A Union of Professionals

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Vermont's Average Teacher Salary Jumps, but Starting Salary Among Nation's Worst

Washington, D.C.— Vermont's average teacher salary rose 5.7 percent for the 2002-03 school year, but its starting teacher salary was among the nation's worst, according to the American Federation of Teachers' annual teacher salary survey released Thursday.

Vermont ranked 24th in the nation for its 2002-03 average teacher salary, at $42,038, up 5.7 percent from the previous year. Vermont ranked 45th in the nation for its average beginning teacher salary, at $25,240, the same as the year before. The AFT estimates that Vermont's average starting salary for the most recent school year, 2003-04, was $26,048.

Regionally, Vermont's 24th ranking for average salary was a spot ahead of New Hampshire, which was 25th, at $41,909, but lower than Massachusetts' No. 8 rank at $51,942.

Across the country, teachers' salaries remained relatively stagnant while their share of health benefits rose at all-time rates, making it difficult to attract and keep good teachers at a time when they are increasingly needed, the report said.

Nationally, the 2002-03 average teacher salary, which is the most recent figure available, was $45,771, up 3.3 percent from the previous year, and the average beginning teacher salary was $29,564, up 3.2 percent from the previous year. But AFT's report noted that teachers' share of health insurance costs spiked an average 13 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"Exorbitant health insurance costs are taking an intolerable bite out of already inadequate teacher salaries. Teachers are being asked to do more, shortages persist in the most challenging areas to teach, yet compensation packages are insulting," said AFT Secretary-Treasurer Edward J. McElroy.

Furthermore, the AFT noted, superintendents' average salaries are as much as four times higher than teachers' average pay. "States and school districts are crying poverty when it comes to teachers' pay yet somehow find money for extravagant administrator salaries," McElroy said.

California led the nation with the highest average teacher salary for 2002-03, at $55,693. South Dakota had the nation's lowest average teacher salary, at $32,414. Alaska led the nation with the highest average beginning teacher salary for 2002-03, at $37,401. Montana had the nation's lowest average beginning teacher salary, at $23,052. # # #

The AFT represents 1.3 million pre-K through 12th-grade teachers; paraprofessionals and other school-related personnel; higher education faculty and professional staff; nurses and healthcare workers; and federal, state and local government employees.