

# INTERIM REPORT: JOINT TASK FORCE ON STATEWIDE EDUCATOR SALARY SCHEDULES



## About this Report

In 2023, [Senate Bill 283](#) created the Joint Task Force on Statewide Educator Salary Schedules. Per subsections (3)(a) and (10)(a) of the bill, the Legislative Policy and Research Office (LPRO) drew from task force discussion to prepare this report on the benefits and challenges of implementing statewide salary schedules for Oregon educators.

This report also draws from presentations given to the task force by officials from Oregon and around the country. Presenters included education policy and data science professionals; these presenters are detailed in the “Process” section of this report. Additionally, this report draws on research LPRO conducted regarding states that have statewide minimum salary schedules.



## Task Force Members

**Sen. Michael Dembrow, Co-Chair**, Senate District 23

**Rep. Courtney Neron, Co-Chair**, House District 26

**Susan Allen**, representing a union of classified staff

**Sarah Barclay**, representing teachers

**Louis De Sitter**, representing a teachers' union

**Lisa Ledson**, representing parents of public school students

**Alisha McBride**, representing superintendents

**Linda Murray**, representing school district business managers

**Lori Sattenspiel**, representing an association of school boards

**Debbie Simons**, representing school administrators

**Ernest Stephens**, representing parents of public school students

**Sarah Wofford**, representing classified staff

### Staff

Maia Powloski, Legislative Analyst

### Legislative Policy and Research Office

Oregon State Capitol | (503) 986-1813 | [www.oregonlegislature.gov/lpro](http://www.oregonlegislature.gov/lpro)

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## Executive Summary

Oregon’s [Senate Bill 283](#) created the [Joint Task Force on Statewide Educator Salary Schedules](#). The purpose of the task force is to propose and make recommendations regarding statewide minimum pay for Oregon’s educators, and a statewide salary schedule. This interim report reflects task force work and discussion spanning its first five meetings from September 26, 2023 to December 15, 2023.

The task force identified the following benefits and challenges regarding potential statewide minimum salaries and potential statewide collective bargaining for educators:

### Benefits

- **Predictability:** Currently, collective bargaining for state employees aligns with the legislative appropriations process. If statewide collective bargaining for educators aligned with the legislative appropriations process, it could provide more predictable funding for districts prior to their budgeting process.
- **Shifting responsibility:** Moving the work of pay negotiations—one of the areas of greatest contention in collective bargaining—from districts to the state could benefit both educators and their employers.
- **Investing in special education professionals and other hard-to-fill positions:** Task force members want to support the educators who work with special education students, in conjunction with the goals and requirements of [SB 819 \(2023\)](#). Support may include pay differentials for special education professionals and other hard-to-fill positions.
- **Uniformity:** Standardizing classified staff job titles and duties could improve pay parity and benefit the development of statewide minimum pay for classified staff.
- **Transparency, accountability, and public trust:** The improved reporting systems needed for statewide collective bargaining or minimum salary schedules could lead to more financial transparency at the state and local levels. Statewide funding of student-to-staff ratios could provide greater transparency and public trust in how districts use state funds.

### Challenges

- **Direct comparisons:** States that have statewide minimum teacher salaries have varied landscapes in their geography, demographics, costs of living, and other factors that make it difficult to compare states directly. Similarly, task force members identified challenges establishing whether comparators for classified staff should consist of other local jobs or classified jobs in other localities.
- **Classified staff minimum pay:** Classified staff work a variety of hours and days, and may work at multiple job sites.
- **Diverse needs:** Statewide minimum salary schedules must accommodate employees who work more than one school job.
- **Statute or administrative rule:** Determining which to use in implementing statewide minimum salary schedules will be a challenge.



- **Regional variation:** Intended to reflect geographic and economic diversity, regional pay variation could increase or perpetuate current pay disparities unless it also incentivizes employment in small, rural, and low-income school communities.
- **State versus local decision-making:** Addressing whether statewide systems of pay should maintain some degree of local flexibility will be a challenge.
- **Equalization:** Task force members expressed that changes to school funding at the state level must maintain a way to equalize resources among districts with varying property wealth.
- **Identifying bargainers:** Lead negotiators play a significant role in collective bargaining on both the employee and employer sides of the process. Identifying lead bargainers in a new, statewide process will be a challenge.
- **Feasibility, sustainability, and costs of implementation:** Challenges include the enforcement of statewide salary schedules, sustainability of the salary schedule system long-term with legislative or administrative updates as needed, and legislative appropriations to support the cost of implementation.

