

The Impact of Teacher Pay on Teacher Poverty: Teacher Shortage and Economic Concerns

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Abstract

The record number of individuals leaving the teaching profession is well documented. This coupled with the lack of individuals entering the profession has contributed to the creation of a teacher shortage crisis in the United States. Urban, rural, mathematics, science and special education areas have been particularly impacted. Research indicates that issues related to stress, political issues, lack of administrative support and limited resources are implicated factors. In addition to inherent job related stressors, limited pay for teachers extends the stress factors from work to the home by impacting the teachers' quality of life. This article will examine the impact of teacher pay on teacher poverty. Factors such as beginning teacher pay, average teacher pay and housing costs will be examined.

Keywords

Teacher Pay, Teacher Shortage, Housing Costs, Teacher Poverty

1. Introduction

The teacher shortage crisis in America has been impacted two-fold by fewer individuals entering the teaching profession and by increased numbers of teachers leaving the teaching profession (Antonucci, 2022; García & Weiss, 2019; Earley & Ross, 2005).

The lack of teachers has been particularly concerning in hard to staff areas, which include Science, Mathematics and Special Education. The impact is greater in rural and urban areas (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

2. The Current State: Why Are Individuals Leaving the Teaching Profession?

According to USA Today in “Number of teachers quitting hits new high”, the

United States continues to see teachers leave the profession at both mid-year and end of year terms. Stress, student behavior challenges, political issues, student emotional needs, class size and lack of staffing were listed as contributing factors (Barnum, 2023). More than a half-million teachers have left the profession since the start of 2020 (Greenblatt, 2022).

In “teacher salaries become a bipartisan cause: Low pay is a major crisis in education”, USA Today addresses the issue of teacher pay contributing to individuals not entering and leaving the teaching profession.

How Much Do Teachers Earn?

“Nationally, the average starting salary for a teacher is less than \$42,000, while teachers of all levels of experience make about \$61,000 (Table 1). Those numbers mask significant variation from state to state, however.” (Wong, 2023)

3. Multiple Impact Factors: (Current and Potential Teachers) Stress, Lack of Support Discipline, Pay

Current news and policy reports indicate a teacher shortage in many parts of the country (Nguyen et al., 2022). These critical shortages harm students and public education, as vacant positions are either left unfilled or filled with less qualified or uncertified teachers. Schools serving a high percentage of minority students and students from poverty suffer the most from a shortage of credentialed teachers (Garcia & Weiss, 2019, Marshall, 2023). Approximately one-third of newly hired teachers in these high-needs schools need more preparation to enter the classroom. These novice teachers are often less effective and leave at least two to three times more than their fully credentialed counterparts (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Furthermore, although low pay contributes to teachers leaving the profession and few candidates becoming teachers (Garcia & Weiss, 2019), other factors compound the issue. These include stress and burnout, lack of support from school leaders, problems with discipline and motivation, and lack of professional autonomy (Ingersoll & May, 2011).

3.1. Stress and Burnout

A national survey revealed that two-thirds of the teaching workforce feel overwhelmed and burned out, with 55 percent considering exiting the profession earlier than expected (Walker, 2022). The high-stress profession of teaching causes many teachers to encounter and suffer from significant emotional issues tied to on-the-job stress (Eaton et al., 1990; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). The inability to cope well can negatively impact relationships with students, affecting academic and behavioral goals (Wentzel et al., 2010). In recent years, teacher stress can be linked to the consequences of COVID-19 and emerging issues such as school closures, persistent uncertainty, and a lack of experience with remote teaching formats (Kim & Asbury, 2020).

Table 1. Teacher salary by state.

