

Characteristics of Public School Teachers

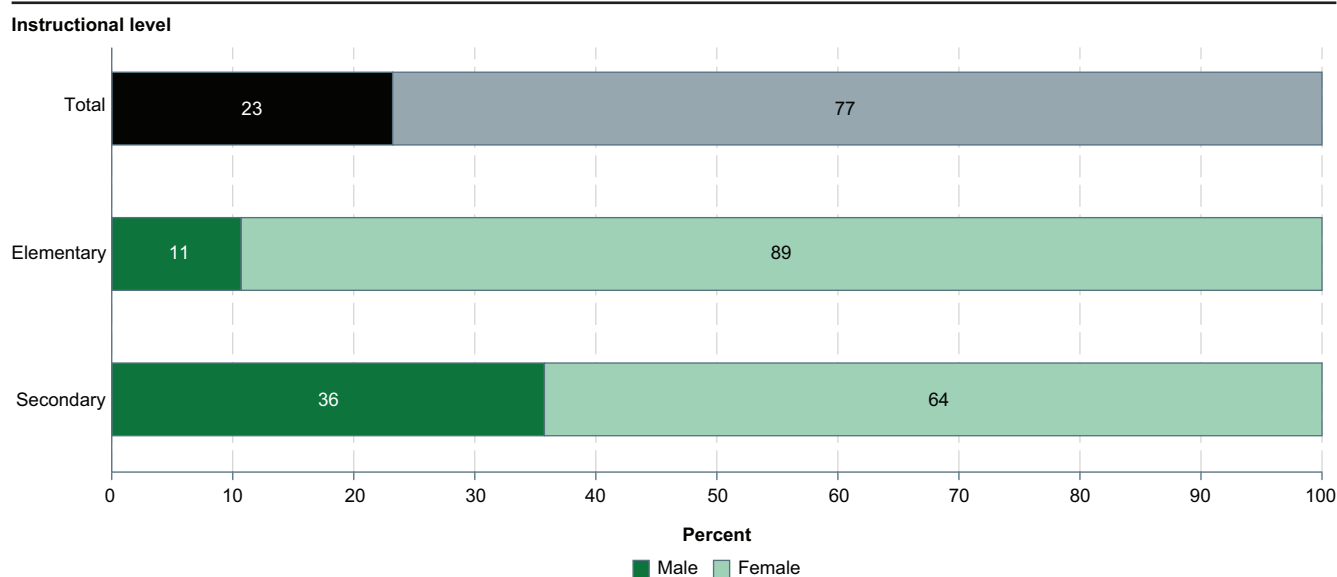
Overall, public school teachers had higher educational attainment in 2020–21 than in 2011–12. Specifically, higher percentages of public school teachers in 2020–21 than in 2011–12 held a master's degree (51 vs. 48 percent), an education specialist degree or certificate (8.4 vs. 7.6 percent), or a doctor's degree (1.4 vs. 1.1 percent) as their highest degree. After adjusting for inflation, the average base salary for full-time public school teachers in 2020–21 (\$61,600) was not measurably different than in 2011–12.

In the 2020-21 school year, there were 3.8 million full- and part-time public school teachers, including 1.9 million elementary teachers and 1.9 million secondary teachers.¹ Overall, the number of public school teachers in 2020-21 was 11 percent higher than in 2011-12 (3.4 million). Specifically, at the elementary instructional level, the number of teachers was 9 percent higher in 2020-21 than in 2011-12 (1.7 million), and at the secondary

instructional level, the number of teachers was 13 percent higher in 2020-21 than in 2011-12 (1.7 million).² Over the same period, public school enrollment in kindergarten through 12th grade increased 2 percent from 48.2 million students in fall 2011 to 49.2 million students in fall 2019, before dropping 2 percent to 48.1 million students in fall 2020, during the first full school year of the coronavirus pandemic.

