

TEACHER SALARIES AND TEACHER SHORTAGES: *The View from the Classroom*

Ellen Sherratt, Níve Calegari, and Katherine Bassett

Among the many challenges of 2020-2021 are teacher shortages. Though not a new crisis, the ongoing paucity of excellent and diverse teachers is as important as ever. After all, these professionals create the next generation of doctors, nurses and epidemiologists; support the masses in understanding the logic of vaccinations and climate change; nurture a healthy democracy and civic-mindedness; and develop children's skills at the most important time in their brain development so they can excel in school, careers and life.

Yet our failure to invest in our teachers, in particular in our teachers' salaries, keeps too many children from accessing the consistently high quality education they need and deserve. **The Teacher Salary Project set out to better understand the role of teacher salaries in contributing to teacher shortages** by surveying classroom teachers nationally, with an oversample of recognized and award-winning

WE FOUND

Nearly half of the teachers surveyed reported their salary was not sufficient to retain them in the classroom for the medium-to-long term.

Two-thirds reported their salary was either insufficient or they were not sure if it was sufficient to retain them.

The salary increase that was **necessary to retain teachers** varied wildly, given differences in local cost-of-living, teacher experience level, and other factors.

Only 20% of surveyed teachers of color reported their salaries were sufficient to keep them in the classroom for the medium-to-long term.

Nearly all respondents (97%) reported that their geography experienced teacher shortages and 91% believed salaries contributed either greatly (59%) or somewhat (32%) to local teacher shortages.

82% of respondents currently or previously worked multiple jobs to make ends meet as a teacher.

17% of respondents were currently working multiple jobs during the school year that were entirely unrelated to teaching (e.g., moonlighting in restaurants, driving Uber, etc.).

Two-thirds of respondents believe federal relief funds should be directed toward improved teacher salaries.

ARE TEACHER SALARIES SUFFICIENT TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN TEACHERS?

Our survey revealed that **45% of respondents believed that their salary was not sufficient for them to continue teaching for the medium to long-term**, assuming all other circumstances do not change (TABLE 1). An additional 21% were unsure if their salary was sufficient to retain them, leaving only 34% who feel confident their salaries are sufficient to keep them in the classroom longer-term. Teachers of color were far less likely to see their salaries as sustaining them in the profession. **Among the 178 respondents of color, 63% reported that their salary was not sufficient to keep them medium to long-term**, 18% were not sure if their salary was sufficient to retain them, and just 20% felt their salaries were sufficient to keep them in the classroom longer-term. The elevated concern among teachers of color regarding the adequacy of teacher salaries is likely due to the fact that teachers of color tend to work in lower-resourced schools where salaries are lower and working conditions are harder.

TABLE 1

Is your salary sufficient for you to continue teaching for the medium-to-long term assuming all other circumstances do not change?

	ALL TEACHERS	TEACHERS OF COLOR	MALE TEACHERS
Yes, my salary is sufficient to remain in the classroom	34%	20%	45%
No, my salary is not sufficient to remain in the classroom	45%	63%	37%
Not sure	21%	18%	19%

“I actually moved to this state because at my previous job I could barely afford to eat after paying my monthly bills. This prompted me to move 8 hours away from my home and family to be able to continue teaching and live a somewhat comfortable life.”
 —Award-winning male teacher of color

“I’ve definitely held off on starting a family due to my salary. I’m a homeowner but would definitely need a second job if I didn’t have roommates. It is sometimes hard to watch friends leave the classroom for starting salaries nearly double mine.”
 —Another award-winning male teacher of color

How much would teachers need to be paid to stay? Answers generally ranged from \$50,000 to \$150,000, with requests for as low as \$45,000 and in one case as high as \$250,000 (with a note that \$250,000 is what

WHO WAS SURVEYED?

The survey included 1,167 current classroom teachers, over half (58%) of whom had been formally recognized for their accomplishments in the classroom.¹ Respondents were largely representative of the larger population of teachers² and spanned all income levels.³ The survey was administered nationally⁴ over a six-week period from late April to early June, 2021 via newsletter, email, and social media from The Teacher Salary Project and partner organizations. Given the

importance of improving teacher diversity, results were analyzed specifically for teachers of color and men, although these results should be treated with some caution given the relatively small number of respondents from both groups. To illustrate their perspective further, which largely mirrors the qualitative responses of all demographic groups, quotes from male teachers of color are highlighted throughout the brief.

1. Specifically, 9% (109) of respondents served as a State Teacher of the Year (STOY) or STOY finalist, 9% (104) served as a Teach Plus Fellow or Teacher Leader, and 25% (290) earned National Board Certification, and 8% (94) served in association or union leadership roles.

