



When Teachers Collective Bargain, They Raise the Bar for All of Us

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The Texas Teacher Pay Penalty: Texans Value Teachers, but Powerful Elected Officials Put Their Friends First

Whether from Temple, Houston, or Edinburg, Texans of all backgrounds support our local public schools, teachers, and staff. In 2022, the Charles Butt Foundation found that 68% of Texan parents think their schools are doing well, and more recent polling shows 89% of parents are satisfied with their child's public education.¹ Despite broad support for public schools, 77% of educators² have considered leaving their job in 2022 — up 19% since 2020. The poll also reveals that 93% of teachers took at least one step toward leaving the profession in 2022.³ Similarly, a 2022 survey by the Texas American Federation of Teachers showed teachers felt forced to leave the profession due to low wages, poor working conditions, and safety concerns.⁴ In the same survey, teachers expressed significant concern about insufficient state public school funding.

Like their Texas counterparts, teachers across the nation face a “pay penalty” where they earn less in total compensation than similarly educated non-teacher professionals. Recent research from the [Economic Policy Institute](#) (EPI) shows the average weekly wages of our teachers have remained relatively flat since 1996 when adjusted for inflation.⁵ Moreover, the benefits for teachers have not offset the growing wage penalty or wage gap. According to EPI, the average weekly wages of public school teachers (adjusted only for inflation) increased just \$29 from 1996 to 2021, from \$1,319 to \$1,348 (in 2021 dollars). In contrast, inflation-adjusted weekly wages of other college graduates rose from \$1,564 to \$2,009 over the same period — a \$445 increase.⁶ A previous EPI study reported a similar gap between 1994 and 2015, in which teachers went from a 2% to 17% wage deficit compared to private sector workers.⁷

¹Charles Butt Foundation. The 2022 Texas Teacher Poll: Persistent Problems and a Pathway Forward <https://charlesbuttdfn.org/2022txedpoll/#findings>

Charles Butt Foundation, “Strong Support, Clear Challenges”. 2023 poll.

² <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/09/08/charles-butt-teacher-survey/>

³. <https://charlesbuttdfn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2022-teacher-poll.pdf>

⁴ Texas American Federation of Teachers. Survey: February 2022.

<https://www.texasaft.org/resources/surveys/texas-aft-membership-survey-reveals-salary-funding-are-major-concerns/>

⁵ <https://www.epi.org/publication/teacher-pay-penalty-2022/>

⁶ Allegretto, Sylvia. “The teacher pay penalty has hit a new high: trends in teacher wages and compensation through 2021”. Economic Policy Institute. August 2021.

<https://www.epi.org/publication/teacher-pay-penalty-2022/>

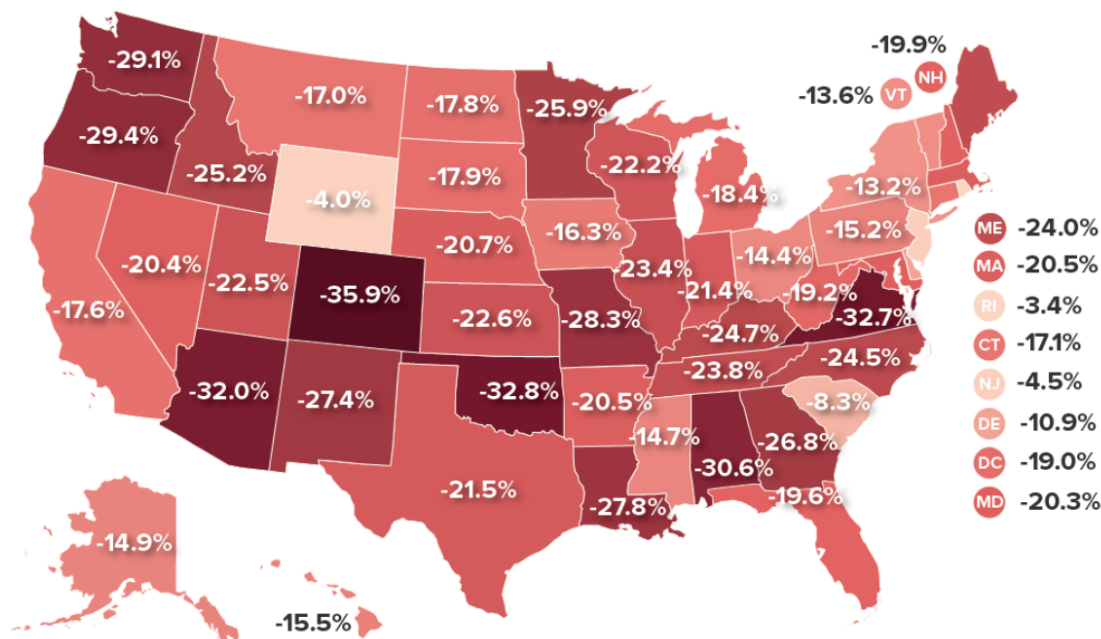
⁷ Allegretto, Sylvia and Lawrence Mischel. “The Teacher Pay Gap is Wider than Ever”. August 2016.

