

119th Congress' Pay Teachers Act: Section-By-Section

Ranking Member Bernie Sanders

Sec.1.Short title; table of contents.

Sec.2.Purposes.

The purposes of this bill are to: 1) ensure public elementary and secondary school teachers earn a livable and competitive salary that is not less than \$60,000 and that increases regularly throughout a teacher's career; 2) ensure paraprofessionals and education support staff are paid a living wage of not less than \$45,000 per year or \$30.00 an hour; 3) increase Federal investments in public schools, and call upon States and localities to increase investments in public education to promote educational equity; and 4) advance the teaching profession by strengthening the educator pipeline and supporting teachers' career development and advancement.

Sec.3.Findings.

Establishes findings related to low teacher pay, the high rate of teachers who qualify for government benefits, the high percentage of teachers who work multiple jobs, the low wages for paraprofessionals and other school classified employees, the high rate of teacher shortages of underqualified teachers, the disproportionate impact that teacher shortages have on schools that serve a high enrollment of students of color, the positive benefits that teachers who enter the profession through comprehensive pathways and participate in teacher leadership opportunities have on our nation's public schools, and states that raising teacher salaries to at least \$60,000 a year and ensuring competitive pay throughout the lifetime of the teaching career is one of the most important steps the United States can take to address the teacher shortage crisis and ensure all students have access to qualified teachers and educational opportunity.

Sec.4.Definitions.

Defines "annual adjustment percentage", "consumer price index", and "Secretary".

TITLE I—INVESTING IN OUR NATION'S STUDENTS

Sec.101.Mandatory appropriations for part A of Title I of the ESEA.

Tripled Title I, Part A funding by providing \$36.774 billion in mandatory funding in fiscal year 2026, and for each succeeding fiscal year, the amount appropriated for the preceding year is indexed for inflation.

Sec.102.Mandatory appropriations for rural education.

Triples Rural Education funding authorized under Title V, Part B by providing \$430 million in mandatory funding in fiscal year 2026, and for each succeeding fiscal year, the amount appropriated for the preceding year indexed for inflation.

Sec.103.Mandatory appropriations for impact aid.

Doubles Impact Aid Basic Support Payments authorized under section 7003(b) of ESEA by providing \$1.46 billion in mandatory funding in fiscal year 2026, and for each succeeding fiscal year, the amount appropriated for the preceding year indexed for inflation.

Sec.104.Mandatory appropriations for the Bureau of Indian Education.

Doubles funding for the Bureau of Indian Education by providing \$1.13 billion in mandatory funding in fiscal year 2026, and for each succeeding fiscal year, the amount appropriated for the preceding year is indexed for inflation. Requires programs or activities that receive funds under this section to pay teachers a livable and competitive salary that is not less than \$60,000 and that increases regularly throughout a teacher’s career.

TITLE II—SUPPORTING OUR NATION’S EDUCATORS

PART A—Ensuring Teachers Are Paid a Livable and Competitive Wage

Sec.201. Definitions.

Defines “annual adjustment percentage,” “annual base salary,” “consumer price index,” “minimum salary for teachers,” and “teacher”. Determined by States, the “minimum statewide salary for teachers” is the minimum annual base salary that the State requires all school districts to compensate full-time, fully certified teachers. This amount is required to be not less than \$60,000, and such amount increases every five years at a rate indexed by inflation.

Sec.202.State teacher pay plan addendum.

Amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to require States to submit a new Title I-A state plan addendum not less 1 year after the date the Secretary finalizes regulation related to the implementation of the Pay Teachers Act. The state plan addendum collects data from States regarding their average statewide and local teacher salaries, their efforts to increase State investments in public education to support increasing salaries and wages for teachers and other school staff, and the State’s efforts to improve the equitable distribution of teachers. Additionally, the state plan addendum requires States to indicate whether the State will: 1) comply with the teacher pay requirements specified in section 1111(i)(2), as amended in section 202 of the PTA, or 2) request to participate in the “Teacher Salary Improvement Pathway.”

