

***If we don't treat teaching as a profession,
we won't have professionals in our classrooms.***

North Carolina's teachers are dedicated and hardworking, and their professionalism has made our public school system a jewel among Southern states. North Carolina leads the nation in number of teachers who have earned certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Disappointingly, we do not compensate our educators accordingly. The [average NC teacher salary](#) was \$50,861 in 2017-2018, about \$9,600 less than the national average of \$60,483. With teacher pay at 37th in the nation, per-pupil spending at 39th, reduced job security, and no incentive to get advanced degrees, the appeal of a teaching job has been significantly reduced in North Carolina.

Teacher Pipeline Shrinking

[Enrollment in undergraduate education programs](#) across the UNC system is down 41 percent since 2010. Decline in enrollment for all levels of education majors, including master's level, is 25 percent. There are 15 UNC system schools with teacher preparation programs, and all are reporting declines in enrollment in their degree and licensure programs. The severe shortage of math and science teachers and middle school teachers for all subjects is a critical and growing problem.

Ways to Recruit and Retain

The UNC system is so concerned about the teacher pipeline shortage that they launched a recruitment website called [TEACH NOW](#), which is used to reach out to high school juniors and seniors, community college students, undecided majors at all UNC schools, and mid-career professionals. The effort even targets military personnel and their spouses.



Schools All Our Students Deserve Need Experienced, Certified Teachers

The pipeline is leaking at both ends in North Carolina. We are seeing a significant decline in enrollment in education degree programs coupled with the loss of current classroom teachers as retention has become more difficult. The overall state teacher attrition rose slightly last year to [13.45 percent](#). The state's inability to recruit teachers from out-of-state just compounds the supply problem. All of these issues are directly attributable to changes in how teachers are paid and their loss of job security benefits. One reason fewer college students are choosing education as a major is the relative pay gap between teachers and other college graduates. According to the [Economic Policy Institute](#), relative teacher pay—teacher pay compared with the pay of other career opportunities for potential and current teachers—has been eroding for over half a century.

Teachers now earn a record 18.7 percent less in wages than comparable workers

Teacher wage gap—public school teacher wages relative to comparable workers, all and by gender, 1979–2017

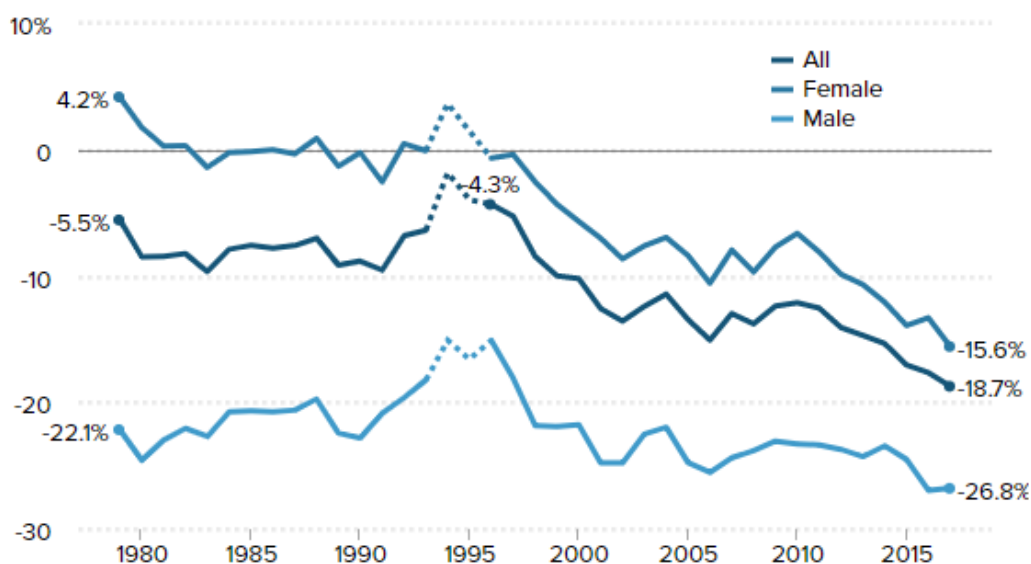


Chart Data

Note: Figure shows regression-adjusted weekly wages of elementary, middle, and secondary public school teachers. Non-imputed data are not available for 1994 and 1995; data points for these years have been extrapolated and are represented by dotted lines (see Appendix A for more detail).

