

TO: Senate Committee on Education
FROM: Colin Robinson, Political Director, Vermont-NEA
DATE: February 1, 2023
SUBJECT: Teacher and Educator Minimum Salary

Context:

- Female dominated workforce: 75% of teachers and over 80% of school support staff are female.
- Highly educated workforce: According to a 2018 Rutgers University study of the Vermont education workforce, over 3 out of 4 teachers have master's degrees or are pursuing master's degrees. Nearly 50% of paraeducators have at least a bachelor's degree.¹
- Underpaid compared to similarly educated professionals: According to the Economic Policy Institute, Vermont teachers make 86 cents on the dollar compared to other professionals with the same level of education.
- Average starting educator salaries are in the middle compared to other states: Vermont ranked 26th in the country with an average starting teacher salary of \$40,810. In the 2021-2022 school year the lowest starting teacher salary in a SU/SD was \$36,975. Vermont ranked 29th nationally for the average annual wage for school support staff at \$32,984.²
- Fewer people pursuing a career in education: Nationwide, the percentage of first year college students pursuing education has dropped by approximately 50% over the past 15 years.
- Difficult to retain teachers prior to the pandemic: We know that 50% of new teachers leave the profession after 5 years.
- Local collective bargaining for teachers and support staff: Vermont has a long and deep tradition of local control and that includes local collective bargaining between the employers – school districts/supervisory unions – and the employees.

Minimum Teacher Salaries:

- Some states have established minimum teacher salaries in statute: While some have language that has been updated recently, others have language that has not. Maine - \$40,000, Massachusetts - \$18,000, Pennsylvania - \$18,500, New Jersey - \$18,500, Missouri - \$25,000. Some other states that do not have collective bargaining for their teachers or have different structures have different language in statute.
- Vermont Concept: Legislation is currently being developed at the request of Rep. Katherine Sims.
 - Honors local control and local bargaining relationship between SU/SD and employees.
 - Establishes a goal of \$50,000 minimum teacher salary and a \$20/hour support staff minimum wage.
 - Creates an education fund tax incentive, similar to Act 46, to encourage local decisions, but not required for FY25-FY27. This will be done through exempting a certain percentage of the cost from local education spending calculations.
 - Targeted to districts with the greatest needs – based on new weights specifically for sparsity and poverty.

¹ https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/RU_SMLR_Womens_Work.pdf

² <https://www.nea.org/about-nea/media-center/press-releases/nea-unveils-new-nationwide-data-educator-pay-and-school-funding>