

Teacher Recruitment & Retention



Executive Summary

Recruiting and retaining qualified public school teachers plays a significant role in school quality and student success. While teacher shortages have been amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, Missouri public schools have consistently experienced challenges hiring and retaining qualified teachers. Students in rural, high-poverty, and high-minority schools are most likely to have less experienced teachers and higher teacher turnover rates. Salary is consistently reported by teachers, students and administrators to be the primary barrier to teacher recruitment and retention. Missouri teacher salaries consistently rank among the lowest in the United States, including in comparisons adjusted for cost of living or to similar professions with similar education requirements.

Highlights

- The average starting and experience-based salaries for Missouri teachers are among the lowest in the United States. **Missouri teachers make 26.5% less, on average, than Missourians in jobs with similar education/training requirements.**
- Schools that serve the highest proportions of nonwhite students and students eligible for free and reduced lunch are more likely to experience high teacher turnover and employ teachers who are working outside of their certification expertise.
- **Increasing teacher pay is a common strategy to improve teacher quality, recruitment and retention.** Proposals to increase minimum and overall teacher salaries, as well as income tax breaks for educators, have recently been advocated for in Missouri.

Limitations

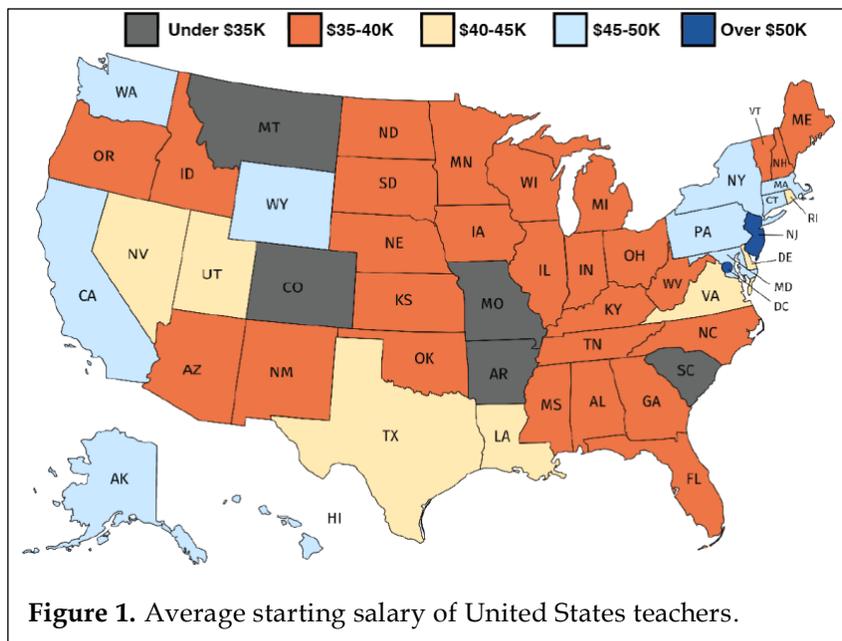
- Because teacher turnover and salary changes occur within broader economic trends (e.g., recessions), it is hard to directly link salary changes to improved teacher recruitment and retention in some cases.
- There is no consensus on the best way to measure teacher quality and student performance. It is therefore easier to directly connect teacher pay increases to improved recruitment/retention than it is to improvements in student achievement.

Research Background

How does compensation for Missouri teachers compare to salaries in other states?

Missouri law requires that new public school teachers receive a minimum salary of at least \$25,000 and that teachers with a master's degree and ten years of experience must earn a salary of at least \$33,000 (Mo. Rev. Stat. § 163.172). Minimum salary requirements were most recently adjusted in

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2005 when the General Assembly voted to increase new teacher minimum salaries from \$18,000 to \$25,000 (\$24,000 to \$33,000 for master’s degree and ten years of experience) over a four-year period ending in the 2009-10 school year. The average starting salary for Missouri public school teachers (\$32,600) currently ranks second to last in the United States (**Figure 1**), where the average starting salary is \$40,106 (median:

\$38,358).¹ The average salary of all Missouri teachers, overall and based on years of experience, is consistently lower than the United States average (**Table 1**).² Public school teachers in Missouri also make 26.5% less than comparable college graduates in other professions (national average is 19.8%).³ Average teacher salaries across all experience levels are lowest for teachers in rural schools and highest for teachers in schools with relatively few students who are eligible for free and reduced price lunch.⁴

		Years of full- and part-time teaching experience			
	Average Salary	5 or Fewer	6-10	11-20	Over 20
Missouri	50,064	45,200	46,180	53,960	59,410
United States	61,730	51,050	56,140	65,700	73,430

Table 1. Comparison of Missouri and United States public school teacher salaries on average and based on years of experience.

Teacher retention and recruitment in Missouri

Each year, 11% of Missouri’s teachers are new district hires, compared to a national hiring rate of 8%. Approximately half of Missouri’s public teacher workforce has less than 10 years of experience.⁵ Recent surveys of Missouri public school teachers and administrators indicate that teacher pay is consistently cited as the top reason that schools had trouble recruiting and retaining teachers.⁵ Several states have found that low-resource schools have significant teacher vacancies,

high turnover rates and tend to hire more teachers with less experience.^{6,7} Similarly, low-income, nonwhite, and rural students in Missouri have the least access to highly experienced teachers.⁴

The Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE), along with a working group of teachers and other stakeholders, recently developed an outreach plan with recommendations and specific action items to improve teacher recruitment and retention.⁸ The teacher salary proposal includes both adequacy targets (e.g., increasing minimum salary, increasing all teacher salaries) and equity targets (e.g., increasing pay in high-need areas). The State Board of Education has requested that the House and Senate establish a Joint Interim Committee to evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of alternative teacher compensation strategies, including incentive pay, health benefit design, tenure, and differential pay based on subject area and geography.⁹ Tax relief for educators is the primary legislative strategy currently being proposed to effectively increase teacher income without requiring a salary change. House Bill 727 would provide an income tax deduction worth 25% of that teacher's income; Senate Bill 228 would reimburse teachers for educator expenses up to \$500.

In addition to the proposal for teacher salary increases, the DESE outreach plan includes plans to improve teacher recruitment by (1) creating and implementing a public relations plan, (2) expanding and improving the Grow Your Own teacher initiative, (3) developing teaching incentives and (4) expanding leadership/professional development opportunities. They also provide recommendations for retention including (1) utilizing innovative school and district accountability measures and (2) improving school climates/cultures.⁸

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