## Opportunities

- **Shared terminology:** Currently, Oregon law uses “educators” to mean certified teachers. Noting the integral role of classified staff in educating Oregon students, the task force sees an opportunity to expand the definition of “educator” in state statute.
- **Investing in early-career pay increases:** The task force learned that research in labor economics indicates pay raises have the greatest impact on staff retention when they are early in an employee’s career.
- **A centralized, real-time reporting system:** Oregon has an opportunity to improve on how legislators, the public, and education stakeholders understand what districts spend. A centralized, real-time reporting system would improve transparency and provide data for appropriations and bargaining processes.
- **Changes to the current service level (CSL) calculation:** To implement statewide minimum salary schedules or statewide collective bargaining, Oregon has an opportunity to change the way it calculates CSL for the State School Fund.
- **Reexamine cost of living adjustment (COLA) calculations:** Modifications to the way school salaries are funded or bargained present an opportunity to reexamine cost-of-living calculations.
- **Equity and the impact of local option levies:** Currently, local levy funds are not factored into Oregon’s equalization formula. The task force sees an opportunity to study how local option levies impact equity.
- **Aligning efforts to modernize Oregon’s Quality Education Model (QEM) and processes:** The QEM and district spending could align to ensure that state resources are used more effectively. Allocating state funding according to specific staffing ratios may increase public trust and transparency.



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## Terms to know

The following four terms appear throughout this report. Definitions and explanations are included below to provide context for this terminology.

### **Collective Bargaining**

Collective bargaining is the process by which employer representatives and labor representatives negotiate agreements regarding pay, working conditions, health benefits, and other terms of the employer-employee relationship. In Oregon, collective bargaining is required for educators in public schools. In states where collective bargaining is not required, administrators and educators may engage in a “meet and confer” process to discuss compensation and employer-employee relations.

### **Minimum starting salary**

The lowest salary a state allows for a beginning teacher is the minimum starting salary. In some states, many beginning teachers earn very close to that minimum number; in other states, beginning teachers earn tens of thousands of dollars more than the minimum starting salary.

### **Statewide minimum salary schedule**

A statewide minimum salary schedule for all school personnel is a list of minimum salaries for each position set at the statewide level, almost always by the state legislature. A few states set their minimum salary as a flat base amount, but most states that have minimum salary schedules use tiered grid systems, with one axis being the employee’s years of experience, and the other axis being the employee’s level or type of education.

Some states’ minimum salary schedules rely less—or not at all—on education level. Some incorporate other factors, such as specialized skills in teaching math, science, special education, or English language learners; leadership in curriculum development; or mentorship to beginning teachers.

### **Statewide salary schedule**

Currently, salary schedules are negotiated between a school district and the local unions. Most use tiered grid systems with one axis being the employee’s years of experience and the other being the employee’s level or type of education. Salary schedules list actual rates of pay, not just minimums.

This task force contemplates the creation of a statewide salary schedule, presumably negotiated between the state government and statewide unions.



## Educator

Although state law currently uses the term “educator” to refer to licensed teachers, this report uses “educator” to mean all workers employed by public schools. If policy or data applies only to specific workers, and not to educators generally, then this report specifies which workers. “Classified staff” refers to non-certified school personnel such as instructional assistants, custodians, bus drivers, or food service workers.

## Process

Oregon’s [Senate Bill 283 \(2023\)](#) created the [Joint Task Force on Statewide Educator Salary Schedules](#). The task force is exploring statewide minimum pay for Oregon’s educators. SB 283 specifies two reports the task force must complete: a report on benefits and challenges due December 2023; and a final report proposing policy changes to that may lead to a statewide salary schedule due September 2024. The bill also named the chairs of the House and Senate Education Committees as co-chairs of the task force.

LPRO staff developed and the co-chairs revised and approved [a draft work plan](#) prior to the commencement of task force meetings. At the task force’s first meeting on September 26, 2023, staff reviewed task force operating procedures and the requirements of SB 283 and discussed the draft work plan and potential research agenda.

Staff presented information on statewide teacher minimum salary schedules across the country at the task force’s first meeting; [presentation slides are available online](#). At the task force’s second meeting, staff reviewed the presentation on teacher minimum salaries in other states and provided new information on statewide minimum pay for classified staff in Delaware and West Virginia. Task force member feedback at the first two meetings informed staff revisions and additions to [a separate report on statewide minimum teacher salaries in other states](#).

Education officials from three states that have minimum salary schedules spoke to the task force. SB 283 directed the task force to study statewide minimum pay for classified staff and regional variation in statewide minimum pay to reflect varied costs of living in Oregon. With those directives in mind, officials from Delaware and West Virginia, both of which have minimum pay requirements for classified staff, spoke to the task force. Washington state officials addressed the task force because Washington is the only state that uses regional variation in its statewide minimum teacher salaries.

