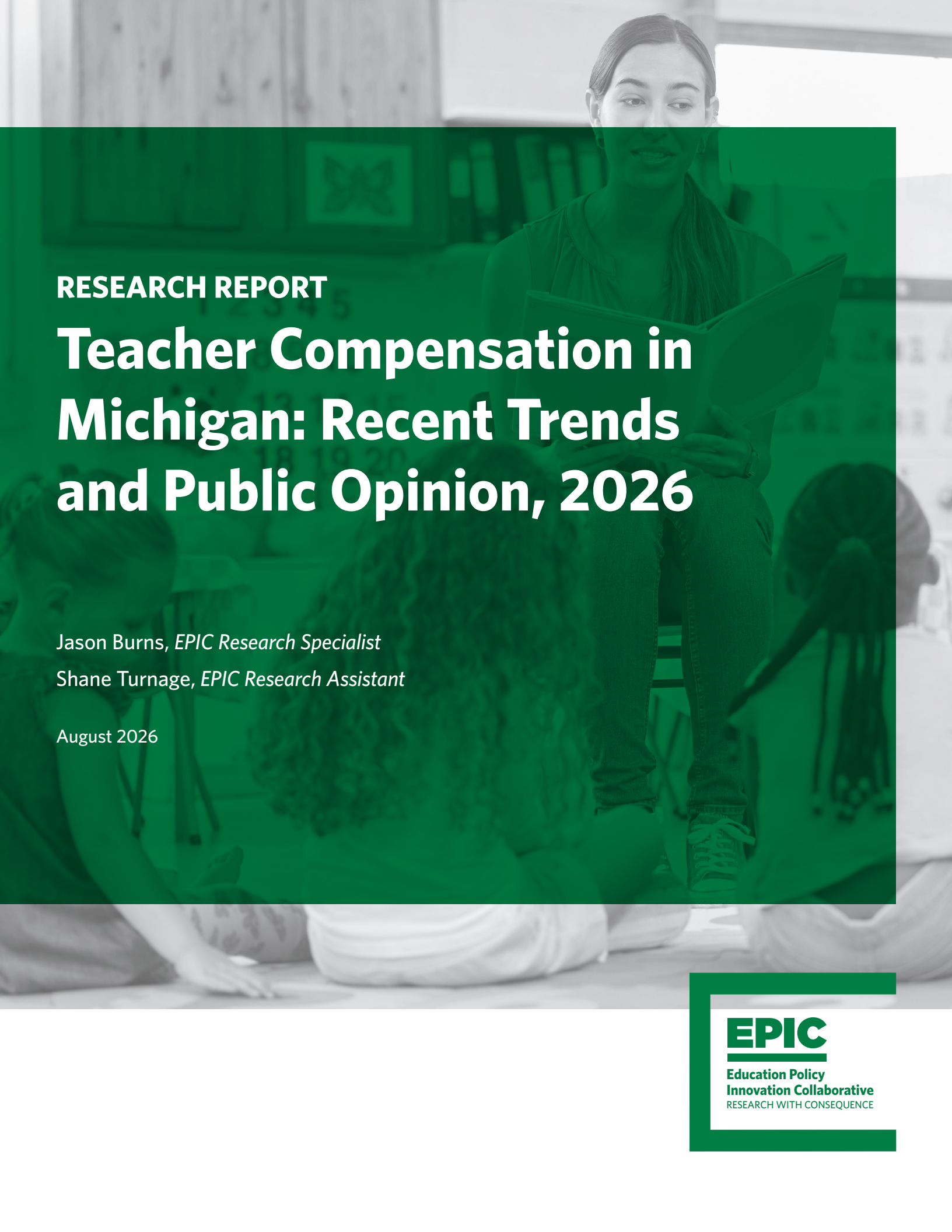




RESEARCH REPORT

Teacher Compensation in Michigan: Recent Trends and Public Opinion, 2026

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August 2026

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Teacher Compensation in Michigan: Recent Trends and Public Opinion, 2026

Jason Burns and Shane Turnage

Teacher compensation sits at the center of some of Michigan's most pressing education policy challenges. Teachers are among the most important school-level determinants of student outcomes, and higher pay has the potential to draw talented individuals into teaching and keep them in the profession, while low pay risks driving them to better-compensated fields. Given the recruitment and retention challenges Michigan has faced in recent years, understanding the state of teacher compensation has real consequences for students across the state.

This is EPIC's third annual report on teacher compensation in Michigan. Our prior reports documented that teacher pay in Michigan has declined relative to other professions, relative to other states, and relative to Michigan's own past, though there is broad and consistent public support for increasing teacher pay. To extend that work, this report draws on updated and expanded data sources covering teacher compensation trends, cross-state comparisons, and recent analyses of how teachers are paid compared to other college-educated professionals. We find:

- The gap between what teachers in Michigan earn relative to what similarly educated professionals earn has grown.
- Michigan's teacher compensation standing relative to other states continues to fall.
- Michigan has experienced the largest decline in teacher compensation of any state over the past 30 years.
- There is strong public support for increasing teacher salaries, though Michiganders' views about how to fund salary increases vary considerably depending on the policy mechanism.

The report proceeds in five sections. We begin by examining evidence on why teachers matter for student outcomes and why compensation is central to building and maintaining a high-quality

teacher workforce. We then assess how teacher compensation in Michigan compares to other professions, to compensation levels at earlier points in the state’s history, and to pay in other states. We conclude by analyzing a new round of public opinion data on teacher salaries and the policy implications of alignment between that public sentiment and research.

TEACHER COMPENSATION AS A POLICY ISSUE

Teacher compensation is a key policy issue in Michigan because it affects who enters teaching, who remains in the classroom, and the quality and stability of the teacher workforce. This section reviews evidence linking teachers to student outcomes, compensation to teacher recruitment and retention, and Michigan school finance policy to districts’ ability to raise teacher pay.

Large bodies of research show that 1) higher student achievement leads to stronger economic growth (Aghion et al., 2009; Hanushek et al., 2017; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2007, 2008, 2020a, 2020b), and 2) that teachers are the strongest school-related predictor of student achievement and other important outcomes (Aaronson et al., 2007; Chetty et al., 2011, 2014; Coleman, 1966; Hanushek et al., 2005; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010; Jackson et al., 2014; Kane & Staiger, 2008; Rivkin et al., 2005; Rockoff, 2004). When students have a more effective teacher, they demonstrate higher achievement and are more likely to attend and complete college, are less likely to become a teenage parent, and enjoy higher earnings in adulthood. Examining the impact of

teachers on student outcomes, Chetty et al. (2014) estimate that students in a classroom led by a teacher of average effectiveness, rather than a lower-performing teacher, will collectively earn an additional \$250,000 in lifetime income.¹

Given the importance of teachers for student outcomes, policymakers have a clear interest in strengthening students’ access to effective teachers. Compensation is one important lever because it shapes schools’ ability to attract and retain effective teachers (Goldhaber, 2010; Hanushek, 2020; Jackson et al., 2014). A recent national survey of high school students found that over 40% expressed some interest in a teaching career, and those students most frequently cited salaries and benefits as the greatest barrier to pursuing one (Anglum et al., 2025). These concerns are also reflected in broader public perceptions of teaching. In 2011, two-thirds of American

adults said they would want a child of theirs to become a teacher (Phi Delta Kappan, 2024); by 2024 that share had fallen to just 40%. Among those who would not want their child to enter teaching, inadequate pay and benefits were the most frequently cited reason (Phi Delta Kappan, 2024).

The economic opportunity provided by teaching, relative to other professions, can shape who enters the profession and who remains in the classroom. Teaching competes with other careers for college-educated workers, and research finds that when labor market opportunities outside of education weaken, teaching becomes more appealing and attracts stronger candidates into the profession (Leigh, 2012; Nagler et al., 2020). Conversely, when teaching provides less economic opportunity than other professions, effective teachers may be more likely to leave the classroom, which can weaken the overall quality of the teacher workforce (Han, 2021; Nagler et

Teacher compensation affects who enters teaching, who remains in the classroom, and the quality and stability of the teacher workforce.

al., 2020; Regmi, 2022). A range of studies reinforce the relationship between higher pay and teacher turnover, especially among early-career teachers (Grissom & Strunk, 2012; Hendricks, 2014; Nguyen et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2025). Evidence from Michigan underscores this link: among those who held a valid teaching certificate, but were not currently teaching, low pay was the most common reason they left the classroom and a higher salary was the most frequently cited factor that would entice them back to the classroom (Lindsay et al., 2021).

Studies also find that higher teacher pay improves student achievement through multiple channels (Britton & Propper, 2016; Grissom & Strunk, 2012; Hendricks, 2014). One is that higher salaries attract and retain effective teachers, as noted above, which creates a more stable and academically rich environment for students. Another channel relates to the interaction between teacher pay and the time required to do the job well. Teachers' responsibilities extend beyond providing instruction to include evaluating student work, planning lessons, documenting student progress, and communicating with families — tasks that often require work outside contractual hours. Nearly half of teachers report working at least 50 hours per week, compared with 17% of all working adults (Steiner et al., 2023). Han (2021) finds that teachers with lower wages are more likely to hold a second job, suggesting that low pay can lead teachers to seek additional income while managing their regular professional responsibilities. Higher salaries may reduce the need for outside employment, giving teachers more time and capacity to meet the full demands of the job.

In Michigan, teacher compensation is strongly tied to state policy. Although districts negotiate teacher salaries locally, their ability to raise pay depends heavily on the revenues available to them. Those revenues are largely set by state policy, and districts have limited ability to raise additional funds that could be directed toward teacher compensation on their own. State-level decisions about the level of funding districts receive, and requirements governing in how districts use those funds, therefore shape how much districts can direct toward salaries. As a result, meaningful changes in teacher compensation are difficult to achieve at scale without state policy choices that affect the resources available to local districts.

Taken together, this evidence shows why teacher compensation deserves sustained attention from Michigan policymakers. Student outcomes have long-term consequences for individuals and the broader economy; teachers are central to those outcomes; and compensation shapes the recruitment, retention, and stability of the teacher workforce. To better understand teacher compensation in Michigan, the following sections examine this issue in Michigan from three perspectives: how teacher pay compares with pay in other professions, how current compensation compares with earlier points in Michigan's history, and how Michigan compares with other states. We then analyze data from a new round of public opinion polling on teacher salaries to assess where the public stands on this issue and whether policymakers have support for taking action on teacher pay.

