



PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR
LICENSING AND STANDARDS BOARD

Teacher & Paraprofessional Compensation

**A Report to the
Legislature**

February 2025

A report developed in
accordance with Minnesota
Session Laws 2024,
Chapter 115, Article 5,
Section 22



For More Information

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Report Cost

As required by Minn. Stat. 3.197, this report cost approximately \$5,000 to prepare.

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Glossary

District: For purposes of this report, the term “district” includes public school districts, charter schools, and “other educational institutions” that are required to fill open assignments with licensed teachers.

Education Support Personnel: Education support personnel are all non-teaching school employees, such as custodians, food services personnel, bus drivers, secretaries, paraprofessionals, and others.

Public Employee Insurance Plan: This refers to the existing statewide health insurance pool that currently is optional for school districts.

Teacher pay gap: This refers to the weekly wage discrepancy between what teachers earn and what similarly educated professionals earn.

Acronyms

ESP: Education Support Personnel

MDE: Minnesota Department of Education

PEIP: Public Employee Insurance Plan

PELSB: Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board

Executive Summary

From September 13, 2024 to January 23, 2025, the Minnesota Teacher and Paraprofessional Compensation Working Group met on nine occasions (including one full-day in-person meeting) to review and discuss data and personal experiences with educator compensation. Per the legislative mandate of Minnesota Session Laws 2024, Chapter 115, Article 5, Section 22, these discussions addressed: (1) the professional pay gap for Minnesota teachers; (2) historical trends for Minnesota teacher pay; (3) historical trends in total compensation for Minnesota teachers, including wages and salary, health insurance and other benefits, and pension benefits; (4) historical trends in the tuition and opportunity costs of teacher preparation and student debt burdens; and (5) the workloads and compensation of Minnesota education support professionals.

Working group members elevated stories and experiences that called for significant and urgent investments to improve educator compensation in order to recruit and retain the educators needed in Minnesota's public schools. Stories were elevated regarding co-workers filing for bankruptcy and bartending or working 2-3 other jobs after school and on weekends, and looking to exit the profession as a result. Members had observed that beginning wages advertised at Kwik Trip, Aldi and Target looked compelling compared to what some school districts offered educators, and the impact this has on local school recruitment efforts. These stories were corroborated by the data, which showed, as one example, that the Minnesota weekly teacher pay gap is 31.1%, ranking #44 nationally, with teachers' average salary of \$70,005 in 2022-23 falling \$15,000 to \$90,000 below that of similarly educated workers.¹

Tens of thousands of Minnesotan school children are impacted by the approximately 946 teacher vacancies and 3,292 underqualified² teachers in the State, with 84% of Minnesota school districts reporting being "somewhat significantly" or "very significantly" affected by the teacher shortage, up from 70% in the 2021.³ To rectify this situation, the working group deliberated on multiple potential recommendations, sharing which elements resonated with them, which were problematic, and where questions emerged. Two key takeaways from the dialogue were that (1) salaries, healthcare and pensions must all be addressed, both for teachers and for education support personnel (ESPs); the group could not stand behind a proposal to improve only certain elements; and (2) very real district budget concerns exist among members such that the below recommendations are supported only with the caveat that they are fully and sustainably funded with state resources.

Assuming the below can be funded fully by the State, the working group proposes the following four recommendations for teacher and paraprofessional compensation:

Recommendation #1: A minimum teacher salary of \$60,000 for teachers with a Bachelor's degree should be introduced. It is further recommended that existing LEA steps and lanes be adjusted proportionally and/or remain subject to bargaining, such that **teachers with a Master's degree and 5+ years of experience can expect**

¹ Allegretto, 2023; University of Minnesota Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity, 2023; National Education Association, 2023.

² Teachers assigned to classrooms outside their certification field on a temporary or emergency basis.

³ Minnesota School Boards Association, 2023; Nguyen, 2023.

a **minimum salary of \$80,000** and such that average and top teacher salaries, on average, increase from their current levels of \$70,005, and \$76,371, respectively to, on average, \$87,005, and \$93,371, respectively, with minimum salaries for part-time teachers pro-rated accordingly. In addition, it is recommended that this policy be phased in over a five-year period and that a mechanism be created to ensure biennial adjustments to the minimum teacher salary based on cost-of-living. It is further recommended that an economic analysis should be conducted to assess the likely impact of this recommendation on teacher recruitment and retention. It is recommended that the Minnesota Legislative Budget Office conduct an analysis to more precisely estimate the total costs of this recommendation. If this recommendation cannot be fully funded, incremental action should be taken on this recommendation. That is, legislators and state agencies should not delay implementation of the recommendations while awaiting additional data or analysis or the full funding required; rather, more incremental increases, such as a \$50,000 minimum teacher salary for teachers with a Bachelor's degree and a \$70,000 for teachers with a Master's degree and 5 years of experience, should be implemented while policy leaders continue working to realize the full recommendation. These costs must be fully and sustainably funded by the State.

Recommendation #2: A minimum ESP base salary of **\$25/hour** should be introduced. This includes not only paraprofessionals but all school employees (custodians, food services personnel, bus drivers, secretaries, etc.) for their regular contract schedule, with a minimum of \$35,000/year, pro-rated for part-time ESPs. It is recommended that this policy be phased in over a five-year period and that a mechanism be created to ensure biennial adjustments to the minimum ESP salary based on cost-of-living. It is recommended that the Minnesota Legislative Budget Office conduct an analysis to more precisely estimate the total costs of this recommendation. If this recommendation cannot be fully funded, incremental action should be taken on this recommendation. That is, legislators and state agencies should not delay implementation of the recommendation while awaiting additional data or analysis or the full funding required; rather, more incremental increases, such as a \$20/hour minimum ESP salary should be implemented while policy leaders continue working to realize the full recommendation. These costs must be fully and sustainably funded by the State.

Recommendation #3: School district employees working at least 20 hours a week at least 67 days per year, should be mandated to join a statewide healthcare pool like the public employee insurance plan (PEIP), which provides less expensive healthcare, dental, and life insurance, including a choice between a Value Option (high deductible) and High Option (low deductible). It is further recommended that **the State pay for 95% of the annual health insurance premium for employees covered under a single plan and at least 85% of the annual health insurance premium for employees covered under a family plan.** It is further recommended that a mechanism be created to ensure ESPs' contracted hours meet these required minimum levels (if desired) to qualify ESPs for benefits. These costs must be fully and sustainably funded by the State. This statewide healthcare pool should be governed by a board made up of equal representation of labor and management.

Recommendation #4: All teachers and ESPs should be able to retire at or above age 60 and with 30 years of service credit at zero penalty, similar to their Rule of 90 counterparts. In addition, **new pension contributions should be fully and sustainably covered by the State**, with equivalent pension benefits applying to ESPs in the Public Employee Retirement system as are provided by the Teacher Retirement Association.

Given the caveat that these recommendations must be fully and sustainably funded by the State, the Minnesota Teacher and Paraprofessional Compensation Working Group went beyond the statutory requirements and explored potential sources of funding, including examining how a number of other states have approached and resourced significant increases in educator compensation.

The Working Group also developed several additional recommendations for the legislature and state agencies to consider to ensure smooth implementation of the compensation recommendations. These include:

A task force should further explore funding options, particularly opportunities to direct legal cannabis funds and/or savings from a mandatory PEIP toward competitive teacher and ESP compensation. This should include a more precise estimate from the Minnesota Legislative Budget Office on the total costs of the compensation recommendations.

Additional data should be collected on: (1) ESP working hours and salaries; and (2) teacher preparation costs and associated student debt. Although recommendations for teacher preparation fall outside this Working Group's charge, members expressed support for existing legislation and a recommendation for a future Working Group to further explore avenues to support teacher debt relief and/or tuition assistance for teacher preparation programs, residencies and the expansion of apprenticeships.

An implementation working group should be established to thoughtfully consider potential unintended consequences or opportunities to limit complication or confusion during implementation.

The report details the legislative mandate, working group decision-making process, data reviewed, recommendations, considerations that emerged, and potential funding sources that were explored to support the adoption of the above seven recommendations.

Introduction

Tens of thousands of Minnesotan school children are impacted by the approximately 946 teacher vacancies and 3,292 underqualified teachers in the State, with 84% of Minnesota school districts reporting being “somewhat significantly” or “very significantly” affected by the teacher shortage, up from 70% in the 2021.⁴ To rectify this situation, the Minnesota Teacher and Paraprofessional Compensation Working Group was convened to develop recommendations to ensure teacher and paraprofessionals’ compensation is competitive. Working group members reviewed historical and cross-state data and members’ experiences with low educator compensation, resulting in a set of recommendations that call for urgent and significant improvements to educator compensation in the State.

