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K-12 Teacher Shortages, Retention, and Salaries in Utah

While Utah's teacher shortage, retention, and salary outcomes rank favorably among states, some data show potential warning signs.

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K-12 Teacher Shortages, Retention, and Salaries in Utah

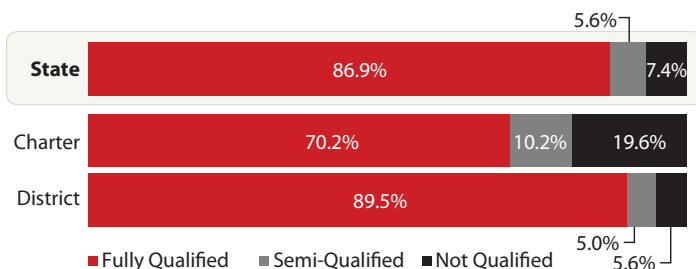
Analysis in Brief

More than 30,000 teachers educate Utah's K-12 students. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored existing concerns related to teacher shortages, retention, and salaries. Despite the pandemic's impact on education, Utah teacher vacancies remain low, teacher retention remains high, and Utah's average teacher salary is comparable to the national average. While Utah ranks relatively well on many metrics associated with these issues, potential warning signs include lower retention rates among early-career and underqualified teachers, high student-teacher ratios, and teacher shortages in certain subject areas.

Key Findings

- 1. Teacher Shortages** – Utah ranks low for teacher vacancies compared to other states and graduates from educator preparation programs increased in the most recent years. That said, 13% of Utah teachers were underqualified in the 2022-23 school year, with rates ranging from 32.7% in Tintic School District to 6.7% in Iron School District. Utah's student-teacher ratio ranks highest in the nation.
- 2. Teacher Retention** – Teacher retention remains high and relatively flat, ranging from 90.0% to 91.3% over the last five years with lower rates for early-career and underqualified teachers. Retention varies across school districts from 82.2% in Logan City School District to 95.4% in North Summit School District. Based on available data, Utah's teacher retention is high compared to other states.

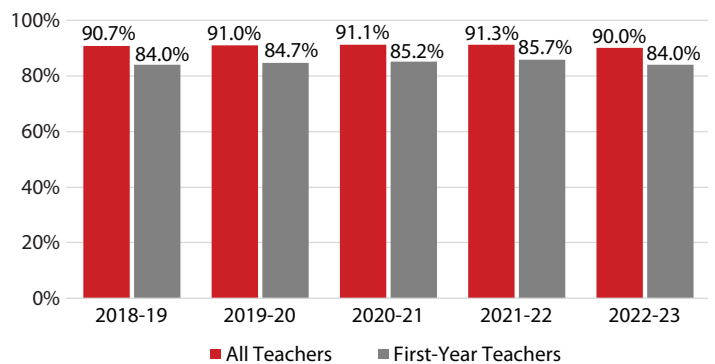
Share of Utah Teachers by Qualification, 2022-23 School Year



Note: Measured as shares of teacher full-time equivalent (FTE) counts. Fully qualified teachers are professionally licensed and have obtained the professional endorsements for their assignment.
 Source: Utah State Board of Education

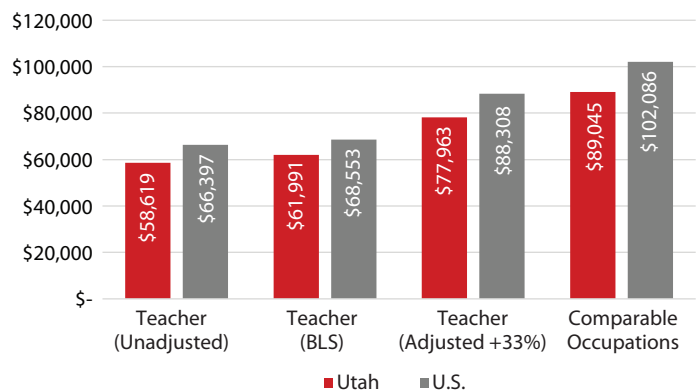
- 3. Teacher Salaries** – Utah's average teacher salary ranks in the middle of states while Utah's average starting salary ranks second highest. When accounting for inflation, Utah's teacher salary remains relatively flat over time. Utah teachers earn 12.4% to 34.2% less than workers in other occupations that require a bachelor's degree (depending on how contract hours are adjusted).

Share of Utah Teachers Returning to the Education Occupation, 2017-18 to 2021-22 School Years



Note: Calculated as the share of previous year teachers who returned to education the following year.
 Source: Utah State Board of Education

Average Utah and U.S. Teacher Salaries Compared to Other Occupations, 2021



Note: Comparable occupations include all BLS detailed occupations that require a bachelor's degree or higher that were not missing needed data.
 Source: National Center for Education Statistics Table 211.69, and Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics

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Introduction

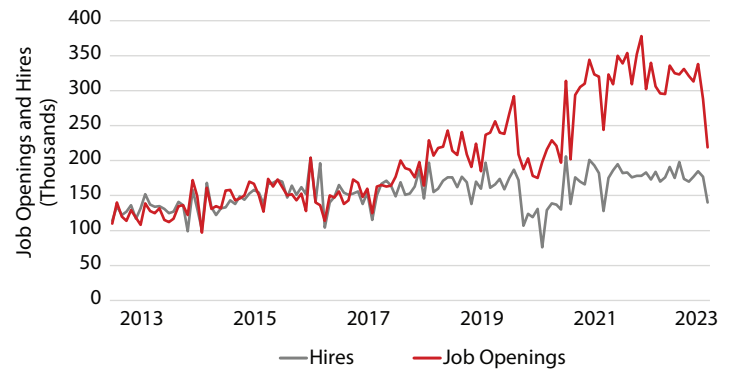
Utah teachers make up a significant share of the state’s workforce. More than 30,000 teachers educated nearly 675,000 public K-12 students statewide in the 2022-23 school year. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on education elevated existing concerns related to teacher shortages, retention challenges, and salaries. Understanding the current landscape of these issues in a post-pandemic environment can support decision-makers in addressing concerns. This report provides a summary of the data and show Utah’s teacher shortage, retention, and salary outcomes rank favorably among states while also describing potential warning signs for the future.