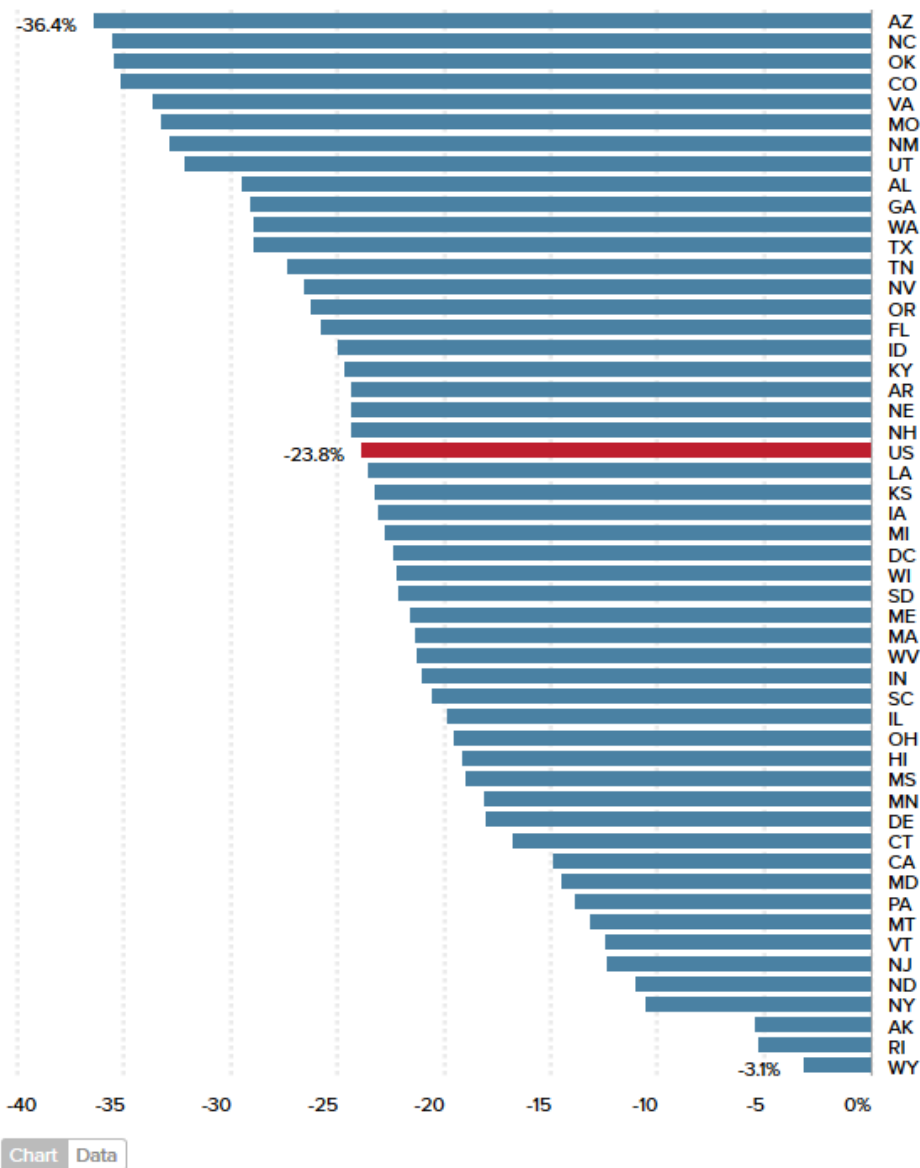
Source: Authors' analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data

Economic Policy Institute

North Carolina is the 2nd worst state in terms of relative teacher pay gap. Teachers in our state earn approximately 35% less than the average for college graduates.

In no state are teachers paid more than other college graduates

Teacher wage penalty, by state



Note: Figure compares weekly wages of elementary, middle, and secondary public school teachers with weekly wages of all other workers with a college degree in a given state.

Source: EPI analysis of pooled 2013–2017 Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data

Economic Policy Institute

Average teacher pay in North Carolina [is below every neighboring state](#), making our ability to recruit teachers from other states very difficult. When North Carolina was closer to the U.S. median in teacher pay, we had considerable success in recruiting teachers. Now, our state recruitment has dried up along with our homegrown supply of teachers, even as school enrollments grow.

Average Teacher Pay: Surrounding States

	State	Estimated 2018 Average Salary
1	Georgia	\$56,329
2	Kentucky	\$52,952
3	Virginia	\$51,265
4	South Carolina	\$51,027
5	Tennessee	\$50,900
6	North Carolina	\$50,861

Source: NEA

This year, North Carolina legislators did include \$11.8 million from the budget to fund salary increases for teachers. The average teacher raise is 6.5%, but not all educators earned the same raise. The pay scale gave beginning teachers more of an increase than experienced educators and eliminated \$5 million dollars for veteran teacher bonuses. Many veteran teachers have seen few pay increases in the past few years.

Additionally, recent efforts of several state legislatures, [including North Carolina](#) as well as [at the federal level](#), involve financing tax cuts for the wealthy by underfunding or cutting public education. The difficult working environments, resulting from severely underfunded schools and low pay have prompted teacher walkouts and protests across the nation and in our state. The events have received much media attention. Teacher walkouts and strikes in some of the states with the worst working conditions for teachers have resulted in some gains, but more funding is critical. [A recent poll](#) found fewer parents would recommend teaching as a profession to their children, resulting in part from the increased awareness of extremely difficult teacher working conditions.

