

A+ Colorado Issue Guide: Negotiating Over Teacher Pay in Denver

Updated information as of 2/1/2019, 12:00pm
Subject to change pending ongoing negotiations



Denver Public Schools (DPS) and Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) are at an impasse in regards to what and how to pay teachers and special service providers who are in the classroom. This is a resource compiled by A+ Colorado to understand what is on the table.

This resource relies on publicly available information to help make sense of the complexity of teacher pay, and the nuances of both the district and the union's current proposals. We hope this document can provide clarity for stakeholders hoping to understand more about this important decision, and facilitate conversation about how to compensate educators in our city.

Who are the decision makers?

The district and DCTA must come to an agreement. The district and the DCTA are represented by their bargaining teams. Once an agreement is reached between the bargaining teams, it must be ratified by the DPS School Board and the DCTA membership.

Who does the teacher pay agreement impact?

Most immediately and directly impacts the current earnings and earnings potential of teachers and school service providers (SSPs) who support teachers and students in areas that involve student physical, emotional, and social health and well-being, including but not limited to audiologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, school counselors, school nurses, school orientation and mobility specialists, school psychologists, school social workers and speech and language pathologists.

Decisions could have ramifications for other personnel as funds are reallocated to teacher pay, and could include cuts to non-bargaining unit staff.

More broadly, investments in teacher pay impact district-level and school-level budgets, hiring decisions, programming etc. These will have direct impacts on students, and their families.

What is on the table?

The teacher pay system, known as ProComp (more on that below), including how much is invested, and the determinants of individual teachers' salaries. DPS and DCTA signed a Master Agreement in fall 2017 outlining broader working conditions, supports, and issues like class-sizes and planning time; these issues are not included in the current discussions.

What are the proposals?

The district and the union disagree on **how much** to put toward teacher pay, and **how to structure** teacher pay. The below table is based on DPS and DCTA's respective proposals from 1/31/2019.

Table I. How much money should be invested in teacher pay? (Based on SY 19-20)			
Current Practice	DPS Proposal	DCTA Proposal	What's the Difference?
Total: \$436m Base pay: \$318m One-time bonuses: \$23m	Total: \$460m Base pay: \$338m in 2019-20; +\$3m in 2020-21 COLA: guaranteed 2 years One-time bonuses: \$20m	Total: \$465m Base pay: \$351m One-time bonuses: \$14m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difference in overall money allocated: ~\$5.5m total • Difference if DPS' higher incentives for Title I schools and highest priority incentive retained: ~\$12m

Table II. How should teacher pay be structured? (Reference Table III to see how this plays out for different teachers)			
	Current Practice	DPS Proposal	DCTA Proposal
Initial salary setting	Set by years of experience and education credentials.	Set by years of experience, education credentials, and advanced licensing or certification.	Set by years of experience and education credentials.
Raises	Annual salary increases are determined by cost of living increases, completing professional development, meeting student learning objectives, and/or getting an advanced degree.	Salary increases determined annually by satisfactory evaluations ("steps"), and cost of living increases. There are 30 steps . Larger salary increases determined by additional education credentials, licensing or certification, or 10 years of service. There are 6 lanes .	Annual salary increases granted each year ("steps"), and for cost of living increases. There are 20 steps , after which teachers may receive longevity increases each additional 5 years. Larger salary increases are determined by additional education credentials, and professional development units ("lanes"). There are 8 lanes .
Bonuses	Up to: \$11,476 On average: \$4,292 A range of bonuses are distributed for teaching in a hard-to-staff position, teaching in a "hard-to-serve" or high priority school, having students with particularly high growth, and/or teaching in a school with particularly high academic growth and improved achievement.	Up to \$8,250 Teachers may earn up to 3 additional bonuses for \$2,500 each: teaching in a Title I school, teaching in a hard-to-staff position, teaching in a high priority school. Additionally, teachers can earn \$750 for teaching in a "Distinguished school" Tuition reimbursement offered up to \$6,000.	Up to \$5,250 Teachers may earn \$1,750 for teaching in a Title I school, \$1,000 for teaching in a "Distinguished school" (agreed upon by DCTA and DPS), and \$2,500 for teaching in a hard-to-staff position. Tuition reimbursement offered up to \$8,000.

