

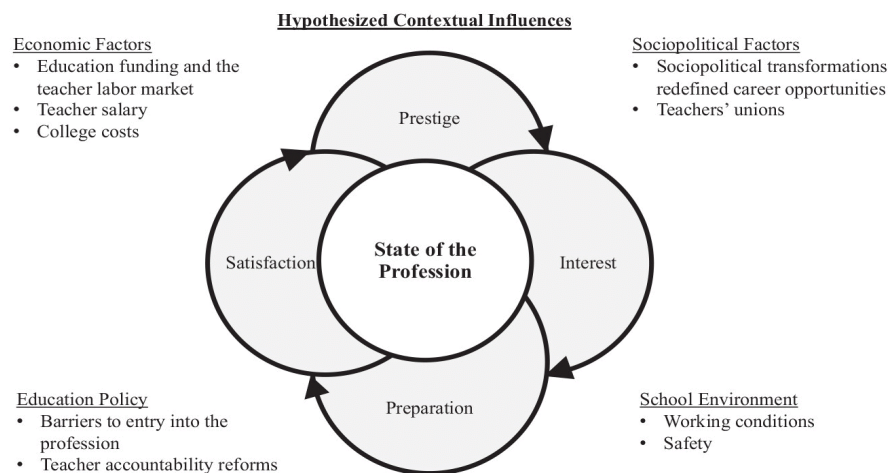
Recruitment and Retention of Teachers: About Low and Stagnant Teacher Wages

The current state of the teaching profession is at or near its lowest levels in 50 years.

Kraft & Lyon (2024)

When we become a really mature, grown-up, wise society, we will put teachers at the center of the community, where they belong. We don't honor them enough, we don't pay them enough. Charles Kuralt

For years, teacher recruitment and retention have cost the U.S.A. both in terms of economics and efforts to improve public education. While the reasons for this state of affairs vary, most experts agree about basic elements for improving the situation. In a recent discussion, Kraft and Lyon (2024) offered the following conceptual picture of relevant contextual factors:



Our primary focus here is on one of these: *teacher salary*.

Salaries and Teachers Experiencing Financial Strain

It is not uncommon for teachers to experience financial problems. Some teachers come from low-wealth families; some are employed in relatively low paying districts; some are employed in districts where living costs are relatively high. And there are times when their buying power is undercut by inflation. Financial problems are compounded for those teaching in economically distressed and geographically isolated locales.

Studies indicate that teacher financial stress is strongly correlated to teacher performance and leaving the field. It is also correlated with the stability of school environments and student well-being (García and Han, 2022; Lutfiu & Hoxha, 2024).

*The material in this document builds on work done by Sandra Alan as a participant with the national Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA in 2024.

The center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA. Website: <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

While the average starting teacher salary nationally was \$41,163 in 2019-20, California, New Jersey, Washington, and the District of Columbia had average starting salaries above \$49,000. In Missouri and Montana, average starting salaries were less than \$35,000, which highlights the wide range of salaries, although the amount itself is not directly comparable across states.

The value of teacher salaries depends on the cost of living in each state. For example, Mississippi — with an unadjusted average starting salary of \$36,543 — has one of the lowest average starting salaries in the country. However, with a lower cost of living than most other states with similar salaries, Mississippi ranks 28th in average starting salary once adjusted for cost of living (Carver-Thomas & Patrick, 2022)

Note: Mississippi legislators recently passed the largest teacher pay raise since the 1980s, which increased the state's base starting salary by 12%, with current teachers receiving an average pay raise of \$5,140 (Carver-Thomas & Patrick, 2022). In Georgia, legislators approved a \$2,500 raise for teachers. Iowa raised the starting pay to \$50,000 and set a minimum salary of \$62,000 for teachers with at least 12 years of experience (Will, 2024).

Efforts Aimed at Reducing Teacher Financial Stress

Many states struggle to recruit and retain teachers. Relatedly, it is widely recognized that teacher salaries are inadequate given the demands and responsibilities of the work and the limited career ladder. Also widely recognized is that better compensation for teachers is associated with better student outcomes. For example, a study conducted by García and Han (2022) found that “every 10% increase in teacher salary was associated with about a 0.2 point boost to average math and English scores.” Hendricks (2014) suggests that increasing teachers’ salaries enhances recruitment of qualified personnel and increases retention, and this contributes to student achievement.

Besides higher salaries, one set of prominent policy recommendations for redressing recruitment and retention problems involves a variety of financial incentives. These include pay differentials and signing bonuses; scholarships, tuition reimbursement, and loan assistance and forgiveness; affordable housing, moving expenses, and free utility hook-ups; state income tax credits; multi-year bonuses; tuition for pursuing continuing education and advanced degrees; and college tuition for the professionals’ children. For example, legislatures are being asked to encourage school districts to “convert their surplus property into housing for teachers, school staff and even students and families” (Jones, 2024).

