The Facts on Teacher Pay in NC

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

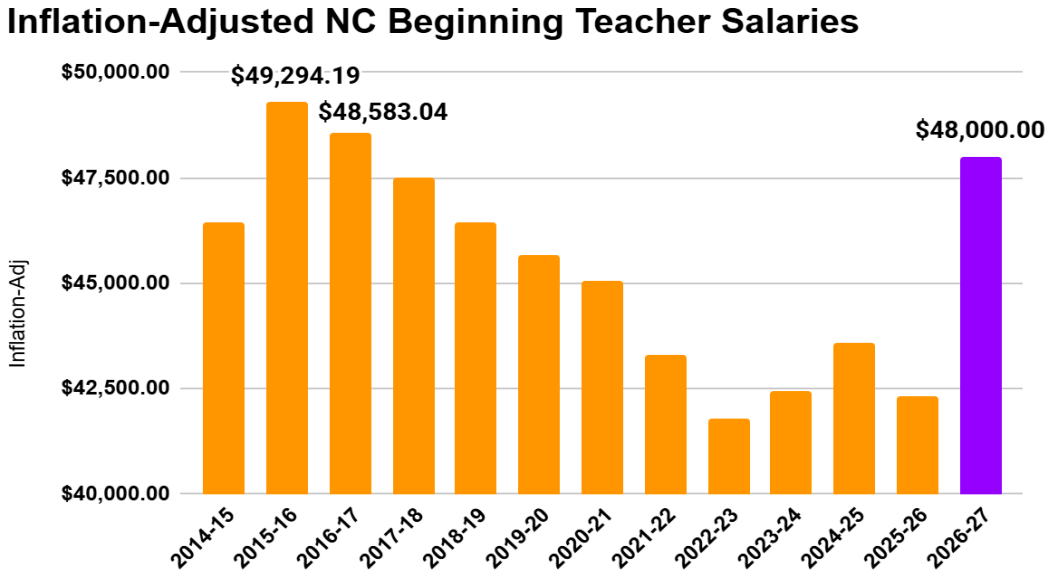
Every day, North Carolinians entrust the general welfare and education of nearly 1.5 million K-12 public school students to approximately 90,000 public school teachers and 22,000 instructional staff. NC’s reputation as an educational leader was well known throughout the country in the early 2000s, and the quality of our public school teachers has historically 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 Measuring the Impacts of Teachers II: Teacher Value-Added and Student Outcomes in Adulthood, a 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 can 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) to a competitive level.

Teacher Salaries in North Carolina

The State Salary Schedule, which sets North Carolina teachers’ base (minimum) salary, starts certified beginning teachers with a bachelor’s degree and no experience at $48,000 in 2026-27. Though the budget has been heralded as offering “historic raises,” with the largest teacher raises in 15 years, the new beginning salary in North Carolina still falls short of the beginning salary in 2015-16, which was $49,294.19 when adjusted to 2026 dollars. Though the salary raises for 2026-27 are a step in the right direction, the new starting salary does not make up for more than a decade of stagnant wages.



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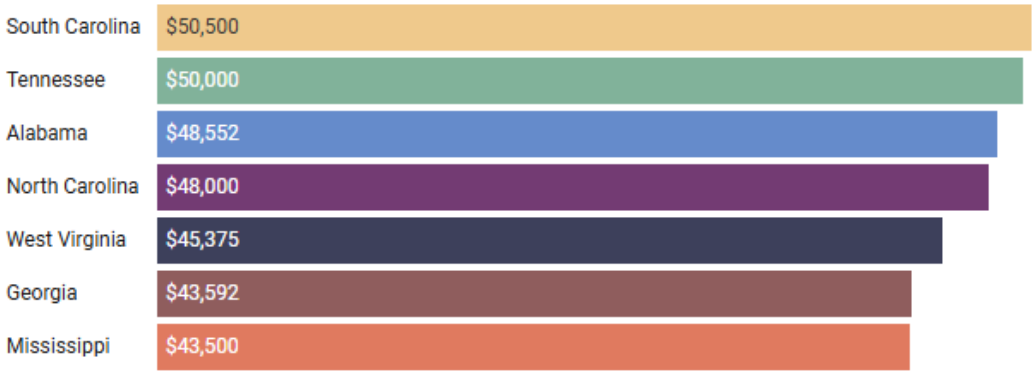
With the new raises, North Carolina advances from last place to the fourth of seven states based on base salaries of states in the southern region that publish a state minimum salary schedule. (See references for links to state schedules.)