Teacher shortages are now a nationwide occurrence. A recent national [jobs report](#) found that we need about 389,000 more teachers to keep pace with increasing enrollment. A lack of classroom educators also contributes to increasingly difficult working conditions due to lack of support and high class sizes. The public does support paying teachers a better salary. According to the [2018 PDK Poll](#) of the *Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*, two-thirds of Americans say teachers are underpaid, and 78% of public school parents say they would support teachers in their community if they went on strike for more pay. Increasing educator pay is one way to improve recruitment. Fully funding classrooms is also vital.

There are many factors involved in recruiting and retaining teachers. Being 37th in teacher pay is certainly a large factor but equally important is the loss of professional respect and job security benefits such as career status (replaced with contracts and no due process rights) and the numerous threats against other benefits like family health insurance.

Teachers have also seen funds for professional development reduced along with deep cuts to classroom resources (teacher assistants, textbooks, supplies and technology). The teacher pay crisis is not traditional for North Carolina.

The average teacher salary in 1999-2000 was \$39,404, which would be \$59,025 today according to the US Department of Labor. Ten years later, in the worst days of the recession, we paid teachers an average of \$46,850, about \$54,496 in today's dollars. Retirement health benefits were eliminated for state employees hired after Jan. 21, 2021, which will create a 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.

Teachers and administrators see the elimination of pay increases for advanced degrees as unfair and as demonstrating a lack of professional respect. In no other profession are employees not encouraged and rewarded for advanced degrees. People who invest in education and expertise specifically to use in service to our children deserve to be compensated commensurately for their professional development and experience.

Perfect Storm Brewing

Failing to pay teachers a professional salary and low per-pupil spending levels are decimating our teacher supply. Young people who came of age during the Great Recession will not choose a career they know to be unstable and uncondusive to family and future. As our teacher pipeline continues to be run dry, we will not have enough experienced teachers to lead our classrooms and help our students succeed academically. Our great public school system, built by so many dedicated and inspired professionals will not have enough quality, certified teachers to ensure that all children receive the education that they deserve.

More college students are questioning if the teaching profession is a good personal and financial choice for their future. Having dedicated, experienced, career teachers is critical for our students' strong academic success. Fostering a work environment where teachers are respected as professionals, with working conditions that enable them to have positive impacts on their students is critical to keeping teachers in the classroom. This includes providing teachers with: adequate compensation, job security and stability, ongoing staff development, a clear career path, a fair evaluation system not based primarily on student test scores, and providing adequate classroom resources like supplies, textbooks, teacher assistants and technology.

Treating teachers like professionals is essential if we are going to have strong schools all our students deserve. ***If we don't treat teaching as a profession, we won't have professionals in our classrooms.***

Resources

<http://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/2018/04/18/this-simple-graph-sums-up-ncs-tax-the-poor-feed-the-rich-tax-system/>

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-budget/house-gop-budget-retains-tax-cuts-for-the-wealthy-proposes-deep-program-cuts>

<http://www.ncjustice.org/sites/default/files/BTC%20BRIEF%20-%20Tax%20Plan%202018.pdf>

<https://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/education/article192733689.html>

<https://ung4.ondemand.sas.com/SASVisualAnalyticsViewer/guest.jsp?appSwitcherDisabled=true&reportViewOnly=true&reportPath=/UNG/External Content/Reports&reportName=EnrollmentReport>

<https://www.epi.org/publication/teacher-pay-gap-2018/>

<http://pdkpoll.org/results>

<https://www.publicschoolsfirstnc.org/resources/fact-sheets/the-facts-on-teacher-salaries/>

<http://wunc.org/post/not-worth-it-why-nc-college-students-are-turning-away-teaching#stream/0>

<https://teachnow.northcarolina.edu/unc-teacher-education-programs/>

<https://ung4.ondemand.sas.com/SASVisualAnalyticsViewer/guest.jsp?reportPath=/UNG/External+Content/Reports&reportName=TQD+Enrollment+Trends&appSwitcherDisabled=true&reportViewOnly=true>

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/educatoreffectiveness/surveys/leaving/2014-15turnoverreport.pdf>

<http://www.publicschoolsfirstnc.org/2015/09/16/update-on-2015-17-nc-biennial-budget/>

<http://edtalks.ncforum.org>

<http://www.wral.com/unc-system-reports-declining-enrollment-in-teacher-programs/15315475/>

<http://www.ncpolicywatch.com/2015/12/09/losing-its-luster/>

<http://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/2015/10/02/north-carolinas-teacher-turnover-rate-reaches-a-five-year-high/>

<http://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/education/article63660742.html>

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