Teacher Shortages

While the term “teacher shortage” is commonly used, defining it, diagnosing it, and understanding its significance is challenging. The U.S. Department of Education collects information on teacher shortage subject areas from states, but data on the magnitude of teacher shortages is not readily available as neither federal sources nor most states consistently track teacher vacancies through time.² The Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) provides insight on U.S. labor shortages in public education broadly (the data cover a range of staff and are not teacher-specific). While the number of public education job openings matched the number of hires from 2013-2017, job openings increasingly outpace hires since 2017 (Figure 1).

The National Center for Education Statistics reports the share of public schools hiring for at least one teaching position (79.7% in the 2020-21 school year), along with the share of schools hiring in each subject area and the share finding it difficult to fill these positions.³ That said, it does not distinguish how many vacancies go unfilled or report on state-level vacancies.⁴ Nguyen et. al. recently published a national report detailing teacher shortage

Figure 1: U.S. Job Openings and Hires in Public Education, 2013-2023



Note: Includes all jobs in state and local government – education.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Jobs Openings and Labor Turnover Survey

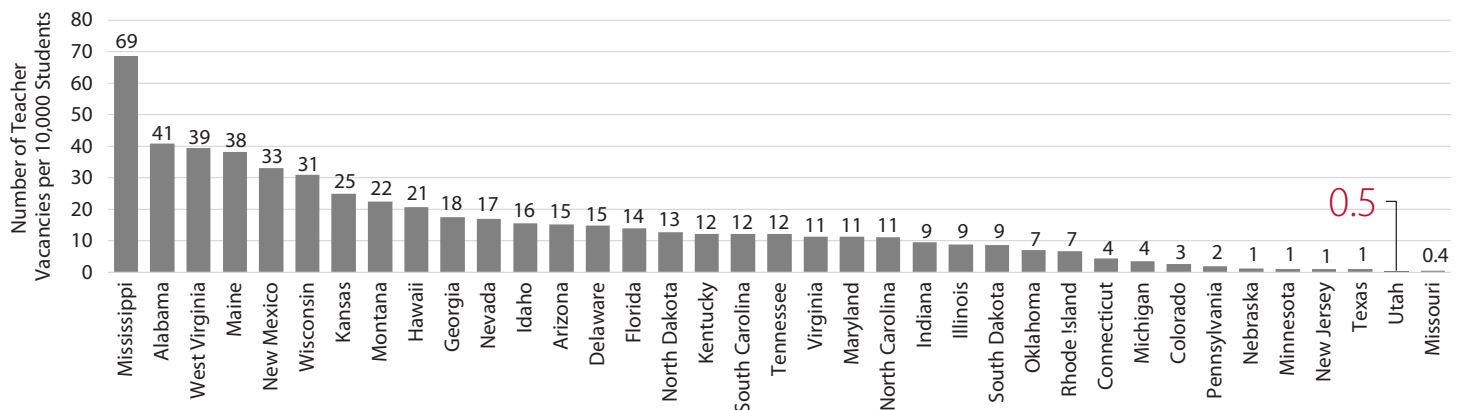
information by state using news reports, education websites, and other publicly available data. Based on their estimates, there were at least 36,000 vacant teaching positions nationwide.⁵

Teacher Vacancies

Utah school districts report fewer teacher vacancies resulting in a low statewide teacher vacancy rate compared to other states. When searching for teacher vacancy data, Nguyen et. al. found or estimated vacancy data for 37 states (Utah included). Teacher vacancies measure the number of positions unfilled at the start of a school year. Based on these estimates, Utah had the second lowest vacancy rate with only 0.5 vacancies per 10,000 students (Figure 2). However, these estimates should be interpreted with caution. Given the lack of a consistent and reliable measurement, these estimates come from data collected in different ways, at different times of year, via different mechanisms, and from varying sources, making direct comparisons difficult.

While most schools report that they are hiring for at least one position at the start of each school year, the difficulty of filling

Figure 2: Estimated Teacher Vacancies Per 10,000 Students by State



Note: The year of available data varied by state. 15 states (including Utah) show data from the 2021-22 school year. The remaining states are from prior years ranging from 2014-15 to 2020-21. Estimates for Alaska, Arkansas, California, Iowa, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Vermont, Washington, and Wyoming were unavailable. Source: Nguyen, Lam, C., and Bruno, P. (2022). Is there a national teacher shortage? A systematic examination of reports of teacher shortages in the United States. (EdWorkingPaper: 22-631). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: <https://doi.org/10.26300/76eq-hj32>

that position varies across schools and states. Based on data from the National Teacher and Principal Survey, Utah reported less difficulty than most other states with 36.2% of Utah schools reporting vacancies as very difficult to fill or going unfilled compared to 46.9% nationwide.⁶

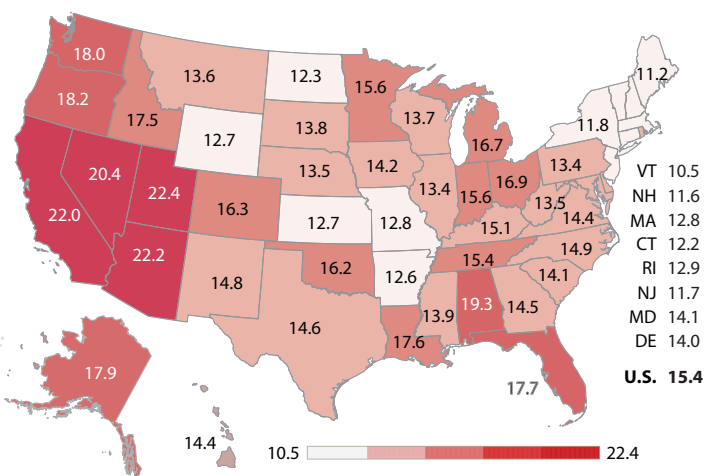
Like most states, Utah does not consistently track teacher vacancy data. A 2021 legislative audit of teacher retention reported teacher vacancy data from surveys by the Utah School Superintendent’s Association in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2021. Data from these surveys show that teacher vacancies in Utah are quite low. Thirty-nine of 41 school districts responded to the 2021 survey and only nine reported vacancies at the start of the school year. These districts reported 37 total vacancies in addition to Cache County School District not reporting an actual number but noting “multiple” vacancies (Table 1). There were 81, 111, and 39 vacancies reported in 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively, and these previous surveys had lower response rates than the 2021 survey. This could indicate that the previous surveys underestimated the number of vacancies to a greater degree than the 2021 survey.

