

Vexation with teachers' budgets

Walkouts across the nation have begun due to pent up irritation because of low funding

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April 11. Teachers arrive at the library after school has ended, and stand together in a circle. Even though there are not many there, they are there to discuss issues surrounding teachers at large.

Teachers are paid less than many jobs even though they are considered to have an important role in children's lives. In fact, due to the negativity around the profession, Indiana has suffered from a teacher shortage. Many walkouts have been enacted by teachers for many different reasons, with West Virginia being the 'first' as their walkouts started in February of last year. There are different reasons why teachers participate, mostly leading back to school funding.

"Evidently, they're protesting because of a lack of pay or what's considered low pay for entry level teachers," said Senator Ron Grooms. "I don't believe it has to do with work conditions. The best to my knowledge it's all about teacher pay."

However, walkouts or going on strike are not always viable or preferred options, and other routes are taken. Teachers participate in activities like walkouts so their voices are heard, as many issues have with education funding have come to light through the walkouts.

"I think teachers are just tired of being disrespected and being the very last ones to be thought of when it comes to things like school funding and just being expected to do things like buy food or supplies for our students or for our classrooms. I think teachers have just had

enough," said Indiana State Teachers Association (ISTA) president Teresa Meredith.

There are laws against strikes in Indiana and other states; however, teachers have found ways to protest while not violating the laws.

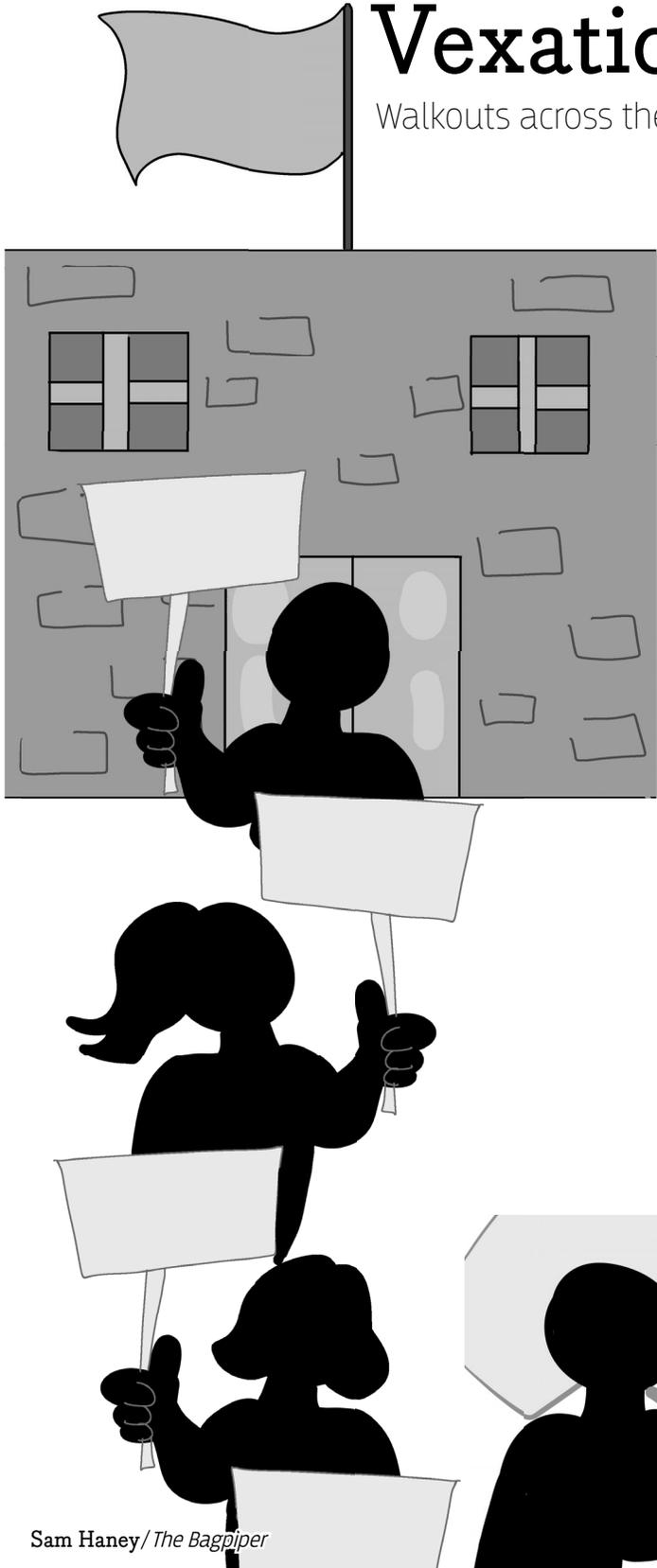
"There's not enough money for individual students allotted for the school so that they can keep up, so I think that there is a push in the nation overall that teachers are starting to become more listened to because throughout the nation teachers who have been fed up have run for office," said English teacher Kristi Charbonneau.

