

## Teachers in California, Michigan Spend the Most to Stock Their Classrooms

By Andrew Soergel, Senior Reporter Aug. 26, 2019, at 3:03 p.m. [More](#)

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With back-to-school season in full swing, a new report suggests teachers will be shelling out hundreds of dollars on classroom supplies that they will need during the academic year.

The average K-12 public school teacher spends \$459 each year on school supplies for which they are not reimbursed, according to a state-level analysis of National Center for Education Statistics survey data conducted by the left-leaning [Economic Policy Institute](#).

California and Michigan lead the nation in unreimbursed teacher spending, with professionals in those states purchasing \$664 and \$628 in classroom supplies, respectively. Teachers in North Dakota and West Virginia, meanwhile, spend the least of their own money, at \$327 and \$333, respectively.

The findings of the report also showed some overlap with the annual U.S. News Best States rankings. Ten of the 20 states in which teachers spent the most without reimbursement ranked in the bottom 20 states for [pre-K - 12 education](#). And 10 of the 20 states in which teachers spent the least placed in the top 20 of those U.S. News rankings.

"There is no other profession I can think of where workers, as a matter of culture and practice, are relied upon to subsidize an employer's costs just so they can do their jobs," Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said Thursday in a statement responding to the EPI report. "But teachers want what kids need, so each year they buy hundreds of dollars' worth of supplies for their students without a second thought – even though they are paid over 20 percent less than similarly skilled professionals."

The report draws on relatively old figures, since the 2011-2012 NCES Schools and Staffing Survey was the most recent to include state-level microdata. But Emma García, an economist at EPI and author of the teacher spend report, adjusted those numbers for inflation to 2018 dollars. She also notes that the levels of spending in 2011-2012 were not an aberration, pointing to more recent survey numbers that suggest levels of unreimbursed teacher spend have risen slightly in recent years.

"This variation should not be interpreted as a variation in teachers' altruism. State-by-state

spending differences are likely due to a combination of factors, including students' needs, how schools are funded in the state, the cost of living in the state, and other factors," García wrote in the report.

EPI also points out that the \$459-per-teacher average holds for all public school teachers, which includes approximately 5% who do not spend any of their own money on school supplies. The report indicates teachers in high-poverty areas often report spending more of their own money on school supplies (\$523, on average, in 2015-2016) than teachers in lower-poverty areas (\$434, on average, during the same period).

"This gap may reflect greater needs among students in high-poverty schools and more deficient funding systems for those schools," according to the report.

During the 2016-2017 school year, the average salary for public elementary and secondary school teachers was \$58,950, according to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#). But wages, too, were shaped largely by geographic location.

The average public teacher in New York or California, for example, brought in \$79,637 and \$78,711, respectively, during the 2016-2017 school year. In South Dakota and Mississippi, that average sat at just \$42,668 and \$42,925, respectively.

Some teachers in recent years have taken to online [crowdfunding](#) to help raise the money to cover their out-of-pocket classroom expenses.