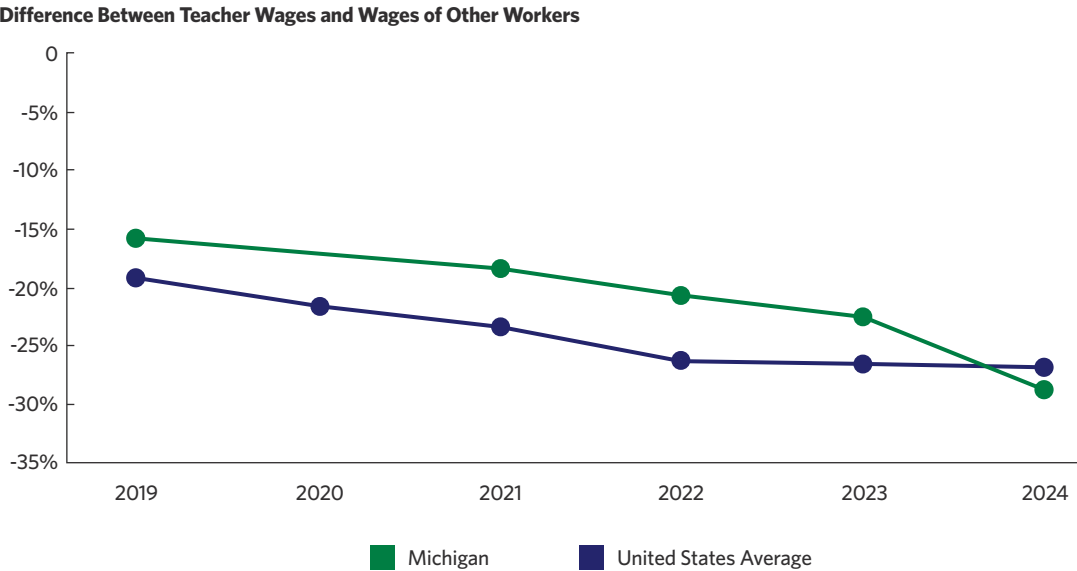
TEACHER COMPENSATION RELATIVE TO OTHER PROFESSIONS

Here we review analyses that compare the earnings of teachers to other professions. The research on this topic consistently shows that teachers earn considerably less than other college-educated professionals.

The Federal Reserve Bank of New York regularly analyzes the earnings of college graduates from 73 different majors early in their careers and at the midpoint of their careers.² Early career workers with degrees in elementary education and secondary education, the most common degrees held by K-12 teachers, earn approximately \$45,000, 22% less than the earnings of college graduates overall (Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2026). Additionally, the difference in earnings between recent graduates of education majors and college graduates overall has grown by roughly 10% over the past two years.³ Educators’ pay falls further behind as careers advance in their career. While college graduates overall see their earnings rise from \$58,000 in the early stages of their career to \$87,000 by mid-career, elementary education majors’ mid-career earnings rise to \$55,000 while secondary education majors see wages rise to \$62,000. Moreover, the five college majors with the lowest mid-career earnings are all in the education field.⁴

The Economic Policy Institute compares earnings for teachers relative to earnings of other college-educated workers with similar levels of education and experience for the U.S. overall and for each state. For several decades, teachers have experienced a wage penalty, meaning that their earnings are below those of other workers with similar education and experience (Allegretto, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025; Allegretto & Mishel, 2020).⁵ Figure 1 below illustrates the teacher wage penalty in Michigan and the United States from 2019 through 2024, the most recent year for which data are available. The line representing the country overall shows that the national teacher wage penalty was just over 19% in 2019 and grew rapidly to 26.4% by 2022 before increasing only modestly over the two most recent years.⁶ As of 2024, the typical American teacher earned 26.9% less than other workers with similar education and experience.

FIGURE 1. Teacher Wage Penalty Over Time, Michigan and U.S. Average



Source: Allegretto & Mishel, 2020; Allegretto, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025. Note: state-level teacher wage penalty figures are not available for 2020.

While teachers in Michigan also faced a wage penalty that grew over time, until recently it was smaller than the national figure. As shown in Figure 1, in 2019 Michigan’s teacher wage penalty was 15.9% and grew more slowly than the national average through 2022. FStarting in 2022, however,

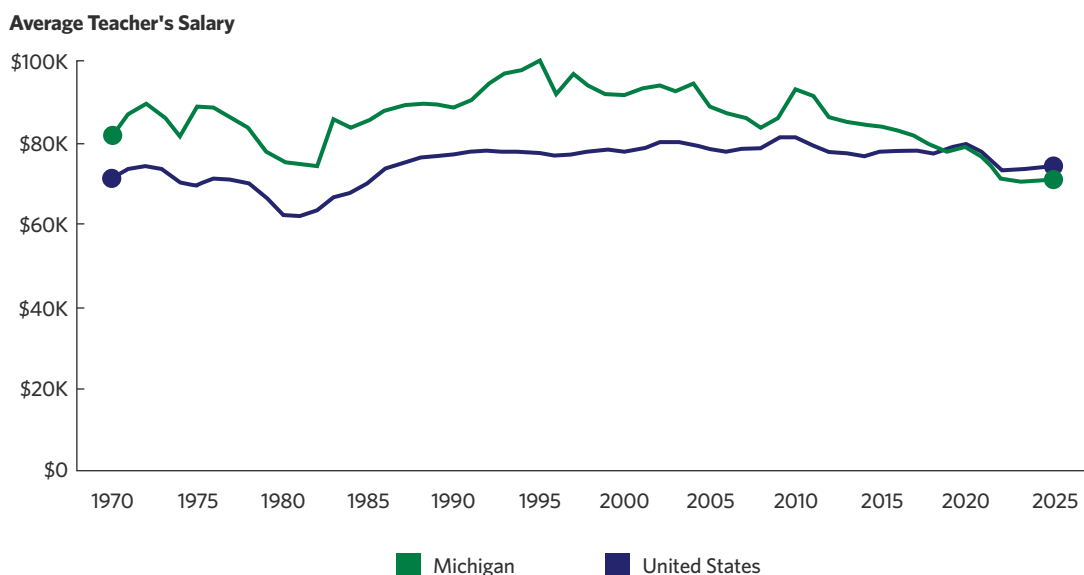
these patterns changed with Michigan's teacher wage penalty growing much faster than the national average. While the teacher wage penalty for the U.S. overall grew by just 0.5 percentage points between 2022 and 2024, Michigan's increased by more than eight percentage points, passing the national average in the most recent year. As of 2024, the average Michigan teacher earned 28.8% less than other college-educated workers, the 12th highest teacher wage penalty among all states.

Comparing the earnings of teachers with other professionals shows that 1) teachers are paid less than other college-educated workers, 2) teacher salaries relative to other workers are lower now than in the past, and 3) Michigan's teacher wage penalty has grown markedly in recent years. This has important implications for Michigan's ability to recruit and retain high-quality teachers as stronger economic opportunities outside of education are likely to discourage young people from pursuing a career in education and entice higher-ability teachers out of the classroom.

TEACHER COMPENSATION IN MICHIGAN: HISTORICAL TRENDS

To understand how average teacher compensation in Michigan has changed over time, we use average and starting teacher salary data for each state collected annually by the National Education Association from 1970 through 2025. To facilitate comparisons of compensation over time, we adjust salaries for inflation to constant 2025 dollars using the Consumer Price Index (CPI).⁷ For years prior to 2025, inflation-adjusted salaries can be interpreted as the 2025 equivalent of that average salary. Figure 2 shows the average teacher's salary in Michigan and for the United States overall, adjusted for inflation. Nominal salaries, the unadjusted salary figures from each year, are presented in Appendix A.

FIGURE 2. Average Teacher Salaries in Michigan and the U.S., 1970-2025, Adjusted for Inflation



Source: National Education Association Rankings and Estimates from 1971-2026. When available, we use the revised estimates provided in these reports.

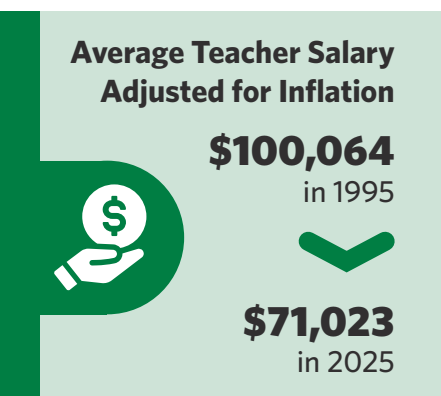
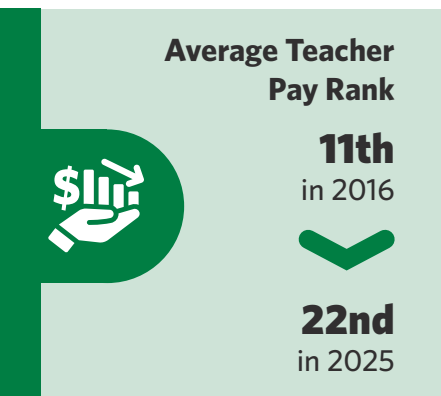
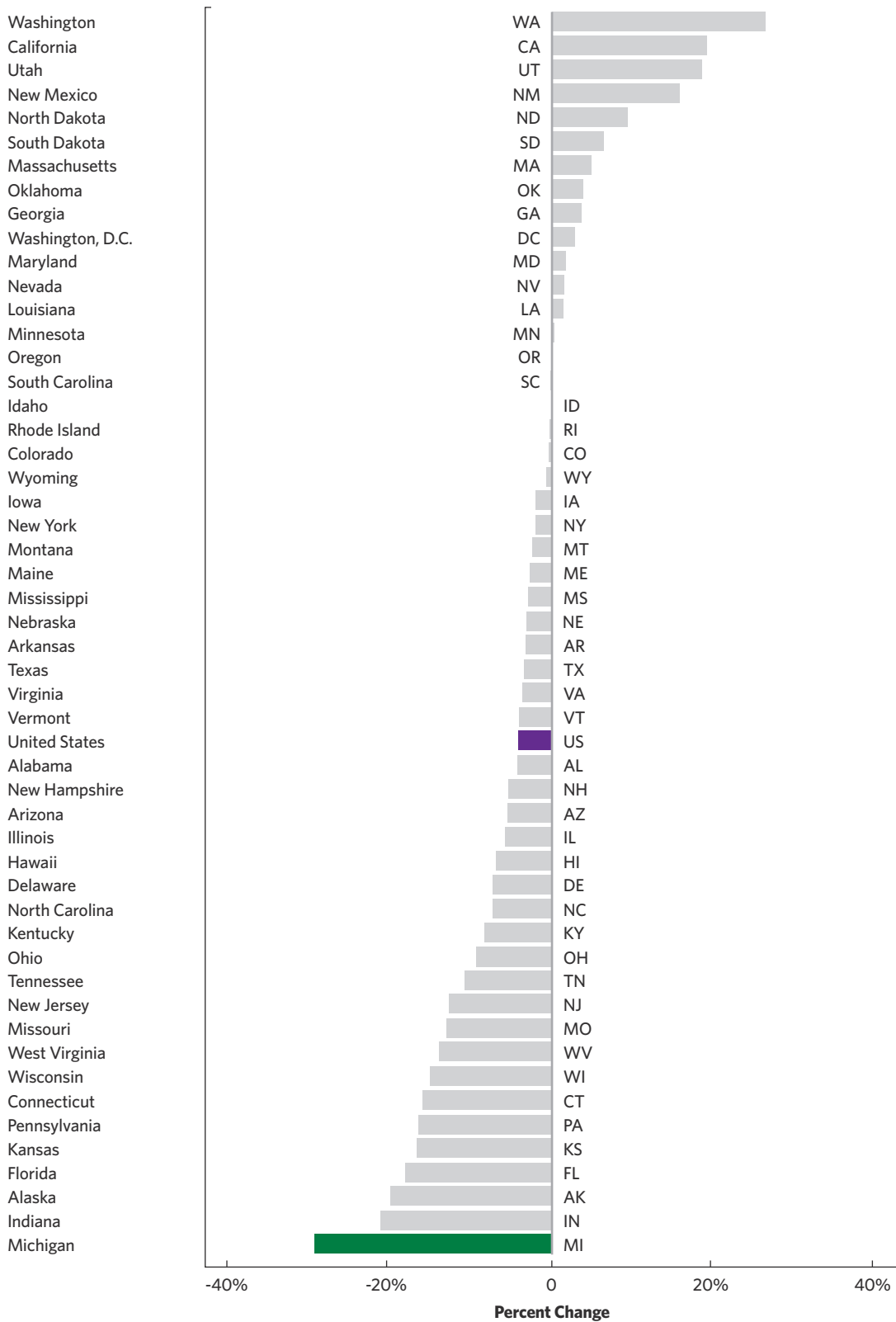


