



The Facts on Teacher Pay in North Carolina

“An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.” -Benjamin Franklin

Every day, North Carolinians entrust the general welfare and education of nearly [1.4 million K-12 students](#) to approximately [92,000 teachers](#) and 22,000 instructional staff. North Carolina’s reputation as an educational leader was well known throughout the country in the early 2000s, and the quality of our public school teachers has made our state attractive to new families and businesses.

Extensive [research](#) pointing to the [critical role teachers play](#) in student achievement highlights the importance of making sure North Carolina has a strong, well-supported teaching force. According to a 2014 report for the [American Economic Association](#), having a quality teacher positively impacts a student’s future. The report showed that students with quality teachers were “...more likely to attend college, earn higher salaries, and [were] less likely to have children as teenagers.” Quality teachers with experience, advanced degrees, proper compensation, and subject-specific certification all contribute to student achievement. When teachers are not properly supported, the impact on children can be devastating.

However, since 2011, the NC General Assembly (NCGA) has systematically cut teacher benefits and given lower-than-inflation pay raises, severely diminishing the conditions for the state’s public school educators and crippling the recruitment and retention of our teaching professionals. Each legislative session, the NCGA has the opportunity to reverse course and send the message that it values public education and our teachers. An essential step is to adjust the base salaries (paid by the state) up to a competitive level.

Teacher Salaries in North Carolina

2023-24 Minimum Starting Teacher Salaries for Southern Region States



The [NC State Salary Schedule](#), which sets NC teachers’ base (minimum) salary, starts certified beginning teachers with a bachelor’s degree and no experience at \$39,000 (2023-24 schedule).

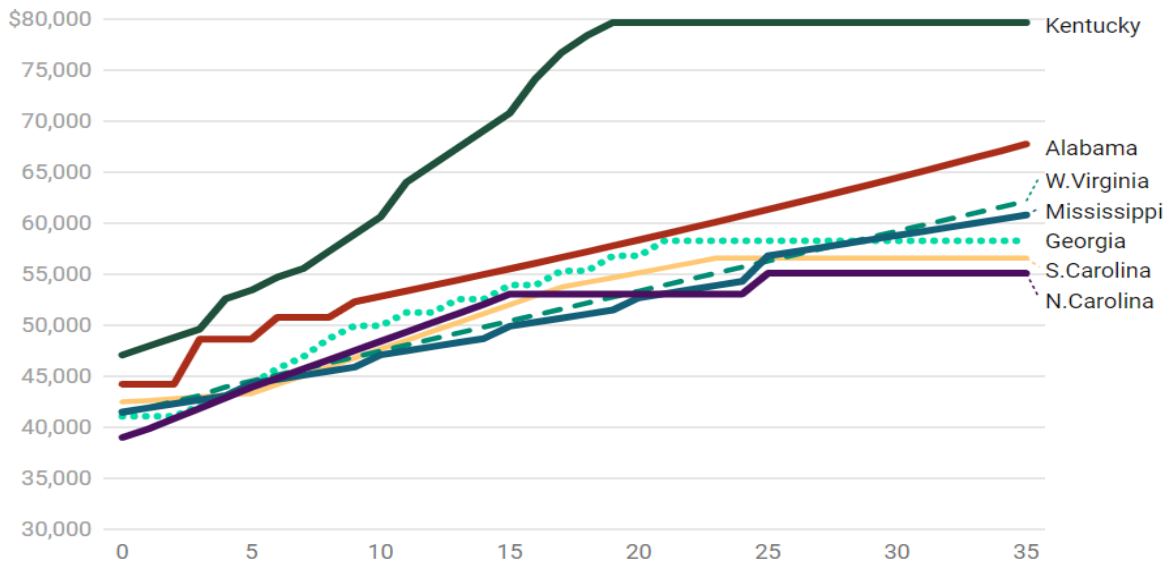
North Carolina has the lowest starting salary of states in the southern region that publish a state minimum salary schedule. (See references for links to state schedules.)

Note: FL & VA do not publish state salary schedules.

