

The Hidden Costs of Becoming a Teacher

Much of the conversation about the cost of choosing teaching as a profession focuses on salaries after teachers enter the workforce. However, aspiring teachers make **substantial investments long before they earn their first paycheck**. Compared with students pursuing other careers, future teachers complete more coursework, spend more on tuition, take longer to graduate, and carry heavier academic workloads. These “pre-service penalties” **represent an often-overlooked barrier to entering the profession** and have important implications for efforts to strengthen the teacher pipeline.



Average Credits to Bachelor's Degree:

159 for future teachers
vs.
137 for other professions.



Meaningful Financial and Time Costs:

More in tuition, heavier course loads, and more time to graduate.



Estimated Tuition Penalty: \$10,000

Future teachers incur substantially higher costs than their peers.



Costs Are Highest for Special Education Teachers:

They have the largest coursework, tuition, time, and workload penalties of any certification area.

READ THE FULL BRIEF

This brief quantifies the substantial pre-service investments associated with pursuing a teaching career and compares them with the tuition, time, coursework, and workload investments of college graduates in other fields.



SCAN ME

TAKEAWAYS FROM THE BRIEF

Future teachers complete substantially more coursework before entering the profession.

Future teachers graduate with an **average of 159 undergraduate credits**. Compared with their peers, they complete 22 additional credits, or 33% more than the typical 120-credit bachelor's degree. **Nearly two-thirds complete at least 150 credits**, representing coursework comparable to a second undergraduate major.

The additional coursework translates into meaningful financial and time costs.

Compared with students pursuing other careers, future teachers pay an average of **\$5,500 more in tuition**, take approximately one additional semester to earn a bachelor's degree, and complete heavier course loads throughout college.

The true cost of becoming a teacher is even larger than it first appears.

After accounting for differences in students' backgrounds and the institutions they attend, the **estimated tuition penalty nearly doubles to about \$10,000**. Even when comparing students pursuing the same major at the same institution, future teachers continue to incur substantially higher costs than their peers.



Pre-service costs are highest for future special education teachers.

Future special education teachers face the largest coursework, tuition, time, and workload penalties of any certification area, reflecting the additional preparation and clinical experiences required for the role.

Preparing effective teachers requires **rigorous coursework and meaningful clinical experiences**, but these requirements also create real financial and time barriers before teachers ever enter the classroom. Reducing these pre-service costs through targeted financial supports and recognizing the additional preparation required for teaching could strengthen the teacher pipeline while maintaining high standards for educator preparation.

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"These findings reinforce the importance of sustained support for preservice teachers enrolled in rigorous preparation programs and competitive compensation that reflects the value of the profession. Strengthening these commitments is essential to attracting and retaining the skilled teachers our students depend on."

— Dr. Glenn Maleyko, State Superintendent of Public Instruction