Table 1: Utah School Districts Reporting Teacher Vacancies, 2021

School District	Number of Vacancies
Cache	Multiple
Granite	8
Murray City	1
Ogden City	2
Park City	3
San Juan	3
Tooele	15
Uintah	2
Weber	3

Source: Office of the Legislative Auditor General

Figure 3: Student-Teacher Ratios by State, Fall 2021



Source: National Center for Education Statistics Table 208.40

While these data are imperfect, they do not suggest a trend of a worsening teacher shortages as measured by teacher vacancies but show an improvement with significantly fewer teacher vacancies reported in 2021 than in 2016. However, teacher vacancy data beyond these years is unknown. Without historical teacher vacancy data, it is difficult to know whether teacher shortages are worsening, improving, or unchanged over time.

Measuring teacher vacancies alone also presents an incomplete picture. For example, teacher vacancies only measure unfilled positions of posted jobs. Local education agencies may choose not to post a position if they think it is unlikely to be filled. Additionally, schools may choose to increase class size instead of hiring a replacement.

Student-Teacher Ratios

Some research calculates teacher shortages based on an “optimal” student-teacher ratio, or the national average student-teacher ratio. Utah’s student-teacher ratio is high compared to other states, which creates less flexibility to increase class sizes if a teaching position goes unfilled. Based on Fall 2021 data (the most recent nationally comparable data available), Utah had the highest student-teacher ratio at 22.4, compared to the national average of 15.4 (Figure 3). An unfilled teaching position can place upward pressure on already high student-teacher ratios. Incorporating student-teacher ratios into the measure indicates Utah could have a larger teacher shortage compared to other states.

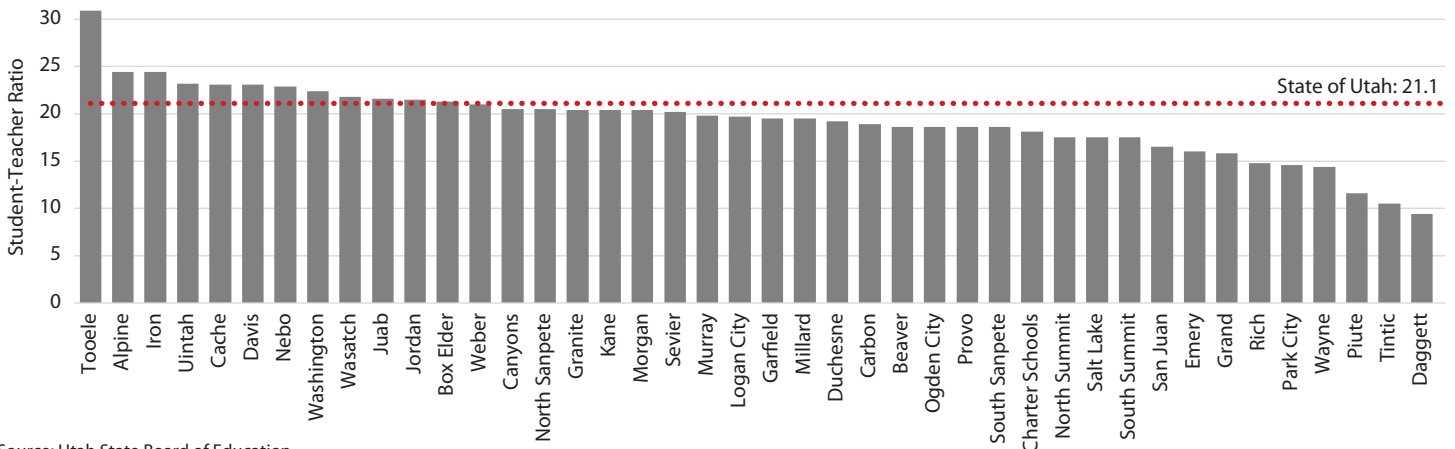
Student-teacher ratios also vary across Utah school districts. In the 2021-22 school year, Utah’s statewide student-teacher ratio was 21.1. However, this ratio varied from 9.4 in Daggett School District to 29.7 in Tooele School District (Figure 4). Some of this variation is likely due to rural school districts having smaller student populations.

Non-licensed and Underqualified Teachers

Understanding the licensure and qualifications of persons filling teaching positions further clarifies the impact of teacher shortages. When defined as the inability to fill a vacancy with a professionally licensed or fully qualified teacher, there could be zero teacher vacancies and a school could still have a teacher shortage.

While hiring a non-licensed or otherwise underqualified teacher could contribute to a teacher shortage, it is important to consider the differences between qualifications and effectiveness. Teacher quality is notoriously difficult to measure and varies among teachers at all qualification levels. While research is mixed, some studies show a positive impact of professional licensure on student outcomes, particularly in mathematics.^{7,8} Additionally, professionally licensed teachers have higher retention rates leading to more experience, which improves student success.^{9,10}

Figure 4: Student-Teacher Ratios by Utah School District, 2021-22 School Year



Source: Utah State Board of Education

Teacher Qualifications Terms & Definitions

Professionally Licensed: Teachers who have completed an educator preparation program, met all professional licensure requirements, and maintained their professional teaching license through continuous professional development.

Associate License: To receive an associate license teachers must complete a criminal background check, complete an educator ethics review, and have a bachelor's degree, be enrolled in a university-based Board-approved educator preparation program that will result in a bachelor's degree, or have a skill certification in a specific CTE area as established by the Superintendent. Teachers must also meet content knowledge requirements.

LEA-Specific License: To receive an LEA-specific license teachers must complete a criminal background check, complete an educator ethics review, and receive LEA-specific teacher training.

Not Professionally Licensed: Teachers with an associate license, LEA-specific license, or no license. Less than 0.3% of educators are working as long-term substitutes with no license.

Fully Qualified: Teachers who are professionally licensed and have obtained the professional endorsements for their assignment.

Semi-Qualified: Teachers who are in the process of pursuing licensure and/or the professional endorsements for their assignment but have not yet completed these requirements.