Teacher Demographics

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools, by instructional level and sex: School year 2020–21



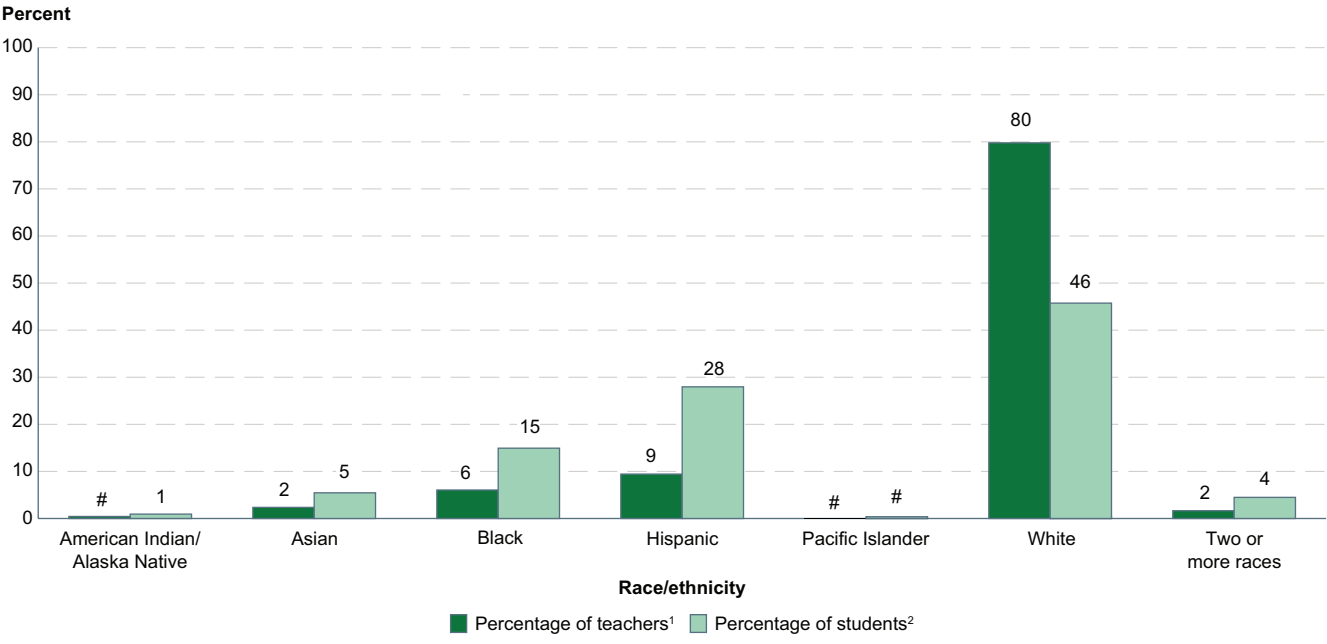
NOTE: Excludes teachers who teach only prekindergarten. Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time teachers rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent teachers. Teachers were classified as elementary or secondary on the basis of the grades they taught, rather than on the level of the school in which they taught. In general, elementary teachers include those teaching any of grades prekindergarten through grade 6 and those teaching multiple grades, with a preponderance of grades taught being kindergarten through grade 6. In general, secondary teachers include those teaching any of grades 7 through 12 and those teaching multiple grades, with a preponderance of grades taught being grades 7 through 12 and usually with no grade taught being lower than grade 5. Teachers were asked whether they were male or female. Although this variable is labeled "sex," the questionnaire did not use either the term "gender" or the term "sex."

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Teacher Data File," 2020–21. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 209.22.

Seventy-seven percent of public school teachers were female and 23 percent were male in 2020-21. The percentage of male teachers at the elementary instructional level (11 percent) was lower than the

percentage at the secondary instructional level (36 percent). Overall, the distribution of public school teachers by sex was not measurably different in 2020-21 compared with 2011-12.³

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools and percentage distribution of kindergarten through 12th-grade students enrolled in public schools, by race/ethnicity: School year 2020–21



Rounds to zero.
¹ Excludes teachers who teach only prekindergarten. Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time teachers rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent teachers.
² Data are for fall 2020 and exclude prekindergarten students. Data represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Enrollment data for students not reported by race/ethnicity were prorated based on the known racial/ethnic composition of a state by grade to match state totals.
NOTE: Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Teacher Data File," 2020–21; and Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education," 2020–21. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables 203.65 and 209.22.