T.J. Kelly, Chief Financial Officer of Washington’s Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), [presented to the task force](#) October 11. Mr. Kelly returned on October 25 to present on [funding for school personnel benefits in Washington](#). Also on October 25, the task force heard from Kimberly Klein, Associate Secretary of Operations Support at the Delaware Department of Education, and Uriah Cummings, Director of School Finance at the West Virginia Department of Education. Mr.



Cummings provided [written materials regarding minimum salaries and school finance in West Virginia](#).

The task force also heard from data scientists and a labor economist. Ben Tate, of the Oregon Longitudinal Data Collaborative, presented at the October task force meetings. Mr. Tate's [October 11 presentation](#) reviewed available Oregon education workforce data. On October 25, Mr. Tate presented on the [Oregon Educator Public Employment Report](#).

For the November 15 meeting, the co-chairs requested presentations from four task force members regarding their constituents' views of the Delaware, West Virginia, and Washington systems of educator pay. These members provided perspectives from school boards, administrators, teachers, and classified staff.

At that same meeting, Dan Goldhaber of the University of Washington and American Institutes for Research [presented research](#) on teacher job postings, the teacher labor market, and data he and his team have collected on the Oregon education workforce. The [meeting materials](#) for November 15 include three papers that Dr. Goldhaber, a labor economist, has produced on the economics of the teacher workforce.

Also at the November 15 meeting, officials from the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) gave a [presentation](#) on statewide collective bargaining for Oregon state employees. Although Oregon educators could remain district employees under a system of statewide collective bargaining, the DAS presentation provided background information for the task force to consider in making its recommendations.

Meetings included time devoted to discussion among task force members. They provided perspectives and feedback from stakeholder groups, as well as their own observations and concerns. The October discussions focused on the benefits and challenges of statewide minimum salaries and statewide collective bargaining. On November 15, task force members discussed the draft of this report. At the December 15, 2023 meeting, the task force adopted this report.

After the task force's November 15 meeting, the governor, the director of the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), and the task force's legislative members expressed the desire to partner, collaborate, and maintain open communication between executive and legislative branches in ongoing work regarding educator salaries, educator collective bargaining, education data transparency, and any potential changes to the way the state funds schools. Governor Kotek issued a [press release](#) highlighting the importance of the task force's work.



## **Benefits, challenges, and opportunities**

The benefits, challenges, and opportunities listed below were identified by task force members during discussions on October 11, October 25, and November 15.

### **Benefits**

#### **Predictability of district spending and state appropriations**

Currently, the Oregon legislative appropriation process may not align with budgeting timelines in school districts across the state. Districts may learn their allocation of state funds within weeks of the date by which district officials must budget for the coming school year. Statewide minimum educator salary schedules would help districts proactively budget salaries and wages for their respective numbers of educators. For these minimums to provide predictability, however, the legislature would need to assure districts of funding to support the statewide minimum pay.

Currently, the legislative appropriations timeline aligns with collective bargaining between state employees and the Department of Administrative Services (DAS). If statewide educator collective bargaining aligned with the legislative appropriations process, it could provide greater predictability in funding for districts prior to their budgeting processes. DAS and the legislature could use similar timelines and practices in statewide K-12 collective bargaining, thus increasing stability of school jobs and predictability of district funding.

#### **Pay negotiations: shifting responsibility from school boards to the state**

Task force members noted pay negotiations as some of the most contentious aspects of educator collective bargaining. They expressed that shifting the responsibility of negotiating pay from districts to the state could benefit both educators and their employers. Statewide collective bargaining could be limited to the subject of employee salaries and wages, or it could address other aspects of the job and workplace.

#### **Investing in special education professionals and other hard-to-fill positions**

In recent legislative sessions, many states have passed pay differentials for teachers who specialize in math, science, English language learners, or special education. These pay differentials have included bonuses, stipends, salary supplements, or boosts to a higher tier of the state's minimum salary schedule. Task force members want to make similar moves in support of Oregon teachers and classified staff who work with special education students.

Special education pay differentials could work in conjunction with the goals and requirements of [SB 819 \(2023\)](#). Oregon's SB 819—along with longstanding federal laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)—affirms the rights of disabled students to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), and the responsibilities of schools to provide FAPE. Task force members expressed that investment in the careers of special education



professionals could fit alongside ongoing conversations about the implementation of SB 819 in the legislature and in Oregon's disability and education communities.

