

# TEACHER SALARIES: COMPARING ACROSS STATES

**Making teacher salary comparisons is not straightforward**; it is difficult to compare salaries across states and even within states. There are several nationally known sources of teacher salary data which compare and rank teacher salaries for the states. Those rankings need to be taken with a grain of salt as the comparisons are not necessarily fair given the variability in definitions and reported data, as well as differences in cost-of-living across geographic areas. This brief presents previously published information on average salary for teachers and offers caveats that ought to be considered when evaluating teacher salary rankings.

## DISCUSSION

The issue of comparing teachers' average salaries is summarized well by a quote from a study by the Florida Department of Education:<sup>1</sup> *Teacher Pay Review* (May 2006) noted that it is "impossible to accurately discern how states truly compare" and "the only conclusion that can be drawn is that there is a need for uniformity, if states are to be compared nationally based on average teacher salary." *Teacher Pay Review* finds that the most common barriers to making accurate comparisons of teacher pay are:

- States and school districts use varying definitions for the components of average salary for teachers
- School districts have database and reporting procedure limitations
- National publications of teacher salary information use different methods to compile and report data
- There is not a standard method for accounting for cost-of-living and tax factors

Different states report salary information in different ways – it may or may not include bonuses, supplemental pay, and fringe benefits.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the definition of a teacher can vary: in some states it may include only classroom teachers, while in others it may include all instructional staff, such as counselors, social workers, librarians, and others. In addition, cost-of-living varies considerably across states and within some states, making valid comparisons even more challenging. Another factor is the workforce composition – some states have a greater proportion of experienced teachers or teachers with master's degrees, while other states have a younger, less-experienced teaching workforce, which impacts the average salary.

In nationally published teacher salary surveys, Washington falls in the top half of states. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) *Survey and Analysis of Teacher Salary Trends 2005* ranks Washington State 19<sup>th</sup> with an average salary of \$45,722. The National Education Association (NEA) ranks Washington 22<sup>nd</sup> with an average salary of \$46,326 for 2005-06. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Occupational Employment Statistics showed that teacher salaries in Washington averaged \$49,448, a rank of 15<sup>th</sup> nationally. Another commonly referred to source, the Digest of Education Statistics, cites NEA estimates, although in some instances those data have been updated (thus the published tables do not necessarily align).

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.flboe.org/ARM/Teacher\\_Pay\\_Review.asp](https://www.flboe.org/ARM/Teacher_Pay_Review.asp)

<sup>2</sup> Supplemental pay is generally paid through a separate contract and can include pay for additional duties such as coaching or department chairs, time to set up a classroom, participation in professional development activities, and other such things. In Washington, the content and structure of supplemental pay beyond the base salary can look different than supplemental contracts found in other states because of Washington's use of a state salary allocation schedule and requirements which limit the maximum average base salaries allowed in a school district.

The table below shows estimates of state teacher salary averages for AFT, NEA, BLS, and the Digest of Education Statistics. Each source has limitations in providing fair comparisons across states. The BLS estimate reflects all teacher income (thus it includes bonuses, supplemental pay, etc.) and is collected in a consistent manner nationwide. However, it is based on a (statistically valid) survey sample and the data are compiled from three years of survey data. In addition, the BLS estimates also include teachers from private schools, not just public school teachers.<sup>3</sup> The NEA salary figures do not include supplemental or bonus pay. The AFT does not define the term “teacher” and the calculation excludes extra duty pay. Each of these differences makes an apples-to-apples comparison very challenging.

Salary information<sup>4</sup> reported by the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction illustrates how teacher salaries can vary considerably depending on the definition. For 2006-07, the average base salary for teachers was reported as \$47,890 while the average total salary was \$55,440. Some school districts average over \$10,000 in additional salary (beyond base pay) for certificated teachers while other districts have zero additional pay.