2. Respondents were predominantly female (84%) and Caucasian (82% plus up to 5% who preferred not to identify their race). Only 1% were from Generation Z (under 25 years old), 37% were from Generation Y (aged 25-40), 48% were from Generation X (aged 41-55), and 14% were Baby Boomers (aged over 55).

3. The largest cohort of respondents (42%) currently more than \$100,000/year, followed by those earning under \$40,000 (15%).

4. There was at least 1 respondent from every U.S. state with over-representation from Colorado (16%), Louisiana (9%), Connecticut (8%), and Ohio (8%).

is needed to buy a home in San Francisco). Other common responses to this open-ended question were \$20,000 or 20% more than their current pay. A significant number of respondents indicated they were only able to teach because they had a partner who earned a higher income.

IS LOW PAY A KEY CONTRIBUTOR TO TEACHER SHORTAGES?

Nearly all (97%) reported that their geography experienced teacher shortages and, as shown in TABLE 2, **91% believed salaries contributed either greatly (59%) or somewhat (32%) to the teacher shortages in their area.** Only 1% believed low salaries did not contribute to their local teacher shortages. Among teachers of color, 96% believed salaries contributed either greatly (70%) or somewhat (26%) to local teacher shortages.

TABLE 2

To what extent do you believe salaries are a contributor to teacher shortages in your geography?

	ALL TEACHERS	TEACHERS OF COLOR	MALE TEACHERS
Salaries contribute greatly to our teacher shortages	59%	70%	53%
Salaries contribute somewhat to our teacher shortages	32%	26%	35%
Salaries contribute minimally to our teacher shortages	5%	3%	7%
Salaries do not contribute to our teacher shortages	1%	1%	2%
NA /We don't have teacher shortages	3%	1%	3%

ARE TEACHER SALARIES SUFFICIENT TO LIVE ON?

TABLE 3

Do you have to work multiple jobs to make ends meet as a teacher?

	ALL TEACHERS	TEACHERS OF COLOR	MALE TEACHERS
Yes, during year, unrelated to teaching	17%	24%	22%
Yes, during year, related to teaching	20%	18%	16%
Yes, during summer vacation	16%	20%	17%
Not currently, but I did in the past	29%	21%	26%
No	18%	17%	19%

Similar to findings from prior research, 82% of respondents either currently (47%) or in the past (29%) had taken on multiple jobs to make ends meet as a teacher. As TABLE 3 shows, 53% currently were working multiple jobs, including 17% who were working multiple jobs during the school year that were not related to teaching (e.g., moonlighting in restaurants, driving Uber, etc.). Among respondents of color, 62% were currently working multiple jobs, including 24% who were working multiple jobs during the school year that were unrelated to teaching.

Another male teacher of color noted:

“My net K-12 salary pays only for my mortgage, HOA, and utilities. To make ends meet, I teach at five different community colleges; two on-ground and three online.”

WHAT ARE THE PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO HIGHER TEACHER PAY?

Research shows that **two-thirds to three-quarters of the public believe teacher pay is too low** (71% according to a poll by *The New York Times*, 78% according to the Associated Press-NORC, and 75% according to NPR). So why don't we see change? Teachers see the greatest barriers as lack of leadership from policymakers, lack of public awareness or understanding, and, interestingly given its contradiction with the public polling statistics, lack of public support. Only one-third to one-half saw lack of district leadership

on the issue, vocal advocacy against higher teacher pay by specific groups or individuals, or lack of teacher advocacy as a significant barrier to improved teacher pay; although, at least 80% of respondents saw each one of these issues as at least somewhat of a barrier.

The only noticeable differences across demographic subgroups were that 63% of respondents of color saw a lack of district leadership as a significant barrier (compared to 49% of all respondents and male respondents) and 42% saw lack of teacher advocacy as a significant barrier (compared to 34% of all respondents and 26% of male respondents).

Other barriers noted included tax policies and funding systems, general aversion to taxes, misperceptions (e.g., about teachers having summers off, or teachers being glorified babysitters), sexism, apathy, specific legislation, values and culture of disrespect and anti-intellectualism, media or politicians spreading misinformation, too much being spent on administration, sheer lack of resources, and acceptance of the status quo.

TABLE 4

How great a barrier to increasing teacher salaries are the following factors?

	A SIGNIFICANT BARRIER	SOMEWHAT OF A BARRIER	NOT A BARRIER
Lack of leadership from policymakers	90%	9%	1%
Lack of public awareness or understanding	74%	21%	5%
Lack of public support	64%	29%	6%
Lack of district leadership	63%	30%	8%
Vocal advocacy against teacher pay	49%	40%	11%
Lack of teacher advocacy	42%	40%	18%

VIEWS TOWARD DIFFERENTIATED TEACHER PAY

TABLE 5

How supportive are you of differentiated teacher pay?

