



Connecticut Education Association

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Testimony of

Kate Dias
Connecticut Education Association

Before the
Education Committee

Re:
HB 1459 AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHER SALARIES

March 12, 2025

Senator McCrory, Representative Leeper, Senator Berthel, Representative Zupkus, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Kate Dias, President of Connecticut Education Association (CEA). CEA is the state's largest association of certified public-school teachers, representing over 43,000 active and retired teachers across 158 school districts in Connecticut. CEA is dedicated to improving the lives of our teachers, the success of our students, and the overall quality of public education in our state.

We are delighted to offer testimony in support of HB 1459 AAC Teacher Salaries. This bill represents an important step forward in making teachers' salaries competitive with those of similarly educated professionals, while also restoring respect to the teaching profession.

Educators make every other profession possible. We provide students with the knowledge, critical thinking skills, and the social-emotional supports they need to be successful in their academic lives and beyond. Unfortunately, work-related stress, staff shortages and low salaries have led to a teacher shortage crisis in our state; according to the Connecticut Department of Education (CSDE) there are approximately 1,300 teacher vacancies in the state and that number is growing.

The teacher shortage has been a problem for decades, one that was clearly underscored and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2020, teachers across Connecticut have reported an increase in social-emotional challenges and dysregulated student behavior, which only serves to make the job that much more challenging. A 2022 survey of Connecticut teachers found that 3 in 4 teachers are dissatisfied with their daily working conditions, nearly all said that stress and

burnout were a concern, and about 3 in 4 said they were considering leaving the profession or pursuing early retirement.¹

In recent years, teachers have found themselves shouldering greater responsibilities due to staffing shortages, increased exposure to dysregulated, disruptive and even violent student behavior, and harassment from parents and other members of the school community.² These challenges have created a thankless environment where teachers who were once heralded as heroes because of their commitment to students during the pandemic now find themselves the target of baseless attacks and criticism by parents, administrators, and school board members.

Restoring respect to the teaching profession is of paramount importance. As with other careers, the most direct way to do this is by offering a salary that is commensurate with the level of education required to do the work. On average, teachers earn less than \$4 for every \$5 a non-teacher college graduate earns (approx. 23% less).³ In 2021, the earnings gap between Connecticut public school teachers and non-teacher college graduates grew to 33%, with teachers earning \$1,348 weekly compared to over \$2,009 weekly for non-teacher college graduates. In my own town of Manchester, a new hire in the recreation department will make over \$60,000, but a teacher will start at \$52,000. That is a significant difference when it comes to demonstrating the value of the work the individuals do.

All told, these trends represent an overall decline in support for the teaching profession. A 2022 poll shows that nearly 2 out of every 3 parents would discourage their children from going into teaching, while 6 out of 10 education degree holders regret completing a degree in education.^{4,5} As you consider strategies to overcome the educator shortage, we offer our policy brief on Teacher Recruitment & Retention, and research on starting salaries in school districts across the state (See <https://cea.org/policy-brief/>).

As lawmakers work to implement policy solutions to address the teaching shortage, we respectfully urge members of this committee to make bold, meaningful investments in teacher salaries and working conditions, and not simply tinker around the edges with cheaper, more attainable policy fixes. While we strongly support reducing financial and administrative barriers for aspiring educators, modernizing teacher certification requirements, and investing in special education services, we know that increasing teacher salaries is the most impactful and immediate

¹ Connecticut Education Association. (2022, November 22). School Crisis: 74% of Teachers Consider Calling It Quits. Retrieved from Connecticut Education Association: <https://cea.org/school-crisis-74-of-teachers-consider-calling-it-quits/>

² Steiner, E. D., Doan, S., Woo, A., Gittens, A. D., Lawrence, R. A., Berdie, L., . . . Schwartz, H. L. (2002). Restoring Teacher and Principal Well-Being Is an Essential Step for Rebuilding Schools. RAND. Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-4.html

³ Allegretto, S. (2022). The teacher pay penalty has hit a new high. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.epi.org/publication/teacher-pay-penalty-2022/>

⁴ PDK Poll. (2022). The 54th Annual PDK Poll. Retrieved from PDK Poll: <https://pdkpoll.org/2022-pdk-poll-results/>

⁵ Partelow, L. (2019). What To Make of Declining Enrollment in Teacher Preparation Programs. Center for American Progress. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-K-12/reports/2019/12/03/477311/make-declining-enrollment-teacher-preparation-programs/>

strategy for turning around this crisis. We have seen it before with the bipartisan 1986 Teacher Enhancement Act and we know we can do it again in 2025.

In conclusion, we appreciate this committee's efforts to uplift the profession and strengthen the teaching pipeline in our state. Only through substantive, tangible investments in the teaching workforce can we effectively attract and retain the qualified, committed educators our schools urgently need. We ask that this committee approve HB 1459 without delay, to raise teacher salaries and restore confidence in the teaching profession. We applaud this committee for raising this concept and look forward to working with members to pass this important legislation without delay.