Figure 2 shows that for a long period Michigan teachers earned substantially more than the national average but their salaries have declined significantly over time. Adjusted for inflation, Michigan's average teacher salary was at least \$10,000 above the national average from 1970 through 2005. Over that period, the long-run average teacher salary in Michigan was equivalent to just under \$90,000 in 2025 dollars. However, after adjusting for inflation, teacher salaries in Michigan have fallen sharply over the past three decades. In real terms, teacher salaries peaked in 1995 when the average Michigan teacher earned the equivalent of \$100,064 in 2025 dollars. Following that high point, teacher salaries declined steadily but unevenly for just over a decade, falling to \$83,904 in 2008 before rising more than 10% over the following two years. Since 2011, the purchasing power of the average Michigan teacher's salary has seen an almost uninterrupted decline. Since 2019 teachers in Michigan have earned less than the national average and, as of 2025, the average Michigan teacher's salary, at \$71,023, was almost \$3,500 less than the typical American teacher's salary. Although teacher salaries grew at slightly faster than the rate of inflation from 2023 to 2025, rising \$216 in real terms, the four most recent years have had the lowest average teacher salaries in the 55 years we examine.

The decline of Michigan's average teacher salary stands out relative to the rest of the country. To put this into perspective, Figure 3 shows how the inflation-adjusted average teacher salary for each state, as well as the national average, changed from 1995 to 2025. Over this period, the average real salary for teachers across the country declined by 4.2%. However, 16 states (including Washington, D.C.) saw their average inflation-adjusted teacher's salary increase over this period. In some states, average teacher salaries have risen by more than 15% since 1995, including Washington state, California, Utah, and New Mexico, where salaries increased by 26.5%, 19.3%, 18.6%, and 15.8%, respectively. Of the 35 states where average teacher salaries declined from 1995-2025, eight saw a decline of at least 15%, including Wisconsin, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Kansas, Florida, Alaska, Indiana, and Michigan. Michigan, which saw the average teacher salary decline by 29%, stands out as having the largest decline of any state and by a wide margin.⁸ In Indiana, the state with the next-largest decline, the average teacher's salary fell by 20.7%.

FIGURE 3. Change in Inflation-Adjusted Teacher Salaries by State, 1995-2025

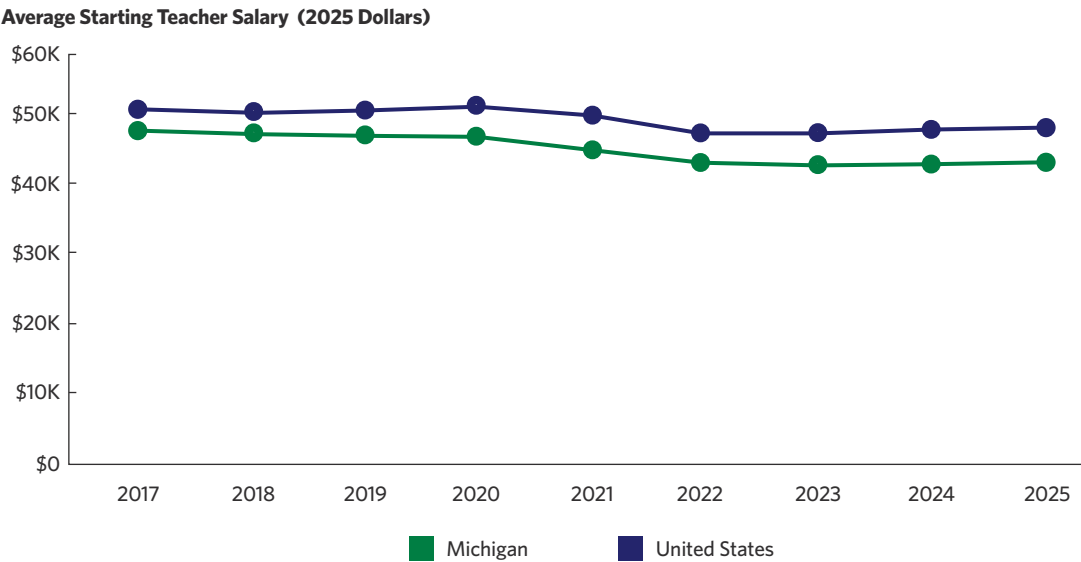


Note: The CPI does not account for differences in inflation rates from state to state.

Source: Author calculations using National Education Association Rankings and Estimates, 1996-2026. Average salaries adjusted to constant 2025 dollars based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), prepared by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor.

Salaries for teachers at the beginning of their careers have followed a similar pattern. Figure 4 shows the average starting salary in Michigan and for the United States overall from 2017 to 2025, the period for which these data are available, also adjusted for inflation using the CPI (see Appendix A for trends in nominal starting teacher salaries).

FIGURE 4. Starting Teacher Salaries in Michigan and the U.S., 2017-2025, Adjusted for Inflation



Source: National Education Association Teacher Salary Benchmarks, 2018-2026.

In 2017, a starting Michigan teacher earned, on average, the equivalent of \$47,953 in 2025 dollars, which was more than \$3,000 below the national average. Adjusted for inflation, starting salaries in Michigan declined in each of the next six years, falling by more than \$5,000 to \$42,585 in 2023. Since then, average starting salaries have increased slightly relative to inflation, rising to \$43,093 in 2025. However, many other states have increased their starting teacher salaries in recent years, leading Michigan to fall further behind the national average. As of 2025, the typical new Michigan teacher’s starting salary was almost \$5,000 less than the national average starting salary.

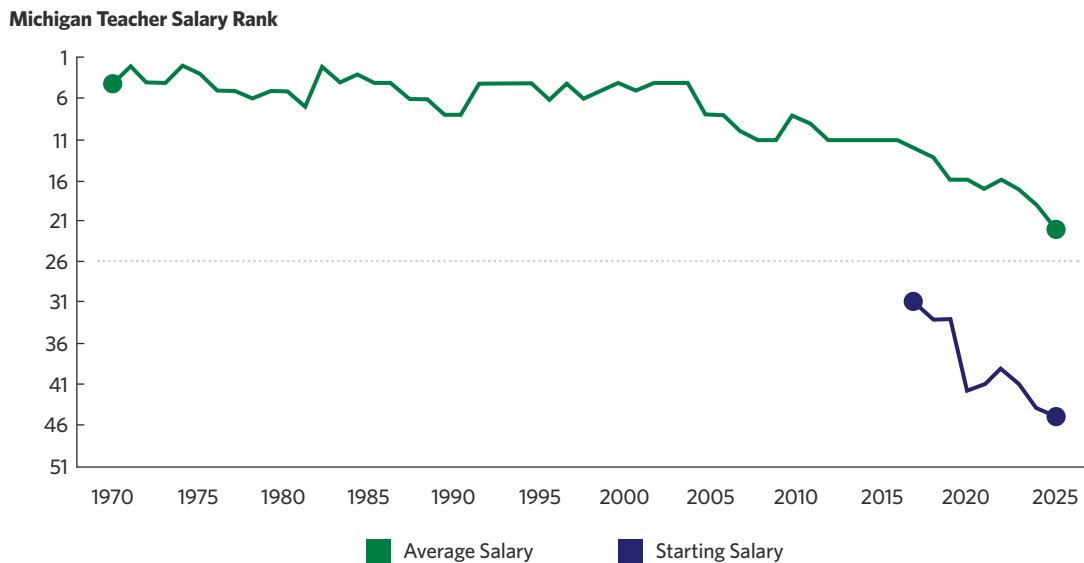
While Michigan’s starting and average teacher salaries have increased slightly in the two most recent years, since 2022 teacher pay in Michigan has been at historically low levels. Average teacher salaries in Michigan have declined more than in any other state, and Michigan’s teachers now earn significantly less than the national average. In the next section, we analyze how Michigan’s teacher pay rankings among the states have changed alongside this decline.

MICHIGAN’S TEACHER SALARY RANKINGS

Trends in average teacher salaries, analyzed in the previous section, show that the average Michigan teacher’s salary was once well above the national average but declined considerably, falling below the national average in recent years. To better understand how teacher pay in

Michigan compares with other states, in this section we analyze data on teacher salaries from the National Education Association by ranking each state's average starting teacher's salary and overall average teacher's salary. We examine rankings for average overall salaries from 1970-2025 and starting salary rankings from 2017-2025, as starting salaries have only been collected more recently. Figure 5 shows the rankings of Michigan's average and starting teacher salary over time.

FIGURE 5. Michigan's Starting and Average Teacher Salary Rankings, 1970-2025



Note: Salary data for Washington, D.C. were not collected until 1979, meaning that from 1970-1978 rankings are out of a possible 50, and since 1979 have been out of a possible 51.

Source: Author calculations using National Education Association Rankings and Estimates and National Education Association Teacher Salary Benchmarks, 1971-2026.