<https://www.epi.org/publication/the-teacher-pay-gap-is-wider-than-ever-teachers-pay-continues-to-fall-further-behind-pay-of-comparable-workers/>

What does the teacher pay penalty look like in Texas? Texas teachers make **21% less than those with a comparable level of education**. When the pay penalty for Texas teachers is ranked against all 50 states, Texas falls in 30th place.

How underpaid are teachers in your state?

Depending on the state, teachers make between 3.4% and 35.9% less than other comparable college-educated workers



Notes: Figure shows state-specific regression-adjusted weekly wage penalties for public school teachers (elementary, middle, and secondary) relative to their college-educated, nonteaching peers. See [Allegretto and Mishel 2019](#), Appendix A, for more details on data and methodology.

Source: Author's analysis of pooled 2016–2021 Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data accessed via the EPI Current Population Survey Extracts, Version 1.0.29 (EPI 2022a), <https://microdata.epi.org>.

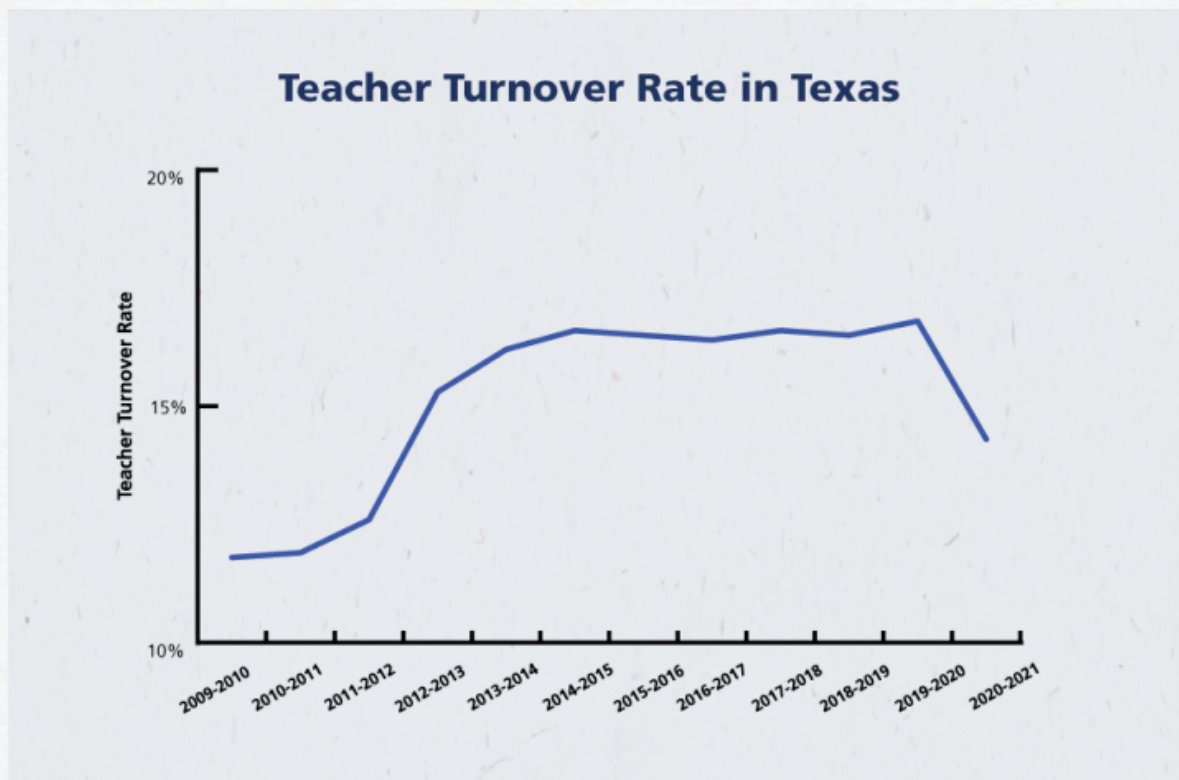
Economic Policy Institute

Every Texan and the Texas American Federation of Teachers (Texas AFT) found that teacher salaries have not increased since 2009-2010 and have actually declined by about 4% on average.⁸ In some districts, teacher salaries have declined at even higher percentages including North East ISD (14%), Houston ISD (13%), and Corpus Christi (11%).

⁸ The Lost Decade. Every Texan and the Texas American Federation of Teachers. April 2022. <https://everytexan.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/The-Lost-Decade-final.pdf>
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Teachers know that the state government undervalues their work. As a consequence, teacher attrition rates increased over the last 11 years. In the Charles Butt Foundation 2022 teacher poll, 81% of teachers surveyed said their pay is unfair, and 41% reported having to work another job to supplement their income. On top of low pay, 98% of teachers surveyed have spent their personal money on school supplies. The Texas AFT similarly found in their survey that the number one workplace issue identified by teachers is pay, followed by workload and working conditions.⁹

Figure 7
The turnover rate for Texas teachers is well above what it was a decade ago
Teacher turnover rate measured by percentage from the 2009-2010 school year through the 2020-2021 school year



Source: Texas Academic Performance Reports

Source: [The Lost Decade report by Every Texan and Texas AFT](#)

The Southern Regional Education Board tracks teacher turnover rates in 16 other states; the regional teacher turnover average is 10%. Texas performs worse than the southern regional average, with a teacher turnover rate of 14% in 2020-2021 and 16.8% in 2019-2020.¹⁰ Low, uncompetitive pay is driving educators away from our public schools, as shown by the climbing teacher turnover rate and decreasing teacher salaries in the last decade. But everyday Texans

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<https://www.texasaft.org/resources/surveys/texas-aft-membership-survey-reveals-salary-funding-are-major-concerns/>

