

Elen Parry

Mr. Greco

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Teaching: Investigating the Disparity Between Work and Pay

An average elementary school teacher in Mountain View gets to work around 7:30 am and begins preparations for the day. They get their schedules set, worksheets ready, books organized, and projects on standby. The kids arrive at 8:15 am, and the day begins. They teach for two hours before getting a ten minute break, unless they're the recess monitor, then it's another ten minutes of supervising energy-fueled children in their games of four square or soccer. After another two hours of monitoring and learning, it's lunchtime. Most teachers gather in the dank teacher's lounge, where there's one working microwave, one dishwasher, one fridge, and one small window letting in minimal sunlight. After a short, but sweet, 40 minute break, it's time to re-enter the classroom. They teach here until 3 pm, when it's time for the students to leave, but not the teachers. The staff remains at the school to prepare for the next day. Even though they're only getting paid from eight to three, they must stay and work overtime if they wish to stay afloat in their endlessly demanding job. Their after-school work consists of endless meetings with parents and support staff, coordinating with the other teachers in their grade level, and writing the lesson plans for the next day, all of this going unpaid. All of this drudgery – and for what? A wage that can hardly pay for living in Silicon Valley.

Chapter 1: How much does a teacher get paid yearly?

The system for increasing pay is complicated to say the least. Pay depends upon years of experience and level of education. Paula DeRitis states,

Two ways. So you go up by how many years you've been teaching and also it goes up by your education level. So it starts with a Bachelor's Degree, and usually a 5th year and that's where you got your credentials. So after your Bachelor's Degree it will go up varying from district to district. But you can also get [a] stipend for Master's Degrees and sometimes PhDs.

What this basically means is that a teacher can increase their pay by seniority and by reaching these academic milestones. But there's also a third way: earning units. One of the most convenient ways teachers can move up the pay scale is through summer programs. In other words, "If you take professional development classes, you get units. You get a choice: you get units or you get pay. So I've moved [up the pay scale] but I've had to take classes on my own time" (Haley).

DeRitis has been teaching in different districts in California for over thirty five years, but her yearly pay is still a measly \$114,000. She's worked at Landels Elementary here in Mountain View for her longest period of time, but at one point, she had the same wage as her mother in law working in Rochester, New York. Compared to Silicon Valley, Rochester isn't nearly as expensive to live in, so why was their pay the same?

Elizabeth Parry, or as her third grade students know her, Mrs. Parry, has been teaching for years in the UK and in the US. She began teaching in Wales, and since moving to Mountain

View in 2000, she's taught at Landels Elementary School. She receives an even lower \$90,000 a year, despite the fact that she has a Bachelor's Degree in teaching and has years of experience.

Klancy Haley, or Ms. Haley, makes the same average pay as Parry, \$90,000. She began teaching at Monta Loma, where she worked for seven years. She taught second grade, then moved to teaching fifth grade. Since moving to Landels, she's taught third grade.

While Parry and Haley work to make ends meet, it's important to recognize that there are other places in California where their pay is even lower. The California Department of Education wrote that, "The average salary of public school teachers in 2016–17 for the State of California was \$79,128." (CDE 2) This number accommodates for the entire state, and not all parts of California cost the same amount to live there. This salary may be enough for a teacher living in the Central Valley, but not here in Silicon Valley.

Chapter 2: How much work actually goes into their job?

In order to fully understand how much a teacher should earn yearly, we need to understand how much of their workload they actually get paid for. As I stated earlier, a teacher only gets paid from eight to three, but there is so much work they do that goes unpaid. Parry states, "So I do many, many hours above and beyond. And not including weekends as well, [and] when I have report cards, which is three times a year. Report cards take an extra fifteen to twenty hours, which is evenings and weekends" (Parry).

It can be quickly calculated that Parry makes around \$35 an hour with her yearly pay at \$90,000. Assuming it takes twenty hours to write report cards, and teachers have to write them three times a year, they could be making an extra \$2,100. Teachers have to write report cards

because it's in their job description, but why should they have to write them without being paid for the work?

Report cards aren't the only area where compensation falls short; there are lots of different occasions in a teacher's job where they should be getting paid, after school commitments being a prime example. Even though teachers only get paid until three o'clock, most have to stay and continue work until past five. After-school commitments consist of IEP meetings, parent-teacher meetings, room organization and teacher prep. As I stated before, it can be quickly discovered that a teacher in Silicon Valley makes around \$35 an hour. For comparison, an elevator installer and repairer makes the same hourly wage (Career Builder 1). If their afternoon work was included in their pay, an elementary school teacher in this area would be making an extra \$18,900 a year.

Chapter 3: How much should teachers get paid?

With all their work in mind, it's easy to decide how much a teacher should be paid: more. It seems like most of their job goes unpaid, unappreciated and unnoted. Their teaching can create long lasting impressions on their students, but unfortunately, their low pay can get in the way of their teaching.

Most teachers have to buy school supplies with their own money. Look back to when you were in elementary school, and it seemed like there was an endless supply of materials –markers, crayons, etc. Most of those came from your teacher's wallet. Parry goes on a seemingly endless scavenger hunt for glue sticks and pencils throughout the year because her students overuse them. Parry states, "Some parents bring in some supplies; it's a volunteer option. I get \$700

from the PTA for the year and I spend \$500 of my own money on supplies on top of that” (Parry).

In 2018, several school districts in LA went on strike protesting their working conditions. Their classrooms were filled with outdated textbooks, failing infrastructure, and breaking desks. They aren't the only ones. Most schools across the country experience similar if not the same thing. Parry sympathizes:

It's really interesting that they're striking not so much for pay, but for working conditions. When I read that some teachers were in classrooms of beyond thirty students, I think that's terrible. There's no way you can be an effective teacher at anything above twenty-five students in elementary school. And the lack of materials and nurses and resources is very disturbing. Clearly those schools are not able to put enough money into education.

The stress of teaching in these less than optimal conditions can lead some teachers into quitting their job and pursuing another career. High teacher turnover has also been plaguing the teaching profession. Many teachers across the US are quitting their job for a number of reasons, one being low pay. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond explain, “Certified teachers are 25% more likely to leave their school. Other key influences on turnover include a lack of administrative support, working in districts with lower salaries, dissatisfactions with testing and accountability pressures, lack of opportunities for advancement, and dissatisfaction with working conditions” (2). With the rise of teacher turnover, districts have begun hiring people who aren't qualified to teach. By doing so, the districts are directly harming the students. Teachers who are inexperienced and underqualified don't have the capacity to teach students effectively.

University of Missouri-Columbia states, “Teachers play a pivotal role in their students’ academic success--or lack thereof” (1). Higher student test scores bring schools prestige and more funding into the districts; therefore, giving teachers a higher salary benefits the teachers, the students, and the district.

Conclusion: Closing Remarks

Saying that teachers deserve a pay raise seems redundant at this point, but it’s the truth. Workers’ rights activists have been fighting against this disparity for hundreds of years, so it’s no surprise we have an uptick in teacher strikes in recent years. Teachers have one of the most important jobs. They’re shaping the minds of the future generations, and it’s important we don’t take their work for granted.

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