### **Uniform job titles and classifications**

Task force members posited that Oregon may benefit from greater uniformity in job titles and duties for classified positions. Currently, comparisons of classified staff salaries can be difficult because districts vary their job titles and responsibilities. Duties may be similar for bus drivers, food service workers, and custodians across the state, but classified staff who assist Oregon students with academic, behavioral, and medical needs have varying titles and responsibilities from district to district. Task force members representing classified staff advised that standardizing classified staff job titles and duties could have benefits.

### **Transparency, accountability, and public trust**

Statewide collective bargaining or minimum salary schedules will need improved statewide reporting systems. Centralized, real-time reporting systems could lead to more financial transparency at the state and local levels. Currently, state government, districts, and unions lack accurate up-to-date data on K-12 spending. The task force expressed that transparent reporting would ease the processes for state appropriations, district budgeting, and collective bargaining. Increased transparency also has the potential to improve trust among diverse education stakeholders and the public.

## **Challenges**

### **Difficulty of making direct comparisons**

Twenty-four states have statewide minimum salaries for teachers. These states differ in their costs of living, geographic and demographic makeup, and K-12 school funding models, as well as in the amount and structure of their salary schedules.

Task force members expressed the desire to compare teacher salary systems with charts or data visualizations, but differing environments from state to state mean that direct comparisons can be a challenge.

Similarly, task force members discussed comparators for classified educators. In determining statewide pay schedules for classified educators, policymakers could compare Oregon classified staff pay to wages earned by workers in similar local jobs outside of the education workforce, or to wages earned by classified educators in neighboring school systems.

Comparing classified staff pay in neighboring school systems poses a challenge because systems vary in their classified staff job titles and duties. Using local non-education jobs as comparators poses challenges, too, because these jobs have different duties than those of classified educators in schools.



### **Varied employment structures for classified staff**

Task force members noted that statewide minimum pay for classified staff must account for the fact that classified staff work a variety of hours and days and may work at multiple job sites. Delaware and West Virginia have statewide minimum pay for classified staff. At the October 25 meeting, the task force learned more about these states' systems.

### **Complex needs of educators who work multiple school jobs**

Task force members expressed concern that in small and rural districts, some educators work multiple jobs that would be governed by different salary schedules under a statewide minimum system. For instance, in a small town, a principal might also drive a school bus, teach math, and coach football. Although this may be more common in rural areas, every district across Oregon may have educators who work multiple school jobs. Task force members stated that, to best serve the diverse needs of schools across the state, minimum salary schedules should accommodate those who work more than one school job.

### **Minimum salaries may be located in statute or administrative rule**

In discussing statewide minimum salaries, the task force observed that Delaware located salary schedules in statute, while West Virginia located salary schedules in the administrative rules of the state's education agency.

Statutes are modified by legislatures, while administrative rules are developed by government agencies or governing boards. Statewide educator salary schedules could be written into statute, or the Oregon legislature could pass a law delegating statewide salary schedule creation to the State Board of Education (SBE). Legislators serving on House and Senate Education Committees lead discussions of education bills that may become statute; the SBE enacts administrative rules.

The task force discussed the benefits and challenges of administrative rules and statutes as forms of policymaking and noted the difficulty of determining which route to recommend. Since administrative rules are developed by agency staff, they do not go through the legislative process, and may be more flexible than legislative timelines. Since statutes must go through the legislative process, they may draw more public attention and stakeholder participation, which has the benefit of inviting many perspectives, and the challenge of a slower process. The development of administrative rules is open to public comment, but the process may draw less attention from the public, which can mean fewer perspectives informing the policymaking, but may allow for faster development of rules.

### **Regional pay variation that reflects Oregon's varied cost of living, while incentivizing employment in disadvantaged communities**

The task force must consider regional variation in its recommendations for statewide minimum salaries for educators. Regional variation attempts to align minimum pay with local cost of living. Washington is the only state that uses regional variation in its statewide minimum teacher salaries.



Task force members inquired whether Washington’s system of regionalization helped address pay disparities between districts. According to T.J. Kelly from Washington’s OSPI, ongoing disparities may be related to the state’s decision to base regionalization on school district borders. Washington’s regionalization factor, Mr. Kelly explained, “is based on the residential property values within a district’s boundary, and the 15-mile area immediately adjoined to the district.” Mr. Kelly advised that using school district borders and property values for regionalization may not be reducing pay disparities in Washington.