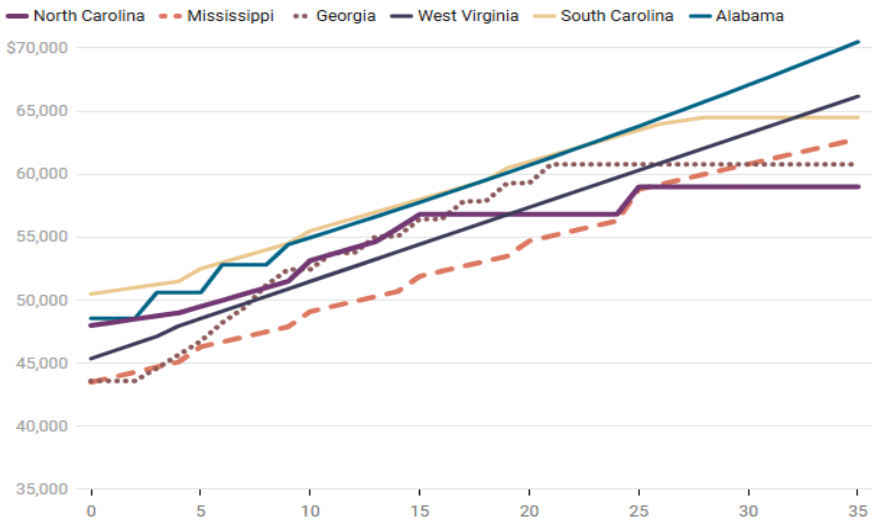
What salary advances can North Carolina's teachers expect throughout their career?

2026-27 Minimum Starting Salaries for Southern Region States

States excluded (e.g. VA and FL) do not publish state salary schedules.



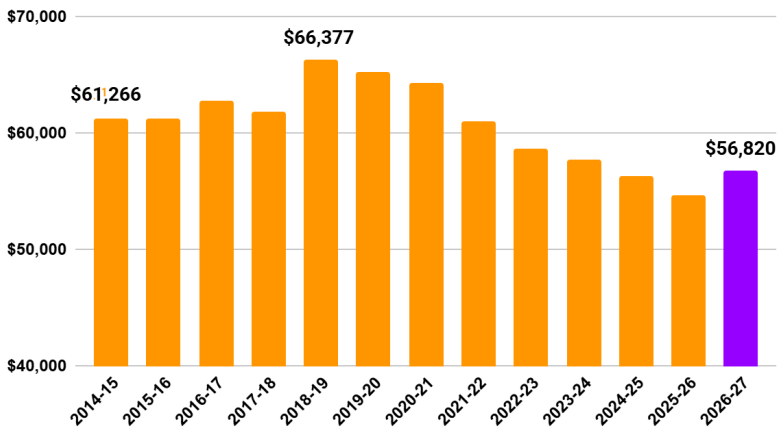
2026-2027 Minimum State Salaries by Years of Experience for Southern Region



The minimum salary trajectories for the southern region states that publish a base salary schedule show that North Carolina's minimum salary for beginning teachers puts it ahead of several states, but slow growth and no growth for years 15-24 results in NC dropping to last place (FL and VA do not publish state salary schedules; TN publishes a limited schedule.) This creates a clear competitive disadvantage for North Carolina in attracting and retaining teachers. Teachers don't have to move very far to experience a much better financial situation.

In 2026-27, the **top salary on the North Carolina salary schedule is $59,000**, which a teacher reaches after **25 years**. With the additional 12% from National Board Certification, 25+ year teachers can increase their base salary to $66,080. However, between years 15 and 24, the North Carolina base salary stays at $56,820 ($63,640 with National Board Certification) with **zero growth for ten years**. In 2018-19 teachers with 15-24 years of experience earned the equivalent of $66,377 in today's dollars.

