



TEACHERSUNITED

INVESTING IN OUR STUDENTS' FUTURE

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR TEACHER
COMPENSATION**

INTRODUCTION

According to Washington State's Constitution, it is the "paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children" (WA Const. art IX, § 1). One piece of the McCleary decision is that the state must provide for teachers' salaries as a part of basic education funding. Exactly how Washington will live up to this constitutional responsibility remains to be seen, but one thing is clear: in order to fully address the educational needs of our students, we must fill our classrooms with effective and dedicated teachers. Integral to this goal is finding the means to both attract and retain those teachers who are pivotal to student success. As our nation faces a severe teaching shortage, it becomes more crucial than ever to ensure that our teacher compensation systems make the teaching profession an attractive and sustainable career choice in Washington.

In this spirit, over the course of a year of research and conversations among Teachers United members, we offer the following recommendations for an equitable teacher compensation system that considers the circumstances of teachers in varying communities across the state. In particular, we must acknowledge and compensate educators for the extra work and professional development required to be effective in our high-needs schools. Along with rural schools, high-needs schools bear the most weight from disproportionately high rates of beginning teachers, turnover, and shortages. Consequently, these students become increasingly disadvantaged in their access to quality education, services, and support.

Because goals for teacher compensation systems are complex and interdependent, the concern arises that cherry-picked strategies executed in isolation can result in more harm than good. Therefore, these recommendations are to be considered as a complete paradigm rather than a list of separate and discrete solutions.

1. Provide a competitive base salary
2. Increase non-instructional time within the paid workday
3. Embed time within the school day for teacher leadership
4. Fund smaller class sizes based on Initiative 1351
5. Continue cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs)
6. Continue National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) incentives

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

We propose these recommendations in order to create a compensation system that better attracts qualified individuals to join the education community and to adequately support those who want to commit their lives to a teaching career.

PROVIDE A COMPETITIVE BASE SALARY

It has long been established that teachers experience a pay penalty--a gap between what teachers and other college-educated professionals earn. This teacher pay gap has widened over time to its current figure of 11%, even when benefits are taken into consideration. In the face of a detrimental teacher shortage, we must make teaching a more attractive and financially feasible career path. One of the ways to accomplish this is by overcoming the teacher pay penalty through a competitive base salary. Providing a competitive base salary not only encourages new teachers to join the profession but also shows a commitment to the experienced educators who want to make teaching their long-term career choice.

INCREASE NON-INSTRUCTIONAL TIME WITHIN THE PAID WORKDAY

Schools must create environments where teachers can thrive in their endeavor to help students meet high academic standards. Therefore, in order to better attract and retain teachers, we must address the increasing impracticality of a teacher's schedule. One aspect of this is tackling the profession's current work-life imbalance by giving teachers sufficient time within their workday to fulfill the obligations required of them. A significant increase in non-instructional time within the workday would improve working conditions and recognize the reality of teachers' obligations that extend beyond time in front of students. These obligations include, but are not limited to, crafting meaningful lessons, collaborating with colleagues, analyzing data, maintaining communication with families, grading and giving necessary feedback, creating student behavior plans, researching best practices, integrating technology, differentiating assignments and assessments to accommodate all students, addressing student safety and health concerns, and participating in the evaluation process.

EMBED TIME WITHIN SCHOOL DAY FOR TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Offering realistic opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles both helps to retain accomplished teachers and increase student outcomes. Unfortunately, current pathways to leadership typically require teachers to leave the classroom, disconnecting them from the students they love to serve. This results in some of our most experienced, knowledgeable professionals facing a dilemma: either continue working with students in your classroom where your school-wide influence is limited or take on a leadership position that allows you to shape policy decisions, share your expertise, and introduce innovations. However, teachers do not need to choose between students and leadership roles. Through hybrid or split roles, teachers can both teach and carry out leadership responsibilities within their workday, such as being mentors, conducting classroom observations, demonstrating lessons, collaboratively planning, and facilitating professional development most relevant to the school's needs. Embedding time within the school day for teacher leadership also ensures more equitable access to leadership positions as they are no longer reserved for those who can commit to time outside of the contracted workday.

FUND SMALLER CLASS SIZES BASED ON INITIATIVE 1351

With the passing of Initiative 1351, voters made it clear that smaller class sizes need to be priority in Washington State. Not only will this improve learning conditions for students, it will improve working conditions for teachers. Steadily increasing class sizes have made it more and more difficult for teachers to meet their individual students' needs as well as their extensive professional responsibilities. Initiative 1351 also emphasizes the additional professional support needed in high-needs schools in order to address students' increased instances of non-instructional challenges. All students deserve to be saved from overcrowded classrooms, and teachers deserve a work environment where they can best fulfill their obligations to their students. If Washington wants to attract and retain successful teachers, it must make teaching a sustainable career choice, and better managing class sizes is one step in that direction.

CONTINUE COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENTS (COLAs)

Cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) and benefit packages should be considered standard to any teacher compensation system. For years, the COLAs for Washington educators were suspended even as the cost of living dramatically increased, essentially wiping out any real increases in wages received through experience or development steps in the salary schedule. Therefore, any compensation system should, as a prerequisite, maintain and continue the COLA approved by Washington voters.

CONTINUE NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFIED TEACHER (NBCT) INCENTIVES

Having NBCTs in classrooms results in better outcomes for schools, so it is in our students' interest to continue to encourage teachers to seek this certification. State-funded incentives have led to Washington having the third-highest percentage of NBCTs in the country, showing a strong commitment to providing our students with some of the best professionals our state has to offer. Further recognition of the asset of NBCTs should continue to be given to those working in high-needs schools through an additional incentive, attracting an effective workforce to schools where students and systems are arguably in most need of NBCTs' expertise. Additionally, it is important that incentives for NBCTs remain state-funded in order to keep this incentive equitable across the state rather than based on whether individual districts can afford to offer them.

If Washington wants to fulfill its paramount duty and create a better teaching compensation system that will recognize and empower a skilled a dedicated teaching force, we recommend a holistic approach that will address all six recommendations put forth in this document.

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ABOUT THE POLICY TEAM:

Our policy teams are the foundation of the TU work. Policy leaders dedicate numerous hours reading through peer reviewed research articles, opinion pieces, and published reports, reflecting on their own experiences and collaborating to engage in thoughtful analysis and debate to develop their recommendations.

Without the dedication of this team, this work would be impossible.

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ABOUT TEACHERS UNITED:

We are a group of effective educators who research education issues and make policy recommendations to local and state decision makers. By developing educator capacity to become responsible leaders and advocates for equity and excellence in student achievement and the teaching profession, we can make the systemic changes our students deserve.