Another issue, beyond getting consistent definitions and reporting of salaries, is cost-of-living difference. One might expect salaries to be higher, for example, in Connecticut than they are in Mississippi, where the cost of living is lower. One cost of living index<sup>5</sup> gives Connecticut a cost index of 124.9, compared to 105.9 for Washington, and 91.8 for Mississippi. Median family incomes vary similarly: In Connecticut, the median family income is \$78,154; in Washington it is \$63,705 and Mississippi it is \$42,805.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, one might expect Connecticut to have higher average teacher salaries than Washington, and Washington’s salaries to be higher than Mississippi’s. To further complicate the matter, costs can vary considerably within states as much as they vary across states. Finally, as the Florida Teacher Pay Review noted, taxation rates differ across states as well which affects the relative value of gross salaries. However, there is not a standard, accepted method for adjusting for living costs or taxation rates, whether at the local or statewide level.

Comparing teacher salary data across states is not as straightforward as it might seem. There are numerous reporting, methodology, and definition differences, thereby making fair comparisons very challenging.

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<sup>3</sup> ERDC requested a special BLS data summary from seven states in order to isolate the salary of public school teachers. The states’ average salaries increased an average of \$2,300 when private teachers were excluded (private teachers’ salaries were lower on average than public teachers in each of the seven states).

<sup>4</sup> OSPI website: [www.k12.wa.us/safs/PUB/PER/0607/ps.asp](http://www.k12.wa.us/safs/PUB/PER/0607/ps.asp), Table 19 ([www.k12.wa.us/safs/PUB/PER/0607/tbl19.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/safs/PUB/PER/0607/tbl19.pdf))

<sup>5</sup> Missouri Economic Research and Information Center, 2007. [www.missourieconomy.org/indicators/cost\\_of\\_living/index.stm](http://www.missourieconomy.org/indicators/cost_of_living/index.stm)

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2006. [www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/statemedfaminc.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/statemedfaminc.html)

## SOURCES

### American Federation of Teachers:

*Survey and Analysis of Teacher Salary Trends 2005*

Table II-1 "Average Teacher Salary in 2004-05 State Rankings", page 23.

[www.aft.org/salary/2005/download/AFT2005SalarySurvey.pdf](http://www.aft.org/salary/2005/download/AFT2005SalarySurvey.pdf)

### Bureau of Labor Statistics:

*Occupational Employment Statistics* - released May 2006

<http://data.bls.gov/oes/search.jsp>

Estimate includes kindergarten, elementary, middle-school, and secondary school teachers, as well as special education teachers for those levels. The data are based on six survey samples conducted from November 2003 to May 2006. The weighted average salary is computed from number of teachers at each level and the corresponding average reported salary.

### Digest of Education Statistics:

*Digest of Education Statistics: 2007*, National Center for Education Statistics

Table 76. Estimated average annual salary of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools, by state or jurisdiction: Selected years, 1969-70 through 2005-06.

[http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07\\_076.asp?referrer=list](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_076.asp?referrer=list)

The table has this citation: "Source: National Education Association, Estimates of School Statistics, 1969-70 through 2005-06 (This table was prepared July 2007)".

### National Education Association:

Rankings & Estimates: Rankings of the States 2006 and Estimates of School Statistics 2007

NEA Research, December 2007 [ [www.nea.org/edstats/images/07rankings.pdf](http://www.nea.org/edstats/images/07rankings.pdf) ], page 92.

Summary Table G: Estimated Average Annual Salaries of Total Instructional Staff and Classroom Teachers.