Not Qualified: Teachers who do not have a professional license or professional endorsements for their assignment. Some of these teachers may have out-of-state licenses or have let their licenses lapse and are in the process of renewing.

Underqualified: Teachers who are either semi-qualified or not qualified.

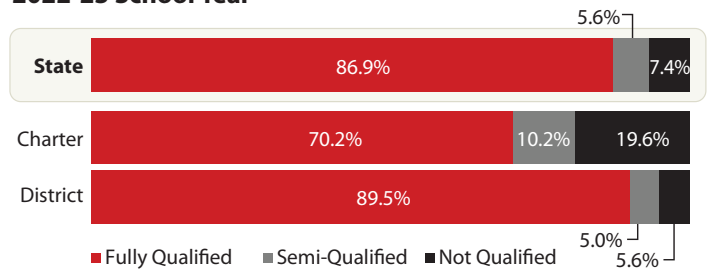
Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute and Utah State Board of Education Administrative Rules R277-301

While Nguyen et. al. attempted to compare teacher qualifications across states, the authors define "underqualified" based on each state's respective standards. This produces unequal comparisons given differences in these definitions across states. In recent years, many states relaxed standards for teacher certification which would artificially inflate their rates.

Data from the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) show 86.9% of Utah teachers were fully qualified, 5.6% were semi-qualified, and 7.4% were not qualified in the 2022-23 school year. Charter schools have larger shares of underqualified teachers (Figure 5).

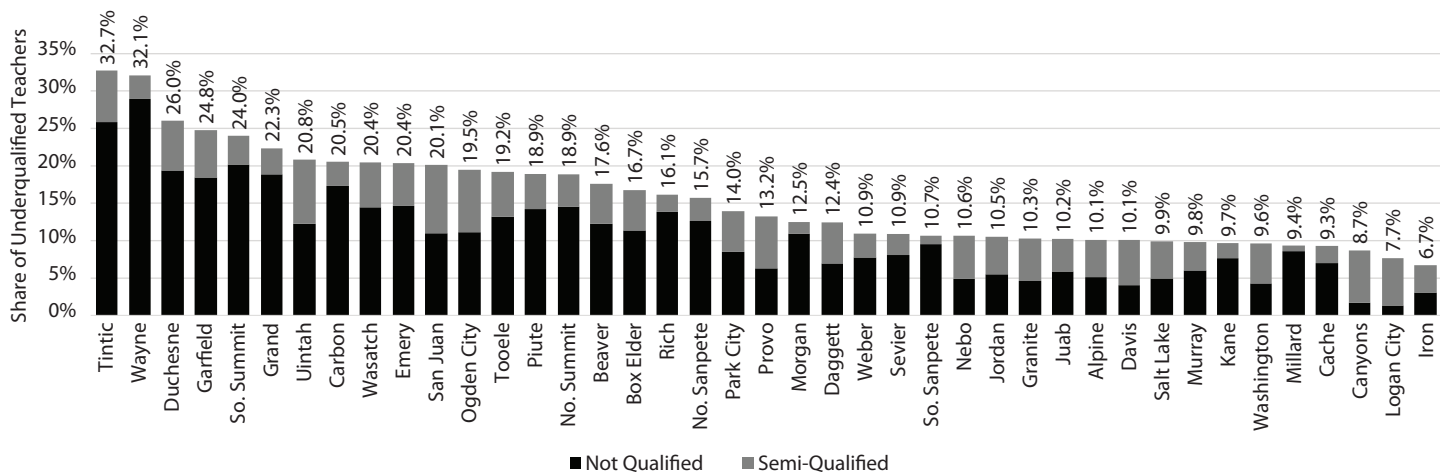
The share of underqualified teachers also varies across Utah school districts (Figure 6). Iron School District has the smallest share of underqualified teachers at only 6.7%, while nearly a third of Tintic School District teachers are underqualified. Data by school vary even more significantly with shares ranging from 0% to 100%. Data from 2012 to 2022 show that the number of non-licensed teachers increased while the number of professionally licensed teachers declined from 2012 to 2018 (Figure 7). However, this trend started to reverse in 2018.

Figure 5: Share of Utah Teachers by Qualification, 2022-23 School Year



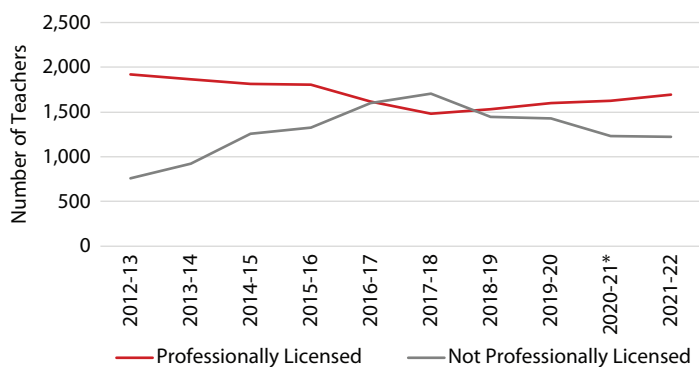
Note: Measured as shares of teacher full-time equivalent (FTE) counts.
Source: Utah State Board of Education

Figure 6: Share of Underqualified Teachers by Utah School District, 2022-23 School Year



Note: Measured as shares of teacher full-time equivalent (FTE) counts.
Source: Utah State Board of Education

Figure 7: Number of Utah First-year Teachers With and Without a Professional Teaching License, 2012-13 to 2019-21 School Years



*International guest teachers prior to 2020-21 had been given an alternative license (non-licensed). Due to their Visa, beginning 2020-2021 all are given a professional license.
Note: Teachers who are not professionally licensed include those with an associate license, LEA-specific license, or no license. More than 99% of Utah teachers without a professional license have an associate or LEA-specific license.
Source: Utah Office of the Legislative Auditor General analysis of USBE CACTUS data

Table 2: Utah Education Preparation Program Enrollees and Completers, 2022-23 School Year

	Program Enrollees	Program Completions
Traditional Programs		
Brigham Young University	1,580	360
Utah Tech University	161	69
Southern Utah University	549	144
University of Utah	321	93
Utah State University	1,530	420
Utah Valley University	672	266
Weber State University	860	213
Western Governors University	602	1,222
Westminster University	46	22
Alternative Route Programs	2,027	306
Total	8,348	3,115

