

Chase Weaver

Dr. M. Lucas

Writing 121

20 November 2022

Factors that contribute to the United States' lack of quality teachers

Education is among the most important parts of society, and it is being threatened. Public schools across the United States are hiring more uncertified teachers than ever before. Schools are underfunded and understaffed. Teachers quit frequently to find better jobs. If this pattern continues, the education of the current and future generations of American children will suffer. One would think that finding the bodies to fill so many empty positions would be easier, but the success of school staffing efforts for the past decade would beg to differ. Why is this? The reason behind the current lack of quality teachers is the high demand and low supply of these teachers, the low wages they receive, and the high amounts of current teacher attrition.

Positions are in High Demand

Demand sounds strange to be a contributor to a lack of teachers. High demand would mean more spaces to fill, right? Well yes, but this also means if the spaces don't get filled, someone is going to have to work harder to fill them. Many states have been filling empty positions with teachers that are not qualified for said positions. For example, the Oklahoma State Education Department had to give several emergency certifications in 2015. "Statewide that number has grown to 948 this year, almost double last year's total...[there were] 506 emergency certifications in 2014, 189 in 2013 and 98 in 2011, according to department statistics" (Naomi

Nix, Paragraph 7). With these “emergency certified” teachers we’re getting an increase in low-quality teachers instead of teachers better suited for these jobs.

Positions unfilled are forced to remain unfilled. Christy Watson, communications director for the Oklahoma State School Boards Association had said: “They have cut hundreds of classes across the state.” With cut classes, other teachers will have to merge classes and teach more students. “[Joy] Hofmeister estimated that with an average class size between 25 and 35, the 1,000 vacancies districts faced at the start of the 2015-16 school year translated into 25,000 to 35,000 Oklahoma students without a teacher” (Nix, Paragraph 10).

Demand has been high ever since the Great Recession. After hundreds of cut programs and classes, many school districts are still struggling to reset them to what they were like over a decade ago. “It would require hiring an additional 145,000 teachers, on top of standard hiring needs, to reduce average pupil-teacher ratios from the current 16-to-1 to pre-recession ratios of 15.3 to 1” (Leib Sutchter, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Desiree Carver-Thomas, Paragraph 6).

Demand has also been high in the past few years thanks to the coronavirus pandemic. According to the Wall Street Journal, around 300,000 teachers and other staff resigned during the first months of the lockdown. (Kathryn Dill, Paragraph 2)

High amounts of under-certified teachers and class-cuts point evidence to a teacher shortage.

The Low Supply of Teachers

Fewer students are becoming teachers, resulting in fewer quality teachers to fill empty positions. “Enrollment in educator preparation programs has dropped by more than 70% over the last decade and fallen below the number of estimated hires by school districts around the state”

(Linda Daring-Hammond and others, Paragraph 1). New teachers don't account for all of the supply though, as former teachers also contribute. Leib Sutchter, among others, argues that at least one-third of the supply of new teachers are reentering ones. But only about one-third of former teachers return (Paragraph 10).

It seems that every year there are fewer teachers available. Data shows that the biggest studies of shortage are in math, science, and special education. For example, in 2015 California's school districts estimated that they would need to fill at least 4,500 positions for special education alone. Universities in California reported only 2,200 quality teachers were ready to teach that year (Daring-Hammond and others, Paragraph 11).

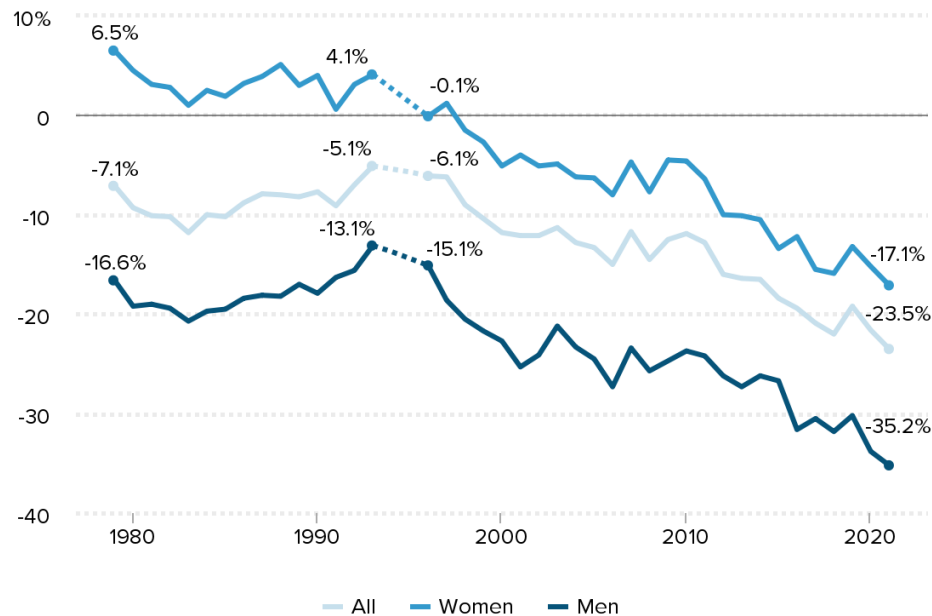
What is causing the shortage of teachers? The low pay of course.

