Pay Teachers Act, 119th Congress

HELP Committee Ranking Member Bernie Sanders (I-VT)

There is no job more important and more difficult than teaching our nation's children. Today, 44 percent of public school teachers quit the profession within 5 years. Our public school teachers are more likely than other workers to experience higher levels of anxiety, stress, and burnout. Public school teachers in America have one of the toughest, most demanding, and most under-appreciated jobs in America, and yet, the average public school teacher in America now makes over 5 percent less than they did nearly 30 years ago after adjusting for inflation. In comparison, the wages for other college-educated staff have increased by 30 percent in that time. According to the NEA, the starting pay for teachers in nearly 20 percent of our nation's school districts is less than $40,000 a year. Further, approximately one in three of our nation's public school teachers earn less than $60,000 per year, including 93 percent of starting teachers.

The sad reality is that teacher pay in America has been stagnant for decades. In America today, nearly 40 percent of public school teachers in our country are forced to work two or three additional jobs to make ends meet. The situation has become so absurd that four hedge fund managers on Wall Street made more money last year than every kindergarten teacher combined – nearly 120,000 teachers. That should not be happening in the United States of America in the year 2025. No wonder researchers have found that the status of the teaching profession is at its lowest point in five decades.

It does not need to be this way. If we are going to attract the best and brightest young people into teaching, if we are going to encourage teachers to teach in underserved communities, if we are going to improve teacher retention and morale, and if we are going to improve student academic outcomes, then we need to pay teachers in America decent wages and improve the teaching profession. The Pay Teachers Act would triple Title I-A funding, ensure that teachers are paid a livable and competitive salary of at least $60,000, increase pay for paraprofessionals and school staff, and ensure that every student is taught by an experienced and qualified teacher who can advance professionally without needing to leave the classroom. Raising teacher salaries annually to at least $60,000 an ensuring competitive pay for all of our teachers is one of the most important steps we can take to address the teacher shortage in America and increase educational opportunities across our public schools.

Increases Federal Investments in Public Schools: The bill makes the following mandatory investments in fiscal year 2026 and each succeeding fiscal year, indexed to inflation

- Triples Title I-A funding ($36.77 billion).
- Triples funding for Rural Education programs ($430 million), doubles Impact Aid Basic Support Payments ($1.46 billion), and provides an additional $1.13 billion for the Bureau of Indian Education.

Ensures Teachers are Paid a Livable and Competitive Wage of At Least $60,000:

- Requires States to establish a "minimum salary for teachers" that must be at least $60,000 and to pay teachers a livable and competitive salary higher than the minimum salary for teachers that is commensurate with similarly college-educated and experienced professionals and increases throughout a teacher's career.
- Provides additional time to comply for States that have an annual starting statewide teacher salary average of less than $45,000, or where 50 percent or less of teachers statewide earn less than $60,000.
- Reduces teachers' out-of-pocket costs through a new grant program to ensure that every teacher in America receives not less than $1,000 for flexible classroom supplies and related expenses, with more funding in Title I schools ($3.8 billion).

Increases Paraprofessional and Education Support Personnel's Salaries and Wages

- Authorizes a new state grant program to increase the pay of paraprofessionals and education support personnel to ensure all such staff are paid at least $30 hourly or an annual salary of at least $45,000 ($20 billion).

Advances and Modernizes the Teaching Profession

- Modeled after high-performing education systems, establishes a new grant program to advance the teaching profession by subsidizing school districts to adopt career ladders that provide educators with opportunities to take on additional responsibilities and roles and receive additional compensation. By investing in teachers' career growth and funding opportunities for mentoring, teacher leadership, and collaboration, there will be more experienced and qualified teachers to serve our students ($8 billion).
- Requires States to monitor that students from low-income backgrounds, racial and ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, and English learners are not disproportionately served by ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers, including long-term substitutes.
- Funds State commissions to modernize the teaching profession by learning from high-performing education systems and developing recommendations to expand students' access to experienced and qualified teachers and to address structural challenges in the profession to improve teaching, collaboration, staffing, coaching, mentoring, school culture, and teacher pathways within the state ($50 million).
- Supports the teaching profession and expands development, advancement, and leadership opportunities by investing in and strengthening the Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) program ($100 million) and the Teacher and School Leader Incentive program ($200 million).

Expands the Teaching Pipeline to Address Teacher Shortages

- Diversifies and expands the teacher pipeline by: (1) authorizing a new Grow Your Own program within the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant program and providing $550 million for TQP grants; (2) investing $150 million in the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence program to support teacher preparation at HBCUs, TCUs and other minority-serving institutions (MSIs); and (3) investing $300 million in IDEA, Part D to support special education personnel.