

Washington Research Council

= Public Policy Brief =

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Teacher Pay: Where do we really rank?

Recent reports on the rankings of teacher salaries have led to confusion on how much teachers make and how teacher salaries in Washington compare to those in other states. According to the Washington Education Association (WEA), teachers in Washington state ranked 21st out of the 50 states and the District of Columbia in 1988–89, with an average salary of \$29,176. A recent analysis by Senate Ways and Means Committee staff and the Office of Financial Management (OFM) indicates that Washington teachers make an average salary of \$29,589 and could rank as high as 9th, if factors such as supplemental contracts, contract length, benefits and cost-of-living differences are taken into consideration. Neither of these figures includes supplemental contracts.

Washington Ranks 21st, Says WEA

The WEA figures come from *Ranking of the States*, an annual publication of the National Education Association (NEA). NEA obtains the figures from state education departments, such as our Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and provides specific instructions about what is to be included. The \$400 difference between the average salary in the NEA rankings and that used in the OFM/Ways and Means report has to do with when the estimate was made and how teachers are defined. John Molohon of OSPI, who submits the salary figures for Washington to NEA, said that the estimates are submitted to NEA before the figures are finalized for the year. As well, NEA looks at specific types of staff in all programs, while the OFM/Ways and Means figures are for certificated instructional staff in basic education programs.

The NEA instructions state that: "The estimated average salary is the total amount regularly paid or stipulated to be paid to an individual, *before deductions*, for personal services rendered while on the payroll of the local education agency Annual average salaries should NOT include 'extra pay for extra duty,' or payments for teaching summer school" (emphasis in the original). According to Molohon, his office interprets this to exclude supplemental contracts. Under state law supplemental contracts are authorized for additional time, additional responsibilities (such as coaching sports teams), or incentives. According to OFM, supplemental contracts are fairly common in Washington and averaged about \$2,011 per teacher for 1988–89.

With Adjustments, Rank Could Change

However, according to Mike Bigelow of OFM, who worked on the OFM/Ways and Means report, some states do include what could be considered supplemental pay in the figures

they submit to NEA. And, in their report on *Teacher Compensation in Washington State*, one of the adjustments was for supplemental contracts. By adjusting for supplemental salaries, longer contract years (185 to 200 days, compared to 181 days for Washington), benefit allowances, and major differences in cost of living among states, the OFM/Ways and Means report shows the average salary of Washington teachers exceeding that of as many as 12 of the states which currently rank higher than Washington, based on the NEA data. According to Peter Veillette of NEA, most states probably do offer supplemental contracts of some kind, but he does not know of any states that include supplemental contract amounts in the figures they report.

Problems With OFM Analysis

There are, however, some problems with the OFM/Ways and Means analysis. Adjustments were not made to the figures for all of the states (this could have allowed other states to move past Washington) and the cumulative impact of the adjustments was not considered.

According to Bigelow, the analysis was done in order to lay some other facts on the table — such as the magnitude of the supplemental contracts. It was not intended as a "comprehensive re-ranking" of teacher salaries, but rather as a way to address the issue of supplemental pay, and to try and determine the consistency with which other states report the data. Bigelow said that they were concerned about the data necessary to do a comprehensive re-ranking, given the time and money available to them.

Supplemental Contracts Should Be Counted

So, what do teachers really make? The supplemental contracts are important, and should be considered in discussions of average salary. From what we've seen, the average teacher in the state is probably making about \$31,600 with supplemental pay.

However, it pushes the analysis too far to adjust Washington's salary data and then revisit the unadjusted figures for other states. Although the rankings may in fact change, the magnitude and direction of the change are by no means clear. Similarly, annualizing salary figures and making adjustments for contract length or differences in the cost-of-living are interesting exercises, but speculative. As we've noted before, interstate comparisons, particularly between group averages, should be viewed with caution. At best, they provide useful benchmarks on the way to developing good public policy. At worst, disputes with the data will substitute for constructive debate on the issue.