¹⁰ Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). Teacher Workforce Data. September 20, 2022.

<https://www.sreb.org/resources/teacher-workforce-data>

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value our teachers and education staff. In a poll conducted by Philanthropy Advocates, **93% of Texans favor the state addressing teacher compensation, benefits, and working conditions** so that good teachers remain in place to prepare students to join the future workforce.¹¹

Public school administrators also acknowledge how critical education workforce issues like pay, benefits, and working conditions are to a strong education system. Dr. Kevin Brown, the executive director of the Texas Association of School Administrators, stated: *“We look forward to our elected leaders taking action to improve workforce education, prioritize the education profession, and ensure the future success of Texans through a quality public education as is required in the Texas Constitution. Now is the time to seize this unprecedented opportunity and make sure we are investing in our future leaders and the future of our state for generations to come.”*¹²

Education staff’s poor working and learning conditions impact everyone

A recent Texas AFT survey indicated that after salaries, working conditions related to workload and safety are the second most concerning issues for teachers.¹³ When the state legislature passes laws requiring extra services and work without sufficient funding, they add additional work to the plates of our already overworked education staff members. For example, HB 4545 from the 87th Legislature requires an additional 30 hours of tutoring for students who do not perform well on the state’s standardized testing. While over 500,000 public school students were required to attend tutoring services in 2021, districts did not get the funding and staffing they needed to effectively implement the policy change. A principal in Austin states, *“We were sort of left having to figure out how to do this state mandate that came down (at the) very last minute and just added one more thing to very overloaded people. We would have been able to do it had money been put behind it. We would have been able to do it in a better way — in a more effective way.”*¹⁴ Teachers, already spread thin by an underfunded public school system, are more likely to consider leaving the profession due to unrealistic workloads imposed by the Legislature.

Teachers are concerned about not having a respected voice in the state’s education system. A recent study conducted by Texas AFT shows that teachers express concerns over a lack of ability to provide their perspectives on the state’s most important policy decisions that impact testing, school funding, licensure (renewal), and evaluation.¹⁵ According to the study, “when teachers have a voice in school-based decisions, they are four times more likely to work hard to reach their goals, believe they can make a difference in the world, and feel excited about their future career in education.”