	Very supportive	Somewhat supportive	Not at all supportive
Higher pay for teachers that take on leadership roles and responsibilities in their schools such as roles in school planning instructional leadership or master teachers	59%	32%	10%
Higher pay for teachers in high-need schools	51%	40%	9%
Higher pay for teachers in high-need subject areas	40%	43%	17%
Higher pay for National Board Certified Teachers*	40%	35%	25%
Higher pay for teachers who earn awards such as Teacher of the Year, Milken, Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching	21%	36%	43%
Higher pay for teachers with strong evaluations	19%	37%	44%
Higher pay for teachers with higher student test scores	3%	9%	88%

*Note: a large sample of respondents (25%) are National Board Certified Teachers.

Partisan divides over differentiated or performance-based pay often bring the discussion to a standstill with both research support and teacher support very mixed. From the perspective of teacher respondents, as shown in TABLE 5, 88% are not at all supportive of higher pay based on student test scores while nearly half (44%) are not at all supportive of higher pay based on teacher evaluations. On the flip side, **59% are very supportive of higher pay for teachers that take on leadership roles and responsibilities in their schools** (e.g., instructional leadership or master teachers) and 51% are very supportive

of higher pay for teachers in high-need schools. 40% of respondents are very supportive of higher pay for teachers in high-need subject areas (e.g. math, science, and special education). Forty percent of respondents also are very supportive of higher pay for NBCTs, although it is important to note that 25% of all survey respondents were NBCTs.

Among teachers of color, who more often work in high-need schools, 68% (compared to 51% of all respondents and 48% of male respondents) are very supportive of higher pay for teachers in high-need schools. Respondents of color are also more supportive (56%, compared to 40% of all respondents and 36% of male respondents) of higher pay for teachers in high-need subject areas.

“I think differential pay can be good in theory but can become very bad in practice.”
—Male teacher of color

“Any differential pay system can and will be abused so it needs to be done in a way that does not affect the students.” —Non-binary teacher of color

“Differential pay cannot be systematized in the ways that policymakers are pushing for. Being recognized as effective does not account for teachers who may be racist or who commit micro-aggressions or who cause harm to students of color.”—Male teacher of color

USING FEDERAL FUNDS TO INCREASE TEACHER PAY

TABLE 6

Should ARP & other Covid-relief funds be spent on improved teacher salaries?

	ALL TEACHERS	TEACHERS OF COLOR	MALE TEACHERS
Improved teacher salaries are very important alongside other priority expenditures	67%	77%	60%
Improved teacher salaries are somewhat important alongside other priority expenditures	17%	12%	23%
Improved teacher salaries are less important than other priority expenditures	8%	5%	11%
Improved teacher salaries are not important compared to other priority expenditures	7%	6%	7%

As districts and states look to find the most impactful uses of American Rescue Plan (ARP) and other federal funds, there are many important competing priorities such as summer school, tutoring, student devices, retaining teaching jobs, and professional development. Yet no efforts to accelerate student learning can succeed if teacher shortages persist. **Among the allowable uses of these federal funds are initiatives to improve teacher retention and expenses needed to maintain district operations. Teacher pay falls into both categories.**

We asked survey respondents, “As your district and state determine the best uses for the federal ARP funding, coronavirus state and local fiscal recovery funds, and other federal funding, how does improved teacher pay compare in importance to other critical priorities for ensuring high-quality schools for all (e.g., summer school, tutoring, student devices, retaining teacher jobs, teacher professional development, etc.)?”

In comparison to these other important priorities, as shown in TABLE 6, **two-thirds of respondents believe teacher salaries are a very important use of these federal funds alongside other priorities, and 93% believed improved salaries should be on the table.** Teachers of color were even more supportive of using district and state ARP funds for teacher salaries, with 77% reporting improved salaries are a very important use of funds alongside other priorities.

CONCLUSION

While teacher salaries are not the only important policy for attracting and retaining teachers, this survey provides additional evidence that salaries are seen by teachers, including a preponderance of teachers recognized for their talent, as an important factor, both for them personally and for their peers.

These findings, while unsurprising, may be used to address the barriers to increased teacher pay that were identified as most problematic: a lack of leadership from policy leaders and a lack of public awareness and understanding. What can you do?

Share these findings with local and state leaders to advocate for increased investments in teacher pay. With 71% of the American public supporting higher teacher salaries, identify colleagues in your geography who will similarly share these findings with key decision-makers.

Advocate to use ARP and other federal relief funds for increased teacher pay.

This once-in-a-generation influx of school funding can kick-start local commitments to sustaining salaries that will attract and retain enough excellent and diverse teachers to support post-Covid learning acceleration. In October 2021, First Lady Dr. Jill Biden called on leaders to do just that, stating, “We have to pay our teachers more...We are giving more money to schools through ARP...and need to give more money to teachers. It’s the bottom line!” Eighty-four percent of our respondents agree that, alongside other important priorities, ARP funds should support professional teacher salaries.