Teachers are underpaid

Teachers make less money than other professions with the same amount of education. This table from the Economic Policy Institute shows the disparity of wages between teachers and their peers.

Teachers earn 23.5% less than comparable college graduates

Public school teacher weekly wage penalty (or premium) for all teachers and by gender, 1979–2021



Notes: Figure shows regression-adjusted weekly wage penalties (or premiums) for public school teachers (elementary, middle, and secondary) relative to their college-educated, nonteaching peers. Data points for 1994 and 1995 are unavailable; dotted lines represent interpolated data. See [Allegretto and Mishel 2019](#), Appendix A, for more details on data and methodology.

Source: Author's analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data accessed via the EPI Current Population Survey Extracts, Version 1.0.29 (EPI 2022a), <https://microdata.epi.org>.

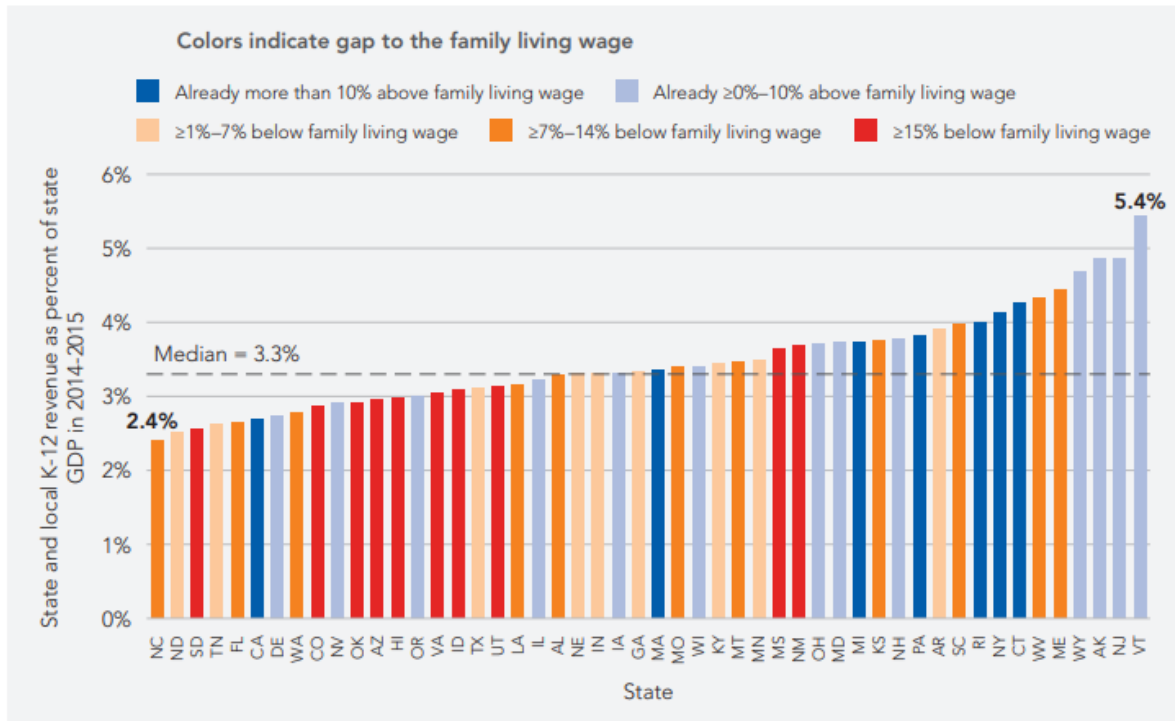
Economic Policy Institute

The blue line shows the wage difference between female teachers compared to other professions. Up until 2000 female teachers had what's called a "weekly wage premium", they made more money than the other professions. The dark blue line represents male teachers and consisted completely of "weekly wage penalties", making less than their peers. Pale blue indicates teachers regardless of gender, which has also stayed in the negative ever since the 1980s. All teachers make at least 17.1% less than other professions, up to 35.2% less if they're male.

