

## **Montana Teacher & Principal Salary: 2023 Educator Salary and Analysis of Growth in Salary**

Robin Clausen, PhD  
 Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems Unit  
 Montana Office of Public Instruction

The latest data available on teacher and principal salary from the Montana Office of Public Instruction is for the 2023 cohort. 2024 data will be available on GEMS, our online public reporting portal, in December 2024. Since salary is public data, we are happy to customize data files upon request, as was the case for the requests from the Governor’s Budget Office and the Department of Labor & Industry. We also deliver similar data to the education associations and researchers in Montana and throughout the United States.

In this brief, we present descriptives of these educator salaries for 2023 and provide an analysis of the difference in salary for the same educators compared to 2022. In 2023, there were 11,321 full and part time teachers, 10,137 teachers worked more than a .90 equivalent teaching position (less than an hour of the workday was not spent on instruction or in school). There are 7574 teachers who had full time salary data for 2022 and 2023. There were 460 principals working across Montana’s schools with salary data from 2022 and 2023. All principals were included in the analysis regardless of FTE, as the principal role is often split with other roles (including superintendent, curriculum director, and teacher). These positions are federally reported, and teacher roles are grouped together in federal reporting.

This table provides data on these teaching roles, the mean difference in salary for teachers between 2022 and 2023, and the mean difference in non-salary compensation during these two periods.

Description (2023 Role)		Difference Salary (2023 less 2022)	Difference Non-Salary Compensation
Long-term Substitute Teacher (Contract)	Mean	-\$4,760.78	\$1,471.88
	N	3	3
Supervising Teacher	Mean	\$2,753.27	\$227.59
	N	65	65
Teacher - General Education	Mean	\$3,530.10	\$1,387.70
	N	6684	6684
Teacher - Gifted and Talented	Mean	\$4,188.56	-\$1,777.80
	N	8	8
Teacher - Special Education	Mean	\$4,636.64	\$1,242.17



	N	719	719
Teacher - Title I	Mean	\$9,132.64	\$1,519.93
	N	95	95
Total	Mean	\$3,696.16	\$1,362.27
	N	7574	7574

Title 1 teachers had the greatest annual increase (\$9,132.64). This is perhaps due to people recently changing positions into the Title 1 role. On average, between 2022 and 2023, general education teachers earned \$3,530.10 more than in 2022 (base salary increase). Correspondingly, non-salary compensation increased for each category, except for gifted and talented teachers for whom there was a decrease in non-salary compensation.

Statewide new teachers' salaries remain low (\$41,639). This low starting salary has changed little over the past 4 years (\$3457), especially when accounting for inflation. Yet in subsequent years of employment, salary does improve, most noteworthy in Title 1 schools or schools on or near a reservation. Yet the upper limit of what a typical teacher earns in Montana is relatively low. After 20 years of experience, the average teacher salary is about \$69,000. There are notable differences between groups of teachers. Teachers in Title 1 schools that have 25 percent of their students classified as Title 1 earn on average \$60,662 (the highest of any identified group). Teachers from small schools (less than 150 students) earn on average \$44,946 (the lowest of any group).

**Teachers Earning Less than \$35,660 in FY 2023**

573 full-time teachers earned under \$35,660 (working .90 FTE or above). The \$35,660 threshold was employed in the Teach Act legislation, which considered first year teachers whose starting pay was under that threshold. These include 146 teachers that had been licensed in the past year (new teachers or teachers recently licensed including those from out of state). There are also 344 teachers that have salary data for teaching positions in 2022 and 2023 that earn under \$35,660. Most of the teachers that earn under this threshold have taught for many years. Teacher compensation at these levels is a new experience for these educators as evidenced by the salary decreases between 2022 and 2023. This can happen because of teacher mobility between schools, where the receiving school pays less or has a position that pays less.