In 2020-21, of all public school teachers,

- 80 percent were White;
- 9 percent were Hispanic;
- 6 percent were Black;
- 2 percent were Asian;
- 2 percent were of Two or more races;
- Less than 1 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native; and
- Less than one-half of 1 percent were Pacific Islander.

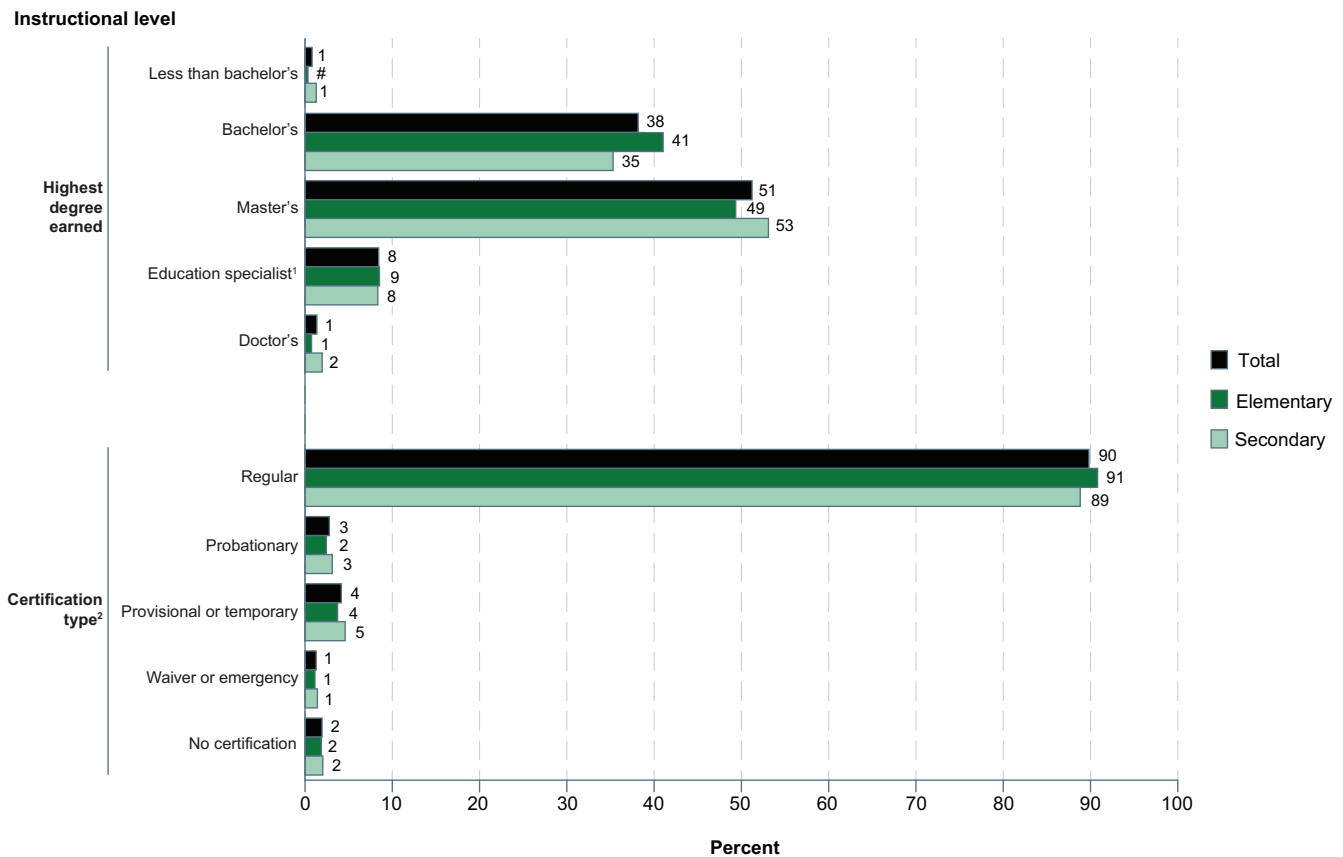
From 2011-12 to 2020-21, the share of public school teachers in each of the racial/ethnic groups changed by 2 percentage points or less. Specifically, lower percentages of public school teachers in 2020-21 than in 2011-12 were White (80 vs. 82 percent) or Black (6 vs.