	American Federation of Teachers	Bureau of Labor Statistics	Digest of Education Statistics	National Education Association
	2005	2003-06	2005-06	2005-06
Alabama	\$ 38,186	\$ 40,530	\$ 40,347	\$ 40,347
Alaska	\$ 52,467	\$ 56,091	\$ 53,553	\$ 53,553
Arizona	\$ 39,095	\$ 36,659	\$ 44,672	\$ 44,672
Arkansas	\$ 41,489	\$ 39,966	\$ 42,093	\$ 42,768
California *	\$ 57,604	\$ 57,007	\$ 59,345	\$ 59,825
Colorado *	\$ 43,965	\$ 45,578	\$ 45,616	\$ 44,439
Connecticut *	\$ 57,760	\$ 58,686	\$ 59,499	\$ 59,304
Delaware	\$ 52,924	\$ 50,562	\$ 54,264	\$ 59,000
DC		\$ 35,350	\$ 61,195	\$ 54,264
Florida	\$ 43,095	\$ 48,006	\$ 43,302	\$ 43,302
Georgia	\$ 46,437	\$ 47,228	\$ 48,300	\$ 48,300
Hawaii	\$ 47,833	\$ 46,560	\$ 51,599	\$ 49,292
Idaho	\$ 40,864	\$ 45,615	\$ 43,390	\$ 41,150
Illinois	\$ 56,494	\$ 53,712	\$ 57,819	\$ 58,686
Indiana	\$ 46,591	\$ 46,851	\$ 47,255	\$ 47,255
Iowa	\$ 39,284	\$ 36,842	\$ 40,877	\$ 41,083
Kansas	\$ 39,351	\$ 37,403	\$ 41,369	\$ 41,467
Kentucky	\$ 41,075	\$ 42,059	\$ 41,903	\$ 42,592
Louisiana	\$ 39,022	\$ 39,477	\$ 40,253	\$ 40,029
Maine	\$ 40,935	\$ 41,994	\$ 40,737	\$ 40,737
Maryland *	\$ 52,330	\$ 51,437	\$ 54,486	\$ 54,333
Massachusetts *	\$ 54,688	\$ 54,657	\$ 56,587	\$ 56,369
Michigan	\$ 53,959	\$ 56,498	\$ 58,482	\$ 54,739
Minnesota	\$ 47,411	\$ 47,142	\$ 48,489	\$ 48,489
Mississippi	\$ 38,212	\$ 39,388	\$ 37,924	\$ 40,576
Missouri	\$ 39,064	\$ 42,099	\$ 39,922	\$ 40,462
Montana	\$ 38,485	\$ 36,441	\$ 39,832	\$ 39,832
Nebraska	\$ 39,441	\$ 42,596	\$ 41,026	\$ 40,382
Nevada	\$ 43,212	\$ 39,050	\$ 44,426	\$ 44,426
New Hampshire	\$ 43,941	\$ 46,346	\$ 45,263	\$ 45,263
New Jersey *	\$ 56,635	\$ 57,194	\$ 57,707	\$ 58,156
New Mexico	\$ 39,391	\$ 42,345	\$ 41,637	\$ 41,637
New York	\$ 55,665	\$ 69,809	\$ 57,354	\$ 57,354
North Carolina	\$ 43,343	\$ 39,034	\$ 43,922	\$ 43,922
North Dakota	\$ 36,449	\$ 38,839	\$ 37,773	\$ 37,764
Ohio	\$ 49,438	\$ 50,904	\$ 50,314	\$ 50,314
Oklahoma	\$ 37,879	\$ 35,604	\$ 38,772	\$ 38,772
Oregon	\$ 48,320	\$ 47,060	\$ 48,981	\$ 50,044
Pennsylvania	\$ 53,281	\$ 50,996	\$ 54,027	\$ 54,027
Rhode Island	\$ 56,432	\$ 55,374	\$ 54,730	\$ 54,730
South Carolina	\$ 42,189	\$ 42,205	\$ 43,242	\$ 43,011
South Dakota	\$ 34,039	\$ 34,894	\$ 34,709	\$ 34,709
Tennessee	\$ 42,076	\$ 40,682	\$ 42,537	\$ 42,537
Texas	\$ 41,009	\$ 43,388	\$ 41,744	\$ 41,744
Utah	\$ 37,006	\$ 43,497	\$ 40,316	\$ 40,007
Vermont	\$ 44,346	\$ 45,766	\$ 46,622	\$ 46,622
Virginia *	\$ 45,377	\$ 54,519	\$ 43,823	\$ 43,823
<b>Washington</b>	<b>\$ 45,722</b>	<b>\$ 49,448</b>	<b>\$ 46,326</b>	<b>\$ 46,326</b>
West Virginia	\$ 38,404	\$ 39,662	\$ 38,284	\$ 38,284
Wisconsin	\$ 43,099	\$ 46,074	\$ 46,390	\$ 46,390
Wyoming	\$ 40,487	\$ 43,188	\$ 43,225	\$ 43,255

\* Global Challenge State