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Think back on your favorite teacher. We all have one. Mine was Mrs. Dresser, my second-grade teacher at Butte View Elementary in Emmett. Before Mrs. Dresser, reading felt like a chore to me. She brought joy to reading and set me on a path of learning that benefits me still today. This is Teacher Appreciation Week, a meaningful opportunity to recognize the people who stand at the front of our classrooms each day, shaping the future of our state. I am proud that during my time as Governor we have moved beyond words of gratitude and backed up our appreciation with real, sustained investment in education and especially in teacher pay. Since 2019, Idaho has made historic commitments to education – a 70% increase! We have maintained a clear focus on supporting teachers and strengthening the profession. These efforts reflect a simple belief: when we invest in teachers, we invest in student success. And the results are measurable — Idaho's average teacher pay has increased nearly 22% since 2021, with minimum salaries rising even more, up 24.5%. In 2019 during my first year as Governor, Idaho took a major step forward with a \$92 million investment in K-12 education.

 AI | 356 Words | High Confidence 

That included raising starting teacher pay and doubling funding for early literacy — a critical foundation for lifelong learning. Even during the uncertainty of 2020, the state continued to prioritize educators, adding \$36 million to increase career ladder funding and expand literacy support. Momentum continued in 2021 with an additional \$87 million investment, including fully funding the advanced professional rung of the career ladder. This ensured that experienced teachers were recognized and compensated for their expertise, while new investments in Career Technical Education expanded opportunities for students and educators alike. Then came 2022 — a landmark year. With a \$696 million investment, Idaho made transformative changes. School districts were given the option to join the state insurance plan, helping reduce costs and improve benefits for educators. Teachers also received additional salary increases and \$1,000 bonuses in recognition of their hard work. A special legislative session added even more support, with House Bill 1 alone providing a whopping \$410 million for public education. The state continued building on that progress in 2023 with a \$653 million investment. Starting teacher pay was raised again, making the profession more competitive and helping attract and retain talented educators. Additional discretionary funding gave local districts flexibility to meet their unique needs, and the Idaho LAUNCH program created stronger pathways from the classroom to career. In 2024, Idaho made its largest education investment in state history — \$1.3 billion — including a landmark commitment to improving school facilities. And in 2025, another \$119 million reinforced that progress, with increased funding for rural school facilities, additional teacher pay raises, and new investments in literacy. Taken together, these investments represent a sustained and intentional effort to elevate the teaching profession. They signal to educators that their work is valued not just in words, but in action. There is still more to do, but the progress made in recent years should give us confidence we are moving in the right direction. This Teacher Appreciation Week, we say thank you — not only with our words, but with our continued commitment to invest in the people who make a difference in the lives of Idaho students every single day.