State	Starting salary	Top bachelor's	Starting master's	Top master's	Top salary
Alabama	\$41,163	\$52,862	\$47,242	\$60,457	\$69,466
Alaska	\$49,907	NA	NA	NA	\$88,247
Arizona	\$40,554	\$52,130	\$43,211	\$61,237	\$68,910
Arkansas	\$35,803	\$48,371	\$39,995	NA	\$54,163
California	\$49,933	NA	NA	NA	\$99,912
Colorado	\$35,724	\$45,273	\$39,313	\$56,740	\$64,646
Connecticut	\$47,477	NA	\$51,478	\$90,099	\$95,823
Delaware	\$43,448	\$61,348	\$49,416	\$77,440	\$88,135
Dist. of Columbia	\$56,313	\$89,294	\$60,067	\$110,179	\$116,408
Federal	\$54,311	\$105,224	\$62,007	\$113,321	\$130,622
Florida	\$44,040	\$61,484	\$46,561	\$64,025	\$66,405
Georgia	\$38,692	\$56,790	\$43,902	\$64,779	\$80,262
Hawaii	\$50,123	\$71,403	\$54,132	\$77,115	\$91,948
Idaho	\$39,842	\$52,420	\$41,233	\$56,797	\$59,110
Illinois	\$41,228	\$60,922	\$45,400	\$75,916	\$84,146
Indiana	\$38,158	NA	NA	NA	\$70,398
Iowa	\$38,515	NA	NA	NA	\$71,877
Kansas	\$39,100	\$44,148	\$42,159	\$54,321	\$60,878
Kentucky	\$37,373	\$53,261	\$41,180	\$58,153	\$62,950
Louisiana	\$42,185	\$54,821	\$42,951	\$56,205	\$58,470
Maine	\$37,580	\$62,637	\$40,308	\$66,552	\$68,748
Maryland	\$48,510	\$64,972	\$51,619	\$87,379	\$95,142
Massachusetts	\$48,372	\$77,082	\$52,310	\$85,109	\$95,147
Michigan	\$37,820	\$64,815	\$42,423	\$70,437	\$74,803
Minnesota	\$41,234	\$56,034	\$46,363	\$67,763	\$73,141
Mississippi	\$36,653	\$55,397	\$39,095	\$63,290	\$70,175
Missouri	\$33,234	\$42,322	\$36,124	\$52,109	\$56,552
Montana	\$32,495	\$44,333	\$36,670	\$61,144	\$65,785
Nebraska	\$36,491	\$44,949	\$43,251	\$61,839	\$69,490
Nevada	\$41,277	\$54,477	\$47,621	\$69,778	\$78,530
New Hampshire	\$39,737	\$59,880	\$43,489	\$67,459	\$71,905
New Jersey	\$54,053	\$85,220	\$57,845	\$89,966	\$93,932

Continued

New Mexico	\$41,737	\$56,114	\$42,703	\$66,364	\$69,690
New York	\$47,618	\$77,720	\$52,170	\$88,896	\$94,795
North Carolina	\$37,127	\$55,160	\$40,839	\$60,675	\$63,359
North Dakota	\$40,907	NA	\$44,808	NA	\$64,009
Ohio	\$38,231	\$66,430	\$42,341	\$77,508	\$82,236
Oklahoma	\$38,074	\$52,759	\$39,508	\$54,849	\$57,151
Oregon	\$39,338	\$55,851	\$43,744	\$68,988	\$74,191
Pennsylvania	\$46,991	\$72,842	\$50,703	\$80,046	\$85,503
Rhode Island	\$44,592	\$83,803	\$47,696	\$87,158	\$89,594
South Carolina	\$37,704	\$55,511	\$43,029	\$62,842	\$76,568
South Dakota	\$40,128	\$52,981	\$44,063	\$55,078	NA
Tennessee	\$39,024	\$52,091	\$42,327	\$56,840	\$64,967
Texas	\$44,527	\$62,634	\$47,569	\$64,939	\$63,673
US	\$41,770	\$60,381	\$45,391	\$70,279	\$76,540
Utah	\$44,349	\$66,473	\$48,354	\$76,945	\$81,594
Vermont	\$40,810	\$56,139	\$45,846	\$70,737	\$77,192
Virginia	\$42,251	\$66,844	\$44,918	\$70,473	\$72,255
Washington	\$51,040	\$61,318	\$60,253	\$88,713	\$98,792
West Virginia	\$37,987	\$59,073	\$40,813	\$61,936	\$65,778
Wisconsin	\$38,961	NA	NA	NA	\$73,364
Wyoming	\$46,826	\$55,813	\$51,280	\$67,448	\$74,513

(Department, 2022).