Looking first at average salaries overall in Figure 5, Michigan was once among the top-paying states for teachers. From 1970 through 2007, Michigan's average teacher salary ranked among the top 10 states. And for half of that period, Michigan's average teacher salary was in the top 5. In 2008, Michigan fell out of the top-10 highest-paying states for teachers, ranking 11th in that year as well as in 2009. Higher salaries in 2010 and 2011 (see Figure 2 and Appendix Figure A2) put Michigan back into the top ten briefly before falling again to 11th from 2012 to 2016. Since 2017, the state's ranking has fallen in tandem with declines in real teacher salaries (see Figure 2). By 2020, Michigan's average teacher salary ranked 16th before falling further to 22nd as of 2025. This shows that teacher salaries in Michigan have not only failed to keep pace with inflation (see Figure 2) but have been outpaced by teacher salaries in other states that have seen larger pay increases for teachers.

Starting teacher salaries in Michigan have fallen even further behind those in other states than average salaries have. As shown in Figure 5, in 2017 Michigan's average starting teacher salary ranked 31st. By 2020, Michigan's ranking has fallen to 41st on this measure before rebounding to 39th in 2022. As other states have placed more emphasis on teacher salaries coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic (Burns & Mavrogordato, 2024, 2025), especially salaries for new teachers, the rank of Michigan's starting teacher salary ranking plummeted to 45th in 2025, ahead of only Ohio, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Missouri, Nebraska, and Montana.

Adjusting Teacher Salaries for Cost of Living

Direct comparisons of salaries between states may not reflect differences in teachers’ standard of living if the cost of living differs significantly across states. And, as one might expect, states with higher teacher salaries like California, New York, and Massachusetts are also known for having a higher cost of living, while states with lower teacher salaries like Mississippi, Louisiana, and Missouri are generally known for having a lower cost of living. Accounting for this could mean that teacher salaries in Michigan compare more favorably with those in other states. To analyze whether this is the case, we adjust each state’s 2025 starting and average teacher salaries for cost of living using two indices: Regional Price Parities (RPPs) from the Bureau of Economic Analysis and the Comparable Wage Index for Teachers (CWIFT) from the National Center for Education Statistics. A key difference between these is that RPPs are based on the cost of goods and services across states, while the CWIFT takes into account additional factors such as the earnings of college-educated workers and the general desirability of living in a given location (see Appendix B for additional detail on these adjustments).

Table 1 shows Michigan’s 2025 national rankings for starting and average teacher salaries based on nominal salaries and after adjusting all states’ nominal salaries using CWIFT and RPPs. Overall, adjusting starting and average teacher salaries for cost of living differences between states has little impact on Michigan’s rankings. The first row of Table 1 shows that, for starting salaries, Michigan’s rank increases from 45th to 40th after adjusting using the CWIFT, passing Wisconsin, Maine, Kansas, West Virginia, and Mississippi. Adjusting Michigan’s starting teacher salary using RPPs shows that, on net, Michigan falls one spot in the ranking, from 45th to 46th.⁹ Turning to average salaries in the bottom row of Table 1, Michigan’s ranking falls by a net of one place when salaries are adjusted using CWIFT and moves up a net of one place when salaries are adjusted using RPPs.¹⁰

TABLE 1. Starting and Average Teacher Salaries in Michigan, Adjusted for Cost of Living			
	Nominal	Adjusted using CWIFT	Adjusted using RPPs
Starting Teacher Salary	45	40	46
Average Teacher Salary	22	23	21

Source: Author calculations using Michigan’s 2025 starting and average teacher salary data. See Appendix B for additional detail on cost of living adjustments using the Comparable Wage Index for Teachers (CWIFT) and Regional Price Parities (RPPs).

Michigan was once among the top-paying states for teachers. Since the early 2000s, however, teacher salaries in many other states have caught up to and passed Michigan. Michigan now ranks near the middle of the pack on average teacher salaries and among the lowest-ranked states for starting teacher salaries. Given that teacher salaries across the country have been rising faster than those in Michigan (see Figure 2), it is likely that Michigan’s ranking will continue to slide. Lower starting salaries mean it is now likely harder to recruit talented individuals into teaching generally, and that Michigan may be losing teaching talent to higher-paying states. Because state policy plays a central role in how Michigan schools are funded, efforts to change teacher compensation at scale would likely involve decisions about state revenues and spending priorities. Those decisions involve tradeoffs. The next section therefore examines public opinion on teacher salaries and on several policy mechanisms that could be used to increase compensation.

PUBLIC OPINION ON TEACHER COMPENSATION IN MICHIGAN, 2026

To gauge public opinion in Michigan on teacher compensation, we again included questions on the State of the State Survey (SOSS) from November 2025 (SOSS 92). This survey wave included questions used in prior years that asked respondents whether starting and average teacher salaries in Michigan should increase, decrease, or stay about the same, as well as what they believed those salaries should be. It also included questions that first appeared in the March 2025 (SOSS 91) survey wave that examined public support for a range of policies targeting teacher compensation and policy mechanisms for funding salary raises. These items ask 1) the extent to which respondents support various policies that could shape teacher compensation, 2) the degree to which respondents agree with different proposals to fund salary increases for teachers, and 3) whether the state should increase, decrease, or maintain funding in several budget areas. This latest survey also included a new question that asked respondents about their support for tax increases to raise teacher pay. The full text of all survey items is included in Appendix C.

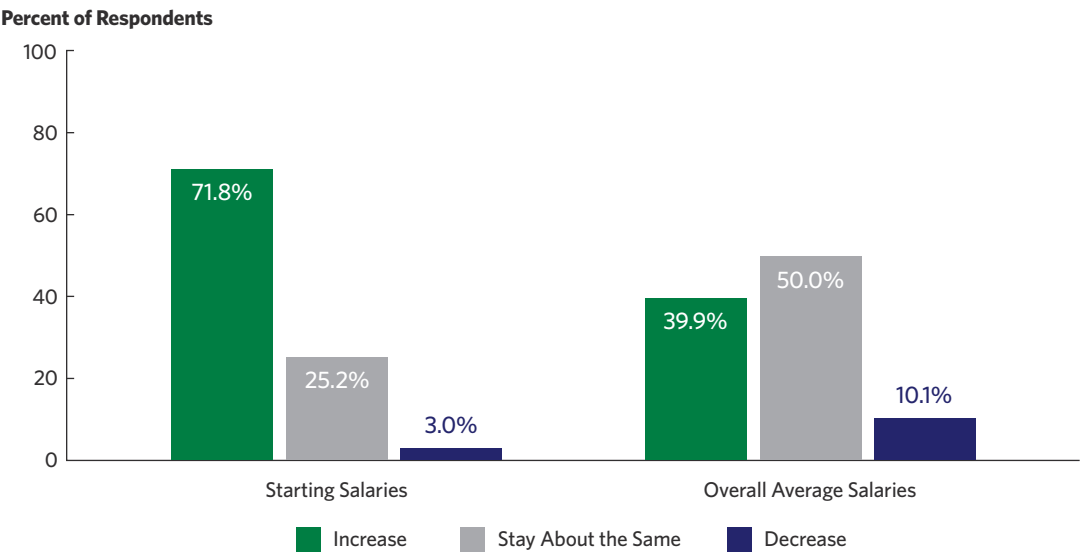
The SOSS is administered by the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research (IPPSR) at Michigan State University (MSU). Survey data are collected from a representative sample of 1,000 Michigan adults. Our analyses employ weighting, a statistical technique used to make estimates representative of Michigan's adult population. Characteristics of the most recent sample are included in Appendix D.

To gauge public opinion on current compensation levels, we use two sets of survey items. The first presents respondents with the average starting salary and the average overall salary for Michigan teachers and asks whether each should increase, decrease, or stay about the same. The second asks respondents what they believe each of those salaries should be. We analyze responses to these two items together. For the directional item, we compare the share preferring an increase with the share preferring a decrease. Where one exceeds the other, we interpret it as a net public preference in that direction, since more respondents would be satisfied by a move that way than would be dissatisfied. Roughly equal shares indicate satisfaction with current levels.. We then compare respondents' preferred salaries with actual 2024-25 salaries. A preferred salary above the current level corroborates a net preference for increases, while a preferred salary near the current level would indicate satisfaction even if many respondents nominally favored an increase.

Figure 6 summarizes responses to the first set of items. This year, as in years past (Burns & Mavrogordato, 2024, 2025), we find broad public support for increasing teacher salaries, especially for new teachers. The left side of Figure 6 shows that nearly three-quarters, or 71.8%, of Michiganders support increasing the typical starting teacher's salary. At the same time, 25.2% believe starting teachers' salaries should stay about the same, and just 3.0% think they should decrease. The right side of Figure 6 shows that 39.9% of adult Michiganders support increasing the average teacher salary in the state, while 50.0% believe it should stay about the same, and just 10.1% believe it should decrease.

71.8% of Michiganders support increasing the typical starting teacher's salary.

FIGURE 6. Michiganders’ Views on Teacher Salaries



*Note: Respondents were provided with salaries retrieved from the National Education Association’s benchmark teacher salary report for 2023-2024: “Public school teachers in Michigan are paid an average **starting** salary of \$41,645” and “Public school teachers in Michigan overall are paid an **average** salary of \$71,188.” They were then asked two questions about whether they thought teacher starting and overall salaries should increase, decrease, or stay about the same. Questions were adapted from the Education Next Survey of Public Opinion.*

Next, we examine results from the second set of items that gauge the public’s preference for what starting and average teacher salaries should be. The six bars on the left of Figure 7 show the average starting teacher salary in Michigan from the 2019-2020 school year through the 2024-2025 school year, while the bar on the right displays the salary Michiganders believe new teachers should earn. The left side of Figure 7 shows that starting teacher salaries in the state have increased by \$5,538 since 2019-20, reaching \$43,093 in the 2024-25 school year. As noted earlier in this report, that increase has not kept pace with inflation. The bar on the right side of Figure 7 shows what the public believes the typical starting teacher’s salary should be. That amount, \$55,074, is \$11,981 more than what the typical starting teacher earned, on average, in the 2024-2025 school year. This means that raising starting salaries to the public’s preferred level would amount to a raise of more than 25% for teachers entering the profession.

