



A Union of Professionals

AFT News Release

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Tennessee Ranks 31st in the Nation for Teacher Pay One of a Minority of States Where Salaries on Par with Inflation

Teachers Nationally Earned 18 Cents for Every New Dollar in Other Professions from 1994-2004

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Tennessee ranked 31st in the nation for its average teacher salary in 2003-04, according to the American Federation of Teachers' (AFT) annual teacher salary survey, released today. Tennessee was one of only 22 states where the increase in average teacher salary kept pace with the national rate of inflation.

The average teacher salary in Tennessee for the 2003-04 school year was \$40,318, up 2.9 percent from the previous year. Tennessee ranked 23rd in the nation for average beginning teacher salary, at \$30,449, an increase of 3.9 percent from 2002-03.

Nationally, average teacher salary growth failed to keep up with inflation for the first time since the 1999-2000 school year. The average teacher salary in 2003-04 was \$46,597, an increase of 2.2 percent from 2002-03. The national rate of inflation in 2004 was 2.7 percent. When adjusted for inflation, the 2003-04 salary is actually a drop of 0.4 percent from 2002-03.

“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 survey also reports that, from 1994-2004, compensation for teachers, after adjusting for inflation, increased at a far slower rate than salaries earned by other professionals, with teachers gaining just 18 cents for every new dollar earned by private sector workers with similar educational backgrounds.

Other states in the Southeast region ranked in the AFT survey as follows: Georgia was 15th in the nation, at \$45,848; Virginia was 20th, at \$43,936; North Carolina was 23rd, at \$43,211; South Carolina was 28th, at \$41,162; Florida was 29th, at \$40,598; Kentucky was 34th, at \$39,831; Arkansas was 37th, at \$39,226; West Virginia was 40th, at \$38,496.

Connecticut had the highest average teacher salary at \$56,516, while South Dakota reported the lowest at \$33,236. Alaska led the nation with the highest average beginning teacher salary for 2003-04, at \$40,027. Wisconsin had the nation’s lowest average beginning teacher salary, at \$23,952.

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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.

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

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