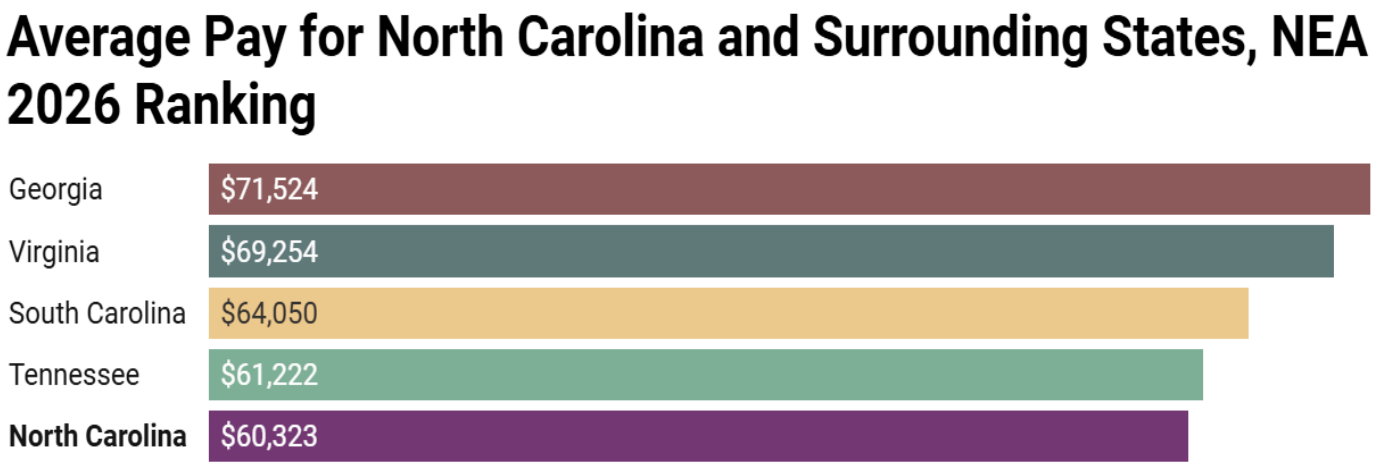
Salaries for NC Teachers with 15 - 24 Years of Experience (Adjusted for Inflation)



It is important to note that the national average salary for teachers in 2024-2025 was $74,495. Even with the new increases, the NC state salary schedule pays teachers with 25+ years of experience approximately $15,500 less than the national average of two years ago.

The state salary schedule tells only part of the story. In NC, districts may use local funds to supplement the state base pay to attract applicants with a more professional salary. This creates disparities between districts that can afford local supplements and districts that cannot. The local salary supplements in 2025-26 ranged from **$11,612 in Chapel Hill/Carrboro School District to $0 in Graham County** Schools. The two largest districts, Wake County and Charlotte-Mecklenburg had the second and third highest supplements, at $11,493 and $10,598 respectively.

Calculations for average teacher pay include the additional boost from local supplements, so salary 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 2026 report (using FY 2024-25 data) estimated the **average teacher salary in NC to be $60,323**, which put NC's salaries as the lowest of its surrounding states. NC's average teacher salary was $14,172 less than the national average ($74,495) and ranked ***43rd in the nation***.



Many states have bolstered teacher salaries to keep up with inflation, but teacher salaries in NC have not kept up. Between 2021-22 and 2022-23, average salaries increased only 2.63%. In 2024-25, average salaries increased 3.09%, but this increase ranked in the bottom half of all states. And in 2025-26, salaries remained frozen at the 2024-25 level due to the failure of the NC House and Senate to pass a state budget. The new budget—passed in July 2026—included substantial raises, but other states are also raising teacher pay. If NC expects to attract and retain high-quality teachers, salaries need to be more competitive when compared to the surrounding states to get teachers into NC.

Most Southern states pay teachers a higher salary if they earn a master's degree or other advanced degree. In 2013, NC **removed master's pay for teachers** who had not earned or started an advanced degree by mid-2014. Now, NC is the only state in the southeast region that does not provide a salary increase for teachers who earn a graduate degree. This policy discourages advanced education and makes our state less competitive in attracting and keeping highly qualified teachers.

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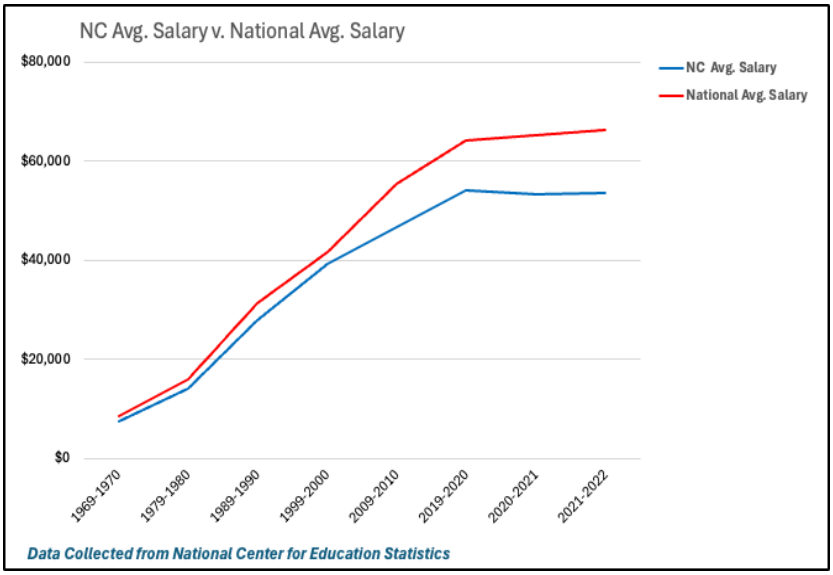
State	Bachelor	Bachelor + Additional Hours	Master	Master + Additional Hours	Doctorate	Specialist (e.g. Special Education)
Alabama	✔		✔		✔	✔
Florida	Salary is set by district. Teachers with a graduate degree in the area of certification receive a pay increase.					
Georgia	✔		✔		✔	✔
Kentucky	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	
Mississippi	✔		✔		✔	✔
North Carolina	✔					
South Carolina	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	
Tennessee	✔	✔ (Advanced Degree)				
Virginia	✔		✔		✔	
West Virginia	✔		✔	✔	✔	