3.2. Lack of Support from School Leadership

School leaders can have a profound impact on a school's culture and climate. Leaders have an obligation and responsibility to empower teachers by creating ongoing opportunities for professional development through collaborations with colleagues (Sergiovanni et al., 2013). Furthermore, these opportunities to collaborate and dialogue can stimulate teachers to acquire new coping skills (Moll, 2013). Shen et al. (2012) and Kearney (2015) emphasized the importance of school leadership in affirming and comprehensibly assessing new teachers' performance. Research shows that new teachers often feel isolated and uncertain about their job performance status when left to interpretation. They need direct communication with school leadership to measure progress, accountability, and problem-solve (Avalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Hopkins & Spillane, 2014).

3.3. Student Discipline and Motivation (and Well-Being)

According to research, teachers believe student conduct, a lack of motivation,

and responding to difficult parents to be significant barriers that impact their ability to perform duties and intensify their frustration (Ratcliff et al., 2010). Student populations have changed, and the ability of teachers to manage behavior could be a stressfully daunting task at any stage in their careers (Aloe et al., 2014). According to Donaldson and Johnson (2011), student misbehavior and classroom management were significant stressors that increased teacher attrition.

3.4. Lack of Professional Autonomy

Rosenheck (2023) notes that although teachers are trained to be experts and are employed for that reason, they often lack the recognition or autonomy to perform their jobs. More than two-thirds of teachers report that they have less than a great deal of control over what they teach in the classroom (71.3%) and what instructional materials they use (74.5%), which adds to the stress and shows their expertise and judgment are not valued (NCES, 2015-2016). Survey data examined how politicization affects teachers' instructional strategies, mental health, assessments of the climate in their schools and districts, and intentions to leave their positions. Findings revealed that educators who complained of being bullied over politically charged matters had lower well-being levels and negative impressions of their school or district (Woo et al., 2022).

4. Impact of Pay: Poverty

Research has revealed disturbing teacher pay trends over the last 18 years. "Simply put, teachers are paid less (in weekly wages and total compensation) than their non-teaching college-educated counterparts, and the situation has worsened considerably over time" (Allegretto, 2022: p 1). Even after accounting for changes in the work year, U.S. teacher earnings in 2019 amounted to just 80% of other college graduates. In contrast, teachers in several European and Asian countries, whose salaries are, on average, comparable to those of other college graduates (Allegretto & Mishel, 2020). Among college-bound students and those taking entrance exams, many interested in teaching as a career choose to sidestep the profession in place of higher-paying career options due to low pay (Croft et al., 2018; PDK, 2018).

Perry (2019) found that many teachers cannot afford to live near the school communities they are teaching in. One of several examples he cited was the San Francisco metropolitan area, where P-12 teachers earn a median salary of \$67,138 but struggle financially to reside close to their communities when the average rent is over \$20,000 per year. An increased number of teachers are working second jobs and full-time non-teaching jobs due to low and declining pay. Moreover, many of these teachers chose to take on part-time work not merely to supplement income but, for some, to make enough money to avoid falling into debt (Reilly, 2018; Long, 2019; Talley et al., 2018).

Table 2. Median home statistics and starting master's pay by state.

