

Fresno Unified tops other big California districts in teacher pay study

By Hannah
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The Fresno Unified School District office building in downtown Fresno, photographed Jan. 31, 2014.

CRAIG KOHLRUSS — THE FRESNO BEE [Buy Photo](#)

Fresno teachers earn hundreds of thousands of dollars more than many of their California peers over a 30-year career, according to a [report released Wednesday](#) by a national organization seeking to reform teacher preparation and pay.

Fresno Unified ranked No. 29 among 113 of the nation's largest school districts — and first among the California districts studied — in lifetime earnings and number of years it takes teachers to reach the top of the pay scale. To provide a fair comparison across cities with varying costs of living, the study's ranking is based on salaries' buying power.

The report from the Washington, D.C.-based National Council on Teacher Quality shows a Fresno Unified teacher would earn about \$1.9 million over a career. Pittsburgh and Columbus, Ohio, topped the list, with teachers earning about \$2.7 and \$2.4 million over a lifetime.

“The total career earnings, at 10, 20 and 25 years of service are higher for Fresno Unified teachers than other teachers on the Valley floor,” said Kim Mecum, Fresno Unified associate superintendent for human resources. “We are pleased this report recognizes our efforts to remain an employer of choice.”

Other California cities, including Long Beach, San Diego, Los Angeles and Oakland, scored near the bottom of the ranking. After adjusting for costly living expenses in San Francisco, teachers there earn just \$794,202 over a lifetime, putting that city above only Hawaii and New York City on the list.

Even teachers in California districts with higher maximum salaries earn less than those in Fresno over their career. Teachers in Sacramento, which ranked No. 51 on the list, top out at about \$1.8 million.

The difference can be explained by how long it takes for teachers to reach the highest step on their district's pay ladder. More years with a higher salary means much more money over time, said Nancy Waymack, managing director for district policy at the National Council on Teacher Quality. Overall, the study found teachers' starting and ending salaries can have little to do with how much they earn over time.

In Fresno, for example, teachers start at about \$38,600 out of college. It can take approximately 13 years to reach \$68,000, the average maximum salary for teachers across the nation.

Compare that to Austin, Texas, where teachers start at over \$46,000 but only earn about \$1.5 million over a lifetime. It takes more than 30 years for Austin teachers to reach their peak annual salary of \$59,900.

Tish Rice, president of the Fresno Teachers Association union, was surprised to hear teachers in other districts take so long to reach their maximum salary.

For Fresno teachers, she said, "It's not discouraging."

Fresno teachers got a 3.5% raise this school year, plus a 2.7% bump in retroactive pay for last year. Rice pointed to other positives: School officials recently added an additional route for the most experienced teachers to earn a raise. Those who take nine credits of professional development classes can earn 3% more each year.

"We definitely want to keep pace with the national average as well as retaining quality teachers," Rice said.

A need for teachers

Teachers aren't going into the profession for the money, says Paul Beare, dean of Fresno State's Kremen School of Education and Human Development. And decent salaries don't seem to be attracting more teachers to the central San Joaquin Valley, he said.

It's gotten so bad that Fresno Unified is "hiring interns, people who don't even know how to be an intern, to be long-term (substitutes)," he said, because there's such a high demand for teachers. Beare said such use of interns is widespread and not limited to Fresno, and that interns are qualified to teach.

Fresno Unified spokeswoman Micheline Golden said the district hired 400 teachers this year, all of whom are qualified to teach in the classroom.

Fewer and fewer people are applying for Fresno State's teacher credential program each year, Beare said, in part because of negative perceptions about teachers' job security.

Last year just 95 students earned a multiple subject credential — which allows them to teach several different course subjects — compared with 800 in 2003. Those who graduate from Fresno State tend to stick around the area, Beare said, but the school could "easily double the number of credential candidates we have."

"Part of it is the budget downturn. A lot of people were getting pink slips, and who wants to go into a profession if you could get laid off?" he said. "Still the perception is, 'Oh, my job won't be secure.'"

Beare said more stringent entrance requirements for credential programs are also to blame. California State University teaching programs have traditionally required prospective students to pass the California Subject

Examinations for Teachers, a multiple-choice test few pass on the first go-around. About 15% of Fresno State students who took the test last year passed, he said.

Fresno State is “doing everything we can” to get more students in the door, Beare said.

“If any student will come here and say they want to be a teacher, we will guarantee them a job while they’re going here,” he said.

The numbers are proof, he said: 100% of 2014 Fresno State teacher graduates had jobs last fall.

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