



Higher Wages Would Attract, Keep Better Teachers

By [Jack Jennings](#) , Founder and CEO of Center on Education Policy

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About [Jack Jennings](#):

Jack Jennings founded the Center on Education Policy in January 1995. From 1967 to 1994, he served as subcommittee staff director and then as general counsel for the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Education and Labor.

To see two conservative think tanks releasing a study disparaging public education is about as surprising as hearing the weatherman announce that the sun is setting tonight. The conservative movement has long used "studies" faulting public education as a way to move the country to private schools and business-run schools.

Assessing the Compensation of Public-School Teachers is only interesting in concluding that public school teachers are both not too smart and overpaid. It begs the question of how such dumb people can succeed in being paid too much. So, let others discuss the study's creation of such dubious elements as a "job security premium" to which it assigns an exact 8.6 percent, and its disregard for Bureau of Labor Statistics data because using that data would lead to opposite conclusions.

[\[Read: States Rights at Heart of New 'No Child Left Behind' Debate.\]](#)

It is more useful to go to studies conducted by impartial groups, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which is composed of the world's most economically advanced countries. The OECD releases many reports on various aspects of these economies, including education.

Earlier this year, OECD released [Building a High Quality Teaching Profession: Lessons from Around the World](#), which analyzes how high-performing countries have created

highly professional and effective teaching forces. Included in this report is a telling chart that shows American teachers are paid less than teachers in many other countries.

For each participating nation, OECD calculated the ratio of the average salaries of teachers with 15 years' experience to the average earnings of full-time workers with a college degree. The United States ranked 22nd out of 27 countries on this measure. In the United States, teachers earned less than 60 percent of the average pay for full-time college-educated workers. In many other countries, teachers earn between 80 percent and 100 percent of the college-educated average.

[\[Read: The End Is Near for No Child Left Behind\]](#)

Last year, McKinsey & Co, a major market researching firm, concluded that the United States was not attracting enough higher-performing college students to teaching. ([See Closing the Talent Gap: Attracting and Retaining Top-Third Graduates to a Career in Teaching.](#)) To make U.S. teacher salaries competitive with those of other careers open to top students would mean paying teachers around \$65,000 to \$150,000 a year, far more than teachers in many school districts now earn.

Money is never the reason why people enter teaching, but it is the reason why some people do not enter teaching, or leave after a few years.