

## U.S. Teachers Work More Hours Than Their Global Peers. Other Countries Are Catching Up



By [Sarah D. Sparks](#) — October 04, 2022 ⌚ 3 min read



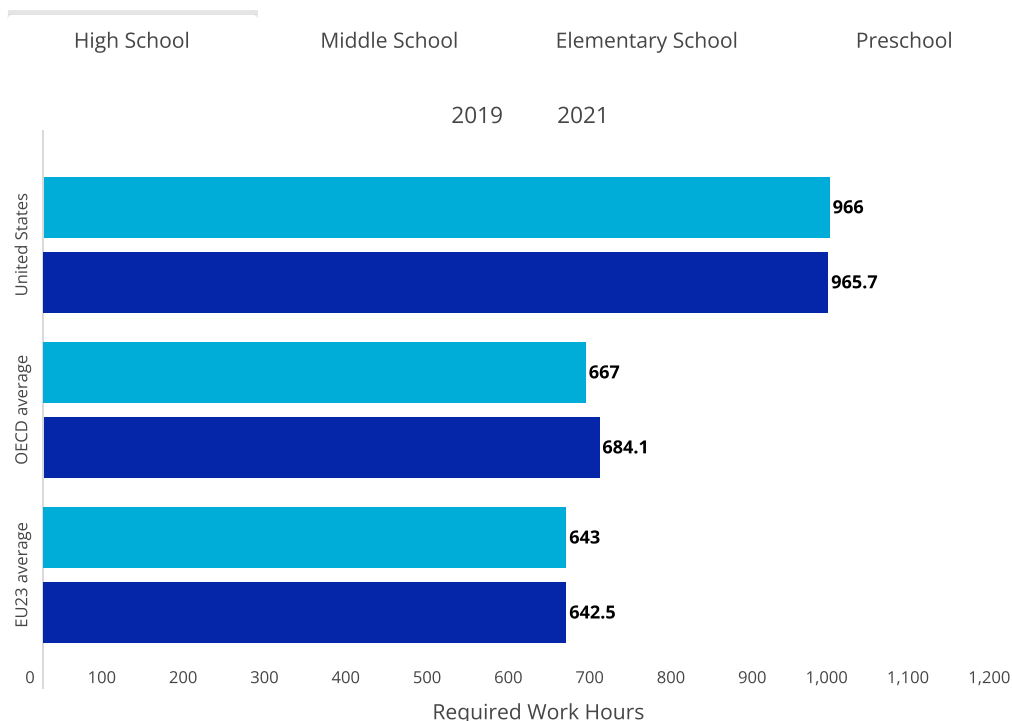
— DigitalVision Vectors/Getty

As districts across the country look for ways to recruit and retain more teachers, international data for the 2021-22 school year suggest looking to other countries for ideas on pay and supports.

In its new [Education at a Glance 2022](#) data release, the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation finds U.S. teachers at most grades spend more time working on average than their colleagues in other countries. However, elementary and secondary teachers globally have seen their workloads tick up closer to those of their American peers since the pandemic.

# How Much Do Teachers and Principals Work, Worldwide?

In all but preschool, U.S. teachers tend to work more hours per year on average than do teachers across all countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, according to OECD data.



SOURCE: Survey on Joint National Responses to COVID 19, conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).



For example, U.S. elementary school teachers’ work hours haven’t changed much since 2019, but at more than 1,000 a year on average, American educators work more than 200 more hours than their peers worldwide. U.S. elementary and high school teachers work more hours than those in any OECD country but Costa Rica, and middle school teachers work more hours than their peers everywhere but Costa Rica and Mexico.

The report also found about half of OECD countries changed their laws around instruction to make it easier for students and teachers to use virtual learning, and the majority have increased teacher training for both remote instruction and technology use in the classroom.