After starting as a teacher, what salary advances can NC teachers expect? Currently, the **top salary on the NC salary schedule is \$55,100**, which a teacher reaches after 25 years in the profession. With the additional 12% from National Board Certification, 25+ year teachers can increase their base salary to \$61,710. However, between years 15 and 24, the NC base salary sits at \$53,060 (\$59,430 with National Board Certification) and is fixed with zero growth.

The minimum salary trajectory for the southern region also shows that for most years NC’s minimum salary lags behind other states except for a few years when the minimum salary slightly outpaces South Carolina, West Virginia and Mississippi. **But because the NC state salary is frozen during years 15 through 24, it soon falls back to the lowest in the region.** This creates a clear competitive disadvantage for NC in attracting and retaining teachers. Teachers don’t have to move very far to experience a much better financial situation.

2023-24 Minimum State Salaries by Years of Experience for Southern Region



Note: FL and VA do not publish state salary schedules; TN publishes a limited schedule.

The state salary schedule tells only part of the salary story. In North Carolina, districts may use local funds to supplement the state base pay as a way to attract applicants and pay a more professional salary. This creates disparities between districts that can afford local supplements and districts that cannot. The [local salary supplements](#) in 2023-24 ranged from \$10,650 in Chapel Hill/Carrboro School District to \$0 in Caswell County, Graham County, and Weldon City Schools. The two largest districts, Wake County and Charlotte-Mecklenburg have the second and third highest supplements, at \$9,797 and \$9,828 respectively, in part because the cost of living is so high in these areas. (See an [interactive map](#) of supplement by county.)

Average Teacher Salary by State, NEA 2023 Rankings

NEA data is from the 2021-22 fiscal year



Chart: PSFNC • Source: NEA • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

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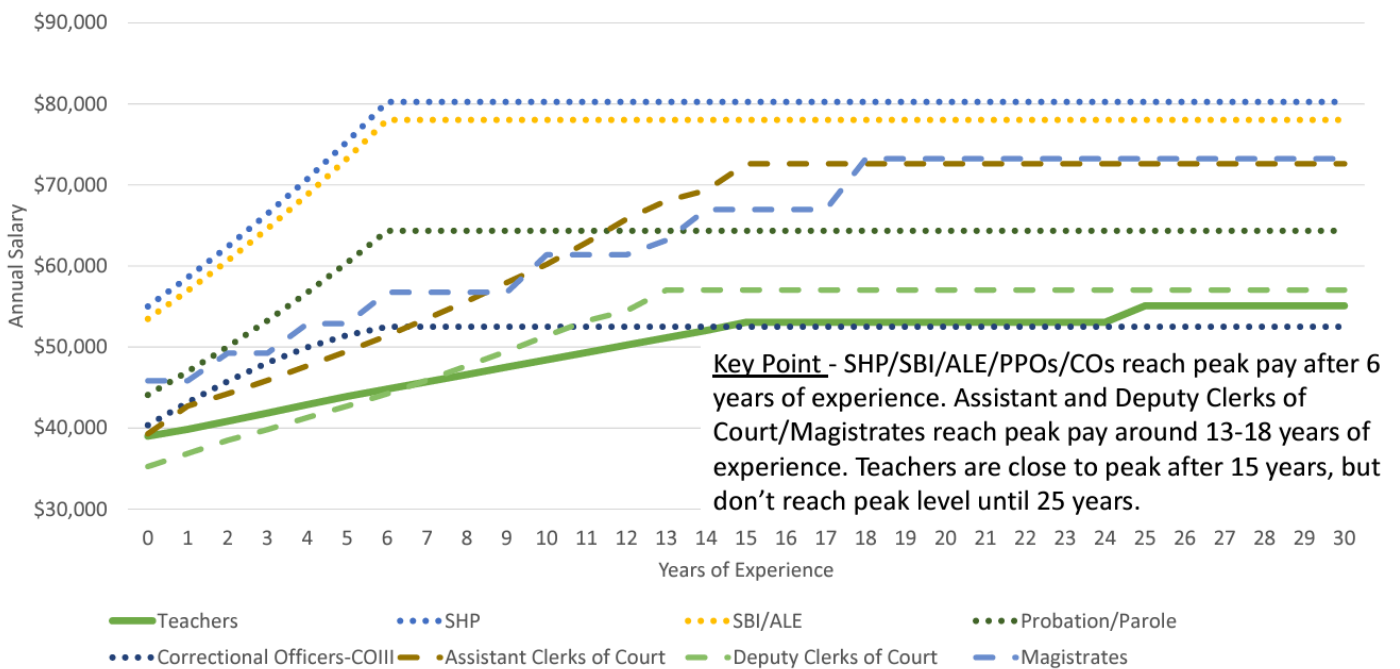
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Calculations for average teacher pay include the additional boost from local supplements, so N.C. averages are higher than the values on the state salary schedule. Each year, the National Education Association (NEA) calculates average teacher salaries for states across the nation. Their [2023 report](#) (using FY 2021-22 data) estimated the **average teacher salary in N.C. to be \$54,863**, which put N.C. salaries ahead of several surrounding states. However, N.C.'s average was \$11,992 less than the national average of \$66,745 and ranked **36th in the nation**. The same report ranked N.C.'s average teacher starting salary at **46th in the nation**. Since 2021-22, many surrounding states have bolstered teacher salaries in an attempt to keep up with inflation and retain qualified teachers. **Unfortunately, N.C. has not kept up, as shown in the 2023-24 minimum state salaries shown above.**