Collect local data on the impacts of low teacher salaries in your area to inform policy.

Further build awareness and political will among the public by posting these findings on social media, sharing them at community forums, and inviting others with broad networks to use their platforms as well.

Sign on as a Teacher Salary Champion campaign at www.TeacherSalaryProject.org/Champion and invite friends and colleagues to do as well.

Collaborate with local teachers’, business, and civic associations to chart a shared commitment and path toward significantly higher teacher pay, particularly for students from underserved backgrounds.

Advocate with your U.S. Congresspeople and the Biden Administration. At the 2021 National Education Association conference, President Biden stated “Teachers need a raise, not just praise,” Call or write the Administration and your federal leaders to share why you care about teacher salaries.

Increased investments in teacher salaries are essential if we are to hire and retain enough excellent and diverse teachers who can create just, equitable, inclusive, joyful, and stable learning environments for every student. Given the importance of teaching quality for student achievement, this will lead to improved student learning, college persistence, career and life success and, in turn, a flourishing, verdant society and planet. There has never been a better time than now. If not now, then when?

AS OF THE TIME OF PUBLICATION, DOZENS OF NOTABLE LEADERS HAVE SIGNED ON AS TEACHER SALARY CHAMPIONS*, INCLUDING

Maia Appleby, Executive Director, American Consortium for Equity in Education

Professor Barnett Berry, University of South Carolina and Founder, Center for Teaching Quality

Elisa Villanueva Beard, CEO, Teach for America

David Bosso, 2019 National Teacher Hall of Fame inductee, and 2012 CT Teacher of the Year

Assistant Professor Travis Bristol, University of California, Berkeley

Sydney Chaffee, 2017 National Teacher of the Year

Jeff Charbonneau, 2013 National Teacher of the Year

Associate Professor Joyce Chen, Ohio State University

Professor Raj Chetty, Harvard University

Dolores Cormier-Zenon, 2020-2021 ASCD President/Chairman Board of Directors

Diana Cournoyer, Executive Director, National Indian Education Association

Deb Delisle, CEO, Alliance for Excellent Education, former Ohio Secretary of Education, and former Assistant U.S. Secretary of Education

Professor Karen DeMoss, Executive Director, Prepared to Teach

Dan Domenech, Executive Director of AASA, the School Superintendents Association

Arne Duncan, 9th U.S. Secretary of Education

Professor Ron Ehrenberg, Cornell University

Sharif El-Mekki, Founder & CEO, Center for Black Educator Development

Professor Nancy Folbre, University of Massachusetts-Amherst

Professor Pam Grossman, University of Pennsylvania

Bryan Hassel, Founder & Co-President, Public Impact

Angie Jerabek, Founder & Executive Director, BARR Center

Professor Farida Khan, University of Colorado-Colorado Springs

Jason Kamras, Richmond District Superintendent & 2005 National Teacher of the Year

Dr. John B. King, Jr., 10th U.S. Secretary of Education

Lisa Lachlan, Director, Center on Great Teachers & Leaders at American Institutes for Research

Anissa Listak, Founder & CEO, National Center on Teacher Residencies

Wendy Loloff Cooper, CEO, Generation Schools

Professor Marvin Lynn, Portland State University

D.T. Magee, Superintendent, Norwalk Public Schools

Talia Milgrom-Elcott, Founder & CEO, 100Kin10

Craig Newmark, Founder of craigslist

Ronn Nozoe, CEO, National Association of Secondary School Principals

Shanna Peeples, 2015 National Teacher of the Year

Jacqueline Rodriguez, Vice-President, American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education

Phil Rogers, Director, National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification

Andy Rotherham, Eduwonk Blogger and Co-Founder, Bellwether Education

Dr. Melody Schopp, former South Dakota Secretary of Education*

Professor Kathy Schultz, University of Colorado, Boulder

Elena Silva, PK-12 Policy Director, New America

Professor Christine Sleeter, California State University

Lindsay Sobel, Interim CEO, Teach Plus

Evan Stone, Founder & Co-CEO, Educators for Excellence

Kate Walsh, CEO, National Council on Teacher Quality

Professor Kevin Welner, Colorado University-Boulder, and Director, National Education Policy Center

Kerensa Wing, 2020 NASSP National Principal of the Year

**Teacher Salary Champions support higher salaries for teachers. They do not necessarily support the content of this report.*

PLUS OVER 70 STATE TEACHERS OF THE YEAR AND POLICYMAKERS AND OVER 1,000 PARENTS, STUDENTS, BUSINESS AND CIVIC LEADERS AND TEACHERS!

Please join the campaign by signing on here:
teachersalaryproject.org/teacher-salary-champions

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