“Probably we have seen more technological change in schools in the last two years than in the last 20 years before,” said Andreas Schleicher, OECD’s director for education and skills and special adviser on education policy to the

secretary-general, in a briefing on the data earlier this week. As a result, teachers now spend more of their work time in direct instruction, and countries are dedicating more time to training teachers in how to use technology in their classrooms.

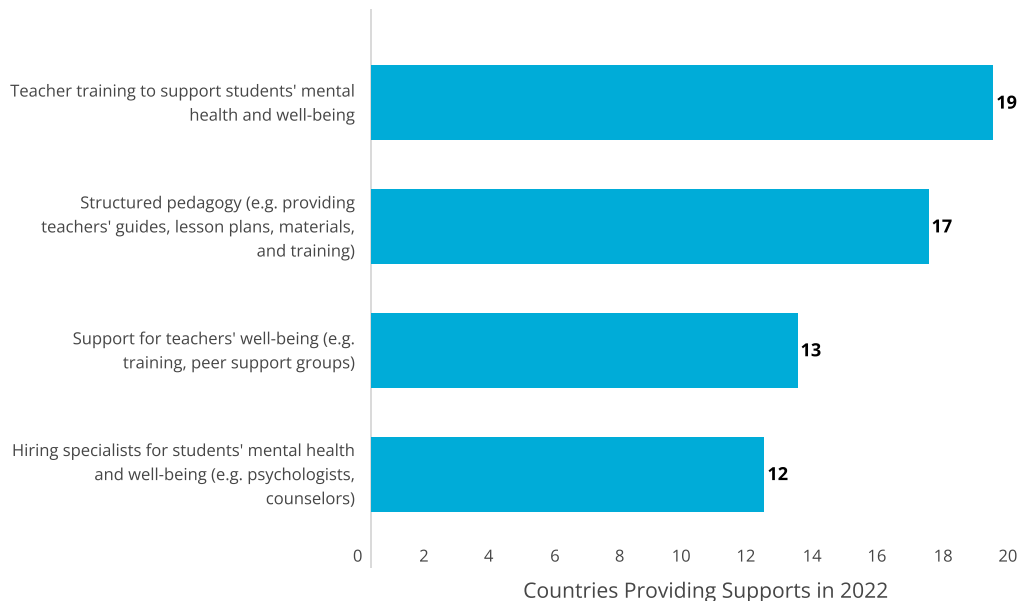
“Instruction time has increased, and it’s become much more targeted to ensuring that students do have opportunities to catch up,” Schleicher said. “You can see very clearly that enhanced provision of digital training for students is either in planning or in place. You can see also enhanced provision of in-service digital training to teachers.”

“That has been one of the main lessons: You can have great technology, but if it’s not effectively integrated in the pedagogical practice, it’s of limited use,” he said.

The United States does not require specific teacher professional development supports at the federal level, but OECD found 17 countries fully pay the cost of all required teacher professional development; six countries also pay for optional teacher training. Since the pandemic, the OECD found more countries also have begun to require additional supports for teacher well-being.

# Global Teacher Training and Support

Since the pandemic, the OECD has found more countries have invested in training teachers to cope with changing technology use in classrooms as well as ways to cope with students' mental health needs. As of 2022, more than a dozen countries have also moved to provide more support for teacher mental health and well-being at the national level.



**NOTE:** The United States does not collect national data on these teacher supports, as decisions are made at the local level.

**SOURCE:** Survey on Joint National Responses to COVID 19, conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).



“Most countries actually are looking very carefully at the impact of the pandemic and what they can do,” Schleicher said. “Virtually every country that we have surveyed puts an emphasis on looking at the well-being of teachers and the effectiveness of the distance learning arrangements that countries put in place during the pandemic.”