Teacher salaries in NC have stagnated for years. [According to the NEA](#), between 2019-20 and 2020-21, the growth in average teacher salaries in NC was one of the lowest in the nation. The following year, [average salaries increased 2.63%](#). In the 2023 state budget, the General Assembly allocated funds to increase salaries an average 3% for 2023-24 and 4% in 2024-25, though the increases vary depending on years of experience. Teachers with more than 10 years of experience will gain from 3.61% to 4.69% on the state salary schedule **over two years**. **These increases fall far short of [recent inflation rates](#), which rose to 7% in 2021 and 6.5% in 2022.**

In February 2024, the NCGA Fiscal Research Division [presented a comparison](#) of the salaries of N.C. state-funded careers (e.g. teachers, deputy clerks of court, magistrates, correctional officers). Only deputy clerks of court have lower starting salaries, and after the 7th year, their salaries are higher. Four of the seven careers reach their salary maximum at 6 years, a full 19 years before teachers reach their maximum. Teachers' maximum salaries are second from the bottom, higher only than state highway patrol officers.

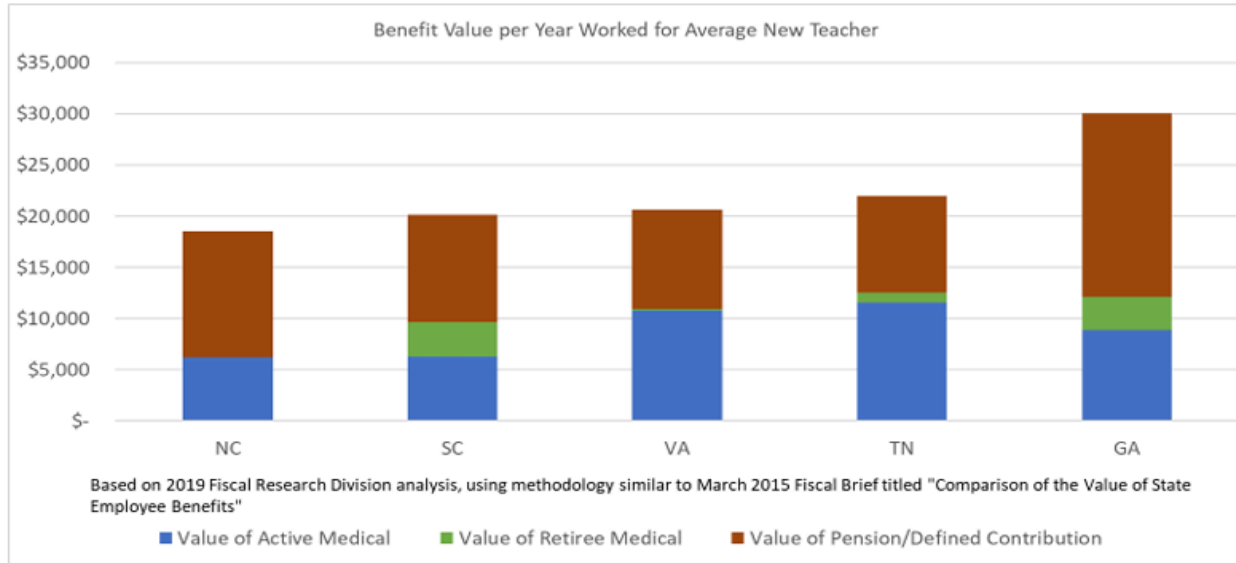
Comparison of NC Salary Schedule Structures