Sec.203.Paying teachers a livable and competitive wage.

Amends ESEA to insert a new subsection in section 1111. Requires States that receive Title I-A grants, within 4 years after the date the Secretary finalizes regulation related to the

implementation of the Pay Teachers Act, to ensure that teachers employed by local educational agencies in their States are compensated an annual base salary that is not less than the minimum salary for teachers. States are also required to demonstrate, in accordance with procedures determined by the Secretary, that teachers employed by local educational agencies are paid a livable and competitive salary that increases throughout their career and is at least commensurate with college-educated and experienced professionals in the region their employers are located in.

However, recognizing that States vary in resources and fiscal circumstances, the bill includes a “Teacher Salary Improvement Pathway” that provides additional flexibilities and an extended timeline for eligible States to comply with the two teacher salary requirements. Eligible States must meet at least one of the following criteria: 1) have an annual starting statewide teacher salary average that was less than \$45,000 in the 2022-2023 school year; 2) 50 percent or more of the teachers employed by local educational agencies in the State did not receive an annual base salary of \$60,000 or more in the 2022-2023 school year; or 3) or demonstrate substantial need for the extended timeline to comply with the teacher salary requirements. To participate in the Teacher Salary Improvement Pathway, a State must submit a request that:

- Identifies the average statewide and local average annual teacher salary baselines based on given years of service in the teaching profession in the 2022-2023 school year.
- Establishes statewide annual goals and a timeline of not more than 6 years after receipt of the request’s approval where all teachers employed by local educational agencies in the State are paid a livable and competitive salary that is at least \$60,000, increases throughout their career and is at least commensurate with college-educated and experienced professionals in the region their employers are located in.
- Describes the State’s plan to require local educational agencies that do not compensate their teachers the minimum salary for teachers to, at a minimum, increase the salaries of their teachers consistent with the statewide annual goals.
- Describes the State’s plan to increase funding for local educational agencies to increase salaries and wages for teachers and other school staff in a manner that does not increase average class sizes or full-time equivalent teacher-to-student ratios at the State, local educational agency, or school level, reduce planning time, or require teachers to teach additional classes.
- Allows public comment on their request to participate in the Teacher Salary Improvement Pathway.

If a State demonstrates substantial progress in meeting its annual statewide goals and demonstrates the need for additional flexibility, such a State may request to revise its statewide annual goals not earlier than 3 years after its request to participate is approved if the Secretary determines such revisions will help the State continue to make significant progress in meeting such requirements. After 6 years, States in the Teacher Salary Improvement Pathway that do not yet meet the two teacher pay requirements may submit subsequent requests to participate in the pathway again if the State demonstrates to the Secretary that the initial request has been effective in enabling the State to increase teacher salaries in a manner that made significant progress in reaching the two teacher pay requirements. Additionally, States participating in the Teacher Salary Improvement Pathway are required to submit an annual report on their progress in

increasing teacher salaries, increasing state investments in public education, and their efforts to improve the equitable distribution of teachers.

Sec.204.Collective bargaining and related rules.

Establishes a new rule of construction related to collective bargaining and additional pay for teachers. The provision states that nothing in the subsection should be constructed to limit States or local educational agencies from providing supplemental pay to teachers above the annual base pay. The bill also specifies that waiver authority under section 8401 of ESEA cannot be used to waive requirements under this subsection.

PART B—Modernizing the Teaching Profession to Improve Student Learning

Sec.211.Definitions.

Defines “career ladder” and “subgroup of students.”

Sec.212.State commissions to advance the teaching profession.

Establishes a new grant program (authorized for \$50 million annually for fiscal years 2026 through 2030) to support States in establishing State commissions to modernize and advance the teaching profession. The goals of these commissions include ensuring all students have access to experienced and qualified teachers, addressing structural and organizational deficiencies in the teaching professions to raise the standards, status, and salaries of the profession, and identifying and reforming policies and practices to promote excellent teaching, especially for subgroups of students.