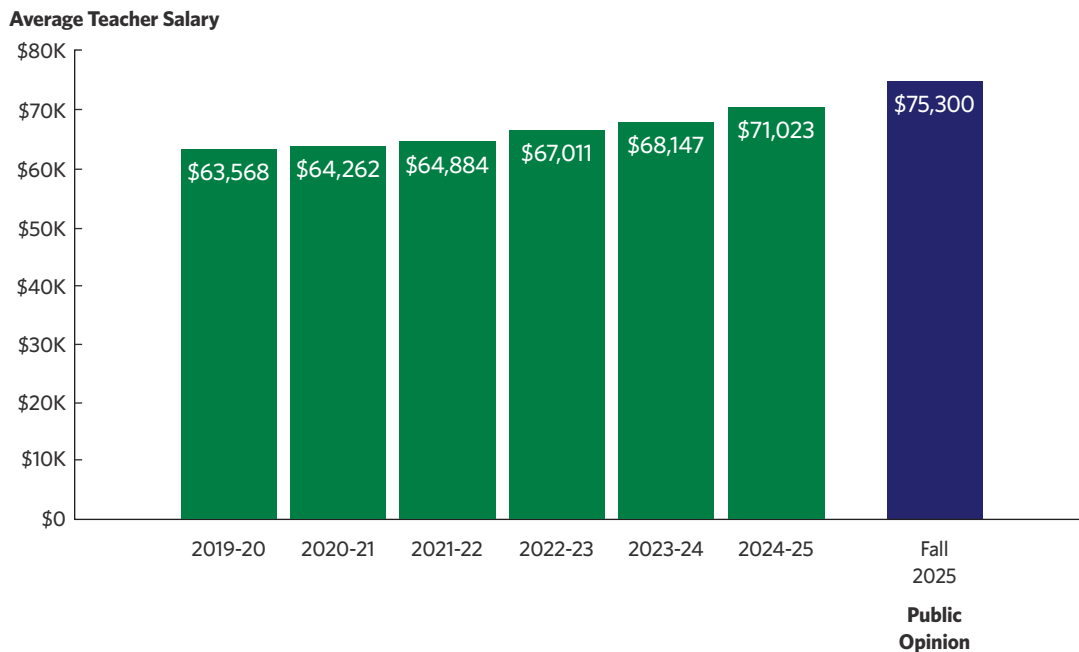
Turning to public preferences around average teacher salaries, Figure 8 presents the same information as Figure 7, with average teacher salaries from the 2019-2020 school year through the 2024-2025 school year on the left and public opinion on what the average Michigan teacher’s salary should be on the right. The left side of Figure 8 shows that the average teacher’s salary increased by \$7,455 over the six most recent years for which data are available. As shown in Figure 2 above, this is below the rate of inflation over that period. The right side of Figure 8 shows the public believes the average teacher in Michigan should earn \$75,300, roughly \$4,300 more than the average teacher earned in the 2024-2025 school year.

FIGURE 7. Starting Teacher Salaries in Michigan, Recent Trends and Public Opinion



Notes: Salary data obtained from NEA Teacher Salary Benchmarks, 2021-2026. Public opinion bar represents the average response to the question: "What do you think the average starting salary should be for a public school teacher in Michigan?"

FIGURE 8. Average Teacher Salaries in Michigan, Recent Trends and Public Opinion

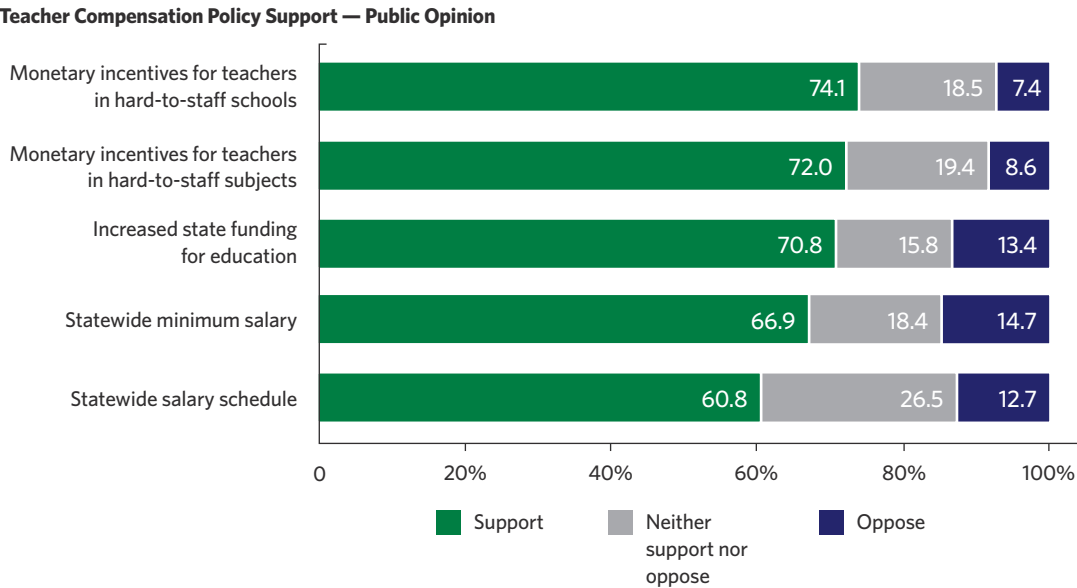


Notes: Salary data obtained from NEA Teacher Salary Rankings and Estimates, 2021-2026. Public opinion bar represents the average response to the question: "What do you think the average salary should be for a public school teacher in Michigan?"

These findings show that Michiganders continue to prefer higher teacher salaries than what teachers currently earn in the state, especially for teachers entering the profession. The public’s preferred salary for starting teachers remains well above the current statewide average and would represent a substantial pay raise for new teachers. For average teacher salaries, the public’s preferred salary is closer to the statewide average, but still roughly \$4,300 above what teachers earned during the 2024-2025 school year. The public’s preference for higher teacher salaries is notable given that teacher salary growth has continued to lag inflation in recent years, meaning that teachers have experienced a declining standard of living over time. Together, these results suggest that the public sees the greatest need for salary increases for teachers at the beginning of their careers, when pay may be especially important for attracting new teachers to the profession and encouraging them to stay.

Next, we examine how Michiganders prefer teacher salary increases to be allocated. Figure 9 summarizes responses to a series of items that asked respondents to indicate their level of support for a set of policies that could be used to increase teacher pay. These policies include monetary incentives for teachers in hard-to-staff schools, monetary incentives for teachers in hard-to-staff subjects, a statewide minimum salary, a statewide salary schedule, and increased statewide funding for K-12 education.

FIGURE 9. Public Support for Policies Related to Teacher Compensation



Notes: Respondents were asked “How strongly do you support or oppose the following policies that could shape teacher compensation in Michigan?” Responses were recorded using a 5-point scale that included “strongly support,” “somewhat support,” “neither support nor oppose,” “somewhat oppose,” and “strongly oppose.” For ease of interpretation, the results shown here collapse both “support” options and both “oppose” options into single categories.

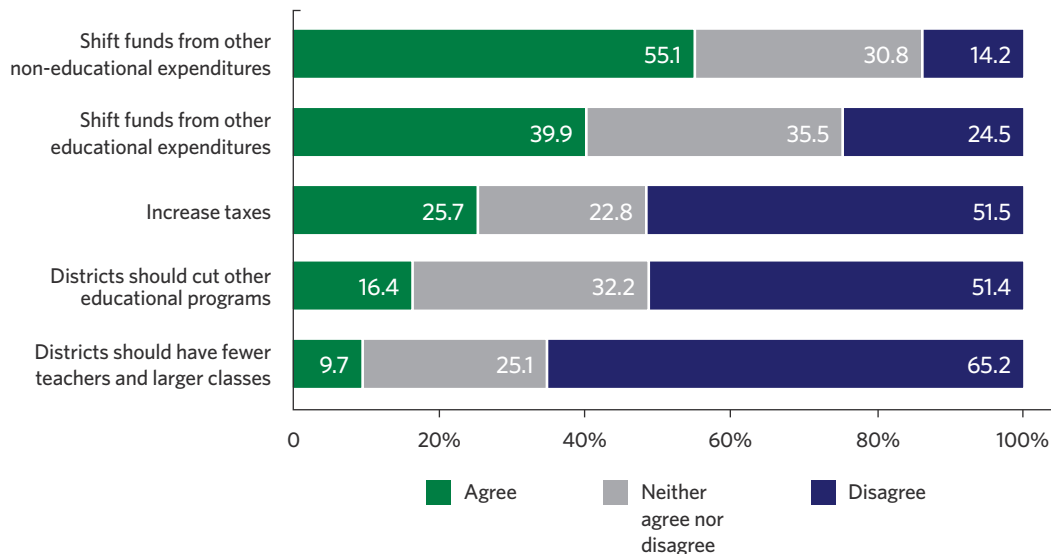
Figure 9 shows broad public support across all these policy options for raising teacher salaries, with each receiving at least 60% support. Monetary incentives for teachers in hard-to-staff schools enjoy the strongest support, at 74.1%, closely followed by monetary incentives in hard-to-staff subjects at 72.0%. Slightly below those are increased state funding for education and a

statewide minimum salary, which receive 70.8% and 66.9% support, respectively. A statewide salary schedule receives the least public support at 60.8%, though this policy is still quite popular. These findings indicate that Michiganders favor state action on teacher compensation, with the strongest support for using teacher pay as a tool to help fill hard-to-staff positions.

Next, we examine public opinion on proposals for how to generate funds to increase teacher pay. Figure 10 summarizes responses to a series of questions that ask respondents the extent to which they support a set of mechanisms the state could use to generate revenue for teacher salary increases. These include increasing taxes, shifting funds from other educational expenditures, shifting funds from other non-educational expenditures, districts cutting educational programs, and increasing class sizes to reduce the total number of teachers.

FIGURE 10. Support for Proposals to Raise Funding for Teacher Compensation

Teacher Salary Funding Proposals — Public Opinion



Notes: Respondents were prompted with “Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about proposals to raise teacher salaries in Michigan. To raise teachers’ salaries, the state should...” A list of phrases then followed which could complete that sentence. Phrases include: “...increase taxes,” “...shift funds from other educational expenditures,” “...shift funds from non-educational expenditures,” “...keep funding the same, but districts should cut other educational programs,” and “...keep funding the same, but districts should have fewer teachers and larger classes.” Responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale that included “strongly agree,” “agree,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “disagree,” and “strongly disagree.” For ease of interpretation, the results shown here collapse both “agree” options and both “disagree” options into single categories.