Legislative Mandate

Minnesota Session Laws 2024, Chapter 115, Article 5, Section 22

TEACHER AND PARAPROFESSIONAL COMPENSATION WORKING GROUP.

Subdivision 1. Establishment; membership.

(a) The Teacher and Paraprofessional Compensation Working Group is established and consists of the following 22 members:

- (1) one prekindergarten teacher;
- (2) one elementary school teacher;
- (3) one middle school teacher;
- (4) one high school teacher;
- (5) one physical education teacher;
- (6) one vocal music or instrumental music teacher;
- (7) one visual arts teacher;
- (8) one library media specialist;
- (9) one community education teacher;
- (10) one teacher teaching in an alternative setting;
- (11) one member working in a school setting with children from birth to age three;
- (12) one special education teacher;
- (13) four paraprofessionals working with elementary, middle, or high school students;

⁴ Minnesota School Boards Association, 2023; Nguyen, 2023.

- (14) two superintendents;
- (15) one community education director;
- (16) two school finance directors; and
- (17) one member with expertise in school board governance.

(b) The members under paragraph (a), clauses (1) to (13), must be appointed by the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board. The members under paragraph (a), clauses (14) to (16), must be appointed by the Minnesota Board of School Administrators. The members under paragraph (a), clause (17), must be appointed by the Minnesota School Boards Association. To the extent practicable, each appointing authority must appoint members representing schools in regions across the State. All appointments must be made no later than September 1, 2024.

Subd. 2. Duties; report.

(a) The working group is established to advise the legislature on strategies and recommendations to provide competitive compensation to teachers and paraprofessionals in Minnesota elementary, middle, and secondary schools.

(b) The working group must report its proposed strategies, recommendations, and draft legislation to the legislative committees with jurisdiction over prekindergarten through grade 12 education finance and policy by February 14, 2025. The report must be filed according to Minnesota Statutes, section 3.195.

(c) At a minimum, the report must:

- (1) analyze data on the professional pay gap for Minnesota teachers;
- (2) provide historical analysis on pay trends for Minnesota teachers;
- (3) examine historical trends in total compensation for Minnesota teachers, including wages and salary, health insurance and other benefits, and pension benefits;
- (4) examine historical trends in the tuition and opportunity costs of teacher preparation and student debt burdens; and
- (5) collect and analyze data on the workloads and compensation of Minnesota education support professionals.

Subd. 3. Meetings; compensation.

(a) The working group must convene its initial meeting no later than September 15, 2024, and must meet regularly thereafter.

(b) Members of the working group are eligible for per diem compensation as provided under Minnesota Statutes, section 15.059, subdivision 3.

Subd. 4. Administrative provisions.

(a) The executive director of the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board or the executive director's designee must convene the initial meeting of the working group. Upon request of the working group, the

executive director must provide meeting space and administrative services for the group. The members of the working group must elect a chair or cochairs from the members of the working group at the initial meeting.

(b) Upon request of the working group, the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board must provide information necessary for the working group to make its recommendations, including but not limited to information on teacher and paraprofessional qualifications, licensure, employment, assignment, and compensation.

Subd. 5. Expiration. The working group expires February 14, 2025, or upon submission of the report required under subdivision 2, whichever is earlier.

Working Group Members

The following people were appointed to the Teacher and Paraprofessional Compensation Working Group:

Role	Member	District
Special education teacher	Adeyoola Ajayi	ISD 742 St. Cloud Area School District
Community Education Director	Carrie Cabe	ISD 279 Osseo Area Schools
Library media specialist	Claire Torrey	ISD 112 Eastern Carver County Schools
Paraprofessional working with elementary, middle, or high school students	Jennajo Ernhart	ISD 277 Westonka Public Schools
Paraprofessional working with elementary, middle, or high school students	Jessica Toft	ISD 659 Northfield Public School District
High school teacher	Jodi Hansen	ISD 518 Worthington High School
School Finance Director	John Carlson	ISD 535 Rochester Public Schools
Middle school teacher	John Wolhaupter	ISD 11 Anoka-Hennepin Schools
Physical education teacher	Katherine Crudo	ISD 138 North Branch Area Public Schools
Community education teacher	Khulia Pringle	NA
Superintendent	Kim Hiel	ISD 279 Osseo Area Schools
Vocal music or instrumental music teacher	Marty Fridgen	ISD 833 South Washington County Schools
Superintendent	Matt Schultz	ISD 229 Lanesboro Public Schools
Member working in a school setting with children from birth to age three	Michelle Smith	ISD 197 West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools

Paraprofessional working with elementary, middle, or high school students	Monica Olson	Cornerstone Montessori Elementary School
Visual arts teacher	Rachel Betterley	ISD 2142 St. Louis County Schools
Prekindergarten teacher	Stephanie Scierka	ISD 623 Roseville Area Schools
Elementary school teacher	Theodore Ngeh	ISD 13 Columbia Heights Public School District
School Board Governance	Tiffany Gustin	Minnesota School Board Association
School Finance Director	Tina Burkholder	ISD 882 Monticello
Teacher teaching in an alternative setting	Tom Lonetti	Northeast Metro 916 Intermediate School District
Paraprofessional working with elementary, middle, or high school students	William Schwandt	ISD 271 Bloomington Public Schools

Working Group Process

The Minnesota Teacher and Paraprofessional Compensation Working Group met on nine occasions between September 13th, 2024 to January 23rd, 2025, to review and discuss the data and experiences per the legislative mandate, namely pertaining to: (1) the professional pay gap for Minnesota teachers; (2) historical trends for Minnesota teacher pay; (3) historical trends in total compensation for Minnesota teachers, including wages and salary, health insurance and other benefits, and pension benefits; (4) historical trends in the tuition and opportunity costs of teacher preparation and student debt burdens; and (5) the workloads and compensation of Minnesota education support professionals. The scope and sequence of the meetings was as follows:

- Meeting #1 (September 13th, 2024) provided space for introductions and an overview of the group’s charge, scope and sequence, processes, and preliminary data.
- Subcommittee Meeting #1 (September 26th, 2024) focused on processing the information presented in Meeting #1. In small groups, members reviewed data on other Minnesota professionals’ salaries and cost of living, with one group focusing specifically on paraprofessionals.
- Meeting #2 (October 10th, 2024) focused on defining “competitive” teacher salaries, including consideration of current beginning, mid-career and late-career teachers and how they compare to teacher salaries in other states and to other Minnesota professionals.
- Subcommittee Meeting #2 (October 24th, 2024) provided an opportunity to break into small groups to react to “strawman” recommendations, including their pros and cons, implications for district type (e.g., public school district, charter, intermediate district, etc.), pay scales, funding, and whether it offers a permanent solution or else how and when it would need to be reconsidered.
- Meeting #3 (November 7th, 2024) focused on discussions of draft teacher salary recommendations and provided space to reflect on and further discuss if they meet the definition of “competitive” discussed in the prior meetings. This meeting also opened up the initial conversation about health

benefits and various options regarding state and local education agencies' responsibilities for paying for competitive educator compensation.

- Subcommittee Meeting #3 (November 21st, 2024) focused on health care benefits and compensation for ESPs, including reviewing draft legislation from Education Minnesota.
- Meeting #4 (December 5th, 2024) covered three key topics: (1) A minimum salary for other school employees, (2) more in-depth dialogue on funding options, and (3) educator pensions.
- Meeting #5 (January 9th, 2025) provided an opportunity to speak directly with a state Secretary of Education who implemented a significant teacher salary raise in 2016 to hear how it was accomplished and what lessons learned Minnesota could take away. This meeting also included watching a recorded presentation from Education Minnesota to the Minnesota PELSB on their teacher and ESP salary and health insurance priorities. Teacher preparation cost data also were reviewed. Finally, the Working Group developed a list of areas for deeper discussion or data review.
- Meeting #6 (January 23rd, 2024 – all day, in person) was focused on reviewing the full draft report and working through the list of areas for deeper discussion or data review and additional emergent areas of disagreement.

From the start it was clarified that the role of the Minnesota Teacher and Paraprofessional Compensation Working Group was to make recommendations to the legislature based on research and discussion but *not* to necessarily reach consensus. As a group of advisors, the working group engaged in an iterative process for developing, reacting to, and refining recommendations for teachers' and paraprofessionals' salaries and total compensation.