State	Median Home Price	Median Home size (in square feet)	Median Household Income	Starting master's pay	Does Starting Master's Pay exceed Median Household Income? If not by how much?	
Alabama	\$165,200	1996	\$52,035	\$47,242	No	(\$4793)
Alaska	\$293,400	1857	\$77,790	NA		
Arizona	\$349,300	1942	\$61,529	\$43,211	No	(\$18,318)
Arkansas	\$145,300	1865	\$49,475	\$39,995	No	(\$9480)
California	\$684,800	1778	\$78,672	NA		
Colorado	\$488,600	2243	\$75,231	\$39,313	No	(\$35,918)
Connecticut	\$318,400	1942	\$79,855	\$51,478	No	(\$28,377)
Delaware	\$304,500	2164	\$69,110	\$49,416	No	(\$19,694)
Florida	\$294,900	1715	\$57,703	\$46,561	No	(\$11,142)
Georgia	\$240,400	2159	\$61,224	\$43,902	No	(\$17,322)
Hawaii	\$732,000	1229	\$83,173	\$54,132	No	(\$29,041)
Idaho	\$398,900	2192	\$58,915	\$41,233	No	(\$17,682)
Illinois	\$234,000	1650	\$68,428	\$45,400	No	(\$23,028)
Indiana	\$186,100	1904	\$58,235	NA		
Iowa	\$161,700	1604	\$61,836	NA		
Kansas	\$177,400	1987	\$61,091	\$42,159	No	(\$18,932)
Kentucky	\$165,900	1823	\$52,238	\$41,180	No	(\$11,058)
Louisiana	\$189,200	1923	\$50,800	\$42,951	No	(\$7849)
Maine	\$301,700	1666	\$59,489	\$40,308	No	(\$19,181)
Maryland	\$361,900	1862	\$87,063	\$51,619	No	(\$35,444)
Massachusetts	\$510,500	1805	\$84,385	\$52,310	No	(\$32,075)
Michigan	\$207,800	1617	\$59,234	\$42,423	No	(\$16,811)
Minnesota	\$300,100	1981	\$73,382	\$46,363	No	(\$27,019)
Mississippi	\$141,900	2033	\$46,511	\$39,095	No	(\$7416)
Missouri	\$194,000	1799	\$57,290	\$36,124	No	(\$21,166)
Montana	\$353,700	2108	\$56,539	\$36,670	No	(\$19,869)
Nebraska	\$205,200	2040	\$63,015	\$43,251	No	(\$19,764)
Nevada	\$358,400	1925	\$62,043	\$47,621	No	(\$14,422)

Continued

New Hampshire	\$357,000	1889	\$77,923	\$43,489	No	(\$34,434)
New Jersey	\$397,900	1724	\$85,245	\$57,845	No	(\$27,400)
New Mexico	\$246,000	1996	\$51,243	\$42,703	No	(\$8540)
New York	\$373,000	1528	\$71,117	\$52,170	No	(\$18,947)
North Carolina	\$242,300	2018	\$56,642	\$40,839	No	(\$15,803)
North Dakota	\$240,200	2145	\$65,315	\$44,808	No	(\$20,507)
Ohio	\$179,700	1691	\$58,116	\$42,341	No	(\$15,775)
Oklahoma	\$146,600	1855	\$53,840	\$39,508	No	(\$14,332)
Oregon	\$438,100	1870	\$65,667	\$43,744	No	(\$21,923)
Pennsylvania	\$234,800	1728	\$63,627	\$50,703	No	(\$12,924)
Rhode Island	\$375,800	1576	\$70,305	\$47,696	No	(\$22,609)
South Carolina	\$223,400	1964	\$54,864	\$43,029	No	(\$11,835)
South Dakota	\$239,500	1853	\$59,896	\$44,063	No	(\$15,833)
Tennessee	\$231,600	2055	\$54,833	\$42,327	No	(\$12,506)
Texas	\$243,600	2073	\$63,826	\$47,569	No	(\$16,257)
Utah	\$458,900	2522	\$74,197	\$48,354	No	(\$25,843)
Vermont	\$294,100	1968	\$63,477	\$45,846	No	(\$17,631)
Virginia	\$329,200	2009	\$76,398	\$44,918		(\$31,480)
Washington	\$504,200	2025	\$77,006	\$60,253		(\$16,753)
West Virginia	\$114,600	1789	\$48,037	\$40,813		(\$7224)
Wisconsin	\$231,300	1800	\$63,293	NA		
Wyoming	\$272,700	2198	\$65,304	\$51,280		(\$14,024)

(Median home prices by state for 2022, 2022)

Table 3. States where the median home statistics exceed the starting master's pay by nearly \$30,000 or higher.