Authorizes the Secretary to make awards to States (which may be to the State educational agency, the Governor or their designee, or a consortium of State agencies) and to reserve funds to support States in applied research, informing the public, and program administration. As part of their applications, States are required to submit their plans to develop and run their State commission and regularly engage students, parents, teachers, principals, other school leaders, specialized instructional support personnel, education system leaders, policymakers, and researchers in operating their commission.

States are required to use 75 percent of their grants to operate their State commissions and may reserve not more than 25 percent for administration. Half of the State's commission members are required to be current or former teachers with diverse backgrounds that students in rural, suburban, and urban areas in the State and include representatives from various State and local entities. Commissions are required to include various State and local agencies and partners in the K-12 ecosystem in the State.

State commissions are required to examine findings and research from high-performing and rapidly improving international educational systems that may be adaptable to the State’s educational context and challenges. States are also required to develop recommendations about policies and resources to recruit, retain, develop, and promote high-quality teachers, examine

students' access to in-field, experienced, and high-quality teachers, and analyze short and long-term trends in the State's teaching workforce, including whether the salaries or wages of teachers, paraprofessionals, and education support staff are livable and competitive. The section also encourages the State Commission to analyze the use and distribution of Federal, State, and local resources, including in-kind resources, donations, and grant opportunities findings from resource inequity reviews described in ESEA section 1111(d), as well as the challenges and opportunities that teachers face at various stages in their career trajectories, including for novice teachers, mid-career teachers, and veteran teachers.

State commissions are required to publish a final report with their recommendations to advance the teaching profession and submit that report to the public, Governor, State education agency, State legislature, and the Secretary.

Sec.213.Advancing the teaching profession grants.

Establishes a new mandatory program entitlement program ("Advancing the Teaching Profession Grants") for States to advance the teaching profession by:

- Incentivizing States in implementing a teacher career ladder that provides professional advancement opportunities and increased compensation ("career ladder awards") for teachers who take on additional responsibilities and differentiated roles to improve teaching and learning.
- Providing all teachers in America "classroom awards" of \$1,000 annually (and \$1,200 for teachers in Title I-A receiving schools) for classroom supplies and other resources to support their students.

States are required to submit State plans on an annual basis that describe how the State will implement a career award ladder program and classroom award program. In a given award year, the Federal government would cover 75 percent of the cost of providing all teachers with classroom awards and all eligible teachers with career ladder awards. States would be responsible for the remaining 25 percent. States would be required to provide estimated numbers in their application and submit actual teacher counts by November 1 to allow the Secretary to correct allotments.

The Bureau of Indian Education is also eligible for an allotment under this section, and the Secretary is given authority to adapt the program to support Bureau-funded schools.

Additionally, the State may use any remaining funds for various activities to advance the teaching profession, including data-driven methods to improve the educator labor market, applied research and related activities to improve teaching and learning, and promote evidence use by educators.

Career Ladder Program:

States that receive an allotment under this section are required to support local educational agencies in developing and implementing a career ladder program. Each program would be

composed of “levels” that the State would assign flexible additional roles or responsibilities and a minimum salary increase for each teacher in the State who attains such level. These details would be collectively bargained at the local level and adapted by school districts with additional specifications. States are required to coordinate with local educational agencies in developing and implementing levels.

Examples of various levels could include teachers who mentor novice teachers or teacher candidates, teachers with coaching responsibilities, teachers who maintain a national certification or a master’s degree, or eligible teacher who supports collaboration to systematically improve instruction, curricula, and job-embedded professional learning.

States would define the minimum salary increase associated with each level. School districts, including under the terms of collective bargaining agreements, memoranda of understanding, or other agreements between such employers and their employees, would develop locally-driven career ladders that add additional specifications and requirements to the State’s levels and salary minimums. States are also required to submit an assurance that they will develop and operate such a career ladder program in a manner that does not alter or otherwise affect the rights, remedies, or procedures afforded to school or local educational agency employees under Federal, State, or local laws (including applicable regulations or court orders) or under the terms of collective bargaining agreements, memoranda of understanding, or other agreements between such employers and their employees, such as contractual requirements for employers to provide basic supplies to teachers

In terms of funding, each State would receive an allotment that includes, per each level, the product of the number of eligible teachers that have attained levels defined by the State and the minimum salary increase defined by the State for such level. The State’s total allotment includes the sum of such calculations per each level proposed in the State’s plan.