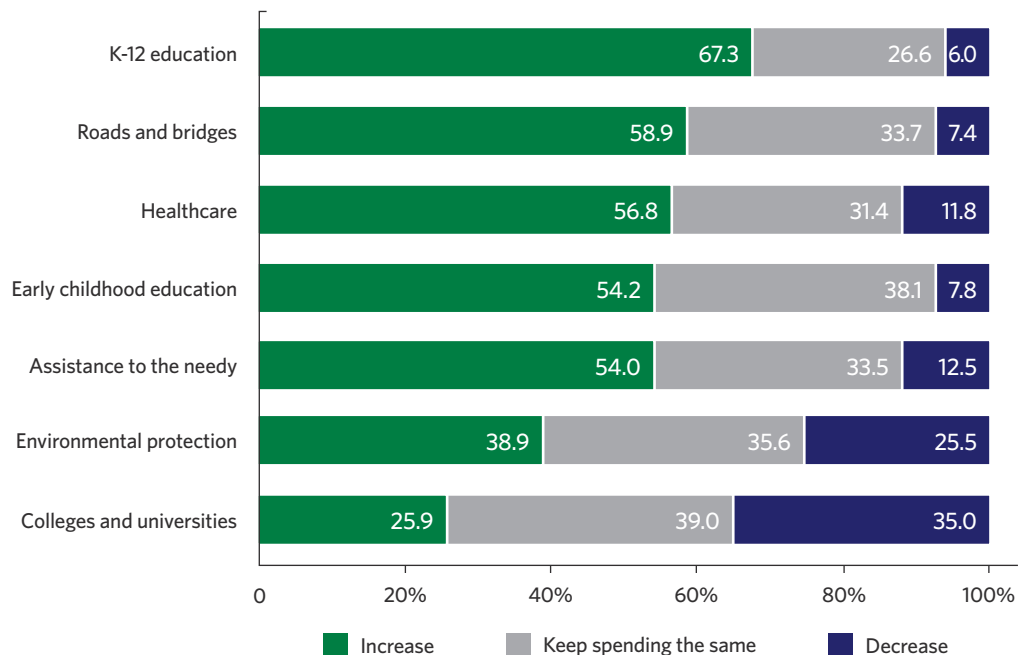
Figure 10 shows that shifting funding from non-educational expenditures enjoys the greatest public support, at 55.1%, and is the only approach supported by a majority of Michiganders. Shifting funding from other educational expenditures is supported by 39.9% of the public, while increasing taxes is supported by 25.7%. The approaches with the least public support are cutting educational services and increasing class sizes to fund salary increases, at 16.4% support and 9.7% support, respectively. These findings suggest that Michiganders are most supportive of funding teacher salary increases through reallocating existing state funding, particularly from non-educational expenditures. At the same time, increasing taxes, cutting educational services, and increasing

class sizes each face majority opposition, suggesting these approaches may be difficult to pursue politically. Taken together, these findings suggest that Michiganders may want higher teacher salaries, but not at the expense of other educational programs or larger class sizes. The public may also have preferences about where in the state budget funding for teacher salary increases should come from, a topic to which we turn next.

To better understand public support for tradeoffs in the state budget to fund teacher salary increases, we examine responses to items asking respondents whether they believe spending should be increased, decreased, or stay the same across several major budget areas. These areas include early childhood education, K-12 education, colleges and universities, repairing/building roads and bridges, healthcare, environmental protection, and assistance to the needy. Combined, these areas represent nearly 85% of all state expenditures in fiscal year 2025 (State of Michigan, 2026). Figure 11 displays the share of respondents who believe the spending should be increased, decreased, or stay about the same in each budget area.

FIGURE 11. Public Opinion on Whether State Spending Should Be Increased, Decreased, or Maintained in Selected Areas

State Budget Priorities — Public Opinion



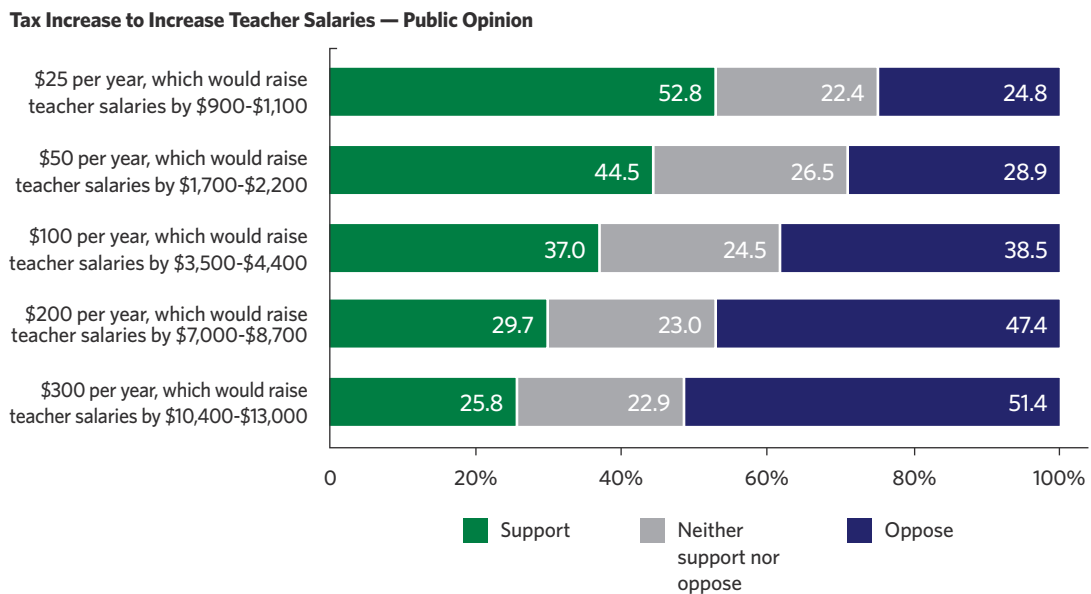
Notes: Respondents were prompted with “If you were making up the state budget for Michigan this year, would you increase, decrease, or keep the same spending for ...” A list of budget areas then followed which could complete that sentence. Areas include: “Early childhood education,” “K-12 education,” “Colleges and universities,” “Environmental protection,” “Repairing/building roads and bridges,” “Healthcare,” and “Assistance to the needy in Michigan.” Respondents then selected “increase,” “decrease,” or “keep spending the same.”

Figure 11 shows the strongest support for increased spending is for K-12 education, where a large majority, or 67.3% of adult Michiganders, favor an increase, while 26.6% believe spending should be kept the same, and just 6.0% believe spending should decrease. Majority support for increased

spending is also found for roads and bridges at 58.9%, healthcare at 56.8%, early childhood education at 54.2%, and assistance to the needy in Michigan at 54.0%. Fewer respondents support increasing spending on environmental protection or colleges and universities. These findings show that Michiganders strongly support increased spending on K-12 education and would prioritize that over funding increases for other areas of the state budget. At the same time, it also reveals a degree of tension. On the one hand, public opinion seems to favor increasing teacher salaries by cutting funding for other budget areas. On the other hand, most non-educational services are also quite popular, suggesting it would be difficult to raise sufficient funds to raise teacher salaries in this way.

An alternative to cutting non-educational programs is to raise new revenues. Consistent with our earlier findings (Burns & Mavrogordato, 2025), in this report we again find that the public opposes cuts to educational programs and services as well as cuts in most non-educational budget areas. Raising new revenues is one possibility that would avoid making unpopular cuts. Yet, we find that only one in four Michiganders support increasing taxes to raise teacher pay. One possibility is that Michiganders may generally oppose a tax increase to raise teacher salaries but could support relatively small tax increases. To test that hypothesis, this year we included a new question that presents respondents with a set of specific tax increases, expressed in dollar amounts, along with the estimated amount by which that additional tax could raise teacher salaries in Michigan. Responses to this question are illustrated in Figure 12. To interpret responses to these items, we compare the share of respondents who support and oppose each increase. For information on how we estimated the salary increase each tax amount would generate, see Appendix E.

FIGURE 12. Support for Tax Increases to Raise Teacher Pay



Note: Respondents were prompted with, "One way to increase teacher salaries is through additional tax revenues. Below are different tax increases per taxpayer and the corresponding increase in teacher salaries they would generate. Please indicate how strongly you support or oppose each option." Responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale that included "strongly support," "support," "neither support nor oppose," "oppose," and "strongly oppose." For ease of interpretation, the results shown here collapse both "support" and "oppose" options into single categories.

We find that public support for tax increases depends strongly on the size of the increase and the salary gains it would generate. As Figure 12 shows, support for tax increases exceeds opposition to them at \$25 (52.8% support vs 24.8% oppose) and \$50 (44.5% support vs 28.9% oppose).¹¹ Support and opposition for a tax increase of \$100 are roughly equal (37.0% support vs 38.5% oppose), while there is little support for paying an additional \$200 (29.7% support vs 47.4% oppose) or \$300 (25.8% support vs 51.4% oppose) per year in taxes to increase teacher pay. Taken together, these results suggest that support exceeds opposition for smaller tax increases and fades as the amount approaches \$100, beyond which opposition exceeds support. The amounts that draw the clearest net support would fund a meaningful share of the gap between current average teacher salaries and the public's preferred average salary (see Figure 8), while an increase near \$100, the point at which support and opposition are roughly even, would generate nearly enough revenue to fully close that gap. This implies that a meaningful share of Michigan adults expresses support for tax increases large enough to move salaries toward the levels they say they prefer.

DISCUSSION

Teacher compensation has important implications for student outcomes and Michigan's economic future. Teachers are central to what students learn, and those outcomes shape both students' long-term individual opportunity and statewide economic growth. Compensation affects schools' ability to attract and retain a stable, effective workforce to support that work. The findings in this report show teacher salary trends that carry significant implications for Michigan's students and economic future. Teacher pay has declined relative to what other professions offer, relative to what teachers earn in other states, and relative to what Michigan teachers earned in the past. These trends have consequences for students, districts, and Michigan's long-term prosperity. Given the state's central role in setting district revenues, state policy decisions have contributed to these trends and will likely be instrumental in any effort to change course.

Teacher salaries in Michigan have declined substantially. The state was once among the highest-paying states for teachers, but its standing has fallen considerably. Inflation-adjusted average teacher salaries in Michigan are now roughly 29% lower than they were at their 1995 peak, the largest decline of any state over that period. Michigan now ranks 22nd nationally in average teacher salary, and the state's position is weaker for new teachers, with starting salaries ranking 45th. This decline in purchasing power also aligns with Michigan's growing teacher wage penalty. As of 2024, Michigan teachers earned 28.8% less than other workers with similar education and experience, roughly the same magnitude as the long-term decline in real average teacher salaries. Put differently, if teacher salaries in Michigan had kept pace with inflation since 1995, the average Michigan teacher today would earn roughly as much as other workers in Michigan with similar levels of education and experience. A recent report adds that, in Michigan, earning a teaching degree can require more time and cost more than earning degrees in other fields, making teaching less financially attractive to prospective educators (Powell & Kilbride, 2026). Together, these findings show that the financial returns to a career in teaching have weakened over time, which may make it harder for districts to compete for prospective and current educators.

Michigan's long-term decline in teacher salaries coincides with significant policy changes in the state's education finance system. Inflation-adjusted average teacher salaries peaked in 1995, the

first year after responsibility for most school funding shifted to the state. Since then, districts' ability to raise teacher pay has depended heavily on state decisions about the level, stability, and flexibility of school funding. For much of the period since that shift, districts have faced declining inflation-adjusted revenues and greater restrictions on how they may use the revenues they receive (Burns & Guzman, 2025). Lower revenues reduced districts' fiscal capacity to increase salaries, while less flexible and less predictable funding made long-term commitments more difficult. Because salary increases create ongoing obligations, this environment likely made districts more cautious about making larger investments in teacher pay.