Source: Utah State Board of Education

Education Preparation Program (EPP) Completions

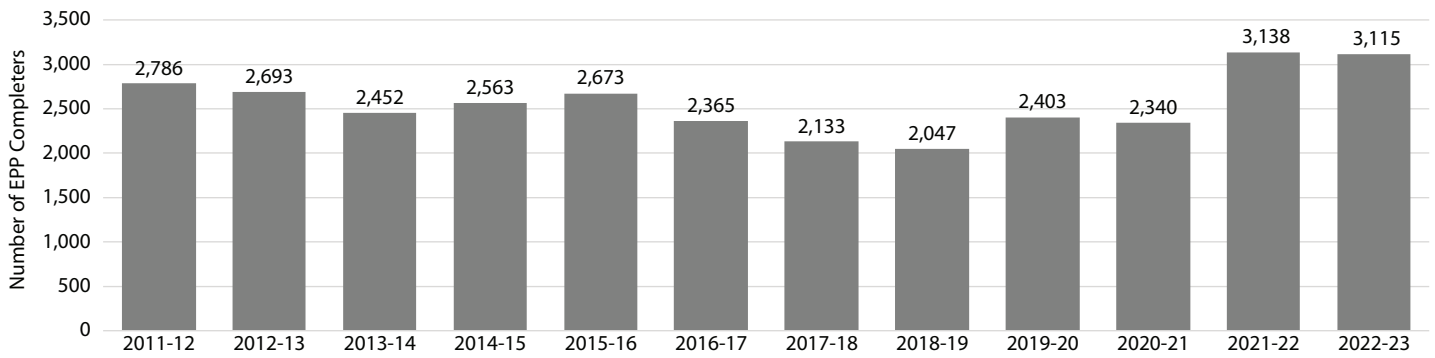
One metric often used to highlight the potential for future teacher shortages is the number of students completing educator preparation programs (EPP). The number of program enrollees and completers by Utah Educator Preparation Program (EPP) for the 2022-23 school year are outlined in Table 2. Graduates from Utah EPPs fluctuated but ultimately grew from 2,786 graduates in the 2011-12 school year to 3,115 in the 2022-23 school year, an 11.8% increase (Figure 8).

That said, the number of graduates from these programs is not a perfect predictor of filling positions that are vacant or filled by underqualified teachers. As context, Utah hires approximately 3,500 teachers per year.¹¹ New hires not only consist of recent

EPP completers, but teachers returning to the workforce, out-of-state hires, and underqualified educators. Additionally, not all graduates from Utah EPPs go on to work as teachers in Utah schools. Some choose to teach in another state, pursue more education, work in a field other than teaching, or not work at all. However, Nguyen et. al. showed that the number of graduates from EPPs within a state is correlated with a decrease in both vacant positions and underqualified hires.¹² This suggests that states that graduate more new teachers are less likely to suffer from teacher shortages.

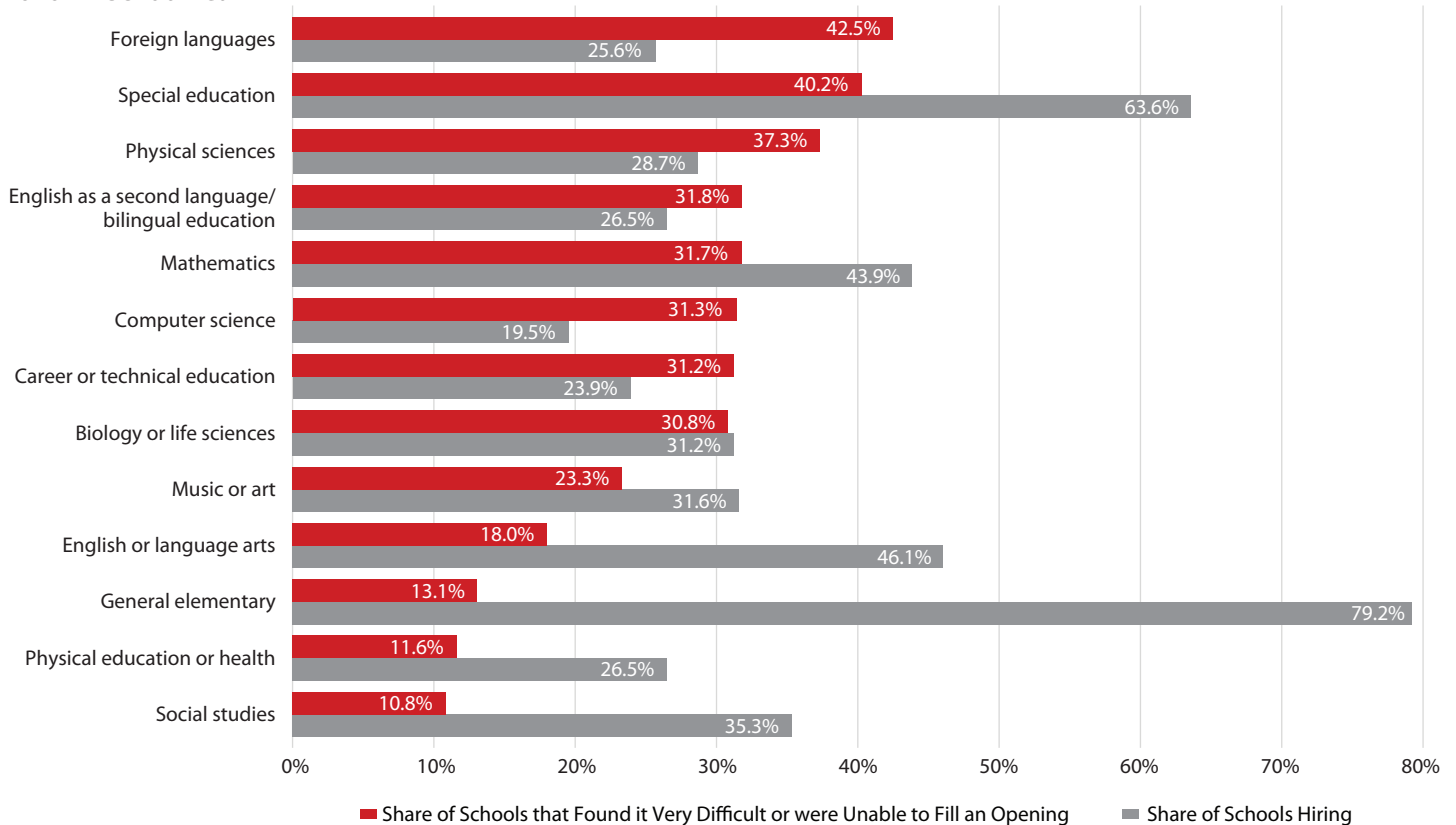
The number of EPP graduates also does not consider subject area, grade-level qualifications, or teachers' preferences for schools or geographic regions. Nationally, schools in rural