Classroom Award Program:

States that receive an allotment under this section are required to operate a streamlined and minimally burdensome program that provides all teachers with at least \$1,000 annually (and \$1,200 for teachers at Title I-A receiving schools) to purchase classroom supplies, supplemental high-quality instructional materials, and other resources to improve the educational experience of their students.

States are required to support teachers in exercising their professional judgment and are prohibited from using these funds to supplant State or local funds that would be used for classroom supplies.

Sec.214. Paying paraprofessionals and education support staff livable and competitive salaries and wages.

Establishes a new mandatory program for States (appropriated for \$25 billion annually indexed by inflation) to ensure that paraprofessionals and education support staff are paid a living wage of not less than \$45,000 annually or \$30 per hour.

The Secretary is authorized to award grants to States (in proportion to their allocation under the Title I-A program) who guarantee, within four years after implementation of the Pay Teachers Act, that no full-time equivalent employee is paid below the minimum salary for paraprofessionals and education support staff and no part-time equivalent employee is paid below the minimum wage for paraprofessionals and education support staff.

Determined by States, the “minimum salary for paraprofessionals and education support staff” is the minimum annual base salary that the State requires all school districts to compensate full-time equivalent employees. This amount is required to be not less than \$45,000, and such amount increases each five years at a rate indexed by inflation.

Determined by States, the “minimum wage for paraprofessionals and education support staff” is the minimum hourly wage that the State requires all school districts to compensate part-time equivalent employees. This amount must be at least \$30 an hour and increases by a rate indexed to inflation every five years.

States are required to submit an application containing their timeline to ensure compliance with the pay requirements, including statewide annual goals for increasing such pay. States are also provided flexibility in subgranting grants to all local educational agencies in the State, provided that they ensure that local educational agencies with high numbers or percentages of students from low-income backgrounds receive higher per-pupil allocations to address inequities in local funding.

This section also encourages paraprofessionals and education support staff to be provided with opportunities for personnel preparation, professional development, credentials, or certifications, such as to assist in the provision of special education and related services or to serve English learners

Local educational agencies are required to use funds to comply with this Act’s paraprofessional and educator support staff’s minimum wage or salary requirements. They may use leftover funds to increase salaries or wages for teachers, paraprofessionals, specialized instructional support personnel, classified school employees, principals, other school leaders, school librarians, school bus drivers, and other staff, as well as to provide paraprofessionals and education support staff with opportunities for professional learning, skill development, credentials, or certifications.

Sec.215.Rules.

Establishes a new rule of construction related to collective bargaining and additional pay for teachers. The provision states that nothing in the subsection should be constructed to limit States or local educational agencies from providing supplemental pay to teachers above the annual base pay. The bill also specifies that waiver authority under section 8401 of ESEA cannot be used to waive requirements under this subsection.

Establishes a new supplement, not supplant requirement for the Advancing the Teaching Profession Grants and the Paraprofessional and Education Support Staff Pay and Working Conditions Grants. Such requirement

PART C—Technical Assistance; Reporting; Administration; Study

Sec.221. Annual State report to the Secretary.

Improves a State’s annual reporting to the Secretary on average per-pupil expenditures, data that States are complying with the teacher pay requirements or the requirements specified under the Teacher Salary Improvement Pathway, and a description of the evidence-based strategies the State implemented to reduce the number and percentage of teachers and paraprofessionals teaching without full certification and licensure overall and in schools served by local educational agencies operating in that serve high numbers or percentages of students from low-income backgrounds, racial and ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, and English learners, and to meet the equitable distribution of teachers requirements specified in subsections (g)(1)(B) of section 1111.

Sec.222. Promoting the equitable distribution of in-field, experienced, and effective teachers.