How do these proposals play out for teachers?

The DPS proposal provides, on average, a 10% raise to teachers. The DCTA proposal provides, on average, a 12.5% raise to teachers assuming incentives are not cut. The current average base salary in DPS is \$54,985, and the average bonus is \$4,292. However, salary is still most reflective of the average experience and education level of teachers. For that reason, it is far better to understand how the proposals would impact teachers with certain backgrounds. The below table is based on DPS and DCTA's respective proposals from 1/18/2019, and is compared to Boulder Valley which has the highest average teacher salary in the state.

Table III. Impact of Pay Proposal on Teacher Pay			
Teacher Profile	Salary and Bonus under DPS Proposal	Salary and Bonus under DCTA Proposal	Salary and Bonus in Boulder
First-year teacher with a BA	Salary: \$45,000 Bonus: N/A	Salary: \$45,800 Bonus: N/A	Salary: \$46,336 Bonus: N/A
First-year teacher with a MA in a Title I school	Salary: \$49,000 Bonus: \$2,500 Total Earnings: \$51,500	Salary: \$52,550 Bonus: \$1,750 Total Earnings: \$54,300	Salary: \$59,138 Bonus: N/A
3rd year ELA- S teacher with 45 credits of professional development units (BA+45) in Title I school	Salary: \$50,750 Bonus: \$5,000 Total Earnings: \$55,750	Salary: \$55,700 Bonus: \$4,250 Total Earnings: \$59,950	Salary: \$55,534 Bonus: N/A
5th year teacher with MA in Title I, highest priority school	Salary: \$56,000 Bonus: \$5,000 Total Earnings: \$61,000	Salary: \$58,850 Bonus: \$1,750 Total Earnings: \$60,600	Salary: \$64,012 Bonus: N/A
7th year teacher with MA and National Board Certification in Title I school	Salary: \$63,000 Bonus: \$2,500 Total Earnings: \$65,500	Salary: \$66,500 Bonus: \$1,750 Total Earnings: \$68,250	Salary: \$66,596 Bonus: N/A
10th year special education teacher with BA	Salary: \$63,000 Bonus: \$2,500 Total Earnings: 65,500	Salary: \$63,038 Bonus: \$2,500 Total Earnings: \$65,538	Salary: \$49,665 Bonus: N/A
12th year teacher with a doctorate in a "Distinguished School"	Salary: \$78,750 Bonus: \$750 Total Earnings: \$79,500	Salary: \$85,215 Bonus: \$1,000 Total Earnings: \$86,215	Salary: \$101,225 Bonus: N/A
20th year science teacher with an MA in a Title I, highest priority school	Salary: \$87,250 Bonus: \$7,500 Total Earnings: \$94,750	Salary: \$82,725 Bonus: \$2,500 Total Earnings: \$85,225	Salary: \$70,673 Bonus: N/A
28th year teacher with a MA	Salary: \$92,000 Bonus: N/A	Salary: \$86,349 Bonus: N/A	Salary: \$70,673 Bonus: N/A
Highest teacher salary	Salary: \$100,000 Bonus: \$8,250 Total Earnings: \$108,250	Salary: \$100,000+ Bonus: \$5,250 Total Earnings: \$105,250+	Salary: \$110,649 Bonus: N/A

Will any teachers be penalized by the new system?

Both DPS and DCTA proposals include “holding harmless” all teachers who are currently earning a higher salary than they would according to the new proposals.

How can DPS allocate more funds?

DPS currently allocates 42% of its operating budget to teacher salaries. In its current proposal, DPS will cut \$10.5m from central staff salaries.

What is ProComp?

In 2005 Denver voters approved a \$25 million annual property tax increase to fund the Professional Compensation System for teachers (“ProComp”). Based on a pilot that started in 1999, and jointly designed by DPS and DCTA, ProComp provides funds for teachers in hard-to-staff schools and positions, receiving positive professional evaluations, and increasing their skills or education levels.

