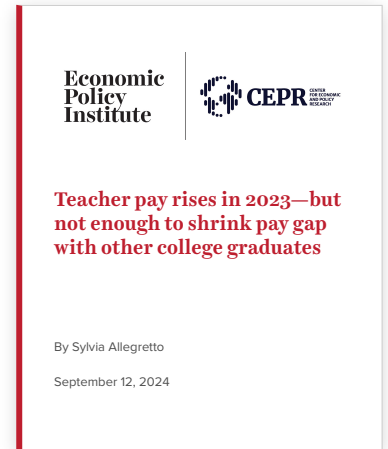


Teacher pay rises in 2023—but not enough to shrink pay gap with other college graduates

Summary: Despite a small improvement of 1.7% in teachers' average weekly wages, the relative pay penalty between public school teachers and college graduates in other professions remains large.



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Key findings

- The pay penalty for teachers—the regression-adjusted gap between the weekly wages of teachers and college graduates working in other professions—grew to a record 26.6% in 2023, a significant increase from 6.1% in 1996.
- On average, teachers earned 73.4 cents for every dollar relative to the earnings of similar other professionals in 2023. This is much less than the 93.9 cents on the dollar they made in 1996.
- Although teachers typically receive better benefits packages than other professionals do, this “benefits advantage” is not sufficiently large to offset the growing wage penalty for teachers.
- The relative teacher weekly wage penalty exceeded 20% in 36 states—the largest was in Colorado at 38.4% and the smallest was in Wyoming at 9.0%.

Why this matters

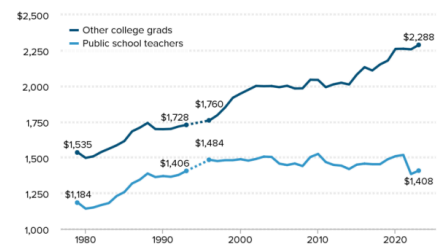
Teacher quality is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement. Closing the growing pay gap between teachers and other college graduate professionals is critical to public education.

How to fix it

Meaningfully boosting teacher pay requires targeted policy action by local and state governments, with support from the federal government, to improve funding for schools. Additionally, public-sector collective bargaining should be expanded, given the role of unions in advocating for improved job quality and a better pay.

Charting the problem

Average weekly wages of public school teachers and other college graduates, 1979–2023



Notes: Figure shows average weekly wages (2023\$) of public school teachers (elementary, middle, and secondary) and other college graduate (nonteacher) 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 1.0.53 (EPI 2024a), <https://microdata.epi.org>.

