

U.S. Students and Teachers Top Global Peers for Time Spent in School in OECD Study

By [Sarah D. Sparks](#) on [September 10, 2019 5:00 AM](#)

U.S. students and teachers alike spend significantly more time at school than their peers internationally, according to the latest **Education at a Glance** compendium by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

The mammoth annual report released this morning tracks indicators in education systems of 46 member and participating countries, including the United States. It includes measures of early childhood through postgraduate education, as well as comparisons of international teachers and principals.

It found U.S. students and their teachers spend a lot more time in the classroom than their global peers.

A typical U.S. student spends 8,884 hours over nine years to complete primary and lower secondary education. That's nearly 1,300 hours—more than a full school year—more than the average for other countries in the report. In higher education, U.S. students also take slightly longer on average to complete a bachelor's degree than their international peers.

Yet young children are much less likely to participate in preschool in the United States than in the typical OECD country:

How Does the United States Compare to Other Countries in Early Education?

	United States	OECD average
Percentage of 3-year-olds in early education	42%	77%
Percentage of 4-year-olds in early education	66%	88%

SOURCE: OECD

Teacher Workloads and Pay

Each year, the typical U.S. teacher is expected to work 2,000 hours. That's 400 hours longer than the OECD average, and ties with Chile and Switzerland for the longest statutory worktime among the countries. At all levels, U.S. teachers spend about half of their time in the classroom, adding up to more instructional time than the global average at every grade but preschool. The average

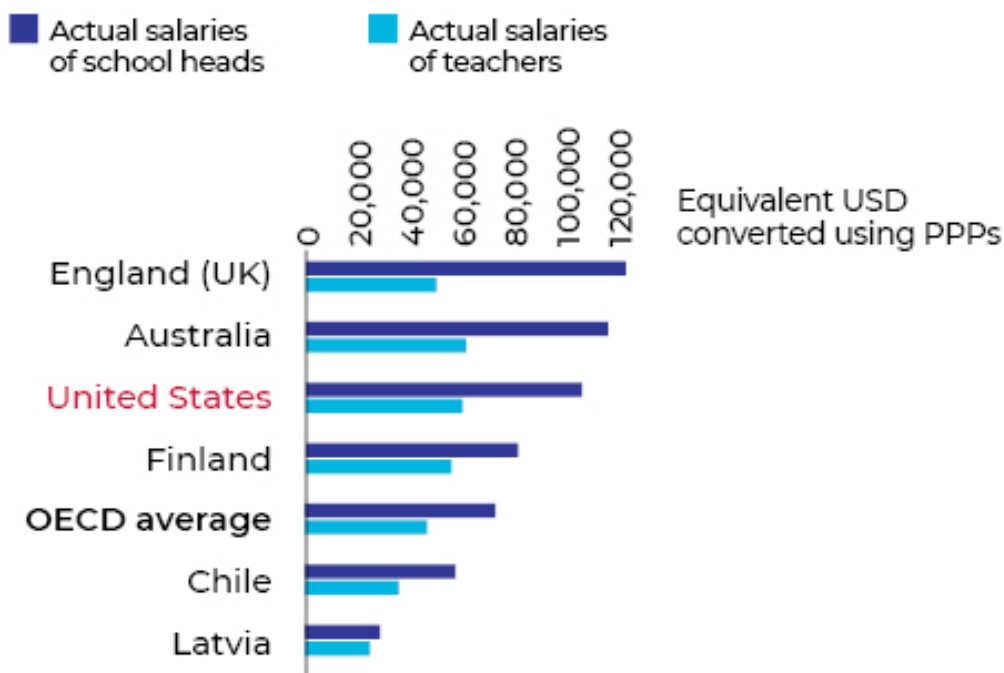
class size in primary school has risen slightly since 2008, but the United States still has lower average class sizes compared to the international average.

U.S. teachers and principals are among the highest paid of all participating countries, the data show. A typical new teacher earns about \$40,000 in the United States, about \$7,000 more than the global average. Likewise, a 15-year veteran teacher earns a little more than \$62,000, compared to just under \$46,000 on average across OECD countries. However, the United States also has one of the largest salary gaps between principals and teachers in the OECD, and U.S. teachers earn 62 percent to 68 percent less compared to other, similarly credentialed professionals in their own country.

"These [teachers'] relative earnings are among the lowest across all OECD countries and economies," the report noted.

The chart below compares several countries' teacher and principals salaries in U.S. dollars, including bonuses and allowances:

Teacher and Principal Salaries Around the World



SOURCE: OECD

The 2019 report also highlighted postsecondary education. The percentage of U.S. young adults ages 25 to 34 who had earned some type of postsecondary degree, rose 8 percentage points from 2008 to 2018, to 49 percent. That's above the OECD average of 44 percent, yet U.S. students were more likely than the OECD average to earn "short-cycle" associate degrees or certificates.

Only 11 percent of U.S. young adults earned a master's or doctoral degree, compared to 15 percent in the OECD countries on average. That's ironic, because someone with an advanced degree earns 131 percent more on average than someone with only a secondary degree in the United States—that's a salary boost 40 percentage points greater than the average internationally.