¹¹ <https://www.edtx.org/getattachment/96a6478d-1872-4550-ad85-664a1190e835/GetFile.aspx>

¹² <https://www.edtx.org/getattachment/96a6478d-1872-4550-ad85-664a1190e835/GetFile.aspx>

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<https://www.texasaft.org/resources/surveys/texas-aft-membership-survey-reveals-salary-funding-are-major-concerns/>

¹⁴ https://www.kxan.com/teachers-resign/#episode_3

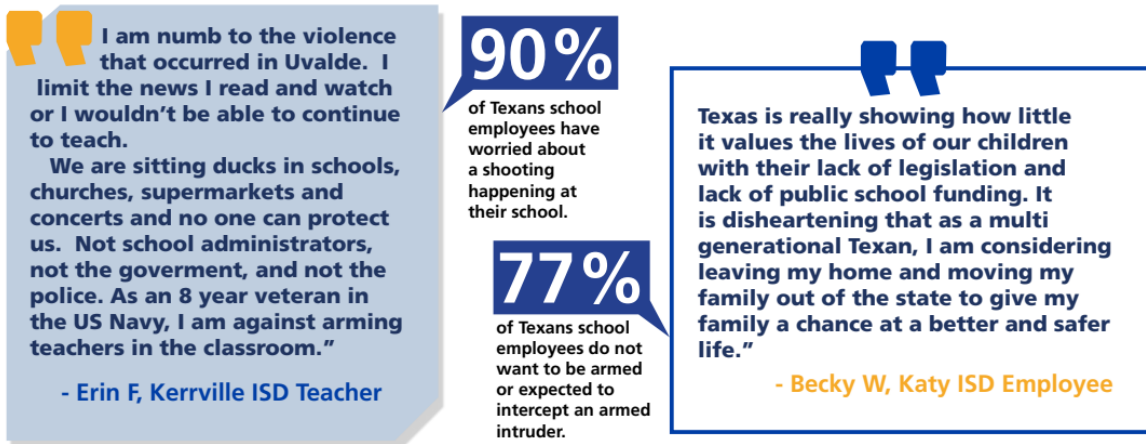
¹⁵ <https://www.texasaft.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/TexasNeedsTeachersV8.pdf>, page 6.

In Today's Classrooms, Texas Teachers Are First Responders

The Texas AFT surveyed over 5,000 public school teachers after the tragic and deadly Uvalde school shooting.¹⁶ Teachers reported feeling unsafe in schools and worried about the safety of their students and fellow staff members.¹⁷ Texas must treat teachers as first responders because their working conditions can be deadly: teachers are expected to step into the line of fire to protect their students from deadly shootings. First responders in Texas (firefighters, emergency medical service providers, and police officers) have the right to collectively bargain over their pay, benefits, and working conditions — and this right should be extended to include teachers.¹⁸ Parents and educators, and ultimately every Texan, will all be safer if teachers have a seat at the decision table when funding safe schools is up for discussion. The federal government already recognized teachers and education staff as first responders during the pandemic by prioritizing these workers first for the COVID-19 vaccine access, and Texas can do the same by including them in the right to collectively bargain.¹⁹

Gun Safety Survey

The Texas AFT survey of 5,100 Texas K-12 school employees, higher-ed employees, parents, and community leaders was conducted in the week after the deadly shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde.



How do we fix the public education workforce crisis?

The policy solutions to address high teacher turnover in our state's public education system are numerous, well-documented, and require swift action from our state's most powerful elected officials. Here are a few of these solutions:

¹⁶ <https://www.texasaft.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/gun-survey-quote-one-pager-1.pdf>

¹⁷

<https://www.kut.org/education/2022-08-12/in-the-line-of-fire-central-texas-teachers-share-safety-concerns-as-students-head-back-to-school>

¹⁸ <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/SOTWDocs/LG/htm/LG.174.htm>

¹⁹

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/03/02/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-administrations-covid-19-vaccination-efforts/>

- Assess the cost to educate Texas students and appropriately increase the basic allotment (funding per student).
- Ensure wealthy corporations are paying their fair share in taxes and stop passing a disproportionate responsibility to fund public schools onto working Texas families.
 - Increase funding for teacher and staff pay, benefits, and working conditions, including classroom size and workload.
- Invest in the professional development pipeline so more individuals enter the education workforce.