Figure 8: Number of Utah Education Preparation Program (EPP) Completers, 2011-12 to 2022-23 School Years



Source: Title II Higher Education Act National Teacher Preparation Reports and Utah State Board of Education

Figure 9: Share of U.S. Schools Hiring and that Found it Very Difficult or were Unable to Fill an Opening by Subject Area, 2020-21 School Year



Note: Calculated among schools reporting that they were hiring for at least one open teaching position in a specific field.
Source: National Center for Education Statistics Table 210.60

areas and/or schools with large shares of economically disadvantaged students often face more teacher shortage and retention challenges.¹³ The 2021 Utah legislative audit (A Performance Audit of Teacher Retention Within Utah’s Public Education System) showed that some rural school districts were more likely to experience a teacher shortage.¹⁴ However, 86.4% teachers in school-wide title 1 schools were fully qualified compared to 86.9% in non-title 1 schools in the 2022-23 school year, indicating similar access to fully qualified teachers for economically disadvantaged students.¹⁵

Subject Area Shortages

Certain subject areas experience more teacher shortages. Nationally, foreign language and special education positions are most often reported as being very difficult to fill or going unfilled (Figure 9). While nearly 80% of schools reported hiring general elementary teachers, only 13.1% of schools reported these positions as being difficult to fill. Special education ranked second for both the share of schools hiring and the share of schools that found these positions very difficult or unable to fill (Figure 9).

The U.S. Department of Education collects state-by-state information on teacher shortage areas by subject area, which shows the number of years each subject area reported a teacher shortage in Utah from school year 1990-91 through 2021-22 (Figure 10).¹⁶ Some of the most common EPP graduate specialties line up with shortage areas. For example, special education and mathematics are both in the top five most common specialty areas for EPP graduates and are the two subject areas most often reported as a shortage area (Figure 11). However, many common EPP graduate areas (e.g., English Language Arts, Music, Physical Education and Coaching) never report shortages. These data support that there are teacher shortages in certain subjects (e.g., special education, mathematics) and in some rural areas, however they do not point to large shortages system wide.

The Utah Teacher Salary Supplement Program helps address some of these shortage areas. The program provides bonus pay to incentivize teachers to teach high demand subjects

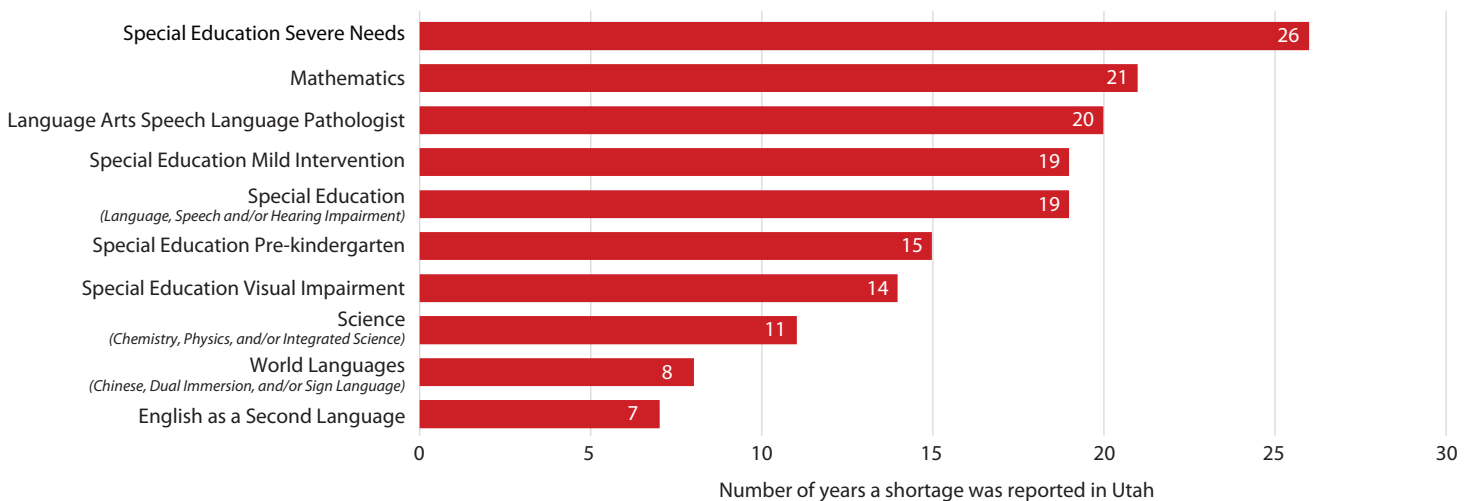
and is currently offered to secondary mathematics and science teachers, computer science teachers, and special education teachers. Data indicate that retention rates for teachers receiving the supplemental pay are about 10 percentage points higher than for those who do not receive the bonus.¹⁷

K-12 Enrollment Trends

Whatever level of teacher shortage Utah faces could be alleviated in coming years due to declining K-12 enrollment. Utah's school-age population (ages 5-17) increased an average of 1.3% annually over the last 10 years but is projected to decline by approximately 0.7% annually over the next 10 years (Figure 12). While departing teachers will still need to be replaced, there will be less of a need for new teachers to meet increasing enrollment. This could help reduce the effects of teacher shortages and potentially provide more opportunities for decreased student-teacher ratios.