## Changing teacher demographics

Globally, teacher and principal salaries tend to increase with their level of education, but across countries that participated in the survey, preschool, elementary, and secondary teachers earned 4 percent to 14 percent lower salaries than other college-educated workers. On average across grade spans, teachers in OECD countries earned about 90 percent of what similarly educated, adult full-time workers in their countries made, taking into account

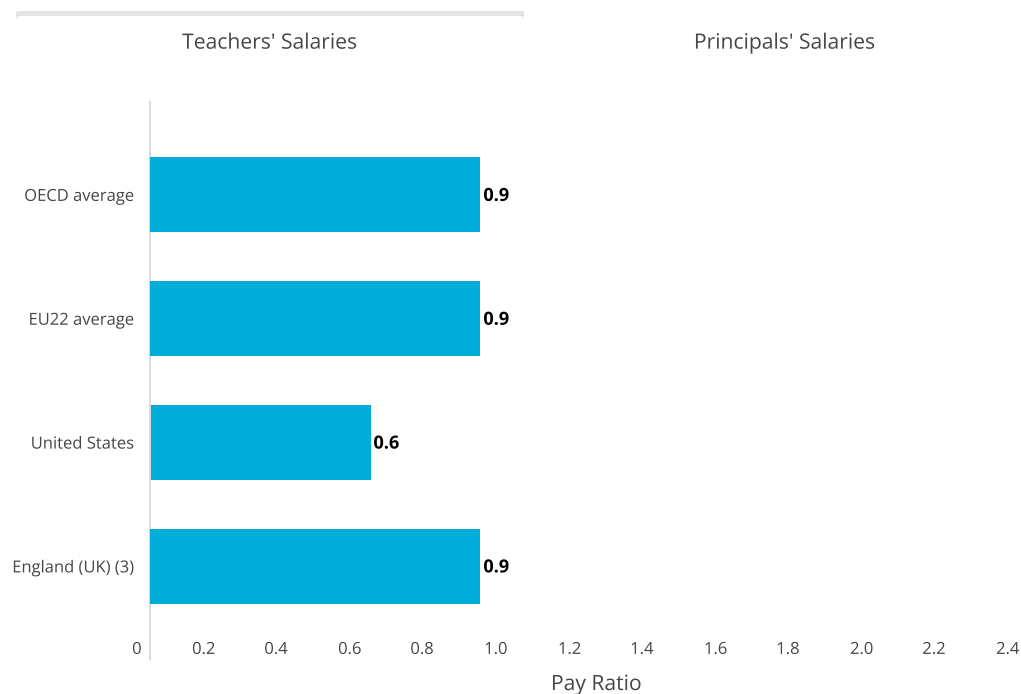
salaries and bonuses. In the United States, however, teachers on average made half of what similarly educated peers made in other fields.

By contrast, elementary and secondary principals earned on average 30 percent higher salaries than the average college-educated workers. (The OECD did not have average salary data for principals weighted to account for specific levels of higher education, such as master's degrees, that school leaders in some school systems are required to have.) In the United States, school leaders earned 1.1 times as much as workers with college degrees generally, but 80 percent of that of similarly educated peers in other fields.

While COVID-19 disproportionately affected older school staff, the OECD found it has not changed the overall share of teaching staff over 40, which has remained at 40 percent on average worldwide among OECD countries since 2015.

## How Do U.S. Teacher Supports Stack Up Against Global Counterparts?

New data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development suggest there's a greater pay gap in the United States between K-12 teachers and other, similarly educated workers, compared to pay gaps in other countries.



NOTE: Pay measured by the ratio of annual average salaries (including bonuses and allowances) of teachers and principals in public schools relative to the earnings of workers with similar educational attainment.

### Changing Teacher Demographics

Pay gaps could make it harder for U.S. public schools to draw in young teachers. OECD data find teachers under 30 make up 14 percent of the U.S. teaching force, significantly more than the OECD average, but still less than half as large a pool as teachers over 50.

< OECD - Average >

Teachers Under 30 Teachers Over 50



SOURCE: Survey on Joint National Responses to COVID 19, conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).



The OECD tracks teacher and other national education data in 38 member countries, as well as of Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa.



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