Instead of adopting these research-based policy solutions, our most powerful elected officials have focused on tax breaks for their friends at wealthy corporations. These tax giveaways deprive our students and schools of vital public funding. Regardless of what Texas elected leaders prioritize, teachers and education staff are looking out for our public students and schools. The Texas AFT found, of the 4,000 teacher members surveyed, **an overwhelming majority were most concerned about public school funding overall.**²⁰

It's time we listen to education staff about turnover, workforce challenges, and the state of our children's public schools. We need to put education staff voices over the interests of wealthy corporations and their billion-dollar tax breaks. These tax giveaways ultimately cost all of us by underfunding our schools and teachers. Collective bargaining is an effective tool that ensures the recommendations of our teachers and the needs of our students are prioritized over the open hands of the greedy corporations not paying their share of school property taxes.

Collective Bargaining 101: A Source for Our Common Good

What is a union?

"A labor union is a group of two or more employees who join together to advance common interests such as wages, benefits, schedules, and other employment terms and conditions. Workers represented by unions have a powerful voice that strengthens their ability to negotiate with their employer about their concerns."²¹

Everyone has the right to join a union in Texas. The greediest corporations and Texas elected officials often mislead everyday Texans to believe that workers cannot join a union. This is simply untrue. Whether you work at a grocery store, a farm, a restaurant, a city or county government organization, or a construction site, Texans of all backgrounds, regardless of immigration status, have the right to form and join a union.

What is collective bargaining?

"Collective bargaining is the process in which working people, through their unions, negotiate contracts with their employers to determine their terms of employment, including pay, benefits,

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<https://www.texasaft.org/resources/surveys/texas-aft-membership-survey-reveals-salary-funding-are-major-concerns/>

²¹ <https://www.dol.gov/general/workcenter/unions-101>

hours, leave, job health and safety policies, ways to balance work and family, and more. *Collective bargaining is a way to solve workplace problems.*"²²

Private sector workers' rights to collectively bargain are protected under federal law (National Labor Relations Act of 1935). However, the National Labor Relations Act did not protect *public sector workers'* rights to collectively bargain. As a result, the right to collective bargain for public employees varies from state to state. *This does not mean public sector employees cannot join a union.* There are thriving public sector unions across the state, like Texas AFT and the Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA). Texas law restricts *public sector* employees, with the exception of police and firefighters, from collective bargaining over wages, hours, or conditions of employment.²³ The state statute explains why collective bargaining is important for firefighters and police officers:

"The policy of this state is that firefighters and police officers, like employees in the private sector, should have the right to organize for collective bargaining, as **collective bargaining is a fair and practical method for determining compensation and other conditions of employment.** Denying firefighters and police officers the right to organize and bargain collectively would lead to strife and unrest, consequently injuring the health, safety, and welfare of the public."²⁴

Why did Texas ban public sector workers from collective bargaining?

Regardless of our race, gender, or class, we prosper together.

Texans of all backgrounds want a fair economy where all workers, no matter our skin color or where we were born, prosper together. Texas officials have banned public sector bargaining as an avenue to maintain their power over working people across the state.

The Texas law banning public sector workers from collective bargaining is rooted in the South's confederate legacy, slavery, and Jim Crow-era segregation laws. It's outdated and discriminatory, and it doesn't reflect our shared values. The mayor of Richmond, Virginia, succinctly explains why removing bans on collective bargaining is fair: "workers in the South were barred from bargaining collectively for the same reason that enslaved people were barred from learning how to read. Because people in power know there is power in numbers. United we bargain, divided we beg."²⁵

²² AFL-CIO. Collective Bargaining. November 2022:

<https://aflcio.org/what-unions-do/empower-workers/collective-bargaining#:~:text=Collective%20bargaining%20is%20the%20process,work%20and%20family%2C%20and%20more> .

²³ Government statute section 617.001 <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/GV/htm/GV.617.htm>.