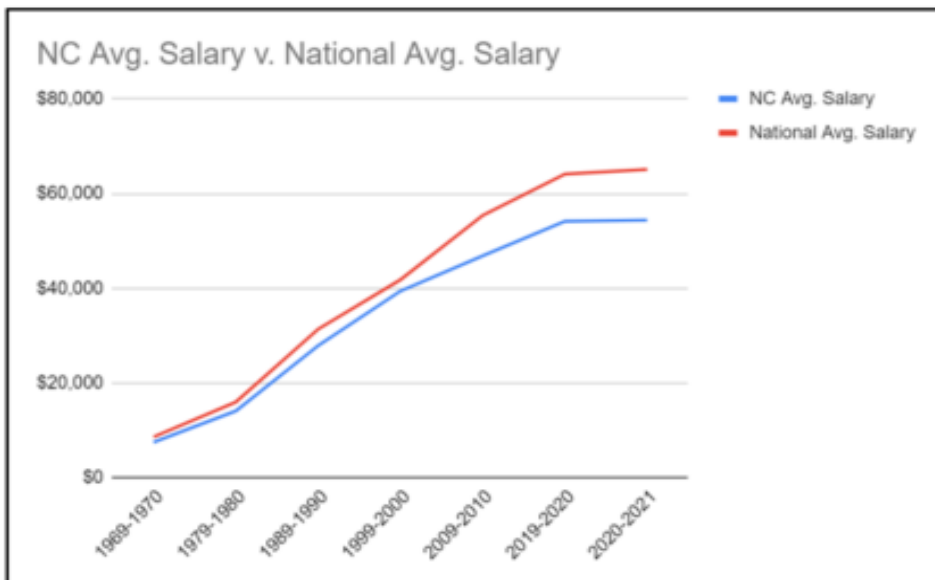
Benefit offerings complement the teacher salary structure and also affect the profession's desirability. According to the [NCGA Fiscal Research Division](#), when compared to its neighboring states, N.C. has the lowest total benefit value for active medical, retiree medical, and pension/defined contribution combined

From 2021 forward, N.C. stopped offering new teachers a retiree medical benefit (green bar). This, in addition to N.C.'s weak salary structure, makes surrounding states even more attractive options for future and current teachers.

Benefits Comparison to Neighboring States



N.C. has not always compared so poorly to surrounding states or the national average. For many years, N.C.'s average was slightly below the national average. After 2000, and especially after 2010 the gap grew much wider.



The [National Center for Education Statistics \(NCES\)](#) data on average teacher salaries from 1969 through 2022 reveals that in 1999-2000 the average N.C. teacher salary was \$39,404. [When adjusted for inflation](#) that number is \$72,234 in today's dollars, more than **\$17,000 higher than the current N.C. average teacher salary.**

Data collected from National Center for Education Statistics



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Conclusion

NC is known for its highly accredited educators, leading the nation in the number of teachers who have earned [National Board Certification](#). Despite being highly qualified, these teachers are not properly compensated for their work, causing new and veteran educators to leave the profession. In a 2021 interview about teacher salaries and the 2021-23 budget, [Gina Guzzo, a former Wake County educator](#) says, "...the really great feeling you have when you're teaching and helping kids, that isn't something that pays your mortgage or pays your water bill...so ultimately, that was a definite big factor in why I decided to leave."

In a March 2024, presentation to the SBE on the 2022-2023 State of the Teaching Profession Report, staff shared that teacher attrition had risen to 11.5% over the last year, up from 7.78% in 2021-22 and higher than it had been for nearly two decades. **These departures, coupled with fewer teachers entering the profession should motivate our state legislators to take quick and decisive action to improve conditions for teachers.**

Raising salaries substantially is an essential first step. We need to pay our teachers like their job is the most important job on our children's journey to become successful citizens...because it is.

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