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Teacher Pay Hurt by Recession, Report Says

By MOTOKO RICH

During the recession and its aftermath, public schools took a hit as both state coffers and local property taxes shriveled. That showed up in shrinking employment, but also in teacher salaries.

According to a [report](#) released Tuesday, the vast majority of teachers in the nation's largest school districts took a pay cut or saw their pay frozen at least one year between 2008 and 2012.

The report by the [National Council on Teacher Quality](#), a nonprofit group that advocates for tougher teacher standards, looked at salary data across 41 of the country's 50 largest school districts. Average annual teacher pay increases, which included cost-of-living and contractually negotiated raises as well as increases awarded for extra years of experience, dropped from 3.6 percent in the 2008-09 school year to 1.3 percent in the 2011-12 year. (The report did not include increases that teachers may have received for extra degrees or certifications.)

Despite the downturn, some districts managed to give teachers larger pay increases. Chicago public schoolteachers, who went on strike last year, enjoyed the largest salary increases across the four-year period covered by the report, with an average 6.5 percent increase. Other districts that increased pay at higher-than-average rates during the recession and recovery period included Milwaukee, New York, Baltimore, Jefferson County in Kentucky and Fresno, Calif.

In Chicago, teachers received contractually negotiated raises of 4 percent in 2009, 2010 and 2011 as well as increases for extra years of experience. The school board voted to rescind the contractual raises in June 2011, one of several issues that triggered the strike.

"There is a coterie of people who believe that we do not deserve a raise," said Karen Lewis, president of the Chicago Teachers Union. She added, "It's not a matter of the hours we swipe in or swipe out, but the work that continues for us under increasingly difficult circumstances."

At the other end of the spectrum, pay for teachers in Albuquerque decreased from 2008-12 as the Legislature, which controls most school financing in New Mexico, did not appropriate funds for raises.

“It’s a tough time being a public school employee,” said Don Moya, chief financial officer of the Albuquerque Public Schools.

Across the country, teacher pay did not increase significantly over the last decade. According to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), average teacher salaries increased less than 1 percent, in inflation-adjusted terms, from 2000-12.

What’s more, average teacher pay — \$56,643, according to the Department of Education — is lower than the average pay in many other professions that require college and graduate degrees.

“I just see we’re going down a road we cannot succeed in,” said Dennis Van Roekel, president of the National Education Association.

Kate Walsh, president of the National Council on Teacher Quality, said districts should pay much higher salaries to fewer teachers.

“We think the profession needs to make more use out of really great classroom teachers,” Ms. Walsh said, “and pay those teachers a whole lot more money.”

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