7 percent). In contrast, higher percentages of public school teachers in 2020-21 than in 2011-12 were Hispanic (9 vs. 8 percent), Asian (2.4 vs. 1.8 percent), or of Two or more races (2 vs. 1 percent).

In 2020-21, the proportion of K-12 public school teachers who were White (80 percent) was higher than the proportion of K-12 public school students who were White (46 percent), whereas the proportion of teachers of other racial/ethnic groups was lower than the proportion of students in those groups. For instance, 9 percent of public school teachers were Hispanic, compared with 28 percent of public school students.

Teacher Training and Experience

Figure 3. Percentage distribution of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools, by highest degree earned, certification type, and instructional level: School year 2020–21



Rounds to zero.

¹ Education specialist degrees or certificates are generally awarded for 1 year's work beyond the master's level. Includes certificate of advanced graduate studies.

² Refers to certification of teachers to teach in the state where they are currently teaching. A teaching certificate is probationary if all requirements have been satisfied except completion of a probationary period. It is provisional or temporary if additional coursework, student teaching, or passage of a test is required to obtain regular certification. It is a waiver or emergency certificate if a certification program must be completed to continue teaching.

NOTE: Excludes teachers who teach only prekindergarten. Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time teachers rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent teachers. Teachers were classified as elementary or secondary on the basis of the grades they taught, rather than on the level of the school in which they taught. In general, elementary teachers include those teaching any of grades prekindergarten through grade 6 and those teaching multiple grades, with a preponderance of grades taught being kindergarten through grade 6. In general, secondary teachers include those teaching any of grades 7 through 12 and those teaching multiple grades, with a preponderance of grades taught being grades 7 through 12 and usually with no grade taught being lower than grade 5. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Teacher Data File," 2020–21. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 209.22.

Overall, public school teachers had higher educational attainment in 2020–21 than in 2011–12.⁴ Specifically, higher percentages of public school teachers in 2020–21 than in 2011–12 held a postbaccalaureate degree as their highest degree, including,

- a master's degree (51 vs. 48 percent);
- an education specialist degree or certificate⁵ (8.4 vs. 7.6 percent); and
- a doctor's degree (1.4 vs. 1.1 percent).

Conversely, a lower percentage of public school teachers in 2020–21 than in 2011–12 held a bachelor's degree as their highest degree (38 vs. 40 percent).

In 2020-21, higher percentages of secondary teachers than of elementary teachers held a postbaccalaureate degree as their highest degree, including,

- a master’s degree (53 vs. 49 percent); and
- a doctor’s degree (2 vs. 1 percent).

However, there was no measurable difference in the percentages of elementary and secondary teachers who held an education specialist degree or certificate.

In 2020-21, of all public school teachers,

- 90 percent held a regular or standard state teaching certificate or advanced professional certificate;
- 4 percent held a provisional or temporary certificate;⁶
- 3 percent held a probationary certificate;⁷
- 2 percent held no certification; and
- 1 percent held a waiver or emergency certificate.⁸

A higher percentage of elementary than of secondary teachers held a regular certificate in 2020-21 (91 vs. 89 percent), while lower percentages of elementary than of secondary teachers held other types of certificates.

Figure 4. Percentage distribution of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools, by years of teaching experience: School years 2011–12 and 2020–21



NOTE: Excludes teachers who teach only prekindergarten. Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time teachers rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent teachers. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Teacher Data File," 2011–12; and National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Teacher Data File," 2020–21. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 209.10; *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 209.22.

