off without pay. I worked every summer for 20 straight years painting houses, barns, out buildings, and businesses. I worked at local taverns and for local farmers.

My wife and I volunteered as youth leaders for our church for 10 years, and took a dozen trips to Mexico with students. We fundraised and worked at food pantries and homeless shelters. We had little money ourselves, but did the best we could to set an example for our kids.

My story isn't unique. I am every teacher in the state of Minnesota. Truthfully it wasn't until I was over 50 that I started to think about retirement. When I began looking into it, I was shocked! Learning that tier 2 teachers had paid in more and would work 10 years longer than tier 1 teachers floored me. I hadn't even thought of it. Had I decided to stay in ND, I would be retiring in 3 years with the rest of my college classmates with an unreduced pension. ND isn't known for its progressive nature. I simply couldn't believe that Minnesota was so behind in this regard. I was also shocked to learn over the years how difficult it would be to receive any type of cost of living raise. Each round of negotiations we fight for maybe 2% and then are told that without negotiation, our support staff will receive the same. Our admin always receives at least 3 and sometimes 5%,

Teachers are at the whim of the ideals of whichever party is in control. If the legislature decides to change curriculum or procedure for whichever ideal is most popular at the moment, we must bend to the changing of the wind no matter the cost. COVID 19 was awful for the entire country. We aren't special in that regard. However the way the apple cart was upset for our students, families, and staff was unprecedented. It would seem that compensation for that more than a measly 400.00 would be in order.

We are not asking for more than average. A reduction in the NRA, reduced penalties for early retirement, and the hope of not having to teach till we are spent is the least we could ask for. Compensation for being on the clock 24 hours/day during COVID isn't too much to ask for. Funding a drastically underfunded pension that we were never responsible for breaking is not too much to ask for.

We are tired of being treated as though we're looking for a hand out. That is not the case. We

are asking for dignity. Teacher pay compared to other professions requiring advanced degrees is well below average. Our pay compared to those in more male dominated professions is vastly different. If we intend to attract new teachers to our profession and keep those we have from leaving to find more lucrative employment with fewer hoops to jump through, something has to be done. "Summers off" and idealism aren't going to cut it anymore.

We are more than a "bottom line". When your'e looking at investing in education, please start seeing teachers as part of that equation. You all know very well that studies have shown undoubtedly that the most important factor regarding quality learning is a qualified teacher. You expect the most of us at every turn. Please then expect to compensate us for it in the manner we deserve. It is not at all too much to ask.

Yours,

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