

# Teachers need support to stay in the classroom



When I landed a great teaching job in my hometown right out of college, it was a dream come true. I loved the work. I loved my school and district. And I had all the education, preparation and training support I needed to become a successful teacher.

Instead, I became a statistic. I left the profession after my third year, one of nearly half of Arizona teachers who quit within their first five years in the classroom. To explain why, I have to give you a bit of my history.

I'm a native Tucsonan, a first-generation U.S. citizen from a Mexican family. I graduated from Northern Arizona University and was selected to student-teach on an Army base in Heidelberg, Germany. The time, money and energy spent on my education led me to my first job at Richardson Elementary School in the Flowing Wells Unified School District.

It was a small, close-knit district, an ideal place to start my career. I took advantage of a high-quality training program; the superintendent knew my first name. Like all new teachers, I was exhausted — but also happy and fulfilled.

So what was the problem? Money. I shared an apartment and still struggled to cover my rent, car payment, utilities and student loans. There was never anything left over. By the third year, I was tired of being broke and not willing to give up my dreams of traveling. I decided that if I was going to change careers, it was better to do it while I was young. I jumped ship.

I trained to be a real estate agent. It was an exciting job, but cutthroat and sometimes lonely. In my first year and a half, I closed 14 deals — not bad for a newbie — but I was depressed. In the classroom, I had loved my students and been loved in return, and I didn't have thick enough skin for this new world.

Then I got engaged. As soon as the ring was on my finger, I knew that I would no longer be alone in trying to make it on a teacher's salary. I could afford to do what I loved. My husband called it my "charity work" — which was partly true, because some of my salary was going back into the classroom to pay for basic supplies.

Money is a huge issue for teachers, but there's another one: The workload is

relentless. You're not done teaching when the final bell rings. You're counseling students, grading papers, planning lessons, meeting with parents and administrators. Teaching requires everything you have — financially, emotionally, physically.

That's what it's like out there. Today, I'm an administrator in the Catalina Foothills School District — something that also wouldn't have been possible without a second income. I spent more than \$10,000 for my master's degree and certification. I'm principal at Valley View Early Learning Center, a beautiful pre-kindergarten of 14 classrooms, 240 students and 15 teachers. It's the hardest work I've ever done, and I love it.

But teachers' pay is only slightly better than it was 20 years ago: A first-year teacher in my district makes \$38,500. There's no way a family of four could live comfortably on one teacher's salary — and those summers off with no pay? That's just more stress for a family in need of every dollar. It means scrambling to find a second job and then going back to school in mid-July, usually without pay, to get ready for the next year.

When my teachers are feeling down or undervalued, I remind them that they have the most important job in the world. When a parent drops off their precious 4-year-old at our pre-K, they feel like they're taking the beating heart out of their chest and handing it over to us. Having 26 of those beating hearts entrusted to you in a classroom is scary, but it can also be an immense joy. That's why we do it. It's our public service.

But even with this powerful calling — and wonderful coaching programs and support — our district still loses about 20 percent of its teachers each year.

So we need help.

Who can help us? The Legislature, for one. But other people, too — any person, any program, any business that can support, sponsor or encourage teachers. If your business can make teachers' personal or professional lives more manageable with a donation — or even a discount — it allows great teachers to continue their work with less worry and more freedom. What could be more important?

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