²⁴ <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/SOTWDocs/LG/htm/LG.174.htm>

²⁵

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/02/05/virginia-shake-vestige-jim-crow-by-giving-public-sector-workers-freedom-bargain-collectively/>

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Historically, the education workforce has been composed primarily of women. Dr. Kaitlyn Henderson, a senior research adviser at global nonprofit Oxfam, finds: “public teachers are one of the largest sectors in this country, behind government workers, and overwhelmingly are women,” she said. “So denying public teachers the right to collectively bargain and organize **really does limit the wage and benefit negotiation of teachers and keeps them working at a much lower wage.**”²⁶

Texas teachers and education staff know that providing more state funding for public education, raising education staff pay, and improving working conditions will benefit everyone — most importantly our children and their futures. Research shows that teacher unions add value to public education and improve student performance overall because of the positive effects of negotiation over pay, benefits, and professional working conditions on our classrooms as a whole.²⁷

Collective Bargaining Improves Teacher Pay

According to the EPI, states who have restricted collective bargaining experienced a decline in teacher compensation.²⁸ In 2011-2012, five states (Idaho, Indiana, Michigan, Tennessee, and Wisconsin) restricted public-sector collective bargaining rights, resulting in an overall decrease in spending on teacher salaries and benefits. The EPI reports: “in the years following the changes, average district spending on teacher compensation decreased by 6%, with spending on teacher salaries falling by about 5% and spending on teacher benefits declining by 9.7%.”²⁹

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<https://www.kut.org/texas/2022-09-13/texas-is-one-of-the-worst-states-in-the-country-for-workers-study-finds>

²⁷ Vachon, T. and Ma, J. “Bargaining for Success: Examining the Relationship Between Teacher Unions and Student Achievement.” Sociological Forum. June 2015. Page 409, “This relationship operates mostly through the salary scale, a factor that can affect the supply of teachers by making teaching a more (or less attractive profession for highly educated workers on the job market. Thus, bargaining for higher wages appears to go beyond mere “rent seeking” by having positive effects on the supply and performance of teachers which in turn fosters greater student achievement”. See also https://thecommonwealthinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Collective-Bargaining_A-Critical-Tool-to-Improve-School-Staffing-Pay-and-Morale.pdf

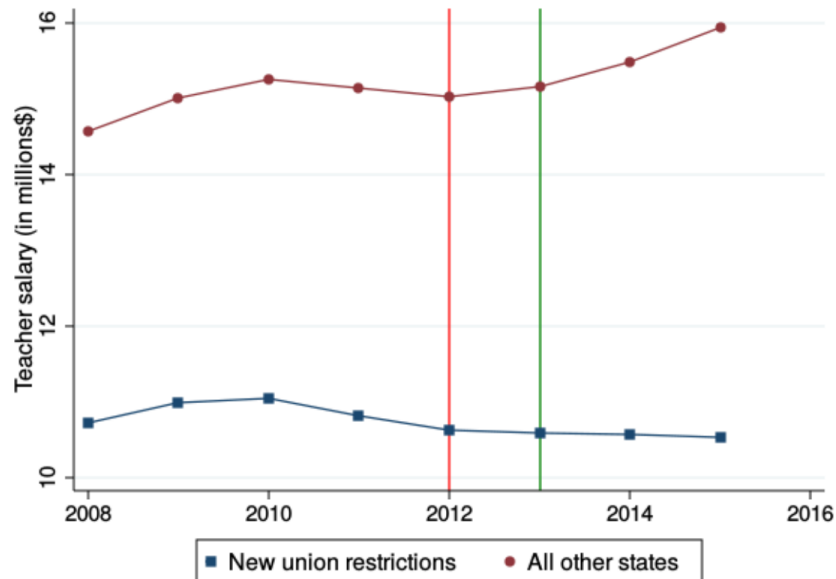
²⁸ Garcia, Emma and Eunice Han. “The impact of changes in public-sector bargaining law on districts’ spending on teacher compensation.” Economic Policy Institute, April 2021.

<https://files.epi.org/uploads/221896.pdf>

²⁹ Garcia and Han, 2021, page 12.

States that restricted collective bargaining saw a relative decline in spending on teacher salaries

Average per school district spending on teacher salaries in five states that restricted teachers' collective bargaining rights in 2011–2012 and in all other states, 2008–2016



