Teachers who did not consider their salary to be “somewhat” or “completely” adequate, on average, desired roughly a $17,000 pay increase, although the exact size of the gap in actual desired base salary differed across teacher and school contexts.

The 2023 SoT survey asked teachers to report (1) their current base salary during the 2022–2023 school year and (2) whether they felt that their base salary was adequate. Respondents who indicated that their base salary was inadequate were asked to report (3) their desired base salary, assuming their roles and responsibilities remained unchanged, to consider their salary “completely adequate.”

Low salaries were a commonly cited reason among teachers intending to leave their jobs—particularly among teachers of color.

Percentage of teachers indicating “my salary is too low” as a top reason why they were thinking about leaving their current teaching job.

Teachers who did not consider their salary to be “somewhat” or “completely” adequate, on average, desired roughly a $17,000 pay increase, although the exact size of the gap in actual desired base salary differed across teacher and school contexts.

Policy Implications

These findings point to the importance of pay adequacy in job satisfaction and retention. State and local leaders have different levers to affect teacher compensation, including establishing new minimum pay standards and creating new opportunities for supplemental pay.

However, our research also points to the importance of factors beyond compensation levels in determining pay adequacy, such as hours worked and administrator support (Steiner, Woo, and Doan, 2023).

Improving teacher job satisfaction is not just a pay issue. Efforts to bolster teacher retention will require solutions that address pay, hours worked, and working conditions.