Defining “Competitive” Compensation

To lay a sound foundation to the Working Group's legislative charge to advise the legislature on competitive compensation for teachers and paraprofessionals in Minnesota elementary, middle, and secondary schools, the committee began its work by considering different approaches to defining and conceptualizing “competitive” compensation. These conversations used the framework provided in report [Raising the Bar on Teacher Pay](#), which recommends:

“In determining whether teacher salaries need to be increased—and, if so, on what scale—state and district leaders should consider three intended outcomes:

1. Reduce or eliminate the pay penalty (i.e., the gap between teachers' salaries and those of comparably educated professionals).

The Working Group emphasized the need to consider compensation across a teacher's career, with the goal of increasing recruitment and retention efforts for the profession.

2. Reduce or eliminate teachers' needs for public assistance and for second and third forms of employment during the academic year.
3. Minimize or eliminate teacher shortages.⁵

After considering the merits of each conceptualization of “competitive” compensation, the group leaned heavily toward the third option, namely that compensation is competitive if it minimizes or eliminates the labor shortage, in this case the Minnesota K12 public school teacher and paraprofessional shortage.

Having identified eliminating or minimizing the educator shortage as the end goal for “competitive” compensation, in subsequent conversations, the Working Group could then center its considerations around whether specific recommendations seem likely to achieve this aim. The Working Group reflected on national survey and econometric data showing the impact of educator salaries on recruitment and retention. One recommendation is to invest in a more robust labor market economic analysis to assess the likely impact of the compensation recommendations on educator supply and demand.

Following the dialogue aimed at defining what is meant by “competitive” compensation, the Working Group reviewed data and discussed draft recommendations in each of the legislatively mandated areas, namely: (1) the professional pay gap for Minnesota teachers; (2) historical trends for Minnesota teacher pay; (3) historical trends in total compensation for Minnesota teachers, including wages and salary, health insurance and other benefits, and pension benefits; (4) historical trends in the tuition and opportunity costs of teacher preparation and student debt burdens; and (5) the workloads and compensation of Minnesota education support professionals.

In addition to reviewing extensive data and sharing lived experiences, the Working Group considered existing and draft legislation from Education Minnesota to which the resulting recommendations closely align. The Working Group also considered compensation proposals that have recently been presented by others in Minnesota, in other states, and nationally. For example, in 2023, the University of Minnesota Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity's *Minnesota Education Workforce Report* recommended a \$60,000 minimum teacher salary, a nearly 50% raise in Greater Minnesota that was estimated to increase current Minnesota education spending by less than 2%. Federal legislation (namely the *American Teacher Act* and the *Pay Teachers Act*) also would raise the minimum teacher salary to \$60,000, which has been adopted in Delaware and Maryland. Arkansas, Iowa, and Tennessee recently introduced a \$50,000 minimum teacher salary and South Dakota a \$45,000 minimum teacher salary. Author Daniel Pink even posed \$100,000 as the appropriate, competitive minimum teacher salary.⁶

⁵ Sherratt, Lachlan & Alavi, 2023.

⁶ Pink, 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE LEGISLATURE

1

A minimum teacher salary of \$60,000 for teachers with a Bachelor's Degree & teachers with a Master's degree and 5+ years of experience can expect a minimum salary of \$80,000.

2

A minimum Education Support Personnel (ESP) base salary of \$25/hour.

3

School district employees working at least 20 hours a week, at least 67 days per year, should be mandated to join a statewide healthcare pool where the State pays for 95% of the annual health insurance premium for employees covered under a single plan and at least 85% of the annual health insurance premium for employees covered under a family plan.

4

All teachers and ESPs should be able to retire at or above age 60 and with 30 years of service credit at zero penalty. New pension contributions should be fully and sustainably covered by the State.

Recommendations to the Legislature

The Teacher and Paraprofessional Compensation Working Group has four primary recommendations, each of which are detailed below. The group had difficulty estimating the cost due to a lack of public data. As such, the group encourages the legislature to direct the Legislative Budget Office to begin data collection on these recommendations, so an accurate cost may be determined.

Recommendation #1

A minimum teacher salary of \$60,000 for teachers with a Bachelor’s degree should be introduced. It is further recommended that existing LEA steps and lanes be adjusted proportionally and/or remain subject to bargaining, such that teachers with a Master’s degree and 5+ years of experience can expect a minimum salary of \$80,000 and such that average and top teacher salaries, on average, increase from their current levels of \$70,005, and \$76,371, respectively to, on average, \$87,005, and \$93,371, respectively, with minimum salaries for part-time teachers pro-rated accordingly. In addition, it is recommended that this policy be phased in over a five-year period and that a mechanism be created to ensure biennial adjustments to the minimum teacher salary based on cost-of-living. It is further recommended that an economic analysis should be conducted to assess the likely impact of the above compensation recommendations on teacher recruitment and retention. It is recommended that the Minnesota Legislative Budget Office conduct an analysis to more precisely estimate the total costs of this recommendation. If this recommendation cannot be fully funded, incremental action should be taken on this recommendation. That is, legislators and state agencies should not delay implementation of the recommendation while awaiting additional data or analysis or the full funding required; rather, more incremental increases, such as a \$50,000 minimum teacher salary for teachers with a Bachelor’s degree and a \$70,000 for teachers with a Master’s degree and 5 years of experience, should be implemented while policy leaders continue working to realize the full recommendation. These costs must be fully and sustainably funded by the State.

Data on the Professional Pay Gap and Pay Trends for Minnesota Teachers

The Minnesota weekly⁷ teacher pay gap is 31.1% in comparison to a national pay gap of 26.6% and ranks #44 nationally.⁸ The weekly teacher pay gap for Minnesota worsened, from 22.5% in 2014-2019 to 25.9% in 2022 to 27.7% in 2023 to 31.0% in 2024, with Minnesota’s national ranking worsening from 35th to 44th.⁹ Long term salary trends were not available for Minnesota specifically, but Figure 1 shows the worsening national weekly teacher pay gap, which increased from 7.1% in 1980 to 26.4% in 2021.

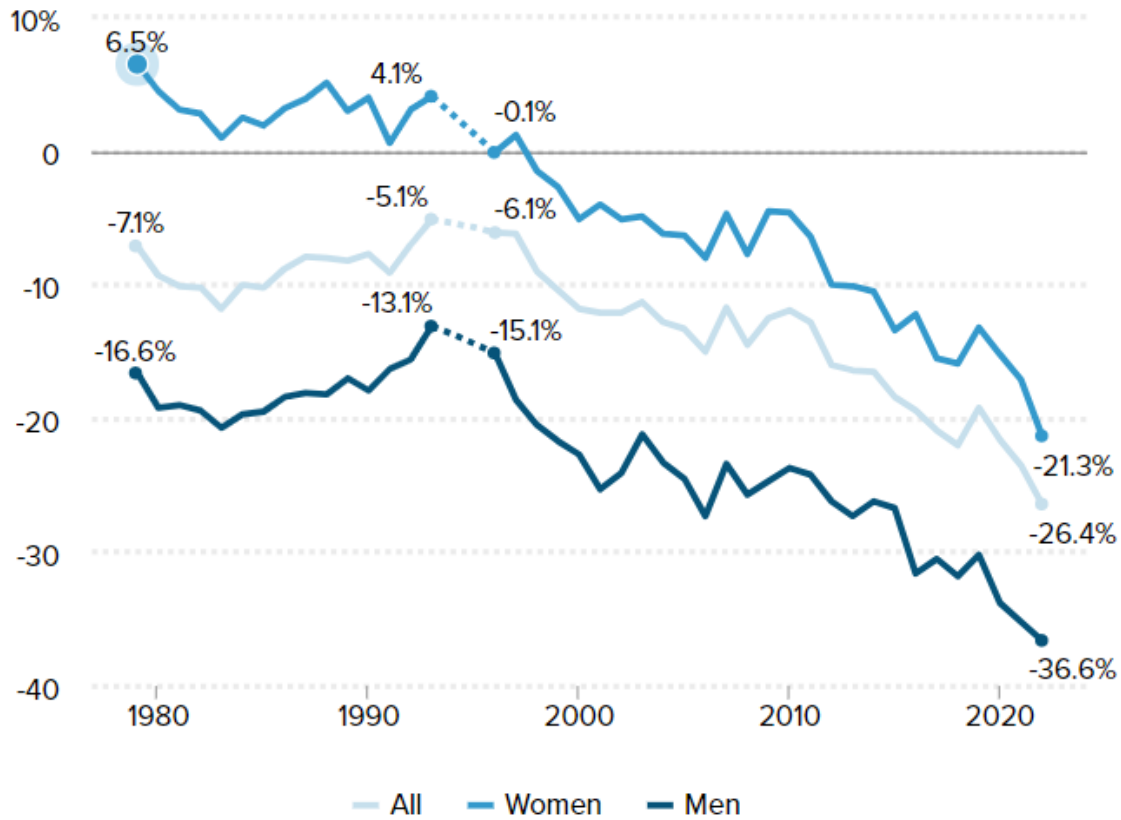
⁷ The weekly pay gap accounts for the often times different number of working days per year between teachers and similarly educated professionals.