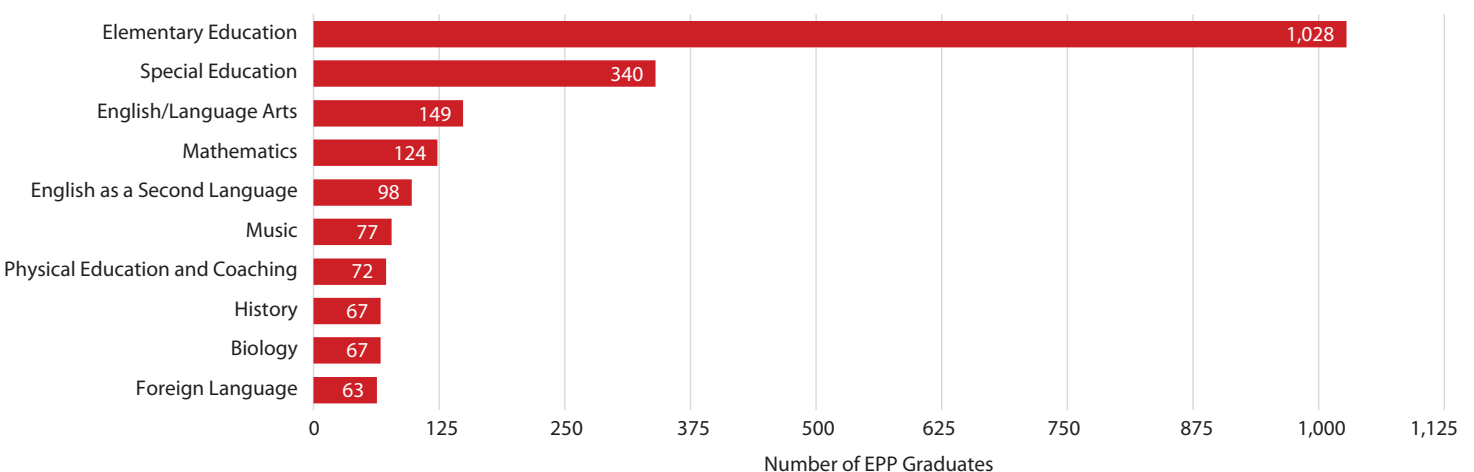
Figure 10: Utah Subject Area Teacher Shortages from 1990-91 to 2021-22 School Years

Number of Years Subject Area was reported as a Shortage Area to U.S. Department of Education



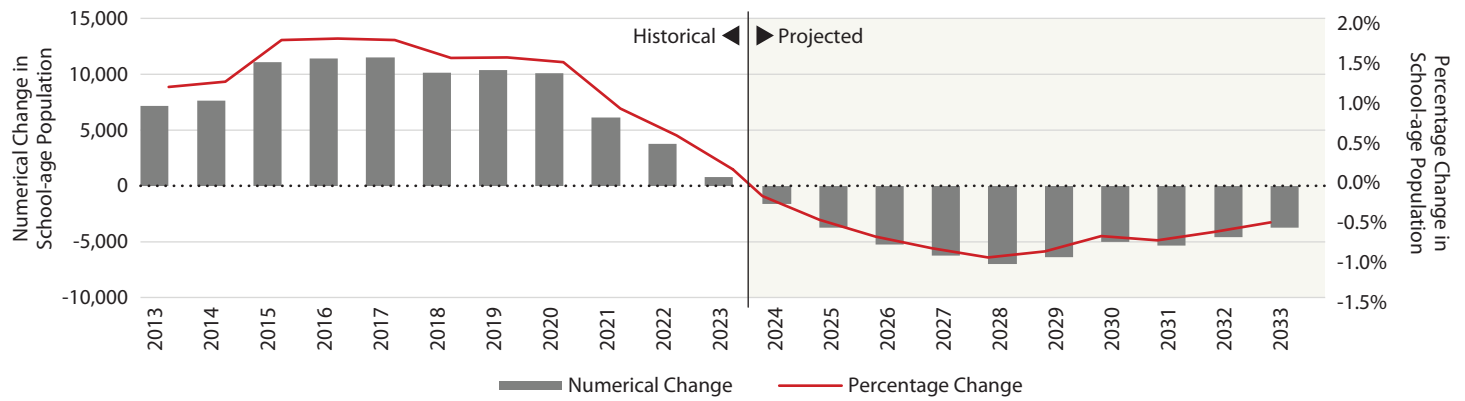
Source: U.S. Department of Education Teacher Shortage Areas

Figure 11: Ten Most Common Subject Areas for Utah Educator Preparation Program Graduates, 2020-21 School Year



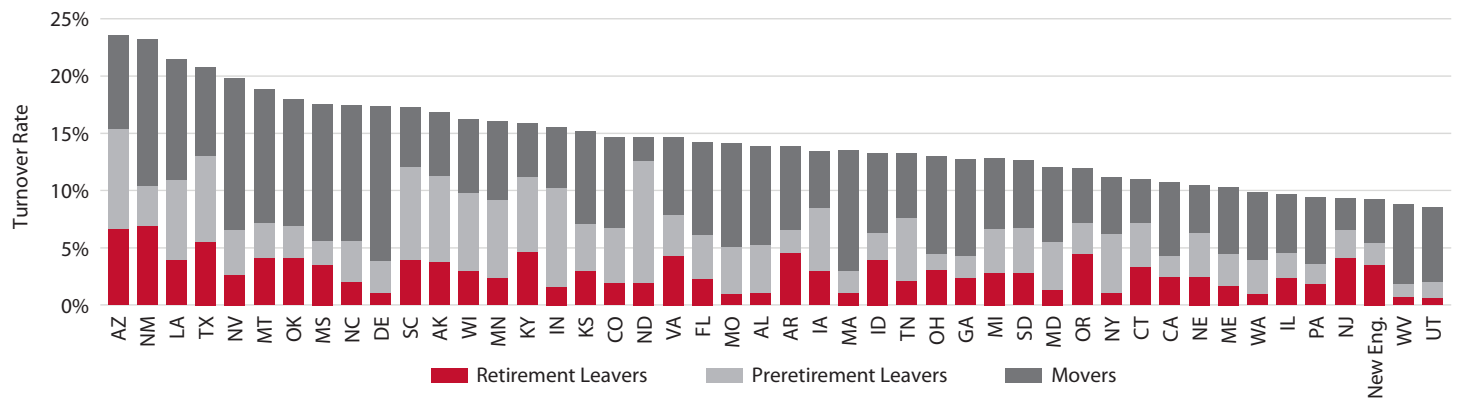
Source: Title II Higher Education Act National Teacher Preparation Reports

