

Union executives want to use strikes to close schools, but aren't teachers receiving "fair" pay and benefits already?

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August 2018

Key Findings

1. Teachers in Washington state are paid on average \$65 an hour, including benefits.
2. The workers who pay their salaries are paid on average \$38 an hour, including benefits.
3. The current compensation system for teachers is not fair to teachers or students.
4. Washington Policy Center recommends discarding the rigid wage ladder, and doubling the pay of the best teachers.
5. Teacher pay is limited by the current school district system, which hires on average one non-teacher for every teacher.

Introduction – powerful WEA union to call strikes

Executives at the WEA teachers union have announced teacher strikes in the coming school year.

They plan to close schools to put pressure on taxpayers for programs that benefit the union.

Union executives are claiming the levels of pay and benefits that taxpayers provide to teachers in Washington state are unfair and should be higher.

To inform the public about how much teachers are paid now, this Policy Note presents an overview of current teacher pay and benefits from tables published by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.¹ Also available online are current salaries of every teacher in Washington state, by school district and by name.²

The WEA union profits from higher teacher pay

Union executives profit when teacher pay increases, since pay raises mean teachers and other school district employees can pay higher monthly union dues. Union executives say they would like to have any teacher or school employee who does not pay union dues fired, but the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that union threats like these violate the First Amendment rights of workers.³

Union executives try to hide how much teachers are paid now

In order to assess accurately whether teachers should receive higher pay, it is important for the public to know how much teachers are paid now, and how this compares to the pay and benefits of a typical working family in Washington state.

1 "Table 19: Certificated Teacher – Duty Roots 31, 32, 33, 34, School District Personnel Summary Profiles – 2017-18 – Preliminary," School Apportionment and Financial Services, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, at <http://www.k12.wa.us/safs/PUB/PER/1718/tbl19.pdf>.

2 "Washington State School Personnel, School Year 2017-2018," School Apportionment and Financial Services, Excel Files, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, at <http://www.k12.wa.us/safs/db.asp>.

3 *Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Council 31 (AFSCME)*, United States Supreme Court, Slip Opinion No. 16–1466, June 27, 2018, at https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/17pdf/16-1466_2b3j.pdf.

Union executives and the news media usually omit reporting how much teachers receive in pay and benefits, making it difficult for the public to know whether union threats to strike and close schools to get more pay are actually “fair” or not.

Teachers are public employees and the amount of tax money paid in salary, health care and other benefits is public information. Washington’s Office of Financial Management and the Superintendent of Public Instruction provide these figures in regular reports.

Current teacher pay and benefits

Here is a summary of what teachers receive in pay and benefits in Washington, as reported by government officials.

- Public school teachers receive on average \$71,088 for a 10-month work year, or about \$49 an hour.
- In addition, teachers receive an average of \$25,700 a year in benefits, or a further \$17 an hour.
- In pay and benefits, a public school teacher makes on average \$66 an hour on an annual basis for working a 10-month work year.
- Teachers can make as much as \$128,000, or about \$88 an hour, for a 10-month work year, plus a further average of \$25,700 in benefits.⁴
- The average wage for a working family in Washington state is \$57,057 for a 12-month work year, or about \$27 an hour,⁵ plus average benefits of \$11 an hour.⁶

Government data show that public school teachers make, on average, more than most working families in the state, and receive over twice the level of health care, paid time off, and other benefits.

In addition, the higher level of compensation paid to public school teachers is earned over a 10-month school year, while most workers have to work a full 12-month year for the lower level of pay and benefits they receive.

Schools now receive record levels of funding

Washington’s public schools are receiving a record level of state funding, and currently receive more tax money, adjusted for inflation, than at any point in state history.

4 “K12 School Employee Salaries, Washington State,” Office of Financial Management, at <http://fiscal.wa.gov/DVK12Salaries>.

5 “Average Wages for Washington State, 2015,” Office of Financial Management, <https://www.ofm.wa.gov/washington-data-research/statewide-data/washington-trends/economic-trends/washington-and-us-average-wages/average-wages-county-map>.

6 “Employer Costs for Employee Compensation for the Regions – March 2018,” Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor, at https://www.bls.gov/regions/southwest/news-release/employercostsforemployeecompensation_regions.htm.



Liv Finne is the Director of the Center for Education at Washington Policy Center. She is the author of *An Option for Learning: An Assessment of Student Achievement in Charter Public Schools*, which in 2011 reignited the charter school debate in Washington state. She wrote “*Why parents will love charter schools*,” “*Why teachers will love charter schools*,” and many other publications during the 2012 public debate on Initiative 1240, the nation’s first charter school initiative. When charter schools came under attack from the state teachers union, she wrote “*Analysis: Why the state supreme court ruling against charter schools is wrong*.” She is also the author of Washington Policy Center’s widely-read education blog, and of Washington Policy Center’s Education Reform Plan: *Eight Practical Ways to Improve Public Schools*. Liv holds a law degree from Boston University School of Law and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Wellesley College. She retired from civil litigation practice to raise two children and work as business partner for a small business she owns with her husband.

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Published by

Washington Policy Center

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206-937-9691

Since 2009, the state budget for schools has increased from \$12.94 billion to \$22.69 billion, a permanent increase of \$9.75 billion, or a 75% increase. School districts have used these additional funds to provide teachers and other employees significant pay and benefit increases.

As a result of this huge funding increase, teachers and other public school employees now receive much more money in pay and benefits than the average working family, along with far greater job security.

Conclusion

Public financial data and the spike in school spending since 2009 indicate that for WEA union executives more money is never enough. Receiving higher pay, more benefits, a shorter work year and greater job security would certainly meet the definition of “fair” for most reasonable people. In fact, teachers on average are paid more today than most of the taxpaying working families who pay their salaries.

Still, threats of marches and strikes indicate that WEA union executives are determined to use conflict and political action, including closing schools to children, to gain access to more public money from working people and other taxpayers.

Note

District-specific information on the issues raised in this Policy Note are available at WashingtonPolicy.org for the following school districts: Evergreen (Clark), Kennewick, Kent, Mukilteo, Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma, and Washougal.