

MYTH: Teachers make just as much as other, comparable professions.

FACT: According to a recent study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, the teaching profession has an average national starting salary of \$30,377. Meanwhile, NACE finds that other college graduates who enter fields requiring similar training and responsibilities start higher:

- Computer programmers start at an average of \$43,635,
- Public accounting professionals at \$44,668, and
- Registered nurses at \$45,570.

Not only do teachers start lower than other professionals, but the more years they put into teaching, the wider the gap gets.

- A report from NEA Research, which is based on US census data, finds that annual pay for teachers has fallen sharply over the past 60 years in relation to the annual pay of other workers with college degrees. Throughout the nation the average earnings of workers with at least four years of college are now over 50 percent higher than the average earnings of a teacher.
- An analysis of weekly wage trends by researchers at the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) shows that teachers' wages have fallen behind those of other workers since 1996, with teachers' inflation-adjusted weekly wages rising just 0.8%, far less than the 12% weekly wage growth of other college graduates and of all workers. Further, a comparison of teachers' weekly wages to those of other workers with similar education and experience shows that, since 1993, female teacher wages have fallen behind 13% and male teacher wages 12.5% (11.5% among all teachers). Since 1979 teacher wages relative to those of other similar workers have dropped 18.5% among women, 9.3% among men, and 13.1% among both combined.
- Teachers lost spending power for themselves and their families as inflation outpaced increases in teacher salaries last year, according to NEA Research. Inflation increased 3.1 percent over the past year, while teacher salaries increased by only 2.3 percent.

MYTH: Teachers are well-paid when their weekly or hourly wage is compared with other professions.

FACT: Teacher critics who make this claim use data collected by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in its annual National Compensation Survey (NCS). But NCS data are based on employer surveys, and the NCS measures *scheduled* hours -- not the work teachers do outside the school day. Because teachers do not work the familiar full year and roughly 9-5 schedules that most professionals have, the comparison is one of apples to oranges.

- **Economic Policy Institute President Lawrence Mishel explains** that in the NCS data "Teachers are measured by days *worked* (say 190 official school days divided by five, resulting in 38 weeks), while others are measured as days *paid* (work days plus paid time off: breaks, vacations and holidays)."
- The bottom line: NCS data vastly *understate* the weekly hours of teachers and the weeks teachers work each year, and thereby significantly *overstate* the hourly wage or weekly wage for a given annual wage.
- If you believe the NCS hourly pay data, then you believe that English professors (\$43.50) make more per hour than dentists (\$33.34) or nuclear engineers (\$36.16).

MYTH: The school day is only 6 or 7 hours, so it's only fair teachers make less than "full-time" professionals.

FACT: Other professionals hardly have the monopoly on the long workday, and many studies conclude that teachers work as long or longer than the typical 40-hour workweek.

- Six or seven hours is the "contracted" workday, but unlike in other professions, the expectation for teachers is that much required work will take place at home, at night and on weekends. For teachers, the day isn't over when the dismissal bell rings.
- Teachers spend an average of 50 hours per week on instructional duties, including an average of 12 hours each week on non-compensated school-related activities such as grading papers, bus duty, and club advising.
- When the Center for Teaching Quality studied teachers' workdays in Clark County, NV, it found that not only did most teachers work additional hours outside of the school day, but that "Very little of this time is spent working directly with students in activities such as tutoring or coaching; far more time is reported on preparation, grading papers, parent conferences, and attending meetings."

MYTH: Teachers have summers off.

FACT: Students have summers off. Teachers spend summers working second jobs, teaching summer school, and taking classes for certification renewal or to advance their careers.

- Most full-time employees in the private sector receive training on company time at company expense, while many teachers spend the eight weeks of summer break earning college hours, at their own expense.
- School begins in late August or early September, but teachers are back before the start of school and are busy stocking supplies, setting up their classrooms, and preparing for the year's curriculum.

MYTH: Teachers receive excellent health and pension benefits that make up for lower salaries.

FACT: Although teachers have somewhat better health and pension benefits than do other professionals, these are offset partly by lower payroll taxes paid by employers (since some teachers are not in the Social Security system), according to the Economic Policy Institute (EPI).

- Teachers have less premium pay (overtime and shift pay, for example), and less paid leave than do other professionals.
- Teacher benefits have not improved relative to other professionals since 1994 (the earliest data EPI has on benefits), so the growth in the teacher wage disadvantage has not been offset by improved benefits.
- The benefits of other workers would not have declined as much in recent years if they had the protection of a union, collective bargaining, and an independent voice on the job -- like public school teachers.

MYTH: Unlike other professions, teachers get automatic raises, regardless of how well they perform their work.

FACT: Name a profession in which people earn *less* each year! Through collective bargaining or state legislation, most teachers are placed on a salary schedule with pay "steps" or "increments" for seniority -- *seasoning* -- on the job and added professional development.

- Teachers never have a chance to stand still or go stale. They are rigorously evaluated, face recertification requirements, deal with ever-more-complex state and federal standards, and are expected to advance to the master's degree level and beyond.
- A well-constructed salary schedule rewards classroom experience, promotes continued professional learning, and promotes both retention and recruitment of quality staff.

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MYTH: The rewards of working with children make up for low pay.

FACT: It is true that most educators decide to enter the teaching profession because of a desire to work with children, but to attract and retain a greater number of dedicated, committed professionals, educators need salaries that are literally "attractive."

- The intrinsic rewards of an education career are often used as a rationale for low salaries. But low teacher pay comes at a very high cost. Close to 50 percent new teachers leave the profession during the first five years of teaching, and 37 percent of teachers who do not plan to continue teaching until retirement blame low pay for their decision to leave the profession.
- New teachers are often unable to pay off their loans or afford houses in the communities where they teach. Teachers and education support professionals often work two and three jobs to make ends meet. The stress and exhaustion can become unbearable, forcing people out of the profession to more lucrative positions.