

The Harmful Trends—and Impacts—of Florida’s Below-Average Teacher Pay



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Research indicates that qualified teachers are central to student achievement, yet Florida continues to lag behind most other states in teacher salary and benefits, and the teacher pay gap is growing. Since the 2008 recession, Florida funding for instructional expenses has declined significantly compared to the US average and is further aggravated by inflation. What does the research tell us about this growing teacher pay gap? In short, there are measurable impacts and evidence-based policy solutions.

Florida’s instructional funding gap is real, and has worsened substantially in recent years.

Relative to the US average, Florida’s spending on instruction has dropped \$700 per pupil in just six years. In 2008, before the recession, Florida spent \$1,191 less per pupil, or 21% below the US average. Since then, as other states raised salaries and benefits by \$443 per student, Florida’s spending actually fell by \$267. As of 2014, the total per pupil gap has reached \$1,901, or 31% below the US average. **Florida now spends 27% less in salaries and 44% less in benefits per pupil.** Florida teachers have lost even more ground when inflation is considered—2014 spending represents \$708 less in constant dollars, a 15% drop.

Per Pupil Spending	2008	2014
FL Instructional Salaries	\$3,425	\$3,214
US Average	\$4,206	\$4,378
SALARY GAP	(\$781) -19%	(\$1,164) -27%
FL Instructional Benefits	\$1,010	\$954
US Average	\$1,420	\$1,691
BENEFITS GAP	(\$410) -29%	(\$737) -44%
TOTAL GAP	(1,191) -21%	(1,901) -31%
FL Instructional Total (Salaries + Benefits)	\$4,435	\$4,168
Inflation Index (CPI)	\$4,435	\$4,876
INFLATION GAP	—	(\$708) -15%

Sources: *Public Education Finances: 2008, 2014* (US Census, June 2010 and June 2016) (Table 11); Bureau of Labor Statistics, CPI inflation calculator.

Below-average teacher pay impacts hiring, turnover, and student success.

For individual teachers, Florida average salaries trail those of other states by over \$8,000 annually. Lower wages are consistent with documented problems of recruitment and retention, which raise turnover costs and hinder student success.

- ◆ **Shortages.** Rising US teacher shortages—predicted by “alarming” drops in interest, qualifications, and applications to education—are even larger in Florida, which already has annual shortages in English, science, math, and special education.
- ◆ **Turnover.** Florida’s teacher retention rate is well below average. Staffing surveys show Florida has more teachers who leave the profession (6.1%) than its share of all US teachers (5.2%). Replacement costs vary from \$4,000 each in St. Lucie County to \$12,000 in Broward, with total costs as high as \$48 million in Miami-Dade.
- ◆ **Student impacts.** Studies find that subject-area knowledge correlates with student success, but shortages in Florida cause over 4% of courses to use out-of-field teachers—not surprisingly, at far higher rates of 7% and 8% in “D” and “F” schools.

Wages and loan forgiveness have proven effects; one-time bonuses do not.

Research provides several evidence-based recommendations to guide salary reforms:

- ◆ **\$40,000 entry wage.** Entry salaries under \$40,000 (as in Florida) are tied to a 10% drop in teacher retention, from 97% to 87% in year two, persisting over five years.
- ◆ **\$10,000 loan forgiveness.** Florida achieved “substantial positive effects” on teacher retention with a state Critical Teacher Shortage Program (discontinued in 2010).
- ◆ **Limits of incentive bonuses.** Unless tied to loan forgiveness, non-recurring bonuses have not proven effective on decisions to enter or continue teaching.

Selected sources on impacts: NEA Research, *Rankings and Estimates: Rankings of the States 2015 and Estimates of School Statistics 2016* (May 2016); M. Haynes, *On the Path to Equity: Improving the Effectiveness of Beginning Teachers* (Appendix A, July 2014); ACT, *The Condition of Future Educators 2015* (2016); R. Rothman & P. Barth, *Does highly qualified mean highly effective?* (2009); FL Dept. of Education, *Identification of Critical Teacher Shortage Areas* (2016-17).

Selected sources on evidence-based solutions: L. Gray & S. Taie, *Public School Teacher Attrition and Mobility in the First Five Years* (NCEES 2015); L. Feng & T. Sass, *The Impact of Incentives to Recruit and Retain Teachers in “Hard-to-Staff” Subjects: An Analysis of the Florida Critical Teacher Shortage Program* (National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research, Sept. 2015).

For more information

An M-DCPS white paper, available upon request, provides further details on the findings and sources used in this policy brief. See *Research Evidence: Salaries and the Attraction of High-Quality Teachers* (2016).