⁸ Allegretto, 2024.

⁹ Allegretto and Mishel; and Allegretto, 2022, 2023 and 2024.

Figure 1: Teacher Preparation Completion Trends in Minnesota¹⁰

Public school teacher weekly wage penalty (or premium) for all teachers and by gender, 1979–2022



The 31.1% teacher pay gap in Minnesota is far higher than in neighboring states. For example, the Iowa teacher pay gap is 18.6%, the South Dakota teacher pay gap is 17.5%, the North Dakota teacher pay gap is 22.9%, and the Wisconsin teacher pay gap is 24.3%. This is due to the higher cost of living in Minnesota compared to these neighboring states. Considering raw salaries, Minnesota teachers' average salary of \$70,005 compares well to the average salary in surrounding states, per Table 1:

¹⁰ Allegretto, 2024.

Table 2: Teacher Pay in Minnesota and Neighboring States¹¹

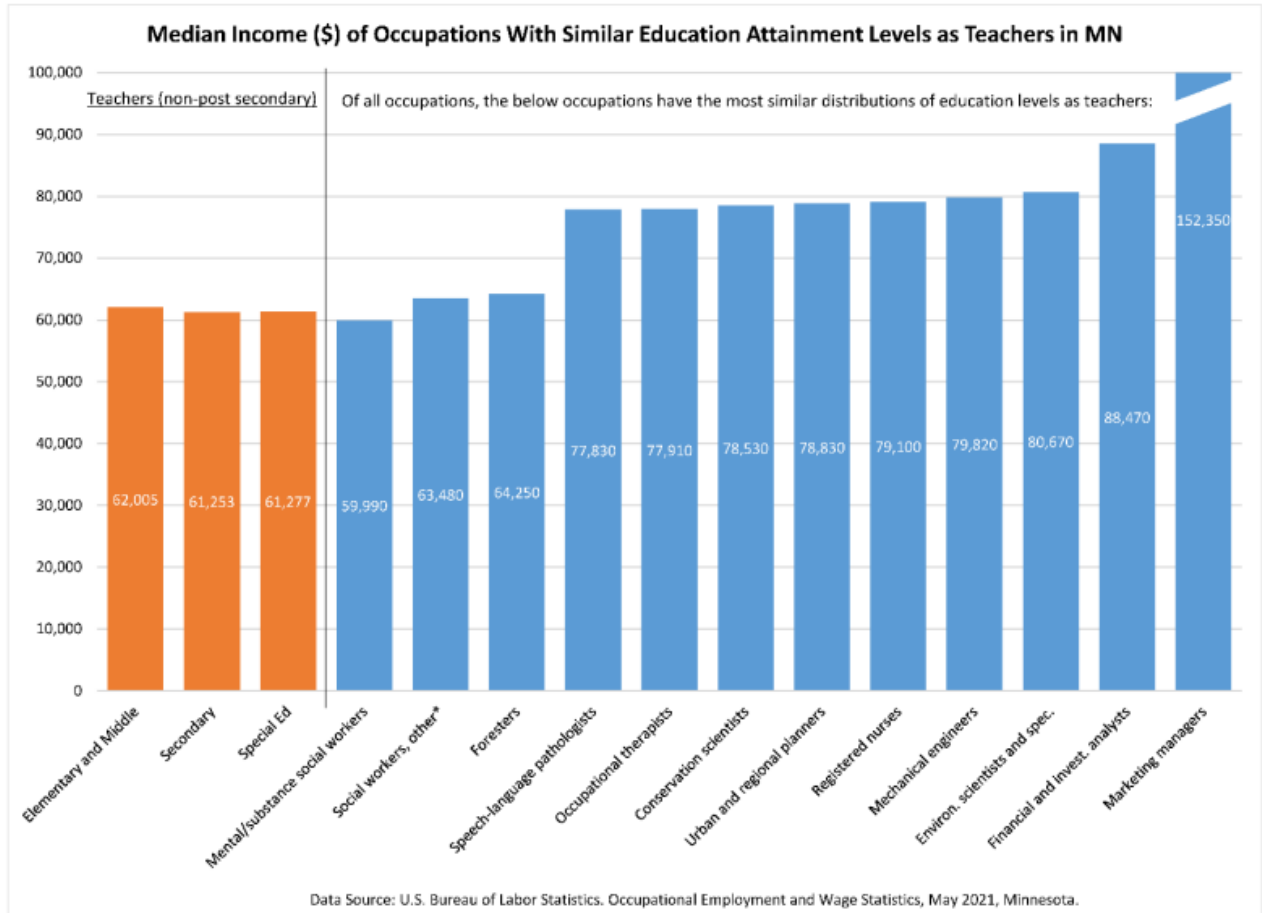
State	Teacher Pay Gap	Starting Teacher Pay	Average Teacher Pay	Top Teacher Pay
Iowa	18.6%	\$39,986	\$61,231	\$74,784
Minnesota	31.1%	\$43,182	\$70,005	\$76,371
North Dakota	22.9%	\$42,393	\$53,153	\$67,544
South Dakota	17.5%	\$42,907	\$56,792	N/A
Wisconsin	24.3%	\$41,151	\$62,524	\$77,083

In comparison to other professionals in Minnesota, teachers' pay fares worse. In addition to the 31.1% pay gap noted above, Minnesota teachers with a Bachelor's degree earn approximately \$17,000 below the average salary of Minnesota workers with a Bachelor's degree and Minnesota teachers with a Master's degree earn approximately \$15,000 below the average salary of Minnesota workers with a Master's degree.¹² Figures 2 and 3 below show more detailed comparisons with other Minnesota employment groups.

¹¹ Allegretto, 2024; National Education Association, 2024.

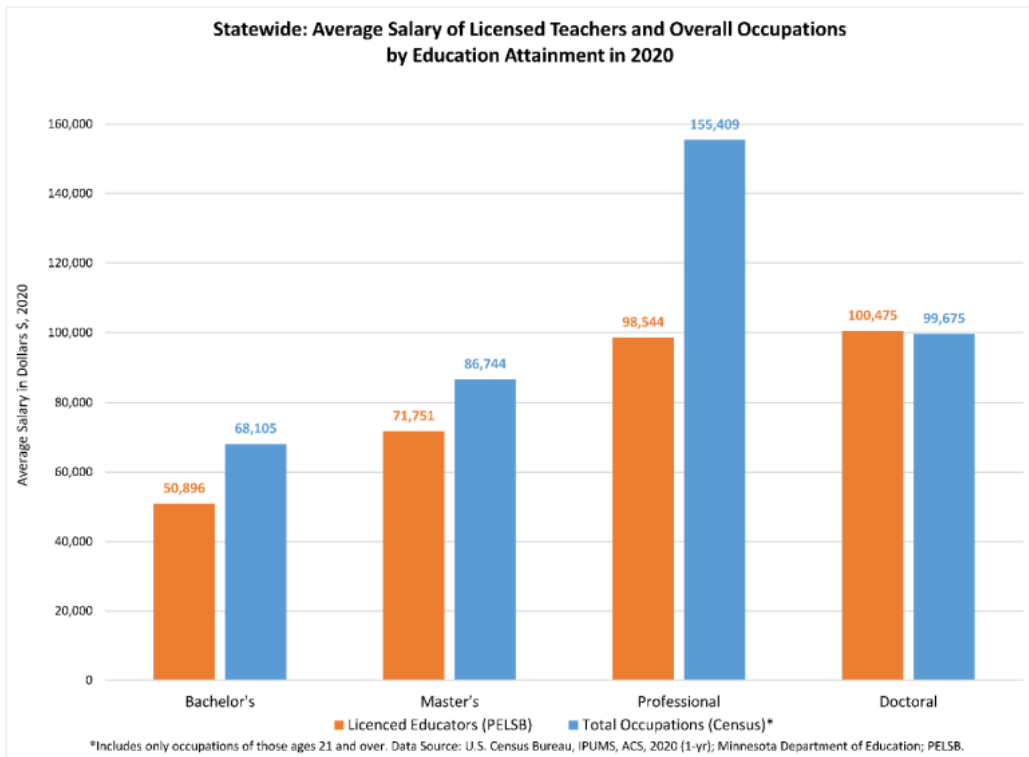
¹² University of Minnesota Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity, 2023.