The steepest and most sustained decline in Michigan teacher salaries, which started in 2011, coincided with changes in how the state funded legacy costs in the educator retirement system. Since that time, districts continued paying for retirement benefits newly earned by current employees, but they also had to devote an increasing share of their revenues to paying down legacy costs for benefits earned in prior years, largely by former employees (Burns & Guzman, 2025). These payments consume significant resources, over \$2,000 per pupil in the 2024 fiscal year, leaving districts with less funding available for current employees' salaries (Guzman et al., 2026). The mechanism for paying down these legacy costs also made it more expensive for districts to raise teacher pay because each additional dollar of salary required additional payments toward legacy costs. In practical terms, a \$1 increase in salary now costs districts substantially more than \$1 to provide.

The decline in teacher salaries also coincides with changes in Michigan's teacher labor market that have important implications for students and the state's future. One early sign of broader labor-market strain was a decline in enrollment in traditional teacher preparation programs. Shortly after the sharpest decline in real teacher salaries began in 2011, enrollment in Michigan teacher preparation programs fell steeply, declining by nearly 50% from 2013 to 2017 (Rogers & Kilbride, 2024). That timing is consistent with research reviewed earlier in this report showing that the relative attractiveness of teaching as a profession depends in part on the economic opportunities available through teaching compared with other careers. When teaching becomes less financially competitive, prospective teachers may be less likely to enter the field, weakening the pipeline of new educators available to Michigan schools.

The most recent years show even clearer signs of strain in Michigan's teacher labor market. From 2022 through 2025, inflation-adjusted average teacher salaries in Michigan were lower than in any other year between 1970 and 2025. This period of historically low pay overlaps with greater instability in the state's teacher workforce, including persistent concerns around teacher shortages. Recent research finds that across these years teachers have been exiting the profession at an "unsustainable" rate, with historically high shares of teachers leaving the profession and even leaving their district during the school year (Kilbride et al., 2026). These most recent years have also seen record-high rates of students being taught by under-credentialed teachers (teachers who are not fully certified for their teaching assignment). While research suggests that factors beyond pay, including increased stress, heightened student needs, and behavioral challenges following the pandemic, have likely contributed to recent staffing challenges, pay remains an important part of the equation (Steiner et al., 2023). When the demands of teaching increase while pay falls behind, schools may find it harder to attract new teachers, retain current teachers, and reduce reliance on under-credentialed staff.

Declining teacher compensation is unlikely to reverse without state-level policy attention. The evidence reviewed in this report suggests that raising teacher pay could help strengthen Michigan's teacher workforce by making teaching more attractive to prospective educators and helping schools retain effective teachers. Public opinion provides important context for policymakers considering how to respond to these challenges. Findings from our public opinion survey show that Michiganders broadly support that goal. Respondents expressed strong support for increasing teacher salaries, especially for teachers entering the profession. This alignment between the challenges facing Michigan's teacher labor market, the research on compensation, and public support for higher teacher pay is relevant context for policymakers weighing whether and how to respond.

Our survey results also suggest parameters for how policymakers could work to raise teacher pay. To implement salary increases, public opinion suggests policymakers have meaningful latitude: Michiganders support several approaches to raise compensation including targeted incentives for teachers in hard-to-staff schools and subjects, a statewide minimum salary, and increased state funding for education. On the question of how to generate funding for teacher salary increases, however, the public is more prescriptive. Broadly speaking, additional funding for teacher salary increases could come from shifting money from other educational programs and services, shifting money from non-educational areas of the state budget, or raising additional revenue. Michiganders appear to want higher teacher pay without reducing student services as respondents are much less supportive of approaches that would cut educational programs or increase class sizes. Respondents are more supportive of shifting funding from non-educational services, though doing so may be difficult because most other state services are also popular. Views on raising new revenues are mixed: Michiganders are generally skeptical of tax increases to raise teacher pay, though support is stronger for smaller tax increases than for larger ones. Together, these findings suggest that the public gives policymakers considerable flexibility in how to increase teacher pay, but less flexibility in how to fund those increases.

Across this report and our two prior reports, the evidence on teacher compensation in Michigan points in the same direction: teacher pay has become less competitive, even as concerns about the teacher workforce have intensified. At the same time, Michiganders continue to express broad support for improving teacher pay, especially for teachers entering the profession. These findings matter because compensation shapes the teacher workforce that serves the state's students. While pay is not the only factor affecting Michigan's teacher workforce challenges, it is difficult to imagine a durable solution that does not address declining compensation. Although policymakers face real questions about how to fund salary increases and how those increases should be distributed, the alignment between research evidence and public support is a notable finding that can inform policymakers seeking to strengthen Michigan's teacher workforce.

ENDNOTES

1. Chetty et al. (2014) define an average-effectiveness teacher for this comparison as a teacher whose value-added is at the mean of the teacher value-added distribution and a lower-effectiveness teacher as one in the bottom 5% of the distribution. Additionally, their estimate of \$250,000 in additional earnings per classroom reflects a real annual discount rate of 3% to account for the time value of money. Their estimated undiscounted earnings for a classroom taught by a teacher of average effectiveness instead of a less effective teacher is \$1,400,000.
2. This analysis defines early career as graduates aged 22-27 and mid-career as graduates aged 35-45. Earnings estimates include all graduates of each major, regardless of their occupation, and therefore may include individuals working outside of education. See the following section for additional information on salaries for individuals employed as teachers.
3. See Burns & Mavrogordato (2024) for an analysis of earnings in earlier years.
4. These five college majors are: Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Special Education, General Education, and Miscellaneous Education.
5. Estimates of the teacher wage penalty vary with methodology; approaches that proxy for cognitive ability, account for selection into teaching, or adjust for the time that schools are in session tend to find smaller penalties. We rely on teacher wage penalty figures estimated by Allegretto & Mishel (2019), which compare the average weekly earnings of teachers with the earnings of other college graduates. We use these figures because they reflect the compensation comparison that prospective and current teachers observe when weighing teaching against other professions, which is the comparison most relevant to recruitment and retention.
6. These estimates compare only salaries. Typically, teachers enjoy insurance and retirement benefits that are more generous than what private sector workers receive, meaning that the total compensation penalty for teachers is smaller than the wage penalty (Allegretto, 2025). Here, we analyze only the teacher wage penalty for two reasons. First, since 2010, policy changes in Michigan have capped what districts can contribute to employee health insurance premiums and shifted away from a traditional defined benefit retirement system and toward a defined contribution system. This means that the benefits received by Michigan teachers now are likely less generous. Additionally, there are many different retirement benefit structures for Michigan teachers depending on when they began their career, making it difficult to describe the retirement benefits earned by the typical Michigan teacher. Second, total compensation penalty figures are not available at the state level.
7. An alternative measure of consumer inflation is the Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) index, which is a chained price deflator that tracks consumer spending rather than the price of a basket of goods and services like the CPI. Chained indices like the PCE incorporate substitution as consumers switch to lower-cost goods, such as switching from buying name-brand products to generic brands over time, which may understate changes in the standard of living afforded by a given salary over time. We therefore use the CPI to adjust for consumer inflation as this better tracks real purchasing power.
8. To analyze whether the scale of Michigan's decline is an artifact of using 1995, the year teacher compensation in Michigan had peaked, we considered salary changes across other years from 1995 to 2010. In analyses not shown here, Michigan also has the largest salary decline measured since 2000, 2005, and 2010.
9. After adjusting for RPPs, Michigan falls a net of one place in the rankings because it jumps ahead of Arizona, Colorado, and New Hampshire but is also overtaken by Missouri, Ohio, Kentucky, and Oklahoma.
10. Using the CWIFT, Michigan falls a net of one place in the rankings because it jumps ahead of Vermont but is passed by New Hampshire and Virginia. Using RPPs, Michigan moves up one place in the rankings because it jumps ahead of Utah, Vermont, Colorado, and Hawaii but is passed by Iowa, New Mexico, and Ohio.
11. The survey item described each amount as an annual tax increase per taxpayer. For purposes of estimating the salary increase each amount would generate, we treated this as an increase per Michigan income tax filer based on the number of Michigan income tax returns in 2023. See Appendix E for additional detail on these calculations.

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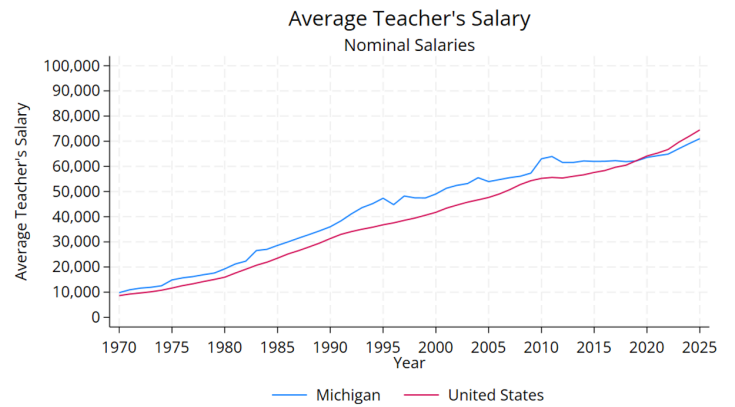
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APPENDIX A: NOMINAL TEACHER SALARIES

FIGURE A1. Average Starting Teacher Salaries in Michigan and the U.S., 2017-2025



FIGURE A2. Average Teacher Salaries in Michigan and the U.S., 1970-2025



APPENDIX B: STARTING AND AVERAGE SALARIES ADJUSTED FOR DIFFERENCES IN COST OF LIVING ACROSS STATES

Variation in the cost of living across states means that comparing nominal salaries may obscure differences in the quality of life a given salary may afford in different places. Put simply, a given salary in a low cost of living state will allow a teacher to enjoy a higher standard of living than they would with the same salary in a higher cost of living state. As a result, accounting for differences in the cost of living across states may help to make more valid comparisons.

Different methods can be used to adjust for differences in the cost of living between states. Here, we use two different cost of living indices to adjust average and starting teacher salaries and then consider the extent to which they lead to different conclusions about the average and starting salaries of Michigan teachers relative to other states.

The first cost of living index we use is Regional Price Parities (RPPs), developed by the Bureau of Economic Analysis. To calculate RPPs, the BEA compares the costs of a range of goods and services (e.g. housing and utilities, food, medical care, etc.) across states. Using RPPs to adjust teacher salaries provides an estimate of a teacher’s purchasing power in each state. A state with a lower cost of living than the national average will have an adjusted average salary that is higher than the nominal (unadjusted) salary while a state with a higher cost of living will have an adjusted salary that is lower than the nominal salary. A potential issue with RPPs is that they are calculated on a calendar year basis, while teachers are paid over an academic year that spans two calendar years. Researchers commonly address this by taking the average RPP from both calendar years spanned by a school year (e.g., García et al., 2024). However, at the time of this writing RPPs are not yet available for 2025. As a result, we use RPP values from 2024.