State	Median Home Price	Median Home size (in square feet)	Median Household Income	Starting master's Pay	Does starting master's Pay exceed Median Household Income? If not by how much?
Colorado	\$488,600	2243	\$75,231	\$39,313	No (\$35,918)
Maryland	\$361,900	1862	\$87,063	\$51,619	No (\$35,444)
Massachusetts	\$510,500	1805	\$84,385	\$52,310	No (\$32,075)
Minnesota	\$300,100	1981	\$73,382	\$46,363	No (\$27,019)
New Hampshire	\$357,000	1889	\$77,923	\$43,489	No (\$34,434)
Virginia	\$329,200	2009	\$76,398	\$44,918	(\$31,480)

According to Bankrate.com in “The top 10 largest lenders in the U.S.,” “Rocket Mortgage (is) still the biggest player. Rocket originated 464,000 loans worth \$127.6 billion in 2022, according to HMDA data. That’s a sharp drop from the boom year of 2021, when Rocket made more than 1.2 million loans worth \$340 billion” (Ostrowski, n.d.). The table gives the median home price and median (starting Master’s) pay for teachers across the United States. In every state the median teacher pay was below the median household income (Table 2).

On average, Master’s level teacher salaries are nearly \$20,000 below the Median Household Income for the Median Home Price in their respective states. According to World Population Review, the states with the Highest Teacher Shortages in 2023 include the following.

- 1) Alabama - (**\$4793 below the Median Household Income**)
- 2) Hawaii - (**\$29,041 below the Median Household Income**)
- 3) Kansas - (**\$18,932 below the Median Household Income**)
- 4) Maine - (**\$19,181 below the Median Household Income**)
- 5) Mississippi - (**\$7416 below the Median Household Income**)
- 6) Montana - (**\$19,869 below the Median Household Income**)
- 7) New Mexico - (**\$18,947 below the Median Household Income**)
- 8) West Virginia - (**\$7224 below the Median Household Income**)
- 9) Wisconsin - NA
- 10) Arizona - (**\$18,318 below the Median Household Income**)

(States with Teacher Shortages 2023, 2023)

Of particular interest are the states with the highest difference between Master’s Level Teacher pay and the Median Household Income for the Median Home Price in their respective states. The differences are on average approximately \$30,000 (Table 3).

5. Conclusion

To address the teacher shortage crisis, the United States must address the factors that are contributing to the crisis. The record number of individuals leaving the teaching profession is well documented. Urban, rural, mathematics, science and special education areas have been particularly impacted. Research indicates that issues related to stress are consistently referenced as contributing factors. In addition to inherent job related stressors, limited pay for teachers extends the stress factors from work to the home by impacting the teachers’ quality of life. Across the United States, on average, master’s level teacher salaries are nearly \$20,000 below the Median Household Income for the Median Home Price in their respective states. In some states, master’s level teacher salaries are nearly \$30,000 below the Median Household Income for the Median Home Price. These economic factors work to hinder teachers from participating in the home buying process. Without additional income from family, second jobs or alternative sources, teachers home buying remain out of reach due to low salaries.

Per the National Low Income Housing Coalition, “Housing is the key to re-

ducing intergenerational poverty and increasing economic mobility. Research shows that increasing access to affordable housing is the most cost-effective strategy for reducing childhood poverty and increasing economic mobility in the United States.” (The Problem, n.d.)

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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