ProComp was a departure from the way teachers were (and still tend to be) paid, which is through a salary schedule defined by “steps and lanes”, where teachers earn a smaller raise for each year they teach (“steps”), and a larger raise for having higher levels of educational attainment (“lanes”). Denver was one of the first districts in the country to begin to differentiate teacher pay by the type of work teachers were doing, where they taught, and, in part, for student academic outcomes.

2005 Mill Levy Ballot Language:

Shall Denver Public Schools (School District No. 1) taxes be increased \$25 million per year, adjusted for inflation, solely and exclusively to fund the professional compensation system for teachers (ProComp), which tax increase shall terminate if ProComp terminates, including compensation to teachers for:

- Teaching in hard-to-staff schools
- Teaching in hard-to-fill positions such as math, science and special education
- Increasing teaching knowledge and teaching skills by successfully completing ProComp approved advanced degrees, professional teaching standards licenses and additional training to improve classroom skills
- Positive professional evaluations
- Achieving distinguished school status

By an additional property tax levy that results in the dollar amount of revenues set forth above in the current budget year and the same dollar amount, adjusted annually in each budget year thereafter for inflation as measured by the Denver-Boulder-Greeley consumer price index, which revenues shall be used solely and exclusively for, and none of which will be spent for any purpose other than, funding ProComp?

Why is pay an issue in Denver?

Denver has become increasingly unaffordable affecting DPS families and educators alike. 2018 saw a record median home price in Denver, one that requires an annual income of

over \$90,000 to afford.¹² The median monthly rent for a one bedroom is over \$1,500.³ According the Self-Sufficiency Index released by the Colorado Center on Law and Policy, Denver families need income of more than three times the federal poverty level to make ends meet.⁴ For example, in a family of four in Denver with two adults and two young children, each adult would need to make nearly \$42,000 to meet basic needs.

What do we know about school district spending and teacher compensation?

In a recent study, a 10% increase in school district spending, often channeled to teacher salaries, reducing class size, and lengthening the school year, translated to significant increases in the likelihood students would graduate, higher wages for students, and a decrease in adulthood poverty.⁵

In terms of the impact of incentives on teachers, the research is increasingly clear that incentives do influence teacher's decisions. Incentives associated with attracting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff positions and in schools with high turnover in several studies have a significant impact on both attraction and retention of teachers, with a far greater impact on retention.⁶

One example is the work in the District of Columbia, where the district implemented ImpactPlus, which integrated teacher pay and evaluation. In 2016-17 to the 2017-18 school year, DC lost only 6% of its highly effective teachers, who made up 36% of the teaching force, and who were eligible for \$10,000-\$25,000 bonuses if they taught at a high-poverty school.⁷

Who supports incentives and differentiated pay?

Denver voters, in approving the ProComp mill levy, supported providing additional funds for incentives. Additionally, in 2014 when DPS and DCTA convened a Design Team for Compensation and Career Pathways to look at ways to strengthen the compensation system. As part of that work, a survey of DPS teachers found that 70% of respondents (teachers and SSPs) believe that ProComp's market incentives are important, or very important, to attracting teachers to and retaining them at hard-to-serve schools. Almost two-thirds indicated that more compensation than currently offered by ProComp is needed to motivate teachers to seek an assignment in a hard-to-serve school. Additionally, over half of principals agree that additional compensation is needed to recruit and retain the best teachers in these same schools. Teachers and SSPs indicate that incentives in the range of

¹<https://www.thedenverchannel.com/lifestyle/real-estate/denvers-median-home-price-hit-a-record-high-of-409-900-in-2018>

² <https://www.denverpost.com/2018/11/15/denver-salary-median-home/>

³ <https://www.zumper.com/blog/2019/01/denver-metro-report-january-2019/>

⁴ <https://cclponline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/denver-county-factsheet.pdf>

⁵ <https://academic.oup.com/qje/article/131/1/157/2461148>

⁶ https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/es_20170426_understanding_and_addressing_teacher_shortages_in_us_pp_dee_goldhaber.pdf

⁷ Thomas Toch, *A Policymaker's Playbook: Transforming Public School Teaching in the Nation's Capital*. FutureEd (June 2018).