Relatively few schools have more than one teacher earning below this threshold. Thus, the distribution of teachers that earn under this threshold occurs in over 75 schools (roughly 10% of the state's schools). This means that it is far from a situation of where there are a few 'low wage' schools, rather numerous schools have at least one position that is hired below this level. And, as we can see in schools classified as Title 1, where positions pay relatively well, there are positions paid under this threshold.

earning less  
teachers. Newly certified teachers  
experience but have not been certified in



Most of the new teachers in 2023  
than \$35,660 are general education  
include those teachers with teaching  
Montana.

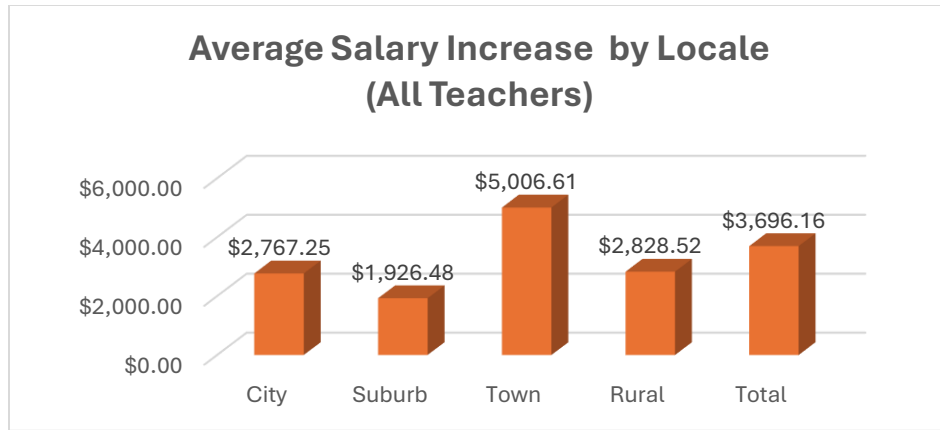
One would expect that in most challenged communities there would be more starting teacher salaries under \$35,660. However, this is not the case in on or near reservation schools. Relatively few of these low wage positions are in on-reservation schools (11). Most are in schools classified as targeted support or comprehensive support (84) in small rural communities. The average salary for these new teachers is \$32,513. Most of these new teachers are in systems with less than 400 students (93), however a large number are from cities (27).



### Salary Growth 2022 - 2023

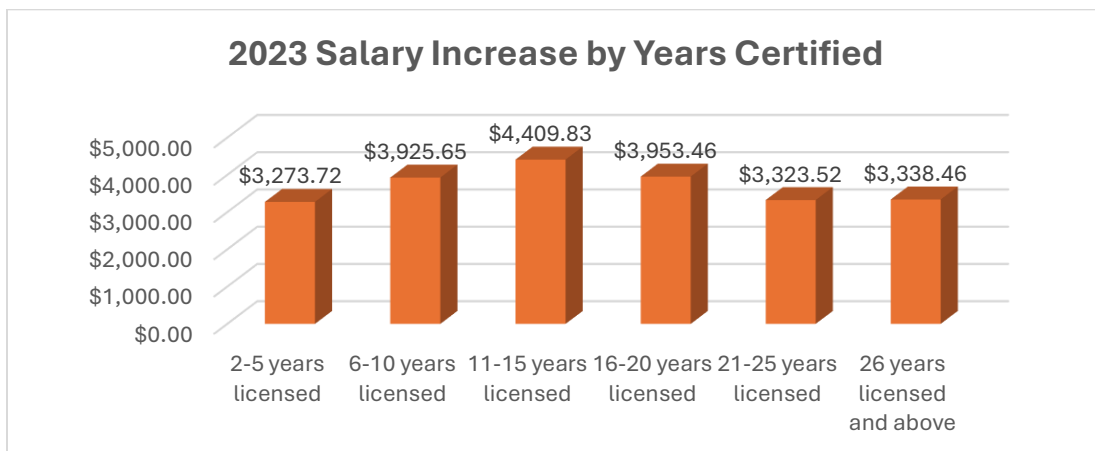
For all teachers that worked full time on average by \$3696.16 (taking the two years). Growth among Title 1 teachers was the lowest. Growth among special education teachers was the lowest. Growth among special education teachers was \$4,636.64. There is no statistical difference between teachers in on or off reservation schools. There is a significant difference with schools classified as targeted support and comprehensive support (favoring teachers in schools in these groups who earn \$4,095.68 more in 2023 than in 2022) ( $p < .001$ ). There are significant differences between locales in the average amount of salary increases, with the lowest happening in cities and suburbs.

