

Hawaii Teacher Compensation Study and Recommendations

HawaiiKidsCAN: Response and Recommendations

Great Teachers

HawaiiKidsCAN believes great teachers are essential to any thriving education system. A large set of research backs this up, showing that the quality of a teacher is the single most important in-school factor in student learning. Given this importance, it follows that teachers should be compensated fairly and competitively for the complicated and interdisciplinary work of helping Hawaii's children become the best version of themselves and reach their fullest potential. We also believe this is an opportunity to not just address how teachers are paid but how we professionalize and position teaching against competing professions.

The Hawaii State Department of Education (HDOE) released the results of a new compensation study on teacher pay commissioned from APA Consulting that was completed in January 2020. The study identifies four primary strategies for teacher compensation (Performance, Professional Growth, Additional Responsibility, and Market Incentives) and asserts that though the economics of Hawaii may make it easier to attract prospective teachers, its cost of living may make it harder for them to stay.

As a local nonprofit organization focused on education advocacy, organizing, and research, HawaiiKidsCAN has conducted an independent analysis of the study. Given the findings of the study, as well as pulling from other relevant research sources, we recommend policymakers use the following guiding principles as they consider teacher compensation policy reforms in both the short and far term:

- 1. Emphasize Responsibility and Incentives**
- 2. Frontload Salary Increases**
- 3. Prioritize Excellence/Difficulty/Scarcity.**

1) Emphasize Responsibility and Incentives

Some believe a blanket raise to all teachers is the best way to improve teacher compensation, while others believe that increasing pay based on degree attainment (Professional Growth Pay) is preferable despite research indicating that master's degrees rarely result in improved teacher performance.¹

HawaiiKidsCAN supports a more targeted approach linked to significantly improving pay for master teachers (as the APA report also identifies) who would then lead "a cadre of new- to- Hawaii teachers and ensure they are prepared to teach in Hawaii's unique

¹ Nittler, K. (2019, September 1). You don't get what you pay for: paying teachers more for master's degrees. Retrieved from <https://www.nctq.org/blog/You-don-t-get-what-you-pay-for:-paying-teachers-more-for-masters-degrees>



environment (APA p.62)." Building off of this recommendation, Hawaii should consider expanding the roles available to high-quality teachers so they can reach more students and benefit from opportunities for career advancement (including salary increases) without having to leave the classroom. Opportunity Culture, designed by Public Impact, a small think tank in North Carolina, is a model of advanced roles for teachers² and would be instrumental to Hawaii for teacher recruitment and retention.

We find alignment in the support of elements of the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) developed with the support of the Milken Foundation, which is now featured by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) (APA p.13). In particular its recommendations on Multiple Career Paths which allow teachers to grow professionally without leaving the classroom are in line with what our organization supports. This could even include the kinds of flexible, non-hierarchical, and hybrid roles suggested by Hawaii National Board certified teacher Jonathon Medeiros, where administrators teach classes and teachers take on administrative responsibilities.³

2) Frontload Salary Increases

It's not just how much teachers are paid, but how and when they are paid, that matters. As the APA study notes, "over the past eight years, the average experience level [for teachers] has been relatively stable, with a minimal increase from 13.0 to 13.3 from 2011-12 to 2018-19. During the same time period, the proportion of teachers who are new to the profession working in Hawaii has increased from 5.4 to 6.9 percent of teachers" (APA p.29). This indicates our attention should be on how to retain newer teachers.

Hawaii is an expensive place to live, and a traditional salary scale, where new teachers make less regardless of their ability, will necessarily make the challenges of retaining young teachers more acute. The study recommends that "Hawaii should expand the number of steps available to teachers and re-grid personnel on these new steps (APA p.62), but HawaiiKidsCAN also recommends changing salary scales so sharper increases are pushed forward, providing new and growing teachers a greater opportunity to manage Hawaii's cost of living early on. This timing is critical, as new educators must consider whether the profession will provide the financial stability for life choices such as owning a home, having a family, or even remaining in Hawaii. With relatively strong state and national economic growth, HIDOE needs to aggressively compete with other industries and employers. A HawaiiKidsCAN member and public school teacher shared, "*To make a real difference in teacher retention rates, any change in the DOE compensation system would---in my estimate---need to increase the salaries for early-stage teachers by a good solid \$12,000 to \$20,000.*"

This frontloading also potentially includes a comprehensive review of related elements, such as the retirement benefits accrued by teachers in their first ten years of teaching. Additionally, as millennial job patterns are better understood and we see low compensation levels that make it necessary for many young teachers to take on second

² Opportunity Culture. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.opportunityculture.org/>

