

## Teachers Are Paid Almost 20 Percent Less Than Similar Professionals, Analysis Finds

By [Madeline Will](#) on [September 5, 2018 4:33 PM](#)



The wage gap between teachers and comparable professionals has grown over time, with teachers now earning 18.7 percent less than other college-educated workers, [according to a new analysis](#).

A new paper published by the Economic Policy Institute, a nonpartisan think tank supported by labor unions, found that the "teacher wage penalty" has increased significantly—teachers earned just 1.8 percent less than comparable workers in 1994. And although teachers do receive better benefits packages than their college-educated peers, those benefits only mitigate part of the gap: Including benefits, teachers face an 11 percent compensation penalty.

---

See also: [Teacher Pay: How Salaries, Pensions, and Benefits Work in Schools](#)

---

These findings might explain why a new majority of Americans [would not want their child to become a teacher](#). Low pay was also a major factor driving the widescale teacher strikes and protests in Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and West Virginia last spring.

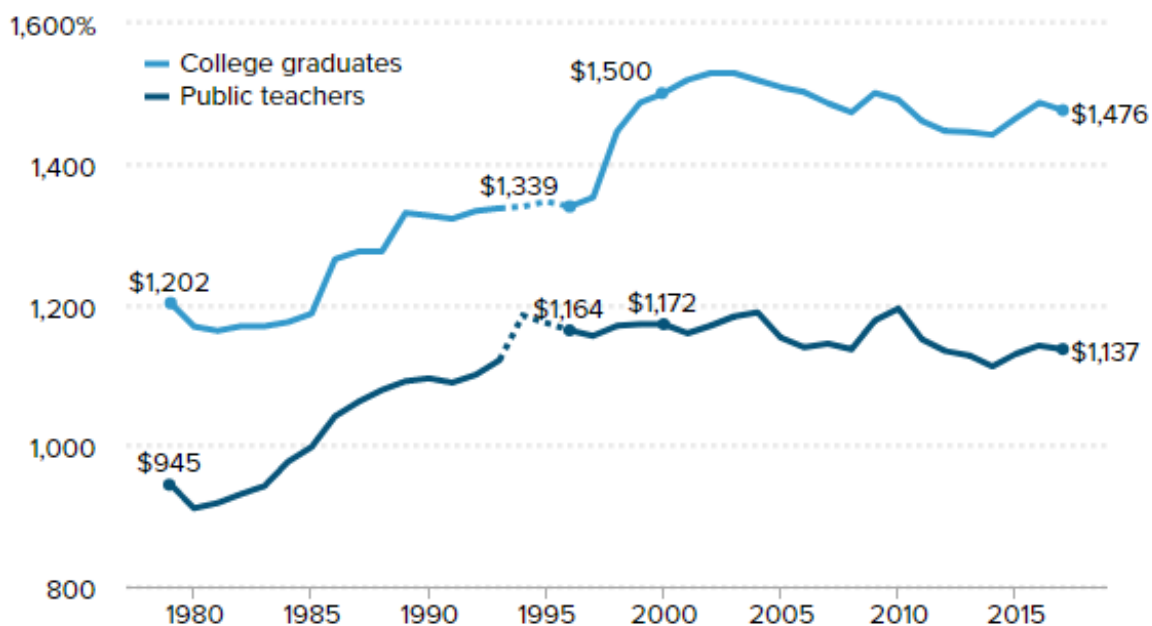
Four of the states with teacher activism had the largest wage penalties in the country—Arizona had a 36.4 percent wage gap between teachers and similarly educated professionals, North Carolina's gap stood at 35.5 percent, Oklahoma's at 35.4 percent, and Colorado's at 35.1 percent.

Overall, teachers' weekly wages lag by more than 25 percent compared to similarly educated professionals in 16 states. There are no states where teacher pay is equal to or better than that of other college graduates.

"The opportunity cost of becoming a teacher and remaining in the profession becomes more and more important as relative teacher pay falls further behind that of other professions," write report authors Lawrence Mishel, the president of EPI, and Sylvia Allegretto, an EPI research associate and a University of California, Berkeley economist.

Compared to other college graduates, in 2017, teachers were paid nearly \$350 less than their peers per week. Since 1996, teacher pay has actually decreased \$27 per week, adjusted for inflation, while college graduates' average weekly wages have increased over that same time period.

**Average weekly wages of public school teachers and other college graduates, 1979–2017 (2017 dollars)**



There are also gender differences. In 1960, teaching was a lucrative profession for women—female teachers earned 14.7 percent more than comparable female workers. But now, the report found a 15.6 percent wage penalty for female teachers. And male teachers take even more of a financial hit—their wage gap stood at 26.8 percent in 2017.

Teaching is a predominately female profession—about 77 percent of teachers are women, [according to the latest federal data](#). The report authors write that historically, female teachers were a "captive labor pool" with few career options and therefore less leverage to secure higher wages. That historical background is why the pay for teachers has been less than pay in male-dominated professions, Mishel and Allegretto write.

"Those arguing that teachers are overpaid have a hard time explaining how, if this is so, men have not swarmed to teaching," they added.

### **Why Are Teacher Wages Declining?**

Mishel and Allegretto attribute the erosion of teacher pay to the revenue declines states are facing because they have cut taxes. While teachers "may have forgone wage increases for benefits," they write, teacher wages have been stagnant since the mid-1990s.

"This makes the wage penalty, on its own, critically important as it is only earnings that families can put toward making ends meet," Mishel and Allegretto write, adding that wages, not benefits, are what pay for expenses like rent, food, and student loan payments.

[A separate analysis](#), published Wednesday by the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution, examined the average teacher salary reductions that have taken place in many states. Michael Hansen, the center's director and the author of the analysis, said in an interview that he wanted to examine the oft-made claim that if a wave of baby boomers are exiting the classroom, teacher salaries would decline by default because teachers are paid commensurate with experience.

Instead, he found that retiring teachers are not the source of average salary declines. Teachers have actually gotten more qualified during the Great Recession—so they should be paid even more, he said. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, more teachers report having master's and doctoral degrees in 2016 than they did in 2007.

Accounting for the increased qualifications, Hansen found that teacher salaries have decreased 3.5 percent since 2007.

"This evidence should compel the public and policymakers to rethink our popular assumptions about how generously (or not) teachers are paid," Hansen wrote in his analysis. "We all know teaching is not a lucrative profession, but this popular understanding overlooks differences in how teachers' salaries have eroded over time."

*Image: Melissa Knight, who teaches art at an Ardmore, Okla., middle school, rallies with other teachers in April at the state Capitol in Oklahoma City to protest low school funding. —Sue Ogrocki/AP-File*

*Chart via the Economic Policy Institute*