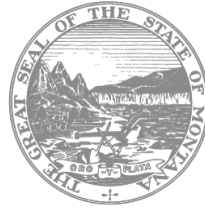
in both 2022 and 2023, salaries grew difference in base salary between the was the highest, meanwhile supervising



Salary is correlated to school enrollment ( $p < .001$ ). Schools with less than 400 students only had a \$2800 increase in average teacher salaries. Schools with more than 25% of their students identified as Title 1 had their teachers earn on average \$4,175.65 more in comparison to 2022.

Among all teachers, the highest growth in salary occurred among teachers in the 36-45 age group (\$4409.83) or having between 11 and 15 years of experience.





their salaries had 21 – 25 years of teaching salaries increase \$3323.52. This is like experience (\$3338.46).

As teachers gain more experience, increase less quickly. Teachers who experience on average had their those with 26 years or more

**Salary Decreases: Teachers Making less than \$35,660**

For the teachers earning under \$35,660 in 2023 compared to their salary data in 2022, all groups showed decreases in salaries between the two periods. The average decline in base salary for these teachers is \$3,986.51. Only 23 of these teachers were from on-reservation schools. Yet, it is noteworthy that for these teachers the average decrease in earnings was \$10,898.30. Large decreases occurred among these teachers employed in targeted and comprehensive support schools (\$6,604.14). This is due to the recruitment of teachers with experience into certain low wage positions.

Rural areas saw a significantly lower salary change than other geographical areas (\$2283.20) (p = .025) for these teachers earning less than \$35,660 in 2023.

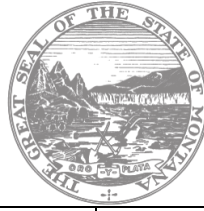
Locale Category	Mean
City (26)	-\$17,968.93
Town (42)	-\$5,126.70
Rural (274)	-\$2,283.20
Total (344 teachers)	-\$3,986.51

Among teachers earning less than \$35,660 in schools without ESSA designations, the average decrease was \$756.98. With these teachers with a base salary less than \$35,660 in systems with an enrollment between 150 and 399 students experienced a salary decrease of \$392.73. Teachers with between 2 and 5 years of licensure had the least salary change in this group (\$1,053.57).

**Building Leader**

Principal salaries increased in 2023, however there was no significant difference based on school size. The average principal salary was \$91,921.70; however, this data point masks important differences based on classification of the school and based on enrollment in the school system. The school system was the level of analysis that was chosen since many principals also are the superintendent of the district/system.

Category	Mean
Average Principal Salary (2023)	\$91,921.70
On Reservation	\$88,247.66
Comprehensive or Targeted Support	\$95,475.66
Schools with over 25% Title 1 Students	\$95,363.29
40 or fewer students in the system	\$72,251.73



41 to 150 students	\$75,436.62
151 to 400 students	\$79,187.37
401 to 850 students	\$85,175.53
851 to 2500 students	\$91,811.01
More than 2500 students in the system	\$116,483.79

The principal salary for the 48 on reservation schools was not significantly different from the other schools in the state, although when broken down by system size there are important differences (such as when comparing on reservation systems with systems of less than 400 students). Schools designated as comprehensive or targeted support or schools with large populations of Title 1 students have principals who on average earn above the mean. Most salaries that occur above the mean are in systems with at least 851 students.