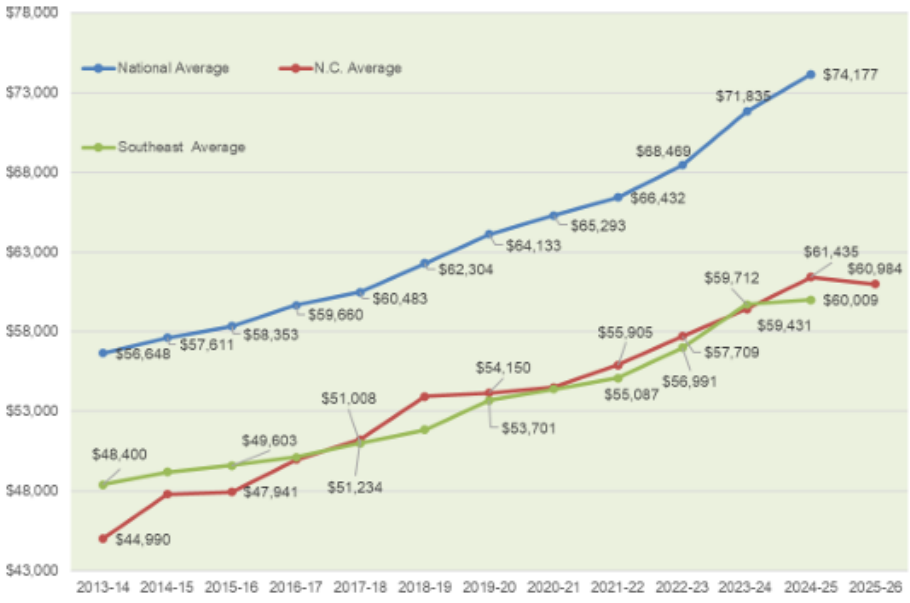


North Carolina has not always compared so poorly. For many years, North Carolina's average teacher pay was just slightly below the national average. After 2010, the gap grew much wider.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data on average teacher salaries from 1969 - 2022 (the most current data available) shows that in 1999-2000, the average teacher salary in NC was $39,404. When adjusted for inflation, that salary is $77,956 in 2026, more than **$17,500 higher than the current NC average teacher salary.**

NCDPI's Highlights of the North Carolina Public School Budget tracks average teacher salaries from 2013-14. **In 2025-26, NC average teacher salaries dropped 1%**, emphasizing the crisis of neglect facing NC's public education system.

With the new July 2026 budget, this trend will change. However, the new budget primarily impacts beginning teachers, not veteran teachers. As a result, while average teacher salaries in NC for 2026-27 will be higher, the increase is mostly due to changes in beginning teacher salaries.



Conclusion

North Carolina 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, 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 March 2026, NCDPI presented to the State Board of Education the 2024-2025 State of the Teaching Profession Report, which showed that teacher attrition was 10.11%. Although this rate was lower than the spike in 2022-23, which jumped to 11.5% (from 7.78% in 2011-22) it is at its second highest rate in nearly two decades.

Although NC legislators have made progress towards improving teacher pay for beginning teachers, there is still much more to do to improve veteran teacher pay. There is still a 10-year salary plateau in place for educators with 15 to 24 years of experience. Improving veteran teacher pay requires ending multi-year salary freezes, restoring advanced degree incentives, and implementing continuous, inflation-adjusted step increases based on years of service. This is how North Carolina can attract and retain highly qualified and experienced educators.

"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."
— Yevonne Brannon, Public Schools First NC

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