\$5,000-\$7,400 per year would be necessary for more educators to move to and stay at hard-to-serve schools.⁸

The use of incentive pay for teachers is not new, nor is it isolated. According to NCTQ's database that tracks the 124 largest school districts in the country (a list that includes Denver, Jeffco, DougCo, and Cherry Creek), 82 have some sort of differentiated pay based on subject or school. Districts are twice as likely to offer incentives based on hard-to-staff subjects than they are for high-needs schools.⁹

Why the focus on school serving primarily students from low-income families?

Studies in multiple geographies, and experience in Denver, show that schools serving higher proportions of students of color, and high proportions of students whose families are low-income are less likely to have qualified teachers, and teachers in those schools are much more likely to transfer to a new school or district.

By nearly every academic measure Denver has some of the largest disparities in outcomes between students of color and white students, and low-income students and their more affluent peers. Ensuring students of color and low-income students have access to excellent educators and lower turnover is critical in eliminating race-based and economic-based disparities between students is imperative.

Where can I find additional resources?

A+ Colorado resources

- [A Fair Share: A New Proposal for Teacher Pay in Denver](#), includes a review of the literature on ProComp and a proposed structure for teacher pay

Bargaining Updates:

- [Denver Public Schools](#)
- [Denver Classroom Teacher Association](#)
- Colorado Department of Labor and Employment [Fact Sheet](#)

Academic research on Procomp

- Derek C. Briggs, Elena Diaz-Bilello, Andrew Maul, Michael Turner & Charles Bibilos, "[Denver ProComp Evaluation Report: 2010-2012](#)," Colorado Assessment Design Research and Evaluation (CADRE) Center and the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (2014): 1-132
- Eleanor Fulbeck & Meredith Richards. "The Impact of School-based Financial Incentives on Teachers' Strategic Moves: A Descriptive Analysis." *Teachers College Record* Volume 117 Number 9, (2015), p. 1-40
- Eleanor Fulbeck "Teacher Mobility and Financial Incentives: A Descriptive Analysis of Denver's ProComp," in the *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* (2016)

⁸ <http://static.dpsk12.org/gems/newprocomp/DesignTeamReportFINAL.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.nctq.org/blog/How-are-districts-and-states-using-pay-to-staff-high--need-schools-and-subjects>

- Dan Goldhaber & Joe Walch, "[Strategic Pay Reform: A Student Outcomes-Based Evaluation of Denver's ProComp Teacher Pay Initiative](#)," Center for Education Data & Research (2011-13): 1-40,
- Strategic Data Project, "[Human Capital Diagnostic](#)," Center for Education Policy Reform at Harvard University (2014).

Perceptions of ProComp:

- Kara Penn, "[ProComp Teacher Perspectives on Design, Usability, and Impact: Focus Group Findings, Implications, and Recommendations](#)," Mission Spark, LLC. (2015).
- The Design Team for Compensation and Career Pathways, "[A Report from the Design Team for Compensation and Career Pathways](#)," Denver Public Schools and Denver Classroom Teachers Association (2014).

Research on the impact of incentives outside Denver:

- Melinda Adnot & Thomas Dee & Veronica Katz & James Wyckoff. "Teacher Turnover, Teacher Quality, and Student Achievement in DCPS," Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, vol 39(1) (2017) , pages 54-76.
- Thomas Dee & Dan Goldhaber. "[Understanding and Addressing Teacher Shortages in the U.S.](#)" The Hamilton Project at The Brookings Institution (2017).
- Tom Toch. *A Policymakers Playbook: Transforming Public School Teaching in the Nation's Capital*. FutureEd (2018).

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Research prepared by A+ Colorado.

For questions please reach out to us at info@apluscolorado.org.

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