



Dear Education - K-12 Subcommittee, my name is Tyvon Bates, and on behalf of American Federation of Teachers Virginia, I am writing to urge you to support HB 535 chief patroned by Delegate Clark.

Pay was already inadequate before COVID-19 and the pandemic has only brought a new host of job responsibilities and risks—new technologies, new instructional settings, and too often, inadequate health and safety protections. This may be the breaking point for teachers.

A RAND study released last year found that among teachers who have left the profession due to COVID-19, the most often cited reason was the “insufficient pay to merit the risks or stress.”¹ This is especially true for teachers under 40 who were more than twice as likely to select this factor as their top reason for leaving.²

While low pay is making it tough for districts to retain teachers, districts also face challenges recruiting teachers. Total enrollment nationwide in teacher preparation programs has declined by more than one-third since 2010 – and this decline occurred as enrollment in bachelor’s degree programs was on the rise.³ Among high school students, low pay ranks as the top reason for not being interested in a career in teaching.⁴

As the Economic Policy Institute has reported, teachers are paid less than other college-educated workers with similar experience and education. This financial penalty discourages college students from entering the teaching profession and makes it difficult for school districts to retain teachers. Based on the most recent reporting, Virginia had the largest teacher pay penalty at 67.3 cents on the dollar earned by similar college-educated workers.

Funding inequities across districts exacerbate the problems for districts with lower revenues and higher student poverty. Nationally, the base salary in high-poverty districts is on average \$5,600 lower than low-poverty districts, a difference of nearly 10 percent. And these differences in salary have implications for school systems’ ability to recruit and retain staff. A

¹ Diliberti, Melissa Kay, Heather L. Schwartz, and David Grant. (2021). “Stress Topped the Reasons Why Public School Teachers Quit, Even Before COVID-19.” *RAND Corporation*. Accessed from https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1121-2.html.

² Ibid

³ Lisette Partelow. (Dec 2019.). “What to Make of Declining Enrollment in Teacher Preparation Programs.” *Center for American Progress*. Accessed from: <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/make-declining-enrollment-teacher-preparation-programs/>

⁴ Southern Regional Education Board. (Sept. 2020) “New Ideas in Teacher Compensation.” Access at <https://www.sreb.org/publication/new-ideas-teacher-compensation>



2021 study of the educator labor market in Washington state examined job openings statewide and found that shortages are nearly two times higher in high-poverty districts.⁵

Using compensation to address the staffing crises means making teaching and school staff jobs more competitive with comparable jobs in the private sector. Higher pay attracts high-achieving young people to enter the teaching profession and helps keep teachers from leaving the profession. And that matters for students.

Countries that pay teachers more - Ireland, Canada, and Finland for example - are able to attract teachers with stronger cognitive skills and that makes a difference for students. When teachers have higher cognitive skills, their students perform better in math and reading.⁶ Other research has found that raising teacher wages by ten percent reduces high school dropout rates by three to four percent.⁷

Virginia has the least competitive teacher pay in the country. Virginia lawmakers should take immediate steps to resolve this. Closing the pay gap between Virginia teachers and other college educated workers would mean raising the average teacher salary by 32.7%. As a step toward that goal, Virginia should raise average teacher pay by 10% to bring teacher pay levels up to the U.S. average.⁸

I hope you will join me in supporting HB 535.

Thank you,

Tyvon Bates
American Federation of Teachers Virginia

⁵ Dan Goldhaber and Trevor Gatz. (2021). School District Staffing Challenges in a Rapidly Recovering Economy. CEDR Flash Brief No. 1108202-1. University of Washington, Seattle, WA. Accessed from <https://www.cedr.us/working-papers>

⁶ Eric Hanushek, Marc Piopiunik, and Simon Wiederhold, S. (2019). "Do Smarter Teachers Make Smarter Students? International Evidence on Teacher Cognitive Skills and Student Performance." *Education Next*, 19(2), 56-64. Accessed from <https://www.educationnext.org/do-smarter-teachers-make-smarter-students-international-evidence-cognitive-skills-performance/>

⁷ Susanna Loeb and Marianne Page. (2000). "Examining the link between teacher wages and student outcomes: The importance of alternative labor market opportunities and non-pecuniary variation." *Review of Economics and Statistics*. 82(3), 393-408.

⁸ The Commonwealth Institute. (Jan. 2022). "Making Teacher Pay Increases Real and Meaningful." Accessed at <https://thecommonwealthinstitute.org/the-half-sheet/making-teacher-pay-increases-real-and-meaningful/>