Figure 2: Teacher Pay in Minnesota and Pay for Other Minnesota Professionals¹³



¹³ University of Minnesota Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity, 2023.

Figure 3: Teacher Pay in Minnesota and Pay for Other Minnesota Occupational Groups by Degree Level¹⁴



With a minimum living wage in Minnesota of \$63,957 for a 1-parent/1-child family, the average starting salary of \$43,182 is more than \$20,000 below the living wage. Moreover, Minnesota teachers must work for nine years before their compensation meets the cost of living for an average family in their county, with over one-third of Minnesota teachers' currently earning less than the basic-needs cost of living for a typical.¹⁵

Most important, given the Working Group's choice to conceptualize competitive salaries as those which will minimize or eliminate the educator shortage, it is important to note that at current salary levels, in August 2023, Minnesota school boards reported 946 teacher vacancies and 1,346 paraprofessional vacancies, with estimates that these results pointed to statewide totals of 1,854 teacher vacancies and 2,575 paraprofessional vacancies.¹⁶ In addition, there were an estimated 3,292 underqualified teachers (or 8% of all teachers) in the State.¹⁷

¹⁴ University of Minnesota Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity, 2023.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Minnesota School Boards Association, 2023.

¹⁷ Nguyen, 2023.

In addition to these broad statewide educator shortage statistics:

- Nearly one-third of new teachers leave within their first five years and nearly one-quarter of licensed teachers are not teaching in Minnesota public or charter schools. Of note, the PELSB MNSPIRE Teacher Survey (2022) found that higher pay was the top-rated factor Minnesota educators believe would help with teacher retention.
- There is an acute shortage of teachers of color, with just 6% of Minnesota teachers compared to 40% of Minnesota students being people of color or Indigenous.
- An alarmingly high 84% of Minnesota school districts report being “somewhat significantly” or “very significantly” affected by the teacher shortage, up from 70% in the 2021. Nearly every Minnesota district (98%) believe the availability of teachers is “somewhat fewer” or “significantly fewer” than five years ago.¹⁸
- An alarmingly high 94% of Education Minnesota members believe burnout affects their workplace and nearly three-quarters say it affected them “a lot,” with the reasons for burnout including the demands of the job, negative interactions with parents and students, problems with school administrators, and low compensation.¹⁹

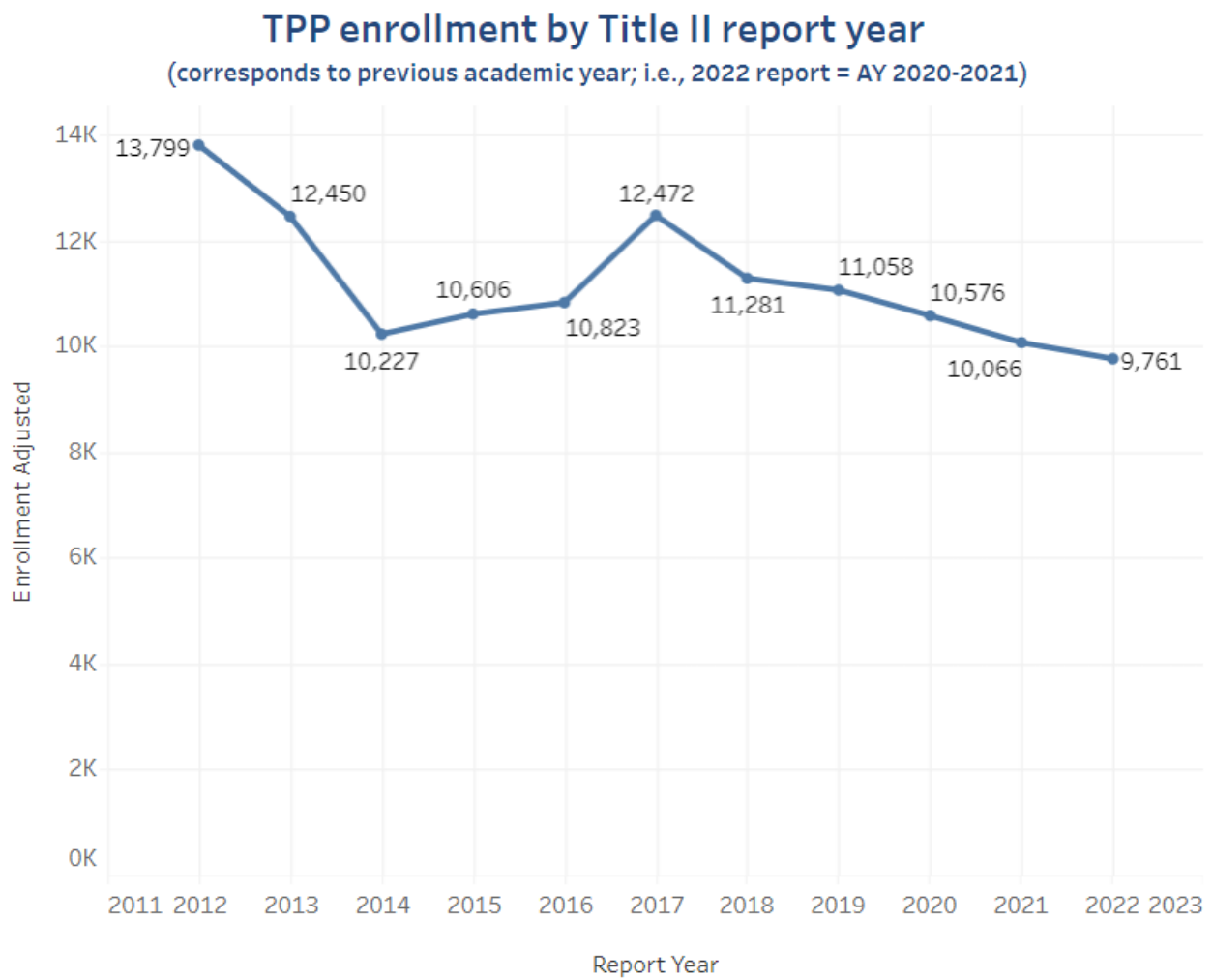
Given the central importance of teachers to student learning and well-being, these numbers are not acceptable. Moreover, the alarming teacher shortage data above are not likely to improve in light of teacher preparation program enrollment and completion data which, as shown in Figures 4 and 5, are in decline. Teacher preparation enrollment in Minnesota has declined by 22% since 2017-18, and by 29% since 2011-12; and teacher preparation completion in Minnesota has declined by 20% since 2017-18, and by 25% since 2011-12.²⁰

¹⁸ Education Minnesota, 2023; University of Minnesota Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity, 2023.

¹⁹ Education Minnesota, 2025.