In many places, teachers can't even make a living wage.

FIGURE 7

State and local K–12 revenue as a percent of state GDP: 2014–15



Source: ERS analysis using data NCES Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education: School Year 2014–15 (Fiscal Year 2015); Bureau of Economic Analysis, Gross domestic product (GDP) by state 2015; NCFES Table 211.60. Estimated average annual salary of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools, by state. Selected years, 1969–70 through 2016–17; MIT Living Wage Calculator <http://livingwage.mit.edu/>

This chart shows the estimated average salary by state. The bars in warm colors show states with teachers earning less than the respective living wage there. An alarming amount of states are below a living wage, 10 of which are more than 15% lower.

Kate Dias, a high school math teacher for 21 years, argues “The general sentiment is we’ve been upping the responsibilities, the expectations, the demands on teachers at increments that are not comparable with wages at all.” Teachers are being overworked and underpaid.

With pay so low, some teachers need to find work elsewhere. “I have to shift my focus pretty quickly from classroom setting to office environment,” says Krista Degerness, a teacher in Colorado. “My teaching salary is not enough to cover my expenses, so I have to spend time

working a second job to not go into the red every month.” Teachers need to work additional jobs to make ends meet. This isn’t a rare occurrence either, as the National Education Association has done research on the subject and found that around 20% of teachers get secondary jobs during the school year, only amounting to about 9% of their total income. And according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, teachers are three times as likely to take secondary jobs compared to all other workers in the United States. (Tim Walker, Paragraph 10)

Covid just complicates things as compensation for teachers getting sick is not very forgiving either. California’s “Protect Teachers on Medical Leave Act” states that: “In California, full-time public school teachers and classified school employees earn 10 and 12 days of paid sick leave each year, respectively.” This amount of time only equates to being sick with covid once, and not getting sick any other times of the year.

Pay isn’t divided amongst schools equally either, as the Learning Policy Institute states:

Students in high-poverty and high-minority settings bear the brunt of teacher shortages.

Considerable evidence shows that shortages historically have disproportionately impacted our most disadvantaged students and that those patterns persist today. Nationally, in 2013–14, on average, high-minority schools had four times as many uncertified teachers as low-minority schools. These inequities also exist between high-poverty and low-poverty schools. When there are not enough teachers to go around, the schools with the fewest resources and least desirable working conditions are the ones left with Vacancies. (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas, Paragraph 21)

Low pay is very unattractive for any job and acts as one of the main sources keeping potential teachers away.

Teachers, dissatisfaction, and resigning

With such low pay and few benefits, teaching is not a very attractive career choice. The previously stated teacher shortage is only enhanced by the lacking wages. An out-of-state middle school guidance counselor once said: “I’d like to [go back into teaching in Oklahoma], but I don’t want to take a \$12,000 pay cut.” (Nix, Paragraph 18) The National Center for Education Statistics says that 44% of public schools will be having vacancies in teaching positions, over half of which are due to resignations. And according to the Learning Policy Institute Typically less than a third of teachers retire from teaching.

Teachers are also overworked, often they have to come up with their own curriculum and lesson plans, grade paperwork off the clock, and to run extracurricular activities to boot. All of this can be extremely taxing on their health, especially if they are working a second job like many are. Up to 70-80 hours a week and they aren’t even able to enjoy their own personal life.

Teachers also feel undervalued and unrespected. According to the Teaching and Learning International Survey, only about 36% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that teaching was a valued profession. Richard Ingersoll, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, says “There was this idea that you don’t have to be that smart. It’s not as complex, or as difficult as being an accountant, working with numbers. Or being a dentist, working with teeth.” Teaching is undervalued as people think little of what effort goes into teaching. The following meme portrays an example of how teachers are disrespected.

I'm angry with the teachers who told us "do well in school or you'll end up a trash man" but never once mentioned that the trash man made more money than them.



they lied to us by DevilMakerOG
MORE MEMES

The students don't like them, the parents don't like them, not even the government likes them, and they get paid less than the trashman. Being unvalued and unappreciated is a hard pill to swallow for a teacher, and unfortunately, a necessary one to swallow as well.

With so much responsibility, teachers are forced to work endlessly and disregard their well-being or resign and find a better-paying job. They are some of the most important figures in the lives of our children, something needs to be done to help them.

What can be done about it?