New Albany-Floyd County Association president Joy Lohmeyer said that as states stopped having textbooks switched out every six years, schools do not get new resources to save money.

"A lot of the districts that you might have seen on the news, they literally had textbooks that were more than 10 years old," said Lohmeyer. "They were totally falling apart. They didn't have technology infrastructure and things like that. Their salaries were lagging way behind."

The ISTA, which may deal with those issues, is made up of teachers, and Meredith is a kindergarten teacher from Shelbyville. The ISTA talks with legislators biannually about legislation concerning teachers. For example, Meredith and the ISTA want the predicted Indiana House budget for instructional staff, House Bill 1001, raised from 2.1/2.2 percent to three percent so schools can afford things like necessities and increased teacher salaries.

The rise of budget can occur through lobbying with the legislature every two years. Teachers will advocate and sometimes bargain with the legislature concerning education. If teacher salaries



remain at the current percentage, school districts will likely not be able to keep up, and in turn lose students as they lose teachers. Funding provides the necessary components for schools' continued running.

"But the bigger reason is we really are pushing for at least that so that every district has some money to bargain a salary increase for teachers," said Meredith.

This number is the percent of the budget on average for the state, including private schools. The corporations decide salaries because of Indiana code 20-43.

"That decision on what their salary is is made by the school board and the superintendents of your school corporation. What Indiana does is provide the funding so that they'll have enough money to pay a fair salary, reward teachers that are high performers, and support them in a pension fund that they can have to help support them when they retire," said Grooms.

The NAFCS budget for teachers previously was 1.97 percent, a large difference from the 7.52 percent for school administration. However, recently a change has been made to how funds are distributed, being separated into two major funds, education and operations. This new organization began in January this year. Before this, the basic grant budget was split into six categories. With this new set up, the operations section in the future is not allowed to have over 15 percent of the state fund.

"So assistant principals and principals are in the education fund now, all right, but other administrators are not, they're in the operations fund. So currently the operations fund in our district we think is going to be about 12 percent of the budget, which would leave about 88 percent of the basic grant budget in the education fund," said Lohmeyer. However, Lohmeyer said the budget is still being figured out.

Forbes Magazine published a chart with information from the Rockefeller Institute revealing Indiana teachers had the lowest raise in teacher salary of all states between 2002 and 2017, the average for Indiana being \$6,904. A law change in 2009 says there cannot be more than 33 percent of a teacher's increase be because of experience

and education.

"If a teacher being evaluated needs improvement, they can't receive any compensation increase whatsoever and if they make improvements, and say next year they're rated effective again, they still won't be on the regular salary schedule because they can't just be put back based on the way the legislation runs so it doesn't encourage people to work hard to improve their practice if they're not ever going to be able to get back on the regular salary range," said Lohmeyer.

This brings to question why there have not been any walkouts in Indiana.

