

Teachers Need More than Apples: Our Underpaid Educators

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Image from <https://arhsharbinger.com/35456/opinion/the-United-states-is-in-a-teaching-crisis-teachers-are-overworked-underpaid/>

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What's Currently Happening?

Since the pandemic, we have heard over and over that there is a teacher shortage, but there never seems to be a follow up discussion about WHY that is. Why are teachers leaving the profession? Why are there less college students wanting to be teachers? There are numerous answers to these questions, but one major one is that teachers have continued to remain underpaid. As Through Education discusses, the teacher pay gap has been a long-standing issue within the education system, but our current economy has made the impacts incredibly more harmful. Many teachers also dedicate far more than the 7.5 hour workday that they are paid for due to grading, mentoring, attending meetings, and preparing classroom activities. On average, teachers accrue 17.5 unpaid hours of overtime each week. That is a significant portion of a teacher's week that is spent working, yet not being

properly compensated for it. On top of the unpaid overtime, as Through Education continues to discuss, teachers on average earn 23.5% less compared to other professionals with similar education levels. Furthermore, female educators and teachers of color are more impacted by income disparities than their male counterparts. These disparities have only increased over time and perpetuates the systemic inequalities within our education system.

While teachers do have unions that help to advocate for fair compensations, the teacher pay gap remains large. Research has shown that states with higher union membership also have higher wages (Through Education). It's also believed that without teacher unions, the wage gap would be even wider than it already is. Looking beyond salary, teacher benefits such as healthcare and retirement options are also inadequate, leading to even more financial stress. In the past few years however, we have seen more and more strikes throughout the United States demanding better compensation and better work environments (Through Education)



Image from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/2/11/denver-teacher-strike-thousands-walk-out-for-better-pay>

How Did We Get Here?

Through Education explains that there are numerous historical factors that play a role in the teacher pay gap. The first is that teaching has been historically seen as “women’s work,” therefore creating an undervalued and underpaid career. Additionally, government policies such as the Salary Equalization Act of 1963 has had limited impact compared to its intentions of closing the pay disparity between men and women, and teachers and other professionals. Lastly, with standardized testing continuing to rise, there is now a focus on performance-based pay for teachers. This has only further exacerbated the pay gap as teachers from affluent schools’ benefit, and teachers from low-income and underserved communities get little compensation.

On another note, part of the teacher pay gap can be attributed to the new education expectations for teachers (Arhsharbinger). Teachers are required to have a bachelor’s degree, but many teachers have had to pursue a master’s degree in order to obtain a full teaching license in some states. This has led many teachers to be in large amounts of student loan debt, and with their low salaries, they have been forced to live in years of debt

because they are unable to pay student loans and keep themselves financially afloat (Arhsharbinger).

A Call to Action

The teacher pay gap needs to be fixed in order to increase the number of educators in schools, and to ensure all current educators are being compensated properly for their work. There are a few things that we can do to help according to EPI and NEA:

- Advocate for local and state politicians to create policy targeted at increasing teacher pay and improving benefits
 - Including improving pension benefits, paid family and sick leave, and comprehensive health care
- Advocate for school funding to help teachers with their classroom resource needs to save some of their own money
- Increase awareness of the importance of teachers and the issues that they are facing in your local community
- Advocate for the rescinding of the regulation that excludes teachers from FLSA protections which gives them overtime protections
- Research and keep up to date on teacher union efforts and support as you can
- Increase union representation

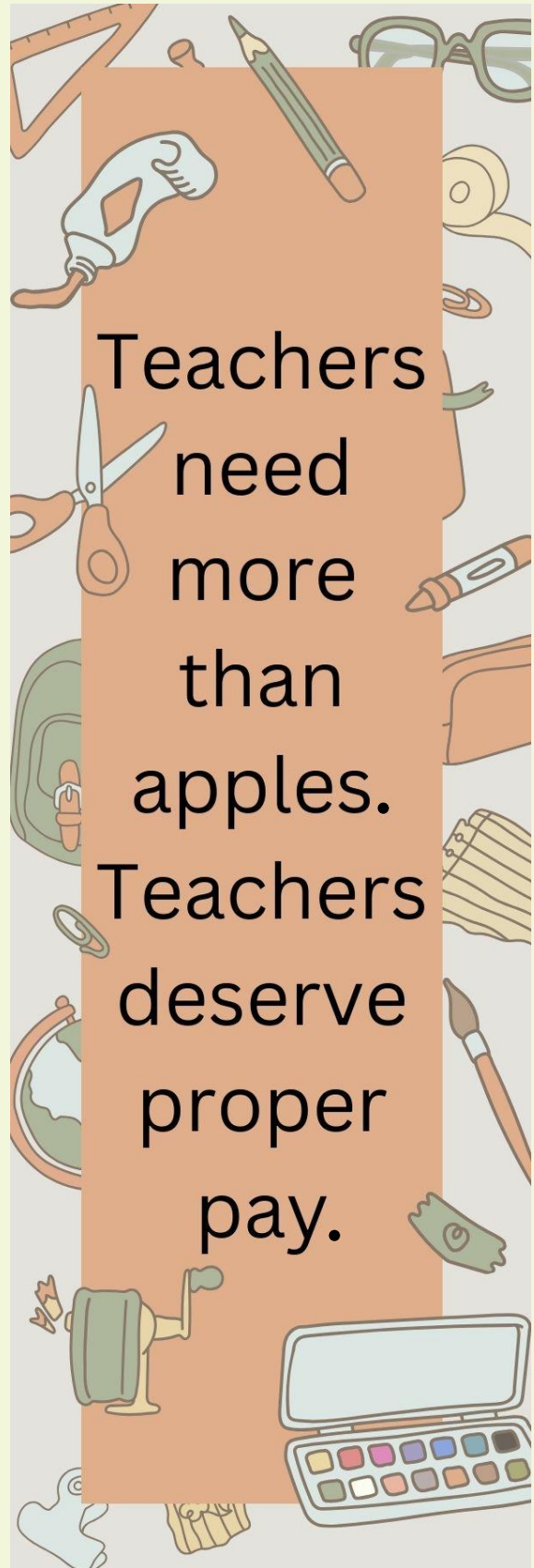


Image by Dani Foster via Canva

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