The Jefferson Union High School District in Daly City, California opened a 122-unit apartment complex in 2022 for its teachers, with apartments going for half of the market rate. Since the opening of these apartments, the school district has seen nearly zero turnover (Jones, 2024). There are also several Texas school districts, such as Ector County ISD, providing housing or subsidizing housing to improve the retention of their school teachers (Hoover, 2023).

In 2023, bills were introduced in Congress to increase the minimum salary of public school teachers and for a national campaign declaiming the value of the teaching profession as a step in enhancing national support for initiatives to address recruitment and retention concerns. For example, a Senate bill entitled *Pay Teachers Act* proposes “funding to support education programs and addresses teacher shortages, including by establishing a minimum salary for public elementary and secondary school teachers” (U.S. Congress, 2023-2024). Unfortunately, new state initiatives and the sustainability of current ones for improving teachers’ financial conditions remain uncertain due to school funding shortfalls.

Concluding Comments

Ultimately, the success of students is dependent on the quality of teaching they receive. Investments to improve teacher economic livelihood are an essential facet for enhancing recruitment and retention of a high quality classroom workforce. Indeed, for those under 40 years old, poor salary has been reported as a top reason for leaving. About 20% of those who stay supplement their salaries by taking on second jobs outside the school system during the school year.

Teacher pay has been a political priority in many states for several years. Currently, teacher shortages are forcing salary increases in some states and are reinvigorating the efforts of teachers' unions. In addition, federal policies have been under discussion to improve teacher economic conditions (e.g., tax credits for teachers and updating and enhancing existing federal grant and loan programs).

However, while varying across states, the steady erosion of teacher wages and compensation relative to other college graduates continues. Teachers' wages amount to about 80% of what other college-educated professionals earn. And for some, the situation is dire. As a high school English/language arts teacher in Texas recently wrote: "I am a single parent, and I currently can't afford to do my job and live. My bills far outweigh my salary due to inflation and the area we live in. ... I have been in education for 15 years, and there is no reason I should have to take two jobs to live, or look at food stamps to feed my family." (Reported in Will, 2024). In contrast:

Imagine schools where accomplished teachers routinely earn six-figure incomes and where all career-oriented teachers can look forward to a satisfying career. - Wise (2012)

System and Structural Improvements Intended to Reduce Teacher Stressors

Job-related stressors are a given, but often not well-addressed in terms of systemic interventions. In a 2012 [Center report](#), besides teacher finances, we highlighted six other fundamental matters that require much greater attention in all discussions about improving teacher performance, student outcomes, and reducing rates of teacher (and student) dropout. These matters include recruitment, preservice professional preparation, induction into the profession, personalized on-the-job (in-service) learning, student and learning supports, and a career ladder. Each represents an arena for systemic interventions that reduce stress. To be certain that our focus here on teacher finances does not overshadow these other matters, we have included links to resources related to these other matters in an appendix.

References and Resources Used in Preparing this Information Resource

- Allegretto S. (2022). *The teacher pay penalty has hit a new high*. Economic Policy Institute.
- California School Boards Association (n.d.). *Education workforce housing*.
- Carver-Thomas, D., & Patrick, S.K. (2022). *Addressing teacher shortages by adjusting teacher salaries*. Education Commission of the States.
- Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Support, *About teacher mental health*. Los Angeles: Author at UCLA.
- Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Support, (2015). *Understanding and minimizing staff burnout*. Los Angeles: Author at UCLA.
- Chetty R., Friedman J.N., Rockoff J.E. (2014). *Measuring the impacts of teachers II: Teacher value-added and student outcomes in adulthood*. *American Economic Review*, 104, 2633–2679.