Amends the equitable distribution requirements of teachers requirements in section (g)(1)(B) of ESEA by extending the requirement to capture students with disabilities and English learners, and amends section 1111(g)(2)(J) to require the State to submit an assurance that the State educational agency will implement evidence-based strategies to reduce the number and percentage of teachers and paraprofessionals teaching without full certification and licensure overall and in schools served by local educational agencies operating in that serve high numbers or percentages of students from low-income backgrounds, racial and ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, and English learners. Similarly, the bill amends plan requirements for local educational agencies in section 1112(b)(2) to extend equitable distribution requirements of teachers to capture students with disabilities and English learners and submit a similar local assurance related to implementing evidence-based practices to reduce the number and percentage of educators without full certification and licensures in public schools.

Provides \$3 million annually to the Department of Education to provide technical assistance and improve compliance with the equitable teacher requirements in ESEA and requires a biannual report to Congress on such issues.

Sec.223. Improving resource equity.

Requires that local educational agencies with schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement identify and propose a plan to mitigate resource inequities and to increase educational opportunities, including the equitable access to qualified teachers. Requires that schools identified for additional targeted support identify resource inequities, including the examination of the local educational agency and school-level budgeting, and requires schools identified for targeted support and improvement to identify and propose a plan to mitigate

resource inequities and to increase educational opportunities, including the equitable access to qualified teachers in such school.

Sec.224.Strengthening per-pupil expenditure reporting.

Proposes additional reporting requirements in the State’s annual report to the Secretary to increase reporting on average per-pupil expenditures. Amends section 1112(e)(1) related to parents-right-to-know to require all schools served by local educational agencies to provide parents with information related to resource equity, including the per-pupil expenditure at their child’s school and whether the per-pupil expenditure at their child’s school is below the average of the local educational agency and State, respectively.

Sec.225.State administration.

Increases the cap on how much States may reserve from Title I-A for program administration from \$400,000 to \$1.2 million. Additionally, the bill allows States to reserve up to 0.5% set-aside of Title I-A to improve fiscal and resource adequacy and equity to carry out specified activities.

Sec.226. National Academies Study to Improve ESEA’s Resource Equity Requirements

Provides \$1.5 million to require the Department of Education to contract with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to conduct and make publicly available a study of how to improve Federal requirements designed to ensure that public schools and local educational agencies that serve a high number or percentage of underserved groups of students, including students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, English learners, students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in the foster care system, receive an adequate and equitable share of State and local funds. The bill requires the study to make recommendations related to improving policies related to comparability as described in section 1118(c) and the supplement, not supplant requirements under section 1118(b).

TITLE III—INVESTING IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION

Sec.301.Mandatory appropriations for the Teacher Quality Partnerships and Grow Your Own Programs.

Amends the Higher Education Act (HEA) to authorize a new Grow Your Own program within the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant program and provides \$550 million for TQP grants in fiscal year 2026 and for each succeeding fiscal year, the amount appropriated for the preceding year indexed for inflation.

Sec.302.Mandatory appropriations for the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence program.

Appropriates \$150 million in the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence program in fiscal year 2026 and for each succeeding fiscal year, the amount appropriated for the preceding year

indexed for inflation, to support teacher preparation at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and other minority-serving institutions (MSIs).

Sec.303.Mandatory appropriations for personnel development to improve services and results for children with disabilities under part D of IDEA.

Appropriates \$300 million in Part D of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in fiscal year 2026 and for each succeeding fiscal year, the amount appropriated for the preceding year indexed for inflation, to support special education personnel.

Sec.304.Mandatory appropriations for the Supporting Effective Educator Development program.

Appropriates \$100 million for the Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) program in fiscal year 2026, and for each succeeding fiscal year, the amount appropriated for the preceding year indexed for inflation to support the teaching profession.

Sec.305.Mandatory appropriations for the Teacher and School Leader Incentive program.

Appropriates \$100 million for the Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) program in fiscal year 2026, and for each succeeding fiscal year, the amount appropriated for the preceding year indexed for inflation to improve teachers' professional development, advancement, and leadership opportunities.