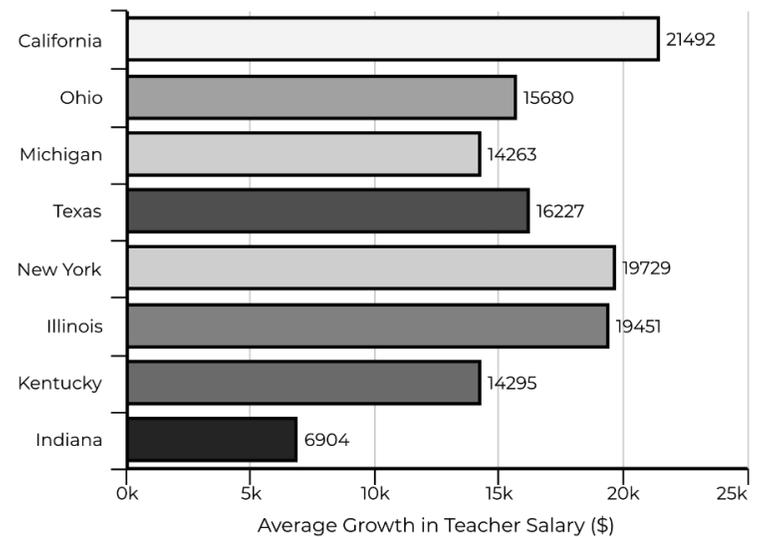
"I think you have to compare costs of living and then add that to the benefits and add that to the pension and then add that to the other benefits the state of Indiana

has provided teachers to compare the entire package, and it's awfully hard to compare from state to state unless you put all of those factors into the formula when you compare teachers' salaries," said Grooms.

If the budget is raised to three percent, which looks unlikely due to the 100 million dollar difference in tax revenue from the predicted amount, it is not a guarantee that all of the money is used for raises, and the money does not only go to public education.

"So when the legislature says, for example, that there's a two percent or 2.2 percent proposed raise for education in the state of Indiana, that used to mean that that was a two percent or 2.2 percent for public education. That's not what that means anymore. What that means now is

Average Salary Change of Teachers by State 2002-2017

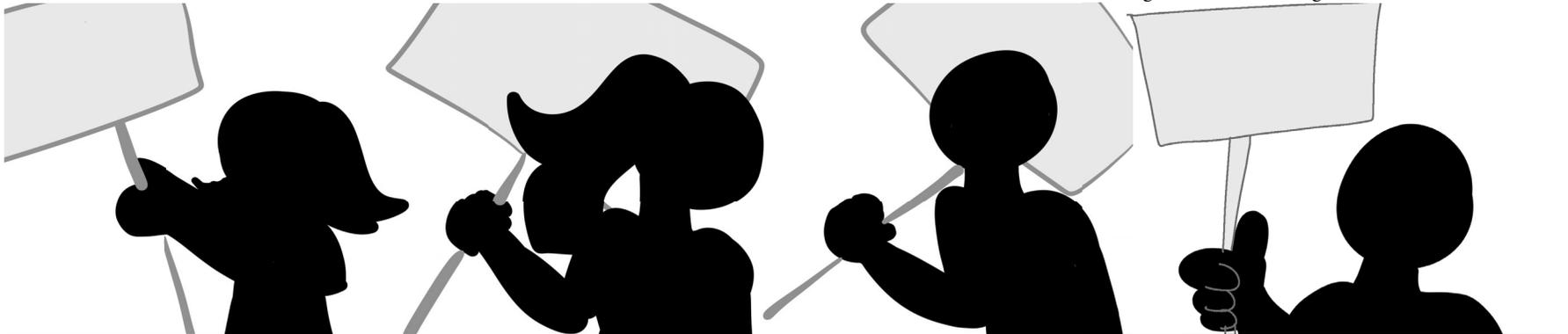


Source: Rockefeller Institute

for all education in the state of Indiana — so that means vouchers, so that would be basically ways for people to use taxpayer money to attend a private school, or going to either public or private charter schools as well," said Lohmeyer.

Teachers' main goals are to be considered by legislators more when laws are being passed involving them, and for them to consider how much they do.

"The bigger picture is that we are underfunding public schools. We are educating 94 percent of the students in Indiana, and we are supported with Indiana tax dollars, and we are underfunding public schools," said Lohmeyer. "We cannot continue to attract quality teachers or retain quality teachers if we don't do something about the funding strain."



To read more about the budgets and teacher walkouts, go to fchsbgpiper.wordpress.com.