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AFT News Release

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TEACHER SALARIES LAG BEHIND INFLATION Teachers Earned 18 Cents for Every New Dollar in Other Professions from 1994-2004 Compensation Out of Step with Rising Professional Demands on Teachers

WASHINGTON, D.C.—For the first time since the 1999-2000 school year, the average teacher salary failed to keep up with inflation, according to the American Federation of Teachers' (AFT) latest salary survey, released today. The survey also reports that, over the last 10 years, compensation for teachers increased at a far slower rate than salaries for other professionals. Teachers gained just 18 cents for every new dollar earned by workers in the private sector.

The decline in teacher compensation comes at a time when growing numbers of teachers are enhancing their credentials by participating in professional development, earning advanced degrees, and achieving national board certification. They also are facing increased professional demands, in terms of licensure and content-knowledge requirements, under federal law.

“Current salaries fail to reflect the professional qualifications, preparation and challenges that teachers must meet every day in the classroom,” said AFT President Edward J. McElroy. “At the very least, teachers’ pay should be a measure of their educational backgrounds and the demands of their jobs. Teachers, like all workers, deserve a salary that enables them to comfortably support themselves and their families.”

The AFT teacher salary survey found that the average teacher salary in the 2003-04 school year was \$46,597, a 2.2 percent increase from the year before. This falls short of the rate of inflation for 2004, which was 2.7 percent. When adjusted for inflation, the 2003-04 salary actually drops 0.4 percent from 2002-03.

“It’s unbelievable that while everyone recognizes the importance of bringing high-quality teachers to our schools, we continue to pay them low salaries and thank them with insignificant raises,” said McElroy. “Inadequate compensation is one of the key obstacles to recruiting teachers to the hardest-to-staff schools.”

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The survey also highlights a 10-year trend in which teacher salaries have grown at a significantly slower rate than private sector pay. Between 1994 and 2004, inflation-adjusted teacher salaries only gained about \$100 per year. By contrast, the growth in earnings in the private sector was five times as high.

There continues to be a wide gap between teacher salary growth and salaries in other professions that require similar educational backgrounds. Average teacher salaries gained just over 2 percent after inflation, while the salaries of other professionals grew between 5 percent and 14.4 percent over the same 10-year period. For example, average salaries for accountants increased by 10.4 percent. This gap can not be explained by the length of the academic year, as the difference is in salary *growth*.

Some of the other facts identified in the AFT survey:

- From 1994 to 2004, average teacher salaries, when adjusted for inflation, dropped in 22 states.
- The average beginning teacher salary in the 2003-04 school year was \$31,704, up just 1.1 percent from the previous year.
- Since 1988, there has been only one year, 2001-02, in which teacher salaries have outpaced inflation by more than 1.1 percent.
- Connecticut had the highest average teacher salary at \$56,516, while South Dakota reported the lowest, at \$33,236.

AFT officials noted that the impact on teachers would be even more dire if the survey took into account the current severe threats to pension plans and healthcare benefits. Many states are attempting to drastically reduce or eliminate these benefits, which were negotiated as part of their compensation.

The *Survey and Analysis of Teacher Salary Trends* is produced annually by the AFT research and information services department, using data compiled from state education agencies, the U.S. Department of Defense, the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Bureau of Economic Analysis. The full report, including state-by-state teacher salary information, can be found on the AFT Web site, <http://www.aft.org/salary/index.htm>.

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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.