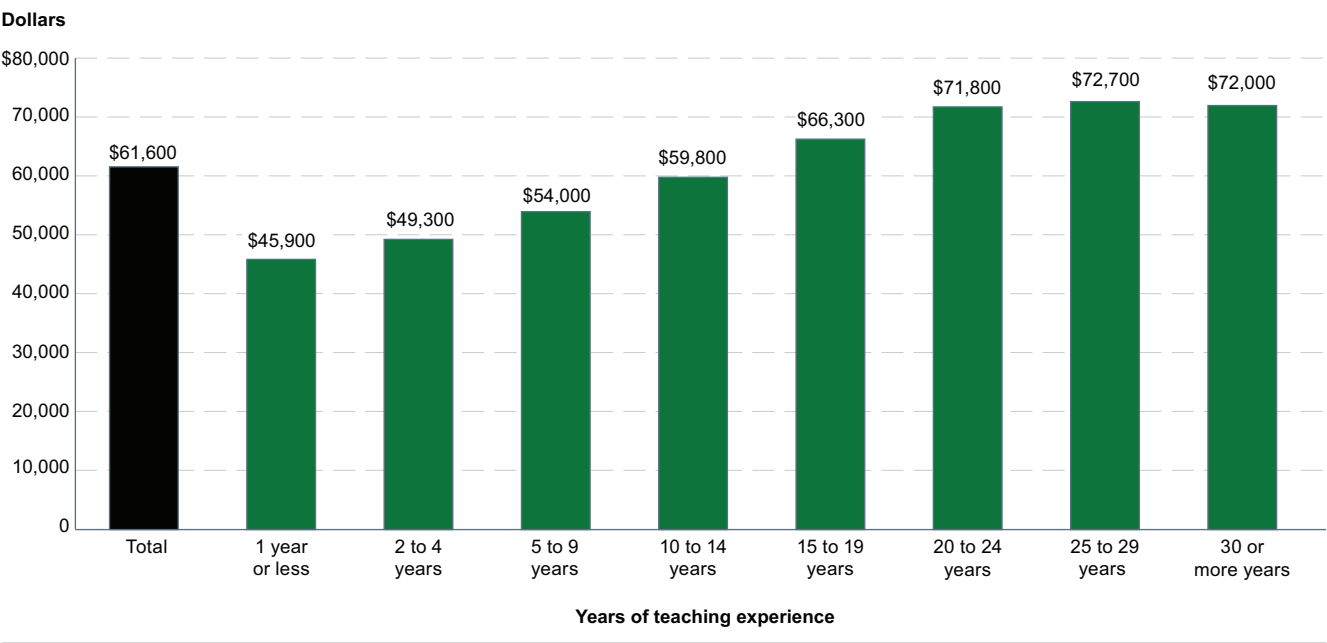
In 2020-21, of all public school teachers,

- 7 percent had less than 3 years of teaching experience;
- 29 percent had 3 to 9 years of experience;
- 37 percent had 10 to 20 years of experience; and
- 26 percent had more than 20 years of experience.

A lower percentage of teachers in 2020-21 than in 2011-12 had 3 to 9 years of experience (29 vs. 33 percent), while the percentage who had more than 20 years of experience was higher in 2020-21 than in 2011-12 (26 vs. 23 percent). There were no measurable differences between 2011-12 and 2020-21 in the percentages of teachers with less than 3 years or 10 to 20 years of experience.

Teacher Salaries

Figure 5. Average base salary for full-time teachers in public elementary and secondary schools, by years of full- and part-time teaching experience: School year 2020–21