- Cleaver, S. (2020). *6 proven benefits to increasing teacher pay*. We Are Teachers
- EdChoice. (2022). *The public, parents, and K-12 education. A national polling report*.
- Engida, M.A., Engida, A.S., Iyasu, S.S., & Fentie, Y.M. (2024). **Impact of teaching quality on student achievement: Student evidence**. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, 1367317.
- García, E., & Han, E.S. (2022). **Teachers' base salary and districts' academic performance: Evidence from national data**. *Sage Open*, 12(1).
- Hendricks, M. D. (2014). **Does it pay to pay teachers more? Evidence from Texas**. *Journal of Public Economics*, 109(C), 50-63.
- Hoover, C. (2023). **More districts offer housing benefits to staff**. Texas Association of School Boards.
- Jones, C. (2024). *California is giving schools more homework: Build housing for teachers*. CALMATTERS.
- Kraft M.A. (2018). **Federal efforts to improve teacher quality**. In Hess R., McShane M. (Eds.), *Bush-Obama school reform: Lessons learned* (pp. 69–84). Harvard Education Press.
- Kraft M.A., Bleiberg J. . (2022). **The inequitable effects of teacher layoffs: What we know and can do**. *Education Finance and Policy*, 17, 367–377.
- Litvinov, A. (2022). **5 ways strong educator unions help public schools**. [NEA Today]. National Education Association.
- Liu S., & Aubry J. (2021). **What do we know about public teacher compensation?** *Issue Brief Number*, 80.
- Lutfiu, B. & Hoxha. L.L. (2024). **Socioeconomic status of teachers and Its Impact on teaching quality**. *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 5(2),
- National Association of Independent Schools (NBOA). (2020). **Overview of teacher compensation: Mission-anchored compensation strategies**. Author.
- NEA (2019-2020). **Teacher salary benchmark report; U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Price Parity Indices 2020**. Author.
- Pomeroy, R. (2022). **When public school teachers are paid more, students perform better**. RealClearScience.
- Reality Changers. (2024). **The role of socioeconomic status in educational outcomes: Strategies for equal opportunities**. Reality Changers.
- Regmi K. (2022). **New evidence on teacher pay**. *Industrial Labor Relations Review*, 75, 1240–1268.
- Richwine J., Biggs A.G. (2011). **Assessing the compensation of public-school teachers**. *Center for Data Analysis Report*, 11.
- Steiner E.D., Doan S., Woo A., Gittens A.D., Lawrence R.A., Berdie L., Wolfe R.L., Greer L., Schwartz H.L. (2022). **Restoring teacher and principal well-being is an essential step for rebuilding schools** (Research report No. RR-A1108-4). RAND Corporation.
- Taylor L. (2008). **Comparing teacher salaries: Insights from the US census**. *Economics of Education Review*, 27, 48–57.
- U.S. Congress. (2023-2024). S.766: **Pay teachers act**.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2024). **Raise the bar: Eliminate the educator shortage**. Author.
- Weeden K.A. (2002). **Why do some occupations pay more than others? Social closure and earnings inequality in the United States**. *American Journal of Sociology*, 108, 55–101.
- West K.L. (2014). **New measures of teachers' work hours and implications for wage comparisons**. *Education Finance and Policy*, 9, 231–263.
- Will, M. (2024). **Here's what teachers think their salaries should be**. Education Week
- Wise, A.E. (2012). **End the tyranny of the self-contained classroom**. Education Week.

Appendix

More Than Wages: Links to Resources for Enhancing Other Factors Related to Recruitment and Retention

Besides wages, other fundamental matters that require greater attention include recruitment, preservice professional preparation, induction into the profession, personalized on-the-job (in-service) learning, student and learning supports, and a career ladder. Here are links to a few resources related to each of these matters.

Recruitment

Good schools start with good recruitment.

- >[*How California Districts Are Responding to Teacher Shortages*](#)
- >[*Creative Solutions and State and Federal Supports Needed to Solve Teacher Shortages*](#)
- >[*Teacher Recruitment & Retention: A Playbook for School & District Leaders*](#)
- >[*9 Strategies for Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining Diverse Teachers*](#)

Preservice professional preparation

Prospective teachers need a good general education and they need to learn what and how to teach using differentiated instruction in a classroom.

- >[*Educating Teachers of Science, Mathematics, and Technology: New Practices*](#)
- >[*Evaluating and Improving Teacher Preparation Programs*](#)
- >[*Improving School Improvement*](#)

Induction

A well-designed induction into the field and a school provide new teachers with orientation, mentorship, and supports that enhance early success and retention.

- >[*Effective Induction Programs Are Key to Retaining New Teachers*](#)
- >[*Conditions for Success in Teacher Induction*](#)

Professional development

Continuous professional development is essential and is best when it is personalized.

- >[*Resources for Teacher Professional Development \(Including Free Options\)*](#)
- >[*10 Strategies for Effective Teacher Professional Development \(with Examples\)*](#)
- >[*Personalizing Professional Development*](#)

A student and learning supports system

Teachers' well-being is enhanced when a school has a system of student/learning supports that potently addresses barriers to learning and teaching and reengages disconnected students. Such a system brings supports into the classroom and surrounds these with a full continuum of schoolwide braided with community interventions.

- >[*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*](#)
- >[*Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*](#)
- >[*Improving School Improvement*](#)

Career Ladder

Well-defined and accessible opportunities for career advancement can play a major role in retention of staff. Currently, teaching has few such opportunities so those wanting to advance move on to administrative roles or leave the field.

- >[*Teacher Career Ladder Framework*](#)