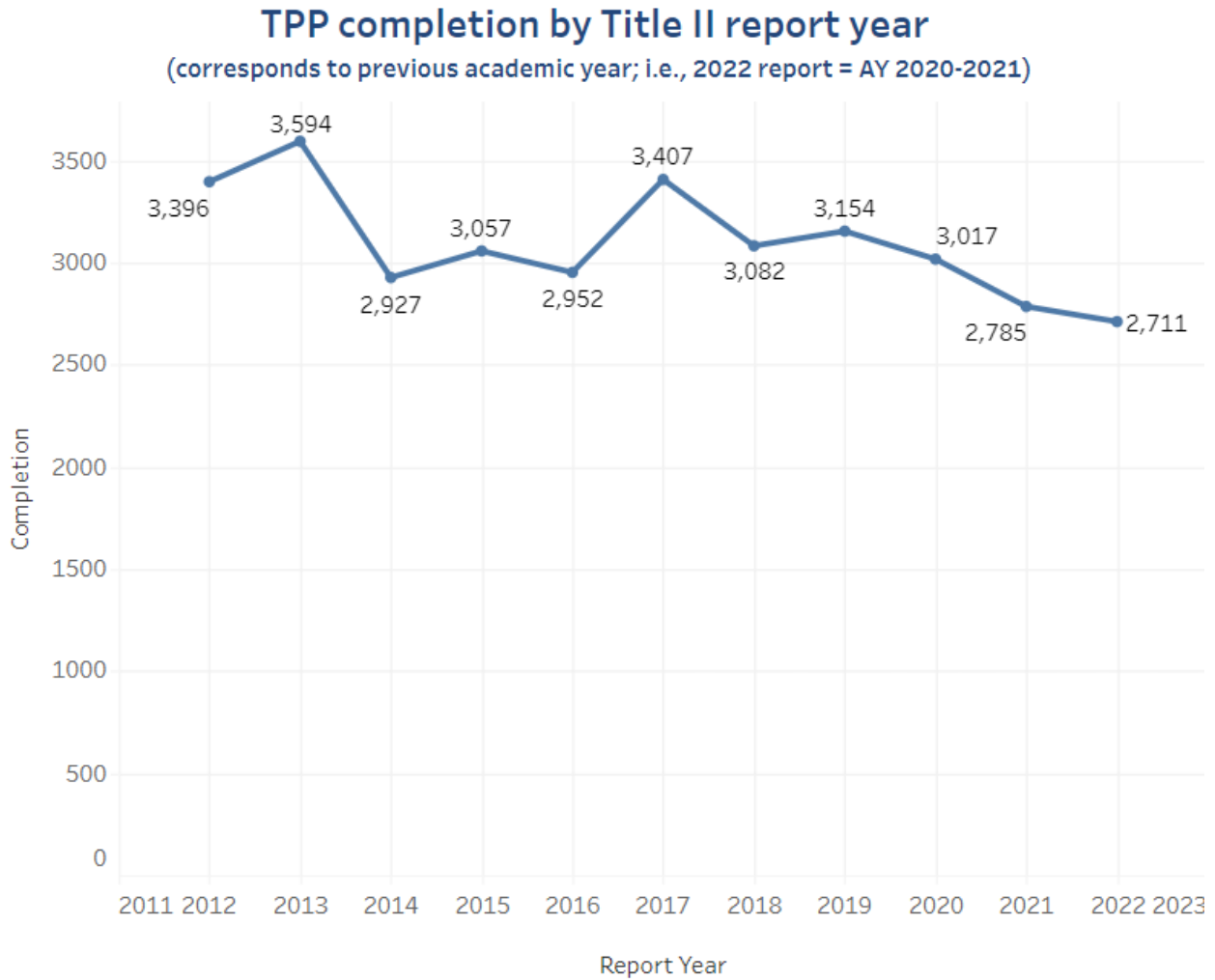
²⁰ Saenz-Armstrong, 2023.

Figure 4: Teacher Preparation Enrollment Trends in Minnesota²¹



²¹ Saenz-Armstrong, 2023.

Figure 5: Teacher Preparation Completion Trends in Minnesota²²



A final data point considered for recommending salaries that would be competitive for recruiting and retaining teachers is RAND’s 2023 *State of the American Teacher Survey*, which found nationally that the difference between what teachers think they should make and what they actually make is on average \$16,000.²³

Working Group members shared experiences that brought these data to life and underscored the urgency of investing in a significant way in more competitive educator salaries. For example, stories were elevated regarding co-workers filing for bankruptcy and bartending or working 2-3 other jobs after school and on weekends, and looking to exit the profession as a result. Members had also observed that beginning wages

²² Saenz-Armstrong, 2023.

²³ Doan, Steiner, Woo & Pandey, 2023.

advertised at Kwik Trip, Aldi and Target looked compelling compared to what some school districts offered educators, and the impact this has on local school recruitment efforts.

Historical Trends in the Tuition and Opportunity Costs of Teacher Preparation and Student Debt Burdens

Data showing historical trends on Minnesota teacher preparation costs and opportunity costs and student debt were not available. However, the Working Group considered the current average annual cost (tuition and living expenses minus grants/scholarships received) for an Education Bachelor's or Master's degree at various Minnesota teacher preparation programs. These include University of Minnesota -Morris (\$11,000/year), Southwest Minnesota State University (\$15,000/year), University of Minnesota - Twin Cities (\$16,000/year), University of Minnesota -Duluth (\$17,000/year), Capella University (\$17,000/year), Minnesota State Univ. - Mankato (\$18,000/year), Concordia University - St. Paul (\$18,000/year), Martin Luther College (\$21,000/year), Saint Mary's University of Minnesota (\$21,000/year), and University of St. Thomas (\$28,000/year).

More data were available nationally, although even nationally historical trend data were not available. Nationally, at least 61% of graduates of education Master's degree programs have some student loan debt, with a median debt of education Master's graduates (for undergraduate and graduate school) of \$72K. According to the Center on American Progress' analysis of federal longitudinal data for 17,160-degree completers between 2007-2008 (with data collection follow-up in 2009-2012), 78% of those trained to teach took out undergraduate federal student loans and 28% took out graduate school federal loans. By 2019, the average amount of undergraduate debt still owed by teachers was \$16,875. For Black Americans, the percent was higher (91% for undergraduate loans and 47% for graduate school). By 2019, the average amount of undergraduate debt still owed by Black teachers was \$17,941.²⁴ Similarly, a 2020 survey by the National Education Association of 1,309 PK-12 teachers found that 53% of teachers have unpaid student loans. Of those with unpaid debt, 28% have \$65,000 or more of debt, 13% have \$45,000 -\$65,000, 21% have \$25,000 -\$45,000, and 37% took out less than \$25,000. Nationally, 14% of educators with student debt owe \$105,000 or more, and the average amount of student debt among educators is \$55,800.²⁵

The data were also corroborated by personal experiences. One Working Group member shared how, during her first five years in particular, she was paying the equivalent of a mortgage in student debt. The conversations on teacher preparation costs and student debt led to the Working Group's stated support for existing legislation in this area and an additional recommendation to collect more data and further explore avenues to support teacher debt relief and/or tuition assistance for teacher preparation programs, residencies and the expansion of apprenticeships. These data also underscore the need to ensure that compensation once employed is sufficiently competitive to warrant the educational investment.

²⁴ Stroll, J., Morris, C., & Gulish, A, 2024; Center on American Progress, 2019.

²⁵ Hershcopf, Puckett Blais, Taylor & Pelika, 2021.

Recommendation #2

A minimum ESP salary of \$25/hour should be introduced. This includes not only paraprofessionals but all school employees (custodians, food services personnel, bus drivers, secretaries, etc.) for their regular contract schedule, with a minimum of \$35,000/year, pro-rated for part-time ESPs. It is recommended that this policy be phased in over a five-year period and that a mechanism be created to ensure biennial adjustments to the minimum ESP salary based on cost-of-living. It is recommended that the Minnesota Legislative Budget Office conduct an analysis to more precisely estimate the total costs of this recommendation. If this recommendation cannot be fully funded, incremental action should be taken on this recommendation. That is, legislators and state agencies should not delay implementation of the recommendation while awaiting additional data or analysis or the full funding required; rather, more incremental increases, such as a \$20/hour minimum ESP salary should be implemented while policy leaders continue working to realize the full recommendation. These costs must be fully and sustainably funded by the State.

Data on the Workloads and Compensation of Minnesota Education Support Professionals

Data on the workloads and compensation of Minnesota education support professionals were not available. It is therefore recommended that the Department of Education collect and publicly report these data so that policy decisions can be developed in a data-informed manner. Nationally, 38% of K-12 ESPs working full-time (30+ hours/week) earn less than \$25,000 per year and 13% earn less than \$15,000. At these salary levels, 32% of PK-12 ESPs are having serious issues making a living wage and another 21% said this was a moderate problem. Meanwhile, over a quarter of PK-12 ESPs reported participating in public assistance programs.²⁶ As shown below in Table 3, the average Minnesota ESP salary was \$34,289 in 2022-23, ranking #19 in the nation. As with teacher salaries, Minnesota ESP salaries are competitive compared to neighboring states but not with the living wage (\$60K-\$76K for a 1-child household, depending on the number and working status of parents).

Table 2: Education Support Professional Pay in Minnesota and Neighboring States, 2023²⁷

State	Average ESP Pay	Ranking
Iowa	\$29,649	41
Minnesota	\$34,289	19
North Dakota	\$32,776	24
South Dakota	\$28,619	44
Wisconsin	35,059	15

The Working Group also examined other states’ ESP pay proposals. For example, Illinois passed a resolution to study the financial implications of an ESP minimum wage of \$20 in SY2025-26, \$21/hour in SY 2026-27, and \$22/hour in SY2027-28. Delaware passed an increase in FY 2025 salaries for school bus drivers from \$22.50/hour to \$25.00/hour, but a more modest increase for food services personnel that would raise the minimum food

²⁶ National Education Association, 2024.

