***Sample Op-Ed Language***

***To submit an op-ed to the Tennessean:***

* Maximum length is 550 words
* Include full name, address, and phone number
* Consider getting a co-signor, someone who also has expertise in or passion about the topic
* Submit your op-ed to David Plazas at dplazas@tennessean.com

***about Increasing Teacher Pay:***

In this year that was truly like no other, the phrase “essential worker” has become common vernacular. The critical role that our health care workers play in sustaining a safe and healthy society is obvious, and I believe that these courageous heroes deserve deep admiration and praise for their selfless contributions to our society.

Yet there are other essential workers in our society that haven’t been getting as much recognition – despite the herculean responsibilities they are charged with. I’m talking of course about teachers.

This year, teachers have ricocheted between online and in-person learning, pivoting at the drop of the hat, gone above and beyond to support students’ needs in this truly chaotic year, all while staying focused on what matters most: educating our students.

And yet the way we pay our teachers does not reflect the amount of work they do nor the essential aspect of that work – preparing future generations.

In fact, a recent study by Education Research Strategies found that, while starting teacher starting salaries in Metro Schools are competitive, MNPS lags behind other Tennessee districts in lifetime earnings. In fact, educators who have taught our students for more than 30 years never reach Nashville's annual median income.

While the district can and should do some things to increase teacher pay, it is also important that the state allocate additional funds to all districts so that local communities have the flexibility to increase pay and address living wage needs. Tennessee ranks 46 out of 50 states in terms of total education funding, and the state’s funding formula has only been fully funded a handful of times. It’s beyond time we examine how our schools are funded and increase the overall amount that we contribute to education.

If Tennesseans truly believe that public education is critical to a productive and prosperous state, then we need to invest in it appropriately and recognize teachers for the essential role they play.

As we move into budget season, let's advocate for better funding in public education and increased compensation for our teachers. The success of our community depends on it.