



# PSEA TESTIMONY: MINIMUM EDUCATOR SALARIES

Jeff Ney

PSEA Vice President

Good afternoon Chairman Harris, Chairman Schweyer and members of the committees. My name is Jeff Ney, and I am the Vice President of the Pennsylvania State Education Association. Incidentally, I am a graduate of Kings College and have spent 20 years teaching elementary school right here in Wilkes Barre.

With me today from our research division is James Henninger-Voss.

We are pleased to have the opportunity to come before you today on behalf of our 177,000 members and have a very necessary conversation about Pennsylvania's educator shortage, and the specific impact of salary on that shortage.

### **The Educator Shortage:**

By now, everyone in this room is aware of the historic teacher shortage gripping our country, and in particular the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, new teacher certifications have decreased by 70 percent since 2010. Equally troubling, 10,000 teachers have left the profession entirely since the 2021-2022 school year.

As the following graphic shows, the number of initial teacher certifications decreased from 15,031 in 2010-11 to 5,440 in 2020-21. That is a shocking reduction that, in time, will make it nearly impossible to staff our schools.

**Figure 11: Number of Initial Teacher Certificates Issued for Graduates of Pennsylvania TPPs (2011-12 through 2020-21)**

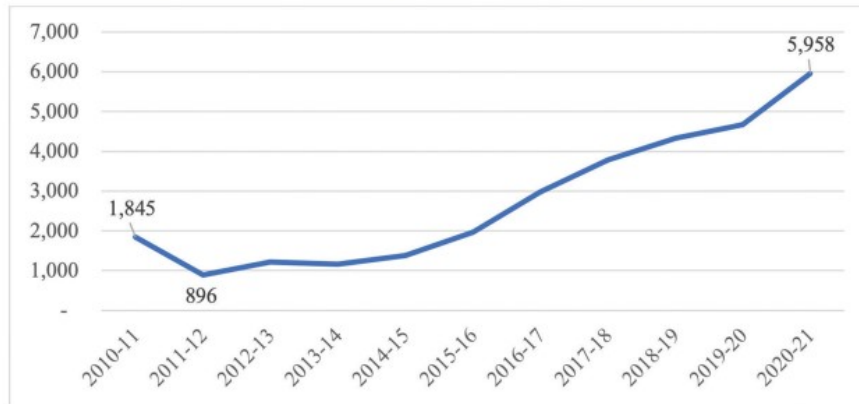


*Data source: PDE Act 82 report*

Conversely, the number of positions filled by those with emergency permits increased from 896 in 2010-11 to 5,958 in 2020-21. An emergency permit is ONLY issued by the Department of Education upon the request of an employing public-school entity (LEA) when a position has

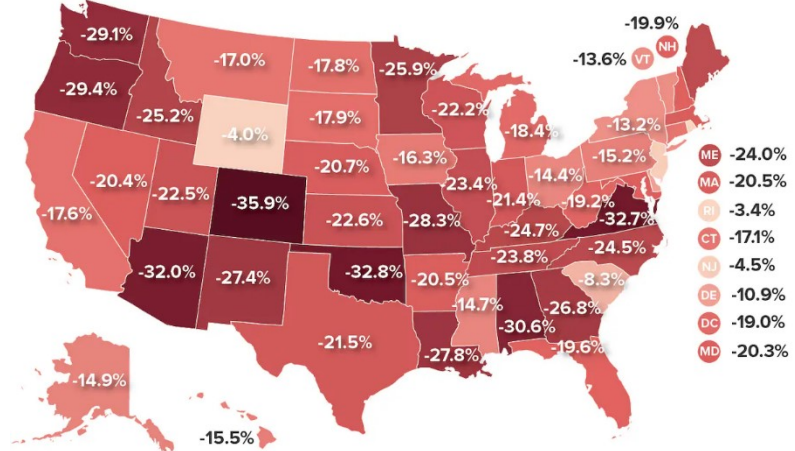
been advertised and no fully qualified and properly certificated applicant is available. **Put more simply, school districts advertised 5,958 teaching jobs in 2020-21 and were unable to hire a single qualified applicant.** It is challenging to express just how concerning that should be for those of us who deeply value and care about public education in Pennsylvania.