²⁷ Ibid.

service worker salary from \$14.64/hour to \$15.01/hour (a 2.5% across-the-board increase) and a 1% salary increase (to a \$28,000 minimum) for paraprofessionals (plus stipends for having a \$2,000 Bachelor's or Associate's degree). And Massachusetts' educator association proposed an ESP minimum salary of \$45,000/year.

Recommendation #3

Recommendation #3: School district employees working at least 20 hours a week at least 67 days per year, should be mandated to join a statewide healthcare pool like the public employee insurance plan (PEIP), which provides less expensive healthcare, dental, and life insurance, including a choice between a Value Option (high deductible) and High Option (low deductible). It is further recommended that **the State pay for 95% of the annual health insurance premium for employees covered under a single plan and at least 85% of the annual health insurance premium for employees covered under a family plan.** It is further recommended that a mechanism be created to ensure ESPs' contracted hours meet these required minimum levels (if desired) to qualify ESPs for benefits. These costs must be fully and sustainably funded by the State. This statewide healthcare pool should be governed by a board made up of equal representation of labor and management.

Recommendation #4

All teachers and ESPs should be able to retire at our above age 60 and with 30 years of service credit at zero penalty, similar to their Rule of 90 counterparts. In addition, **new pension contributions should be fully and sustainably covered by the State,** with equivalent pension benefits applying to ESPs in the Public Employee Retirement system as are provided by the Teacher Retirement Association.

Historical Trends in Total Compensation for Minnesota Teachers, Including Wages and Salary, Health Insurance and Other Benefits, and Pension Benefits

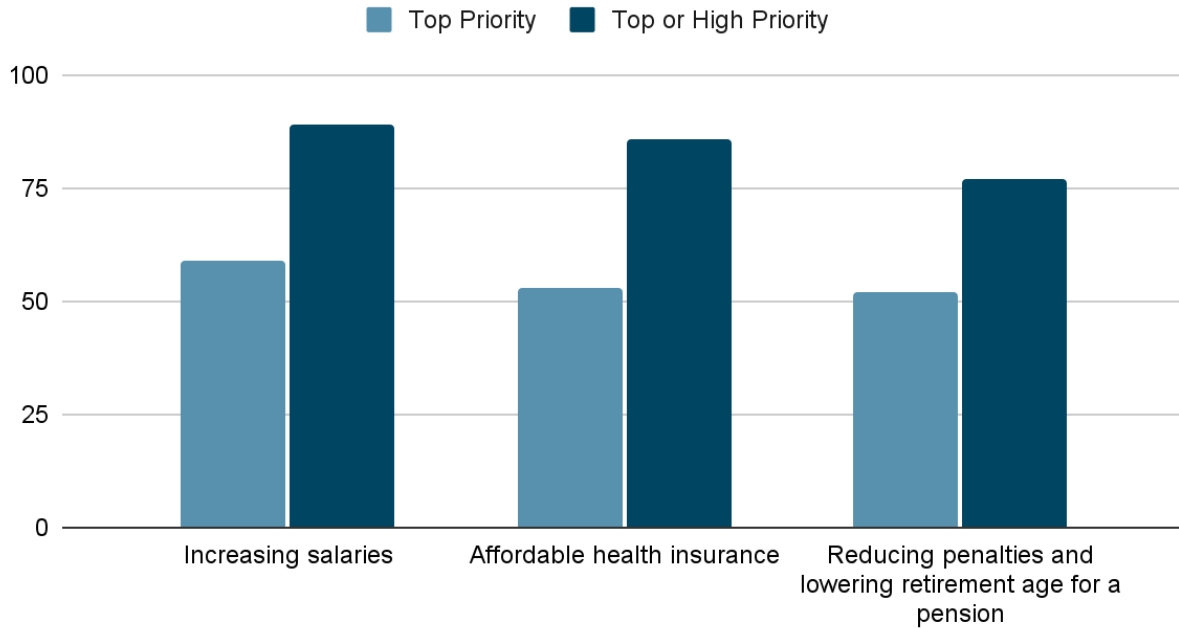
One clear message from the Working Group was that teacher pay must be considered alongside health insurance and pension benefits. A recommendation exclusive of benefits (or of ESPs) would not be competitive to resolving the State's educator shortage. This sentiment was corroborated by data. Nationally, the teacher "total compensation penalty" is lower than the 26.6% teacher pay gap, but also at a near all-time historic high of 16.7%, up from 2.7% in 1993.²⁸ Among teachers surveyed by Education Minnesota, as depicted in Figure 6, 71% are concerned about low pay, 67% are concerned about pensions, and 64% are concerned about high healthcare costs.²⁹

²⁸ Allegretto, 2024.

²⁹ Education Minnesota, 2024.

Figure 6: Minnesota Teachers' Priorities³⁰

Which benefits should Education MN prioritize?



Nationally, from 2018 to 2022/2023, teacher health care costs have risen at a faster rate than inflation and increases in teacher salary. The cost of health insurance has risen by 45%. The health care premiums teachers' pay has risen by 14% (from \$139/month to \$162/month for an individual or \$592/month to \$711/month for a family). Meanwhile teacher salaries have risen by 10% and the cost of living has risen by 17%. School districts are also paying 13% more for single coverage and 12% for family coverage compared to 2018, and are holding steady the proportion of health insurance premiums they cover at 84% (single person) and 64% (family). By comparison, private industry pays 78% to 80% (individual) and 65% to 79% (families).³¹

The Working Group reviewed approaches that were elevated as bright spots by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and Southern Regional Education Board. Namely, North Carolina provides state-level health insurance and negotiated for monthly premiums, deductibles and out-of-pocket maximums to remain unchanged since pre-pandemic. New Jersey provides school districts the option to participate in state-administered group plans offered to state employees (to benefit from their larger group size and lower premiums). And Texas divided the State into 20 regions in 2023, each with adjusted health care costs. District

³⁰ Education Minnesota, 2024.

³¹ National Council on Teacher Quality, 2024.

exemplars include Brevard Public Schools, Florida and Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia, both of whom increased the district share of health insurance costs.³²

Research and data on teacher retirement benefits were also considered by the Working Group. 67% of Minnesota teachers are concerned about pensions, 45% of Minnesota teachers are not satisfied by the retirement benefits they receive (a quarter are not at all satisfied), and 43% are satisfied with the retirement benefits they receive.³³ Teacher retention increases dramatically once an educator is vested in a secure pension plan; however, other national research suggests pensions overall are not a driver of recruitment and retention.³⁴ Nationally, only half of new teachers stay in the profession long enough to receive any pension at all, and one-third receive pensions that are less than their own paid contributions. Just one-fifth of teachers receive full pension benefits. Research suggests employee contribution rates do not impact teacher recruitment (although teachers want to know there is some plan in place). Research on teacher retention shows no effect of pensions on the retention of early career teachers, a mild “pull” effect as experienced teachers approach retirement age, and a large “push” effect after teachers reach retirement age.³⁵

As shown in Table 3, the average Minnesota teacher retiree benefit is \$27,593 (and the median is \$29,400), with 50% of teachers estimated to leave without receiving any pension.

Table 3: Education Support Professional Pay in Minnesota and Neighboring States, 2023³⁶

State	Average Benefits for New Retirees	% of New Teachers Who Qualify for a Pension
Iowa	\$20,263	42
Minnesota	\$27,593	50
North Dakota	\$29,508	56
South Dakota	\$16,286	53
Wisconsin	\$22,911	64

Note: Based on 2016 data; “newly retired” refers to retirees in the last 10 years.

Minnesota ranks #20 nationally for the highest quality retirement benefits offered to new teachers and #16 for the average quality of retirement benefits offered to new teachers.³⁷ South Carolina was ranked the #1 state for teacher pensions largely because of its high contribution rate of 14% and quick vesting period in its Defined

³² American Federation of Teachers, 2022.
³³ Education Minnesota, 2024.
³⁴ National Education Association, 2024.
³⁵ Aldeman & Robson, 2017; Aldeman & Rotherham, 2019; and Aldeman & Schmitz, 2019.
³⁶ Marchitello, M., 2019.
³⁷ Equable Institute, 2024.

Contribution plan. Tennessee ranked #2 for its 7% contribution into the Defined Contribution portion of their plan and a 5% crediting interest rate on members' contributions. South Dakota, Oregon and Michigan also are rate highly.³⁸ Meanwhile, the NEA highlighted Minnesota, alongside New York, as national exemplars. Minnesota recently lowered the retirement age from 66 to 65, while New York reduced final average salary calculation from five years to three years.