The second cost of living index we use is the Comparable Wage Index for Teachers (CWIFT), which is calculated by the National Center for Education Statistics (Cornman et al., 2019). This index accounts for the cost of labor across states by comparing the earnings of college-educated workers in a range of professions with the national average and using that to estimate the cost of hiring teachers. For instance, if accountants and social workers in Michigan earn 10% more than the national average, one could expect that teachers would command 10% higher salaries as well. A potential advantage of this approach is that, in addition to the price of goods and services, it can capture factors such as access to local amenities (weather/climate, cultural experiences, low crime, etc.), or lack thereof, which may lead workers to either demand higher salaries or accept lower salaries. Here, too, states with lower-than-average costs will have adjusted salaries that are higher than their nominal, unadjusted salaries. We adjust starting and average teacher salaries using values from the 2022 CWIFT, the most recent year for which estimates are available (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).

Appendix Table B1 presents Michigan’s national salary figures and rankings in nominal terms and adjusted for differences in the cost of living across states. Relative to nominal salaries, CWIFT-adjusted salaries for starting and average teachers in Michigan are lower, suggesting that the cost of employing teachers, and college-educated workers more generally, is higher in Michigan. However, RPP-adjusted salaries are higher than nominal salaries, indicating that the price of goods and services in Michigan is lower than in other places. Collectively, these figures suggest that Michigan is a more affordable state to live in, but may be seen as a less desirable place to live.

TABLE B1. Starting and Average Teacher Salaries in Michigan, Adjusted for Cost of Living				
		Nominal	Adjusted using CWIFT	Adjusted using RPP
Starting Teacher Salary	Salary	\$43,093	\$39,732	\$44,787
	Rank	45	40	46
Average Teacher Salary	Salary	\$71,023	\$65,483	\$73,815
	Rank	22	23	21

APPENDIX C: SURVEY ITEMS

- Public school teachers in Michigan are paid an average starting salary of \$41,645. Do you think public school teachers' starting salaries should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?
 - [if respondent selected increase or decrease] What do you think the average starting salary should be for a public school teacher in Michigan?
- Public school teachers in Michigan overall are paid an average salary of \$71,188. Do you think public school teachers' salaries should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?
 - [if respondent selected increase or decrease] What do you think the average salary should be for a public school teacher in Michigan?

3. How strongly do you support or oppose the following policies that could shape teacher compensation in Michigan?					
	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Neither support nor oppose	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
A statewide minimum salary for teachers					
A statewide salary schedule for teachers					
Monetary incentives for teachers in hard-to-staff schools					
Monetary incentives for teachers in hard-to-staff subjects					
Increased state funding for education					

4. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about proposals to raise teacher salaries in Michigan.					
To raise teachers' salaries, the state should:	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
increase taxes.					
shift funds from other educational expenditures.					
shift funds from non-educational expenditures.					
keep funding the same, but districts should cut other educational programs.					
keep funding the same, but districts should have fewer teachers and larger classes.					

5. If you were making up the state budget for Michigan this year, would you increase, decrease, or keep spending the same for...			
	Increase	Decrease	Keep spending the same
Early childhood education			
K-12 education			
Colleges and universities			
Environmental protection			
Repairing/building roads and bridges			
Healthcare			
Assistance to the needy in Michigan			

6. One way to increase teacher salaries is through additional tax revenues. Below are different tax increases per taxpayer and the corresponding increase in teacher salaries they would generate. Please indicate how strongly you support or oppose each option.					
	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Neither support nor oppose	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
\$25 per year, which would raise teacher salaries by \$900-\$1,100					
\$50 per year, which would raise teacher salaries by \$1,700-\$2,200					
\$100 per year, which would raise teacher salaries by \$3,500-\$4,400					
\$200 per year, which would raise teacher salaries by \$7,000-\$8,700					
\$300 per year, which would raise teacher salaries by \$10,400-\$13,000					

Notes:

Starting and average teacher salaries were taken from the National Education Association’s benchmark salary data for the 2023-2024 school year, the most recent year available when the questions were sent to the State of the State Survey for administration.

To ease response burden, respondents who indicated that the average (starting) teacher’s salary should stay about the same were not asked what they thought that salary should be. For these respondents, the salary amount provided in the question was imputed as their preferred average (starting) teacher salary. For instance, if a respondent indicated that the average teacher salary of \$71,188 should stay about the same, their preferred average teacher salary was assumed to be \$71,188.

When estimating public opinion on what starting and average teacher’s salaries should be, we cleaned the data in several steps. First, we trimmed both high and low outliers that could skew the results. We also recoded a small number of responses we interpreted as indicating an amount by which the respondent believed the starting or average teacher’s salary should increase or decrease. Together, these steps had the effect of decreasing our estimates of public opinion on what starting and average teachers’ salaries should be, relative to the raw responses. Please contact the authors for additional information.

APPENDIX D: STATE OF THE STATE SURVEY SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	431	43.1%
Female	567	56.7%
Intersex/Other	2	0.2%
Race/Ethnicity²		
American Indian or Alaska Native	30	3.0%
Asian	21	2.1%
Black or African American	146	14.6%
Hispanic or Latino	25	2.5%
Middle Eastern or North African	9	0.9%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0.1%
White	798	79.8%
Other Race	19	1.9%
Marital Status		
Married	498	49.8%
Single	502	50.2%
Number of Children in the Household		
None	729	72.9%
1 Child	136	13.6%
2 Children	84	8.4%
3 Children	32	3.2%
4 Children	11	1.1%
5 Children	5	0.5%
6 Children	2	0.2%
7 Children	1	0.1%
Highest Level of Educational Attainment		
Did not go to school	1	0.1%
Did not graduate high school	23	2.3%
High school graduate or GED holder	320	32.0%
Technical/Junior college graduate	79	7.9%
1 st year college	85	8.5%
2 nd year college	114	11.4%
3 rd year college	36	3.6%
College graduate (4 year)	192	19.2%
Some postgraduate	31	3.1%
Graduate degree	119	11.9%

	Frequency	Percent
Employment Status		
Work full-time	343	34.3%
Work part-time	92	9.2%
Work and go to school	24	2.4%
Have a job, but not at work last week (on vacation, sick leave, etc.)	6	0.6%
Unemployed, laid off, or looking for work	68	6.8%
Retired	249	24.9%
School full time	29	2.9%
Homemaker	75	7.5%
Disabled	84	8.4%
Semi-retired / retired and working part-time	13	1.3%
Other (please specify)	17	1.7%
Household Income		
Less than \$10,000	66	6.6%
\$10,000 to \$19,999	91	9.1%
\$20,000 to \$29,999	102	10.2%
\$30,000 to \$39,999	105	10.5%
\$40,000 to \$49,999	79	7.9%
\$50,000 to \$59,999	96	9.6%
\$60,000 to \$69,999	71	7.1%
\$70,000 to \$79,999	68	6.8%
\$80,000 to \$89,999	38	3.8%
\$90,000 to \$99,999	59	5.9%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	147	14.7%
\$150,000 or More	75	7.5%
Voter Registration		
Registered	944	94.4%
Not Registered	48	4.8%
Don't know	8	0.8%
Political Party Affiliation		
Republican	267	26.7%
Independent	322	32.2%
Democrat	370	37.0%
Another party, third party, etc.	41	4.1%

Note: State of the State 92 Sample Characteristics (n=1000). ¹ Respondents were not required to answer all questions, meaning that the number of responses for any specific item may be less than 1000. ² Respondents are able to select more than one race/ethnicity, meaning that counts by race/ethnicity may sum to greater than 1000.

APPENDIX E: ESTIMATING TEACHER SALARY RAISES FROM TAX INCREASES

Estimating the teacher salary increases that would result from a given tax increase requires identifying the number of individuals who would be subject to the tax and the number of teachers in Michigan. Additionally, we considered additional employment costs districts face so as to make teacher salary increases budget neutral. In estimating teacher salary increases from different potential tax increases, we aimed for a more conservative approach to avoid a situation in which a given tax increase would generate less than expected revenues.

Additional revenues could be raised through a range of taxes on income, property, and sales. The Michigan Constitution and Michigan Compiled Laws include many limitations on the ways that sales and property taxes can be raised and how those revenues are directed, while there are fewer legal restrictions related to income taxes. This suggests an income tax increase as the most straightforward means of raising additional revenues. We considered estimating tax revenues in terms of an income tax rate increase, but decided against because 1) not all income is subject to taxation and 2) the item would have a much higher response burden as respondents would need to multiply a given tax rate by their income to calculate the additional tax burden. To reduce response burden while yielding accurate estimates, we retrieved the number of tax filers from the Michigan Department of Treasury, which reported approximately 5.2 million tax returns for 2023, the most recent year available when this survey item was developed (Michigan Department of Treasury, 2023).

People who work as teachers can perform many different kinds of duties, meaning that the number of teachers who work in Michigan depends on how one defines what a “teacher” is. According to the Center for Educational Performance and Information (n.d.), Michigan employs roughly 100,000 teachers. According to a series of annual reports on Michigan’s teacher workforce produced by the Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC), Michigan employs slightly more than 80,000 teachers (Kilbride et al., 2024, 2025, 2026). As there is no universally agreed on definition of a teaching role, we use these figures as a range to allow for teacher salary increases to be more or less restrictive.

Finally, increasing teacher salaries would impose additional costs on districts. These include the employer’s share of income and social security taxes, worker’s compensation taxes, and required contributions into Michigan’s educator retirement system, which can reach 50% of payroll (Burns & Guzman, 2025). If these costs are unaccounted for, providing districts with additional funding to raise teacher salaries could result in them needing to make cuts in other areas of their budget, which would run counter to public opinion (see Figure 11) that educational programs should not be cut to increase teacher pay. We therefore factor in these employer costs when estimating the raise that a tax increase could yield by multiplying the per-teacher revenue generated by a given tax by 2/3 (allowing for employer costs to equal 50% of salary increases) to estimate salary increases that would be budget neutral for districts.

We estimate the lower and upper bounds of additional teacher salaries that would result from a given per-filer income tax increase using the following equations:

$$Increase_{lower_bound} = \frac{\tau \times 5,200,000}{100,000} \times \frac{2}{3}$$

$$Increase_{upper_bound} = \frac{\tau \times 5,200,000}{80,000} \times \frac{2}{3}$$

In both equations, τ represents a given tax increase, expressed as dollars per tax filer. When inputting these values in the survey item, we rounded all estimated salary increases to the nearest \$100.



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