**Figure 2: Number of Teaching Positions Filled by Individuals on an Emergency Permit (2011-12 to 2020-21)**



Data source: Act 82 Report from PDE

There are a number of causes driving this shortage, some of which policymakers have greater control over than others. And while we can debate whether low salaries are the *primary* factor, we cannot ignore hundreds of years of economic evidence that proves that raising salaries can and will certainly help address it. As the graphic to the right shows, courtesy of the Washington Post, teachers in Pennsylvania earn, on



average, 15 percent less than other college graduates—a factor commonly referred to as the “teacher pay penalty.” They do not have flexibility in their work schedule or the ability to work from home. And, they have seen their profession become demonized and part of a broader culture war. If we want to retain the teachers we have and reach the next generation of educators—who are currently sitting in high school classrooms—we need to make the profession as economically viable and attractive as possible.

### **Competition from Other States:**

For proof of this point, look no further than Pennsylvania's neighbors, who have clearly learned this lesson already.

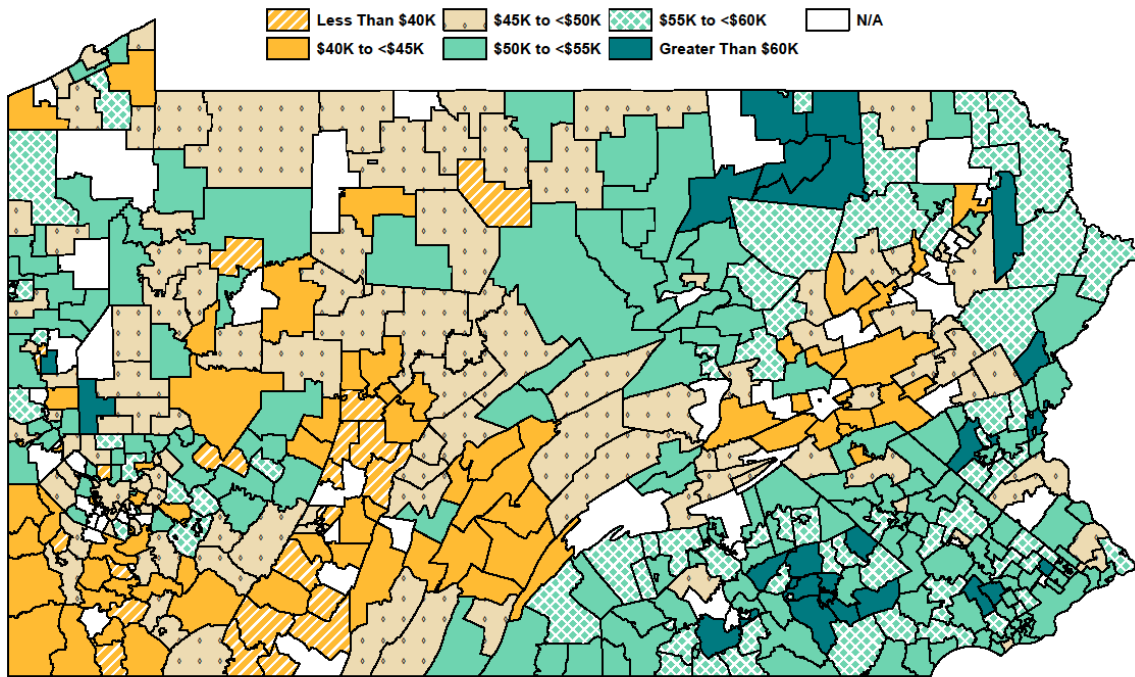
Maryland has implemented a \$60,000 minimum salary that will go into effect in 2026. Delaware is poised to advance a \$60,000 minimum salary. In New Jersey, over 100 school districts have a starting salary above \$60,000 and only 10 have a starting salaries between \$40,000-\$50,000. Even West Virginia advanced Senate Bill 204 which will dedicate \$24 million to raise salaries of teachers with less than 8 years of experience. Why, if young educators could earn \$60,000 in Maryland or \$50,000 in West Virginia would they stay in Pennsylvania and earn significantly less?

