



Contact:

Public Affairs Dept.
202/879-4458

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Puerto Rico's Teacher Salaries 50% Lower than Those on U.S. Mainland

Washington, D.C.— Puerto Rico's average teacher salary of \$22,164 for 2002-03 ranks far below that of any state or U.S. territory, according to the American Federation of Teachers' annual teacher salary survey released Thursday. In fact, Puerto Rico's teachers make less than half the U.S. average teacher salary of \$45,771.

Puerto Rico's average teacher salary for 2002-03 was \$22,164. Among the territories, Guam's average teacher salary for 2002-2003 was \$34,738; and the U.S. Virgin Islands' salary was \$34,764.

Puerto Rico's average beginning teacher pay was \$18,000, the lowest of any state or territory.

Across the country, teachers' salaries remained relatively stagnant while their share of health benefits rose at all-time high rates, making it difficult to attract and keep good teachers at a time when they are increasingly needed, the report said.

Nationally, the 2002-03 average teacher salary, which is the most recent figure available, was \$45,771, up 3.3 percent from the previous year. The average beginning teacher salary was \$29,564, up 3.2 percent from the year before. But AFT's report noted that teachers' share of health insurance costs spiked an average 13 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"Exorbitant health insurance costs are taking an intolerable bite out of already inadequate teacher salaries. Teachers are being asked to do more, shortages persist in the most challenging areas to teach, yet compensation packages are insulting," said AFT Secretary-Treasurer Edward J. McElroy.

Furthermore, the AFT noted, superintendents' average salaries are as much as four times higher than teachers' average pay. "States and school districts are crying poverty when it comes to teachers' pay yet somehow find money for extravagant administrator salaries," McElroy said.

California led the nation with the highest average teacher salary for 2002-03, at \$55,693. South Dakota had the lowest average teacher salary on the U.S. mainland, at \$32,414. Alaska led the nation with the highest average beginning teacher salary for 2002-03, at \$37,401. Montana had the lowest average beginning teacher salary on the U.S. mainland, at \$23,052.

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The AFT represents 1.3 million pre-K through 12th-grade teachers; paraprofessionals and other school-related personnel; higher education faculty and professional staff; nurses and healthcare workers; and federal, state and local government employees.