Potential Sources of Funding

Although it was beyond the charge of the Working Group's remit, given the critical caveat that all recommendations be fully and sustainably supported by state revenues, the Working Group considered potential funding sources that could be explored further in support of the above four recommendations, specifically funding from legal cannabis revenues, lottery revenues, a new sales tax, a possible sports betting tax, possible philanthropic dollars, repurposing existing funds, or revenues from the State's general fund.

First, it must be noted that there are multiple cost-savings that the above recommendations are likely to generate, which would off-set the costs. Most significant are the cost savings that would result from a mandatory statewide health care insurance pool. Not only will the expanded pool itself significantly drive down the costs of educators' health insurance plans, but also the coordinated effort will free up local administrative time and resources for other priorities, such as approximately \$10 Million currently spent on brokers. In addition to the cost-savings associated with a statewide health insurance pool, there are cost-savings associated with teachers and, especially, ESPs, coming off of public benefits programs. Finally, there are cost savings associated with reduced teacher turnover. Small districts spend approximately \$11,000 on each teacher that must be replaced due to turnover, while large districts spend approximately \$25,000 per teacher when they leave.³⁹

In exploring specific revenue streams, the Working Group began with the newly legal cannabis tax revenues. Minnesota law requires that 80% of revenues from legal cannabis taxes go to the General Fund and 20% to a local government cannabis aid account in the Special Revenue Fund to be distributed to cities and counties. In June 2023, the Minnesota Department of Revenue projected that by FY 2027, \$111,240,000 would be generated for the General Fund and \$17,200,000 would be generated for the Special Revenue Fund. The Working Group considered the case of Colorado, which legalized marijuana in 2012, promising to direct the tax revenues to schools. In Colorado, the first \$40 million in taxes is directed to school maintenance/construction and 10% is directed to local governments and \$30 million to a state public school fund controlled by the Department of Education. At first this money was earmarked only for rural districts, but it now is disbursed to all districts. Marijuana taxes cover just 1.6% of education funding in the State.

The Working Group also considered funding from the lottery. The Minnesota lottery fund generates \$80 Million to \$90 Million per year for environmental projects. Minnesota voters last month voted to continue using lottery funds to protect the environment (parks, trails, clean water research, habitat protection, outdoor programs for kids, etc.), but this focus could be reconsidered. Other states do direct lottery funds to education. Last year, Missouri's lottery generated \$388 Million for public schools, including \$14 Million for a Classroom Trust Fund spent at the discretion of local school districts, including \$12.5 Million in teacher salary increases. Last year,

³⁸ Moody and Randazzo, 2022); Education Minnesota, 2024.

³⁹ Learning Policy Institute, 2024.

North Carolina's Education Lottery, which was launched in 2007, generated \$1 Billion for public schools, including \$386 Million for operations. Until 2016, these funds primarily supported the classroom teacher budget line but more recently shifted to noninstructional staff costs. The specific allocations change from year to year and are determined in the annual state Appropriations Bill. These funds account for less than 5% of North Carolina's \$12.3 Billion K-12 budget. The specific allocations, and funds are dispersed to the State department of public instruction.

Other states also provide multiple examples for funding teacher salary increases. Arkansas' and Tennessee's recent \$50,000 minimum teacher salary policies came from state general revenue funds. In Tennessee the policy was introduced alongside the introduction a new funding formula, the Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement, which requires that state funds intended specifically for teacher pay are used for teacher pay. When New Mexico increased teacher pay by 35% from 2019 to 2022, they were in the enviable position of enjoying especially high state tax revenues from the oil and gas industry that allowed for salary increases across state government. Nevada recently secured \$250 Million from the State General Fund after it was learned a \$1 Billion "rainy day" surplus was available with projections for even greater surplus. The funds went to an Interim Finance Committee to support about half of local districts in raising teacher pay by 20% as part of the State teacher association's "Time for 20" campaign. They are currently working to move the funds to the K12 funding formula to make it sustainable and are looking to close property tax loopholes and expanding the base on the sales tax.

Last year Delaware passed a phased-in approach to raise teachers' base pay to \$60,000 (and raise all educators' pay), at a cost of \$232 Million over four years, with the State covering 70% of the costs while local districts cover 30%. Maryland provided \$225 Million (between FY20-FY23) to jumpstart statewide efforts to negotiate salary increases of at least 10%. In FY23, Maryland increased the Foundation Per Pupil Fund by 13% (and between FY23 and FY33 will increase it by 49%). In total, they identified \$3.9 Billion and \$700 Million per year from local entities for a \$60,000 minimum teacher salary and additional supports through a ballot measure to direct casino and sports betting revenues to education, a new state funding formula and local investments, and local tax increases of, on average, 0.7% in 2023, 1.1% in 2028 and 2.9% in 2034.⁴⁰ The 2022 commercial casino tax revenues were significant, generating \$393 Million in Iowa, \$495 Million in Illinois, \$734 Million in Michigan and \$17 Million in South Dakota.⁴¹ While there does not appear to be an appetite for commercial casinos in Minnesota, there are current efforts to legalize and tax sports betting and gaming in Minnesota with projected tax revenues of \$23.8 Million by 2027.⁴² Another potential revenue source is Minnesota's \$85 Billion opioid settlement, of which only \$26 Billion has been spent or committed to-date.⁴³

To gain greater insight into possibilities for funding a significant salary increase, particularly through a new sales tax, the Working Group invited Dr. Melody Schopp, former South Dakota Secretary of Education, to share the State's approach. In 2016, South Dakota introduced a half-penny sales tax specifically to raise teacher salaries. It generated \$70M/year in new revenues for schools, increasing teacher salaries by 22% over 5 years (or by, on average, \$5,000). Dr. Schopp shared the approach the State took to build bipartisan support, with a conservative governor, and the lessons learned in the process. The Working Group considered how Minnesota's sales tax compares to other states. Specifically, the Minnesota sales tax is 6.875% (or up to 8.375% in some areas) and the

⁴⁰ Sherratt, 2023.

⁴¹ American Gaming Association, 2023.

⁴² Minnesota Department of Revenue, 2024.

⁴³ Zuraw, Pattani, Larweh, Kalata, Whaley, Flanagan, Pendergrass and Prescott, 2024.

average combined state & local tax rate (8.04%) ranks #15 in the nation. In comparison, the highest state tax rates are in California (7.25%) and Indiana, Mississippi, Rhode Island, and Tennessee (7.0%), and the highest combined sales tax states are Louisiana (9.56%), Tennessee (9.55%), Arkansas (9.45%), Washington (9.38%), and Alabama (9.29%). It was also noted that the Twin Cities metro area raised the sales tax by 1 percentage point starting Oct. 2023 (0.75% for transportation and 0.25% for housing).⁴⁴

Finally, the Working Group considered if funds, such as those from the Q-Comp performance-based compensation system, could be repurposed, or costs from administration or special education streamlined. The group also considered if Minnesota's largest corporate philanthropists (Target, Thrivent, 3M Co, U.S. Bankcorp, Securian Financial Group) or wealthiest billionaires (e.g., Cargill Family, Pohlard Family, Best Buy Founder Richard Shulze, DirectTV Founder Stanley Hubbard, Bill Austin, Glen Taylor, Mark Davis, etc.) could potentially be tapped to support investments in the State's educator workforce.

While no simple solution exists for funding competitive educator compensation, it was clear that many other states have adopted multiple different approaches that Minnesotan lawmakers may also consider.

Additional Recommendations for Consideration

The Working Group also developed several additional recommendations for the legislature and state agencies to consider to ensure smooth implementation of the compensation recommendations. These include:

A task force should further explore funding options, particularly opportunities to direct legal cannabis funds and/or savings from a mandatory PEIP toward competitive teacher and ESP compensation. This should include a more precise estimate from the Minnesota Legislative Budget Office on the total costs of the compensation recommendations.

Additional data should be collected on: (1) ESP working hours and salaries; and (2) teacher preparation costs and associated student debt; and pending analyses of these data additional compensation recommendations should be considered. Although recommendations for teacher preparation fall outside this Working Group's charge, members expressed support for existing legislation and a recommendation for a future Working Group to further explore avenues to support teacher debt relief and/or tuition assistance for teacher preparation programs, residencies and the expansion of apprenticeships.

An implementation working group should be established to thoughtfully consider potential unintended consequences or opportunities to limit complication or confusion during implementation.

⁴⁴ Walczak, 2024.

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