³ Medeiros, J. (2018, November 27). Principal (Teacher?): "Everyone a leader, everyone a learner." Retrieved from <https://www.nbpts.org/principal-teacher-everyone-a-leader-everyone-a-learner/>



jobs, members of the Millennial Generation and Generation Z have learned to distrust and reject the increasingly archaic model of spending a full career working for a single employer. In fact, global research has shown that money and security are the most important elements considered by millennials when looking for a job, while opportunities for advancement loom large, with two-thirds of survey respondents believing that less than two years is the “right” amount of time to stay in a single role before being promoted or moving to another, while a quarter said less than 12 months.⁴ This is to say the teaching profession must compensate in a way that presumes frequent movement, high competition, and salary distributions in other professions that reflect these more fluid conditions.

3) Prioritize Excellence/Difficulty/Scarcity

Teaching, like any human endeavor, features ability on a continuum. Some people are truly amazing, some need greater support to do well, and some are better at other things. Teaching is no different.

HawaiiKidsCAN believes, as the National Center on Teacher Quality has offered (APA p.11), that the state’s approach to compensation “should ensure districts consider additional compensation for effective performance; teaching in high-need schools and subjects; and relevant, prior, non-teaching work experience.” This approach was found in HawaiiKidsCAN’s own 2019 Public Education Survey, with 81% of likely Hawaii voters supporting higher differential pay for teachers who work with students with special needs.⁵ A HawaiiKidsCAN member and public school teacher shares: *“I and other new teachers coming into this profession are already quality teachers, which means that they are not considering our background, our experiences, our intentions, and our own education. They do not value what experience and education we have earned or are earning to get the pay we deserve.”* As the state works to orient itself around 21st century skills like computer science, a strategy HawaiiKidsCAN also supports, we believe an opportunity for greater compensation should also be available in that and similar lanes. Given the unique geography and history of Hawaii, we also believe relevant historical, contextual, or professional experience (such as expertise in native Hawaiian history) could be rewarded similarly. Research from Australia’s *Grattan Institute*⁶ has also recommended offering \$10,000 cash-in-hand scholarships to high achievers to study teaching if they commit to serving in public schools, growing the depth and quality of the teaching force through incentives.

The comparison districts cited by the report (APA p.72) raised questions for us, as we felt that a comparison to Alaska could have been helpful, given its similar and unique remoteness, cost of living, and challenges to travel. In fact, looking at the unique economics of Hawaii’s industries could have been instructive, given that annual salaries

⁴ Manpower Group. (2016). *Millennial Careers: 2020 Vision*. Retrieved from https://www.manpowergroup.com/wps/wcm/connect/660ebf65-144c-489e-975c-9f838294c237/MillennialsPaper1_2020Vision_lo.pdf?MOD=AJPERES

⁵ HawaiiKidsCAN. (2019). *2019 HawaiiKidsCAN Public Education Survey*. Retrieved from <https://hawaiikidscan.org/research-and-resources/public-education-survey/>

⁶ Goss, P., & Sonnemann, J. (n.d.). *Attracting High Achievers*.



in Honolulu drop by \$14K when cost of living is factored in ([Hawaii News Now](#))⁷. Other reports show U.S. average labor earnings were higher than Hawaii wages in most industries ([Hawaii News Now](#))⁸.

Conclusion

We appreciate the HIDOE's efforts to explore needed changes to Hawaii's teacher compensation system. Hawaii continues to rank below the national average on measures of student achievement such as National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and we know we must address our state's persistent teacher shortage in order to provide excellent educational opportunities for all keiki. At the same time, we recognize the fiscal realities and complexities of this issue, and that any approach must be highly strategic and thoughtful. We hope the APA study and HawaiiKidsCAN's response and recommendations help to advance this important discussion and spur policymakers and leaders to take bold action.

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About HawaiiKidsCAN

Launched in 2017, HawaiiKidsCAN: The Hawaii Campaign for Achievement Now empowers communities with accessible information about our schools, and helps elevate their voices and concerns to build the conditions for all students in Hawaii to thrive. We use research and communications, grassroots organizing and direct advocacy at the statehouse to ensure a more equitable future for our keiki.

⁷ Staff, H. N. N. (2019, September 5). Analysis: Honolulu salaries lowest in nation when adjusted for cost of living. From www.hawaiinewsnow.com/2019/09/05/analysis-honolulu-salaries-lowest-nation-when-adjusted-cost-living/
⁸ Staff, H. N. N. (2018, April 11). In most industries, Hawaii workers earn less than national average: Study. From www.hawaiinewsnow.com/story/37926197/study-hawaii-workers-earn-less-in-just-about-every-industry-and-women-earn-least-of-all/