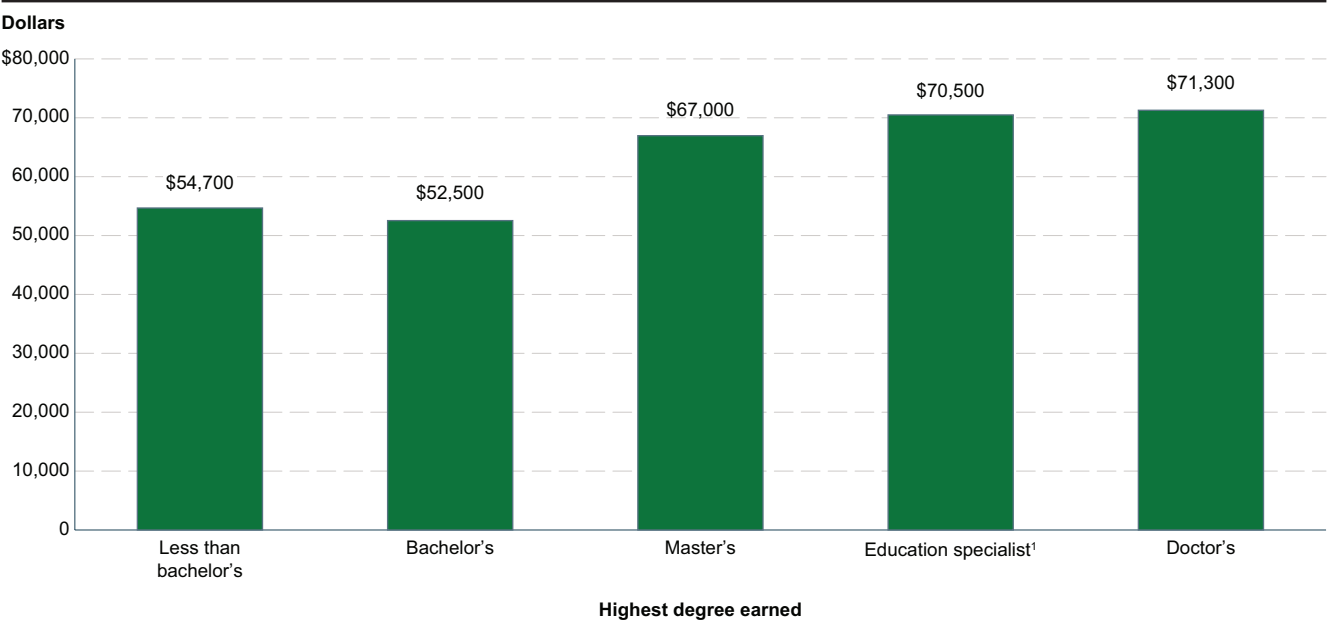
NOTE: Amounts presented in current 2020–21 dollars. Estimates are for regular full-time teachers only; they exclude other staff even when they have full-time teaching duties (regular part-time teachers, itinerant teachers, long-term substitutes, administrators, library media specialists, other professional staff, and support staff). Excludes teachers who teach only prekindergarten. Average base salary is for the school year; summer earnings are not included. Teachers who reported a base salary of zero are excluded.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), “Public School Teacher Data File,” 2020–21. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 211.10.

The previous sections of this indicator explored characteristics of all full-time and part-time public school teachers. In this section, teacher salary information is presented only for regular full-time teachers in public schools.⁹ In 2020–21, the average base salary (in current 2020–21 dollars) for full-time public school teachers was \$61,600.¹⁰ While salaries differ across the country, salary levels for teachers within states or school districts are often set based on teachers’ years of experience and education credentials (commonly referred to as “steps and lanes”).^{11, 12} These two factors are explored below.

Average base salaries for full-time public school teachers in 2020–21 were generally higher for those with more years of full- and part-time teaching experience, except for teachers with the most experience (average salaries for teachers with 20 to 24 years, 25 to 29 years, and 30 or more years of experience were not measurably different). Average base salaries, in current 2020–21 dollars, ranged from \$45,900 for teachers with 1 year or less of experience to \$72,700 for teachers with 25 to 29 years of experience.

Figure 6. Average base salary for full-time teachers in public elementary and secondary schools, by highest degree earned: School year 2020–21



¹ Education specialist degrees or certificates are generally awarded for 1 year's work beyond the master's level. Includes certificate of advanced graduate studies.
NOTE: Amounts presented in current 2020–21 dollars. Estimates are for regular full-time teachers only; they exclude other staff even when they have full-time teaching duties (regular part-time teachers, itinerant teachers, long-term substitutes, administrators, library media specialists, other professional staff, and support staff). Excludes teachers who teach only prekindergarten. Average base salary is for the school year; summer earnings are not included. Teachers who reported a base salary of zero are excluded.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Teacher Data File," 2020–21. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 211.10.