There are important differences based on the location of the schools. Among the 73 city schools, the average principal salary is \$111,104.51, whereas schools located in rural areas have principals that earn on average \$81,460.79. Of note the average salary among principals of schools in towns is \$105,070.76. There are important differences based on neighborhood poverty. The National Center for Education Statistics offers a poverty measure that is based on the relative income and poverty in the community (School Neighborhood Poverty estimates). This study analyzes neighborhood poverty based on quartiles for school districts throughout the state. The distribution of principal salaries aligns closely with the relative poverty of the community, where principals in the least advantage communities earn \$83,782.33 on average and in the 124 most advantaged communities, whose average neighborhood income is over 3x the poverty level, principals earn on average \$97,173.80.

**Descriptive Statistics**

Dependent Variable: Salaries2023

IPR_CAT	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Q1 Least Advantaged	83782.3336	21519.29313	119
Q2 Below Median (274)	88341.0276	28667.53011	106
Q3 Above Median (274)	94961.3076	26337.93915	111
Q4 Most advantaged	97173.8029	22303.92726	124
Total	91140.2246	25215.27892	460

**Principal Salary Change 2022 to 2023**

Average principal salary grew by \$2,845.18 in 2023. Important differences can be noted for schools on reservation (\$254.83) and schools that have between 41 and 150 students in the district/system (\$374.88). Principal salaries grew on average the most in schools classified as comprehensive or targeted support (\$3,946.78) and in systems that have more than 2500 students in the district/system (\$4701.63).



Category	Mean Difference
Average Principal Salary Difference	\$2,845.18
On Reservation	\$254.83
Comprehensive or Targeted Support	\$3,946.78
Schools with over 25% Title 1 Students	\$2,630.48
40 or fewer students in the system	*1
41 to 150 students	\$374.88
151 to 400 students	\$2,866.39
401 to 850 students	\$2,686.12
851 to 2500 students	\$2,177.19
More than 2500 students in the system	\$4,701.63

Average salary increase in town areas was \$6,456.73, meanwhile average trends in rural areas only increased by \$1573.60.

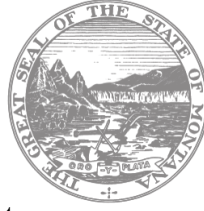
Locale Category	Mean
City	\$4,427.07
Suburb	*
Town	\$6,456.73
Rural	\$1,573.60
Total	\$2,845.18

There were no significant differences based on neighborhood poverty. There are important areas in which salary increases did not keep pace, such as in Quartile 2 schools (below the median for the state). Schools in this category only saw principal salary increases on average by \$670.18. This compares with Quartile 3 (above the median for the state) which saw an increase of \$3,182.62.

### Conclusions

Statewide new teachers' salaries remain low (\$41,639). This low starting salary has changed little over the past 4 years (\$3457), especially when accounting for inflation. Starting teacher salaries have not increased at the same pace as for other teachers. To stay at the same pace, for example, starting salaries would increase at the same pace as other teachers. The increase for general education teachers in 2023 was \$3,530.10. This is evidenced in the difference year over year in teacher salaries. There are multiple schools that hire for low wage positions (under \$35,660) and account for roughly 10 percent of the state's schools. This occurs both among new and veteran teachers. Few schools hired multiple teachers at this level. Salaries decreased for those teachers

<sup>1</sup> Missing data note since count of schools is under 10.



and 2023,  
recently hired into a low wage position  
school. Teachers in schools that are  
ESSA accountability experienced the least  
earning less than \$35,660. Schools with fewer than 150 students also experienced moderate  
salary decreases.

making under \$35,660 between 2022  
perhaps because these teachers were  
and made more previously in another  
classified as universal support for  
volatility in salaries among those teachers

There are important differences in principal salaries by school size, the locale of the school, and the relative neighborhood poverty. All principals in the state were factored into this analysis regardless of FTE. In some schools, principals' salaries increased at a breakneck pace, such as those systems in town locales with more than 850 students. However, in other communities such as in on reservation communities and schools with fewer than 150 students there were more tempered average salary increases.