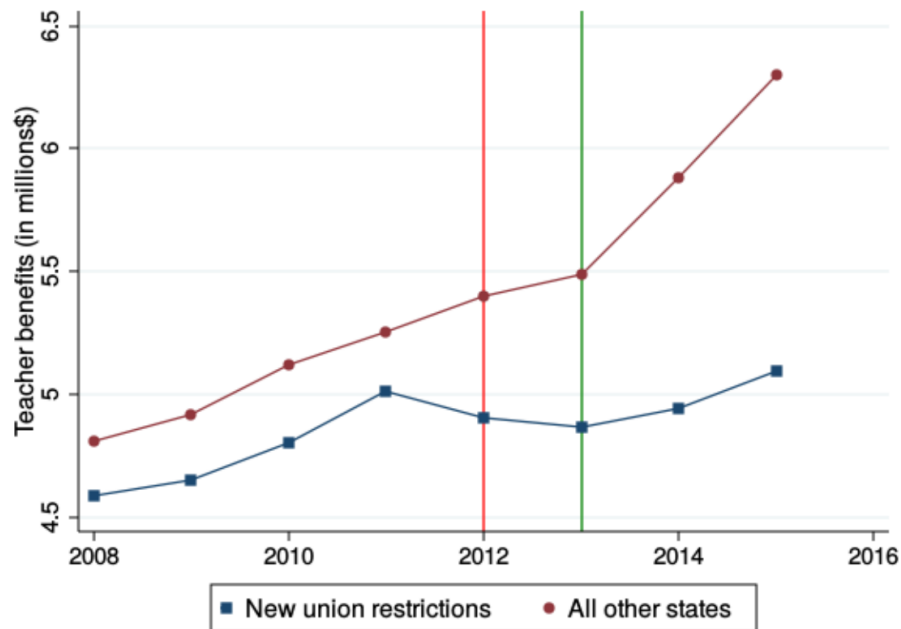
Note: The five states are Idaho, Indiana, Michigan, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. Data are for elementary and secondary public school districts.

Source: Local Education Agency Finance Survey microdata from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES 2008–2009 to 2015–2016)

The study also found that public expenditures on teacher benefits in those same five states also declined after the imposed restrictions on collective bargaining went into effect. Benefits are another important teacher retention and workforce pipeline development tool.

States that restricted collective bargaining saw a relative decline in spending on teacher benefits

Average per school district spending on teacher benefits in five states that restricted teachers' collective bargaining rights in 2011–2012 and in all other states, 2008–2016



Note: The five states are Idaho, Indiana, Michigan, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. Data are for elementary and secondary public school districts.

Source: Local Education Agency Finance Survey microdata from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES 2008–2009 to 2015–2016)

Reduced spending on teacher compensation and benefits contributes to attrition and a poor public education system. Teachers are workers, and building worker power is critical to a fair economy and our multiracial democracy. States where teachers have collective bargaining rights frequently experience fairer wages and better working conditions, because power is balanced between powerful elected officials and the everyday working people in our public schools.³⁰

How Teachers and their Unions Are Raising the Bar for All Students and Communities

Across the U.S., teacher unions are using their power to improve wages and benefits that decrease teacher turnover while also fighting for smaller classroom sizes, centralized air conditioning in overheated buildings, and funding for extracurricular subjects like art and music.

In **Columbus, Ohio**, 94% of teachers voted to go on strike in August 2022 due to poor working and learning conditions: “The labor dispute was over several issues including smaller class sizes, full-time art, music and physical education teachers in elementary schools and functional heating and air-conditioning in classrooms.”³¹

In **Seattle, Washington**, “an estimated 6,000 members of (the) Seattle Education Association went on strike (on) Sept. 7, demanding reasonable workloads and class sizes, supports for special education and multilingual learners, and pay levels sufficient that school district employees can afford to live in the city where they work.”³²

In **Indiana**, teachers are fighting for smaller classrooms, professional pipelines, and safety: “‘Our working conditions are our students’ learning conditions,’ Ramirez said. ‘It is not really about us. If there are too many students in a room, we cannot provide them with the education they deserve. I think being able to bargain class size is crucial for the well-being of public education.’”

In **West Virginia**, in 2019, teachers went on strike to stop the privatization of public education, which would negate the effect of a strike in 2018 that secured pay increases.³³ Privatizing education and measures like school voucher programs are rooted in racism³⁴ and make access to education opportunities unequal.³⁵ Every Texan’s Jaime Puente reports vouchers are “especially harmful to rural Texans who rely on public schools not only for their children’s education but also to serve as the institutional core of their community. Schools in rural areas are often a hub for social, recreational, and cultural life, and they play a vital role in improving community health.”³⁶

In **Oklahoma**, teachers went on strike and won pay raises and more funding for schools overall.
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<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/ohio-teachers-school-system-reach-agreement-potentially-ending-strike-2022-08-25/>