Average base salaries for full-time public school teachers in 2020–21 were generally higher for those with higher levels of educational attainment. For example, in 2020–21 the average base salary (in current 2020–21 dollars) for teachers with a doctor's degree (\$71,300) was

- 36 percent higher than the salary of teachers with a bachelor's degree (\$52,500);
- 6 percent higher than the salary of teachers with a master's degree (\$67,000); and
- 1 percent higher than the salary of teachers with an education specialist degree or certificate (\$70,500).

In 2020–21, the average base salary (in current 2020–21 dollars) for full-time public school teachers was lower for elementary teachers (\$60,500) than for secondary

teachers (\$62,700). Female teachers had a lower average base salary than male teachers (\$61,100 vs. \$63,100). By race/ethnicity, the average base salary was highest for Asian teachers (\$70,200) and lowest for American Indian/Alaska Native teachers (\$52,100). In addition, the average salaries for Hispanic (\$62,100) and White (\$61,600) teachers were higher than the average salary for Black teachers (\$59,000).

The average base salary for full-time public school teachers in 2020–21 can be compared with average base salaries in previous years using a constant dollar adjustment.¹³ In terms of constant 2020–21 dollars, the average base salary for full-time public school teachers was not measurably different in 2020–21 than in 2011–12.

Endnotes:

- ¹ Excludes teachers who teach only prekindergarten. Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time teachers rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent teachers. Teachers were classified as elementary or secondary on the basis of the grades they taught, rather than on the level of the school in which they taught. In general, elementary teachers include those teaching any of grades prekindergarten through grade 6 and those teaching multiple grades, with a preponderance of grades taught being kindergarten through grade 6. In general, secondary teachers include those teaching any of grades 7 through 12 and those teaching multiple grades, with a preponderance of grades taught being grades 7 through 12 and usually with no grade taught being lower than grade 5.
- ² Percent changes are calculated using unrounded counts.
- ³ Teachers were asked whether they were male or female. Although the text refers to “sex,” the questionnaire did not use either the term “gender” or the term “sex.”
- ⁴ Level of educational attainment refers to the highest degree earned.
- ⁵ Education specialist degrees or certificates are generally awarded for 1 year’s work beyond the master’s level. Includes certificate of advanced graduate studies.
- ⁶ A teaching certificate is provisional or temporary if additional coursework, student teaching, or passage of a test is required to obtain regular certification.

- ⁷ A teaching certificate is probationary if all requirements have been satisfied except completion of a probationary period.
- ⁸ A teaching certificate is a waiver or emergency certificate if a certification program must be completed to continue teaching.
- ⁹ Salary data are presented for regular, full-time public school teachers only; the data exclude other staff even when they have full-time teaching duties (regular part-time teachers, itinerant teachers, long-term substitutes, administrators, library media specialists, other professional staff, and support staff).
- ¹⁰ Average base salary is for the school year; summer earnings are not included. Teachers who reported a base salary of zero are excluded.
- ¹¹ Tran, H., and Buckman, D.G. (2020). The Relationship Between Districts’ Teacher Salary Schedule Structures and the Qualifications of Their Teacher Staffing Profile. *Journal of School Administration Research and Development*, 5(1), 6-15.
- ¹² Griffith, M. (2016). Policy Analysis: State Teacher Salary Schedules. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. Retrieved November 7, 2022, from <https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/State-Teacher-Salary-Schedules-1.pdf>.
- ¹³ Constant dollar estimates are based on the Consumer Price Index, prepared by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, adjusted to a school-year basis.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables 203.65, 209.22, 211.10, and 211.20; *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 209.10

Related indicators and resources: [Characteristics of Elementary and Secondary Schools](#); [Characteristics of Public School Principals](#); [Characteristics of Public School Teachers Who Completed Alternative Route to Certification Programs](#) [*The Condition of Education 2018 Spotlight*]; [Public School Enrollment](#); [Spotlight A: Characteristics of Public School Teachers by Race/Ethnicity](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]; [Teacher Turnover: Stayers, Movers, and Leavers](#) [*web-only*]

Glossary: Doctor’s degree; Education specialist/professional diploma; Educational attainment; Master’s degree; Public school