Losing teachers to other states will impact our ability to educate the next generation of Pennsylvania's students, and will accelerate Pennsylvania's brain drain. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, our commonwealth had the 4<sup>th</sup> largest population decline in the nation, led by young adults seeking careers elsewhere. This population loss will affect our economy, tax base and fiscal stability, in addition to its impact on our schools.

### **Raising Educator Salaries:**

To combat the very real challenge of the staffing shortage, PSEA has proposed raising our minimum teacher salary from \$18,500 to \$60,000 and raising our minimum Education Support Salary to \$20 per hour. As the following graphic shows, only 12 percent of starting teacher salaries are greater than \$55,000, while 25 percent of starting salaries are less than \$45,000.

**Pennsylvania Educator Starting Salaries in Effect for the 2023-24 School Year**



Source: PSEA Contract Data (October 2023-24)

Date: 10/20/2023

"N/A" (Not Available) includes Districts without a contractual minimum salary that has been confirmed by PSEA Research or the PaFT because the District may not be organized, may not have a contractual minimum salary, may not have provided written or publicized documentation, or may still be negotiating a contract for this year.

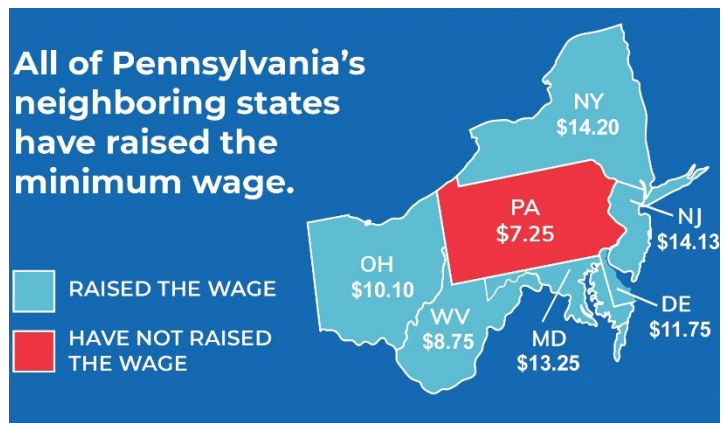


Our proposal would immediately raise the starting teacher salary to \$50,000 per year and increase that figure by \$2,500 for the next 4 years to reach a \$60,000 starting salary by 2027-28.

Each year, the state will pay to increase educators’ salaries up to the minimum salary. That money rolls into the “base” to ensure that schools receive the funding every year, even past 2027-28. Over 5 years we estimate the cost for this proposal at \$178 million for salaries, pension and social security—starting with a \$27M investment to raise all salaries to \$50,000 right away.

**It is imperative to note that this funding would come from the state and not adversely impact school districts in any way.**

Additionally, our proposal calls for raising the minimum salary for nonprofessional school employees to \$20 per hour. While it is challenging to hire teachers in the current environment, schools are finding it nearly impossible to hire support staff at such low wages.





## **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, the educator shortage is real and devastating in Pennsylvania. We are producing fewer teachers and support professionals and competing with other states to keep them in Pennsylvania. One of the best ways we can address this challenge is by showing them the respect they deserve and making their pay more competitive.

This move will require a modest yearly investment and will help every district in the state.

PSEA has other solutions to the educator shortage that we will be more than happy to share at the appropriate time. It is our sincere hope that we can continue working with legislators to engage in a multifaceted effort to focus specifically on the cost of college, the need to diversify the education profession and pathways for paraprofessionals to become teachers.

Finally, we must take a moment to commend the work of your committees and of House Democrats in general. While others have chosen to focus on banning books, dragging our schools into a highly politicized culture war, or trying to implement school voucher schemes that are doomed to fail our students, you have focused on the real work of making public education stronger. Thank you.

Once again, thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.