No matter the method used for regionalization, the task force noted that regional variation in minimum pay can create challenges in some localities. Due to Oregon’s regionalized minimum wage, some low-wage workers who live in a lower minimum wage region commute to work in a nearby higher minimum wage region. A similar phenomenon could result as an unintended consequence of regionalized minimum pay for the school workforce.

As discussed above, areas with a higher cost of living may be more likely to have voter-passed local levies that support higher pay. In this way, regional variation, intended to reflect Oregon’s geographic and economic diversity, could increase pay disparities among Oregon educators.

### **State versus local decision-making**

The task force must consider whether statewide systems of pay should maintain some degree of local flexibility. Task force members, particularly those representing school districts and boards, expressed the value of local control. Oregon will face an ongoing challenge to reduce disparities by enacting minimum or statewide salary schedules while providing localities the level of flexibility they desire.

### **Equalization**

Currently, Oregon’s school funding formula subtracts the amount districts collect in property taxes from the amount of funds the state provides. This process reduces inequities between districts with higher and lower property values. Task force members expressed that changes to school funding at the state level should maintain resource equalization among districts of varying property wealth.

### **Identifying bargainers**

Those with bargaining experience expressed that negotiators play a significant role in the process, on both the employee and employer sides. Task force members noted that statewide negotiators on both sides will need to be carefully chosen and well trained if statewide collective bargaining is enacted. After hearing the employer perspective from DAS at the November 15 meeting, task force members expressed their desire to hear from public employee unions, so the task force can better understand how educator unions might select and train negotiators for statewide collective bargaining.



### **Feasibility, sustainability, and costs of implementation**

If enacted, state government entities such as the legislature, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), or DAS would need to enforce statewide salary schedules. Legislation would need to provide enforcement mechanisms, and state entities tasked with enforcement would need to follow through on their enforcement responsibility. The state would need to sustain the salary schedule system long-term and allow for legislative and administrative updates as needed. Legislative appropriations would need to support the cost of implementation.

## **Opportunities**

### **Shared terminology**

Although state law uses the term “educator” to refer primarily to licensed teachers, many other school professionals educate Oregon students. Educational assistants, paraeducators, aides, and other classified staff support students and teachers in academic, behavioral, and social-emotional teaching and learning. The task force sees an opportunity to expand the definition of “educator” in state statute to reflect the variety of professionals who educate in Oregon schools.

### **Investing in early-career pay increases**

At the November 15 meeting, labor economist Dan Goldhaber shared his research on education workforces in Oregon and various states across the country. Dr. Goldhaber’s research indicated that attrition is greatest in the first few years of educators’ careers, and that salary boosts are one of the most impactful tools to increase retention for early-career employees. Most states’ recent school personnel raises, however, have been flat across-the-board pay increases. Few states have used early-career investment to reduce attrition. Oregon has an opportunity to align its salary policies with the latest research in education labor economics.

### **Centralized, real-time reporting system**

Oregon currently lacks a statewide, real-time system that tells legislators and education stakeholders how much districts spend. A centralized reporting system would improve transparency and provide important data for legislative appropriations and collective bargaining.

By collecting statewide data in one centralized, real-time system, Oregon has an opportunity to improve the quality and currency of information available to legislators and collective bargainers. The task force expressed that a centralized, real-time reporting system could increase financial transparency in education, provide consistent and accurate data for education policymakers and stakeholders, ease collective bargaining negotiations, and improve the accuracy of the current service level (CSL) calculation.

### **Changes to the current service level (CSL) calculation**

Enacting a statewide minimum salary schedule or statewide salary schedule presents Oregon with an opportunity to ensure the accuracy and consistency of its biennial



current service level calculation. Because the ratio of teachers and other personnel per student vary from school to school and district to district, legislators do not have a full understanding of what state appropriations buy in each district. Additionally, legislative task force members have expressed interest in possible reforms to Oregon's Quality Education Model (QEM) and the processes surrounding its use.

**Reexamine cost of living adjustment (COLA) calculations**

The task force expressed concern about whether current COLA calculations accurately reflect the lives of today's educators, particularly in light of rises in inflation and housing costs. Modifications to the way school salaries are funded or bargained present an opportunity to reexamine the way Oregon calculates COLA. Within the opportunity of COLA reexamination is the challenge of varied costs of living in different Oregon communities.

**Equity and the impact of local option levies**

Oregon's equalization formula subtracts a district's property tax revenue from the funds the district receives from the state. This equalization reduces inequities between districts with low and high property tax revenue. This equalization formula, however, does not account for local option levies passed in some districts. Levies tend to be passed by voters in wealthier localities and exacerbate inequities. The task force sees an opportunity to study how local option levies impact equity.