32 <https://nwlaborpress.org/2022/09/washington-school-strike/>

33

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2019/02/20/this-time-it-wasnt-about-pay-west-virginia-teacher-s-go-strike-over-privatization-public-education-they-wont-be-last/>

34 <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/racist-origins-private-school-vouchers/>;

35 <https://everytexan.org/2022/09/22/vouchers-the-lost-cause-fight-of-our-generation/>

36 <https://everytexan.org/2022/09/22/vouchers-the-lost-cause-fight-of-our-generation/>

37 <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-oklahoma-teacher-walkout>



How Collective Bargaining Can Raise the Bar for All of Us, as Told by Our Teachers

Texas teachers and education workers in San Antonio, Austin, and Houston participate in a consultation process with their district leadership. While these consultations do not permit teachers and education workers to collectively bargain over pay, benefits, or working conditions, the consultations provide a space in which workers' voices are heard by the district administration on important decisions impacting teacher and staff work.

The San Antonio Alliance Local 67 union president, Alejandra Lopez, explained that the teacher, staff, and district leadership consultation space supports transparency, accountability, and advocacy. Lopez explained to Every Texan that as a result of the consultation process, San Antonio Alliance has been able to ensure their community is informed of safety protocols during COVID-19 and keep staff vacancies low compared to other districts in the state. Lopez explained the root purpose of the consultation process: “The idea is that the people impacted by these issues need to be in the same room to help solve the problem; we aren’t going to get the same quality solutions without the impacted people informing the solutions.”

Lopez also shared that collective bargaining is essential to raising the bar for all Texans and that it is fundamentally unfair to exclude teachers from the collective bargaining rights that protect other first responders. He attributed the ban on collective bargaining rights for teachers to systemic gender and racial discrimination. Research shows that for the last 120 years,

education work has been disproportionately occupied by women, whose labor has been undervalued, and both trends continue to this day.³⁸

Finally, Lopez raised the well-researched community schools model³⁹ and expressed that if teachers had collective bargaining rights, they could do so much more to demand education models that meet the unique and important needs of our communities.

Good public sector jobs build middle-class prosperity for people of all backgrounds. Don't let wealthy corporations tell you otherwise.

My own mother is a very proud public school teacher in rural upstate New York. My mom attended college for the first time as a single 30-year-old adult with three children at home. When I was 14 years old, my mom got her first teaching job at our local public school. Mom's union job provided our family with affordable health insurance coverage for the first time. I will never forget my 10-year-old brother's relief when he realized his prolonged asthma condition would no longer be a financial burden for my mom, due to her union's strong collective bargaining agreement. Strong public sector jobs build a prosperous middle class, just like it did for my family. Our state's most powerful elected officials must stop answering to the interests of greedy corporations over the needs of everyday Texans, especially our teachers and education staff. If we allow for the continued, systemic decline of public education staff salaries, benefits, and working conditions at the hands of greedy corporations and their friends in high places, it will cost all of us — regardless of our skin color, where we live, or how much money we earn. It already costs all of our children.

Low teacher and staff pay, declining benefits, and poor working conditions are ultimately the result of the most powerful elected officials favoring wealthy corporations over us, the hardworking people of Texas. To solve the problem, we need the power and voice of educators and school staff members at the decision-making table to ensure our public education system reflects the respect and value it deserves — and that we all deserve. It's time for Texas teachers to collectively bargain for the rights they need to strengthen our public schools — and, ultimately, to strengthen our state for all of us.

Take Action!

- Join us! Sign up for advocacy alerts with Texas AFT and stay updated on the [Respect Us](#) campaign.
- Your voice matters. Stand with teachers and education staff to raise the bar for all Texans by letting your elected officials' offices know you care about teacher pay and working conditions.

³⁸ <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2019/02/the-explosion-of-women-teachers/582622/>

³⁹ <https://www.nea.org/student-success/great-public-schools/community-schools/what-are-they#:~:text=Community%20Schools%20are%20public%20schools,children%20best%E2%80%94all%20working%20together.>

Every Texan is a unionized workplace that supports the expansion of multiracial worker power to ensure a just and equitable future in Texas. Every Texan United, a unit of the Nonprofit Professionals Employee Union (NPEU- IFPTE Local 70), represents staff on issues of pay, benefits, and working conditions. Every Texan United and Every Texan enacted their first collective bargaining agreement (CBA) in August 2021.