As the future of American education is at stake, change needs to happen. Some good strategies to fix the issues would be to:

1. Increase competitive pay - If schools in high-need districts can pay more, they can get the teachers they need. Higher pay would also encourage current teachers to stay and decrease the need for them to find additional jobs. Positively contributing to their health and maintaining classroom quality.
2. Get more teachers in high-demand subjects - The places we need more teachers are some of the most important ones. As previously mentioned, the number of students becoming teachers is lower than ever. To combat this, teachers going into these subjects could be given scholarships to aid in paying for their education. New systems can be developed to assist in getting teachers to schools they are needed in as well as covering the expenses to travel there.
3. Improve working conditions - More care could be put into the working environments that teachers are subjected to. Perhaps cleaner classrooms, more supplies, and more benefits. The more welcome a teacher feels, the less they will want to quit. Tasks that overburdened teachers can be given to new staff members. With a lessened workload, teachers can be less stressed.

Education in America is in a rough state. There's such a high demand for teachers, and there's just not enough teachers to supply. Teachers turn away from the profession for many different reasons, not just because of the money, but from the lack of respect and the difficulty of the work. There is hope for the future teachers and children of America, it just seems a little pricey at the moment. But the sooner we put work into fixing the issue, the sooner the issue will be gone. Next time you see a teacher, be kind to them. They've been through more than you could imagine.

Works Cited:

- Allegretto, Sylvia, and Lawrence Mishel. "The Teacher Pay Gap Is Wider than Ever: Teachers' Pay Continues to Fall Further behind Pay of Comparable Workers." Economic Policy Institute, 9 Aug. 2016, www.epi.org/publication/the-teacher-pay-gap-is-wider-than-ever-teachers-pay-continues-to-fall-further-behind-pay-of-comparable-workers/. Accessed 11-22-22
- Allegretto, Sylvia. "The Teacher Pay Penalty Has Hit a New High: Trends in Teacher Wages and Compensation through 2021." Economic Policy Institute, 16 Aug. 2022, <https://www.epi.org/publication/teacher-pay-penalty-2022/>. Accessed 11-22-22
- Darling-Hammond, Linda, et al. "Addressing California's Emerging Teacher Shortage: An Analysis of Sources and Solutions" Learning Policy Institute, 19 Jan. 2016, <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/coming-crisis-teaching>. Accessed 11-22-22.
- Dill, Kathryn. "School's Out for Summer and Many Teachers Are Calling It Quits." The Wall Street Journal, Dow Jones & Company, 20 June 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/schools-out-for-summer-and-many-teachers-are-calling-it-quits-11655732689>. Accessed 11-22-22
- Hadavi, Tala. "2020 Has Shone a Light on the Importance of Good Teachers, but Many Are Paid Less than a Living Wage in the U.S." CNBC, CNBC, 11 Dec. 2020,

<https://www.cNBC.com/2020/12/11/why-teachers-salaries-are-so-low-in-the-us.html>.

Accessed 11-22-22

Katz, Nicole, et al. "Low Teacher Salaries 101." ERS, June 2018.

<https://www.erstrategies.org/cms/files/4089-low-teacher-salaries-101-updated-1130.pdf>.

Accessed 11-22-22

Nacpil, Thea. "Why Are Teachers Quitting the Profession? Top 8 Reasons."

TeachersAreTheBest.com, 9 July 2022,

<https://teachersarethebest.com/why-are-teachers-quitting-the-profession/>. Accessed

11-22-22

Nix, Naomi. "Why Oklahoma Is Racing to Put Nearly 1,000 Uncertified Teachers in Its Classrooms." The 74, 1 Dec. 2015,

<https://www.the74million.org/article/why-oklahoma-is-racing-to-put-nearly-1000-uncertified-teachers-in-its-classrooms/>. Accessed 11-22-22.

Rosales, John. "Moonlighting." NEA, National Education Association, 2 Jan. 2018,

www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/moonlighting. Accessed 11-22-22

Sutcher, Leib, et al. "A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S." Learning Policy Institute, 16 Sept. 2016,

<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/coming-crisis-teaching>. Accessed 11-22-22

Walker, Tim. "Almost One-Third of New Teachers Take on Second Jobs." NEA, National Education Association, 25 July 2019,
www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/almost-one-third-new-teachers-take-second-jobs#:~:text=Overall%2C%20about%2020%20percent%20of,to%20take%20on%20this%20burden. Accessed 11-22-22

"Why U.S. Teachers Are Leaving the Profession." PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, 22 Aug. 2022,
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/classroom/2022/08/why-u-s-teachers-are-leaving-the-profession-in-droves/>. Accessed 11-22-22