

“An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.” – Benjamin Franklin

Every day, North Carolinians entrust the general welfare and education of nearly 1.6 million K-12 students to approximately 94,000 teachers and 21,000 teaching assistants. For a minimum of 1,025 instructional hours each school year, teachers are hard at work helping each child succeed in school and in life.

North Carolina's reputation as an educational leader is well known, and the quality of our public schools has made our state attractive to new families and businesses. A quality public school education depends on quality teachers; there's a mountain of research pointing to the critical role our teachers play in student achievement.

According to the [Center for Public Education](#), “Having an effective teacher consistently rises to the top as the most important factor in learning—more so than student ethnicity or family income, school attended, or class size.” Experience, advanced degrees, and subject-specific certification are among many teacher credentials that contribute to student achievement.

Challenges of Recruiting High Quality Teachers

For the 2016-17 school year, North Carolina's average teacher salary is \$49,837. That's about \$9,000 less than the national average of \$58,950, according to the NEA. North Carolina ranks 35th in the nation for average teacher pay as of 2017. We are 5th in the Southeast for teacher pay. In the decade from 2004-5 to 2014-15, adjusted for inflation, NC teachers suffered a 10.2% average salary decline, the fourth largest decline in the nation.

State	Estimated 2016-2017 Average Salary
Georgia	\$54,602
Kentucky	\$52,339
Virginia	\$51,049
Louisiana	\$50,000
North Carolina	\$49,837
Florida	\$49,407
Alabama	\$48,868
Arkansas	\$48,616
South Carolina	\$48,598
Tennessee	\$48,456
West Virginia	\$45,701
Mississippi	\$42,925

Source: [NEA Rankings and Estimates](#), 2017

The teacher pay crisis is not traditional for North Carolina. The average teacher salary in 1999-2000 was \$39,404, which would be \$58,123 today according to the US Dep't of Labor. Ten years later, in the worst days of the recession, we paid teachers an average of \$46,850, about \$57,629 in today's dollars.

Effects of 2017-2019 Budget on Education

- The biennial budget passed during the 2017 legislative session provided average raises of 3.3% in the first year, and 9.6% (over 2016-17) in the second, though there appears to be inadequate funding included to actually reach those goals. But the raises include almost every step, and there will be bonuses of \$385 for teachers with 25+ years in 2017-18 and 2018-19.
- About 15,720 teacher assistant positions are funded, a decrease of about 7,000 compared to 2008; the budget failed to restore teaching assistant numbers to pre-recession levels. The 2015 budget continued to offer no salary benefits for teachers who have earned or will earn a Master's or doctoral degree after 2013.
- New bonuses of \$2,150 for grade 4-8 math teachers and grade 4-5 reading teachers will go to the top 25% statewide and within LEAs in 2017-18 only.
- Teacher assistant tuition assistance program in several counties is expanded.
- In 2008-09, North Carolina spent \$65.98 per student on classroom materials when adjusted for inflation. Under the 2017-18 budget, per-pupil funding for classroom materials is only \$30.55, **less than half** of the pre-recession level. Teachers are still spending their own money for supplies and instructional materials.

Recent Legislation

On February 8, Republican legislative leaders introduced [HB90](#), allowing a phase-in plan for smaller class sizes in grades K-3 until 2021-22 instead of the rigid mandate for the 2018-19 school year. In addition, legislators included in the bill a new allotment for enhancement teachers that grows to about \$246 million by FY 2021-22. This funding is calculated on one enhancement teacher for every 191 students in grades K-5. School districts welcomed this additional funding while noting that many districts currently have a lower ratio with more teachers than this allotment pays for currently employed, **meaning the legislature again fails to fully fund these teachers.**

Teacher Pipeline

North Carolina continues to experience a shortage of teachers and of potential teachers. Middle schools STEM and special education positions are the most difficult to fill, but many districts face annual shortages across our state. The decline in pay – adjusted for inflation; even this year's raises represent lower pay than before the recession – and less generous benefits for graduate degree and longevity continue to demonstrate our legislative leaders' lack of commitment to making teaching a valued, viable profession for families in NC.

- The legislature created a new, less generous form of the Teaching Fellows program that they terminated in 2011. The new plan favors STEM/special education teachers and offers incentives for teaching in low-wealth schools, which is certainly commendable and helpful to deserving students and districts. However, the earlier program created 500 teachers per year (as would the governor's proposal) at 17 institutions across the state, while the program that passed will offer only 160 scholarships annually at the five "most effective" teacher preparation programs, a very narrow selection for a state with so many excellent higher learning choices.
- Retirement health benefits were eliminated for state employees hired after Jan. 21, 2021, which will create further drag on the already slow teacher pipeline and reinforce to young people that teaching is not a profession that will sustain a family in NC.

- Every year that Master's pay and career protections are not restored is a new message to NC teachers and potential teachers that the profession is not valued or rewarded here. This is a problem that must be addressed to restore our teaching pipeline and the strength of our once-enviable public school system.

The Excellent Public Schools Act of 2013:

- Eliminated career status for educators. (Teachers can already be dismissed if there is just cause; career status protected teachers with four or more years of experience from arbitrary dismissal.)
- Teachers will now be placed on one to four-year contracts. This is considered a due process policy, not a tenure policy.
- Gives schools a letter grade based on performance.
- Will pay teachers for performance—based primarily on student test scores.

Public schools may be at a distinct disadvantage in some of the pay for performance issues since evaluation standards differ from those used for charter and private schools. For example, private schools aren't assigned letter grades, and neither private nor charter schools are subject to the same teaching certification standards and academic and financial oversight as our public schools.

References

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