Figure 12: Annual Change in Utah School-Age Population (ages 5-17), 2013-2033



Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute State and County Projections 2020-2060

Figure 13: Teacher Turnover Rates by State, 2011-12 and 2012-13 School Years



Note: States with fewer than 25 teachers surveyed were excluded (HI and WY). Three small New England states with similar data patterns were combined (NH, RI, VT).
Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of National Center for Education Statistics Schools and Staffing Survey, 2011-12 and Teacher Follow-up Survey, 2012-13

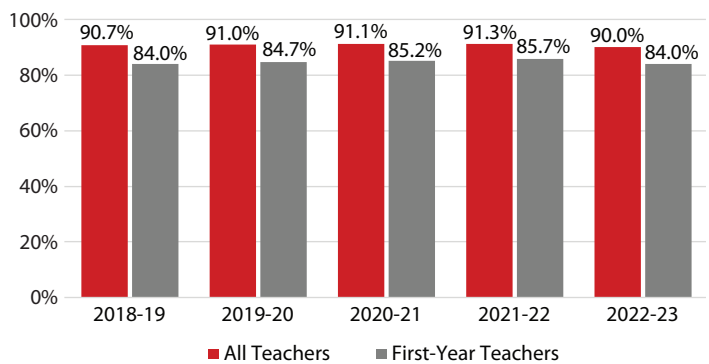
Teacher Retention

The ability to retain effective educators can reduce teacher shortages and improve outcomes for students. While there are some state-by-state comparisons on teacher retention, consistent comparable data is unavailable. Fortunately, USBE tracks several different measures related to teacher retention in Utah allowing for more insightful analysis.

Teacher Retention Comparisons

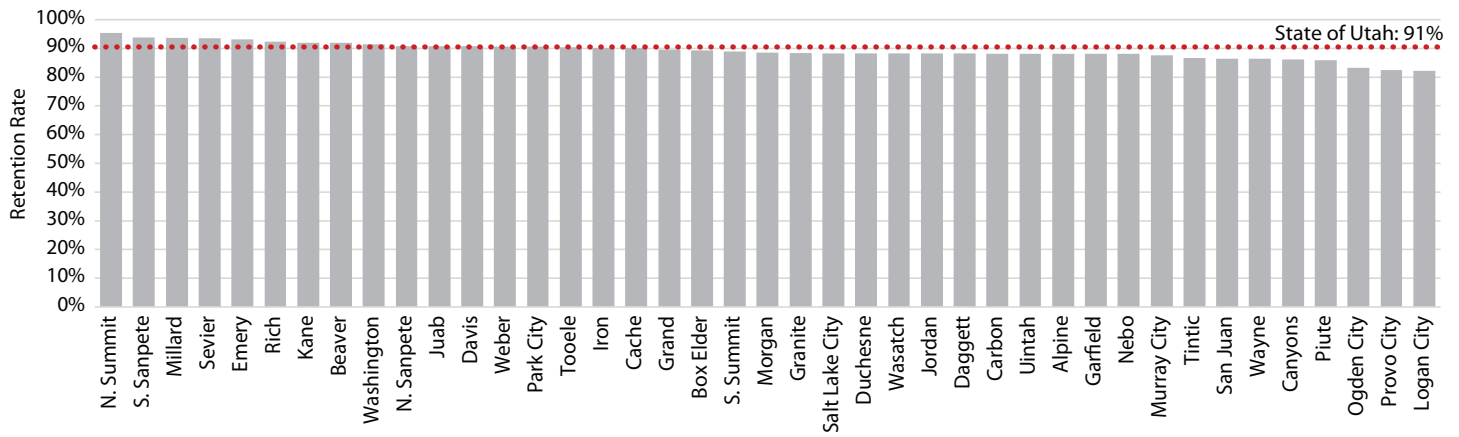
Based on available research, Utah’s overall teacher retention rate is high compared to other states. A 2017 study from the Learning Policy Institute found that Utah had the lowest teacher turnover (highest retention rate) among all 50 states (Figure 13). Utah teacher retention remained relatively consistent over the last five years for both teachers as a whole and first-year teachers, with a small decline in the most recent year (teachers from 2021-22 returning in 2022-23). Approximately 90% of 2021-22 teachers returned to teach in the 2022-23 school year (Figure 14). The retention rate for first-year teachers is lower at about 84%.

Figure 14: Share of Utah Teachers Returning to Education, 2018-19 to 2022-23 School Years



Note: Calculated as the share of previous year teachers who returned to education the following year.
Source: Utah State Board of Education

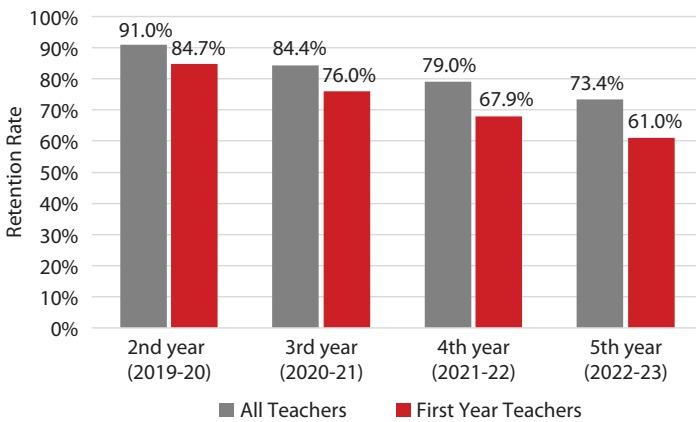
Figure 15: Teacher Retention Rates by Utah School District, 2017 to 2021 (5-year Average)



Source: Office of the Legislative Auditor General

Retention rates vary across school districts from 82.2% in Logan City School District to 95.4% in North Summit School District (Figure 15). When surveyed about teacher turnover in 2021, two-thirds of school districts did not report difficulty in retaining teachers, while the other third of school districts reported retention being an issue.

Figure 16: Utah 5-year Teacher Retention Rates, 2018-19 Cohort



Source: Utah State Board of Education

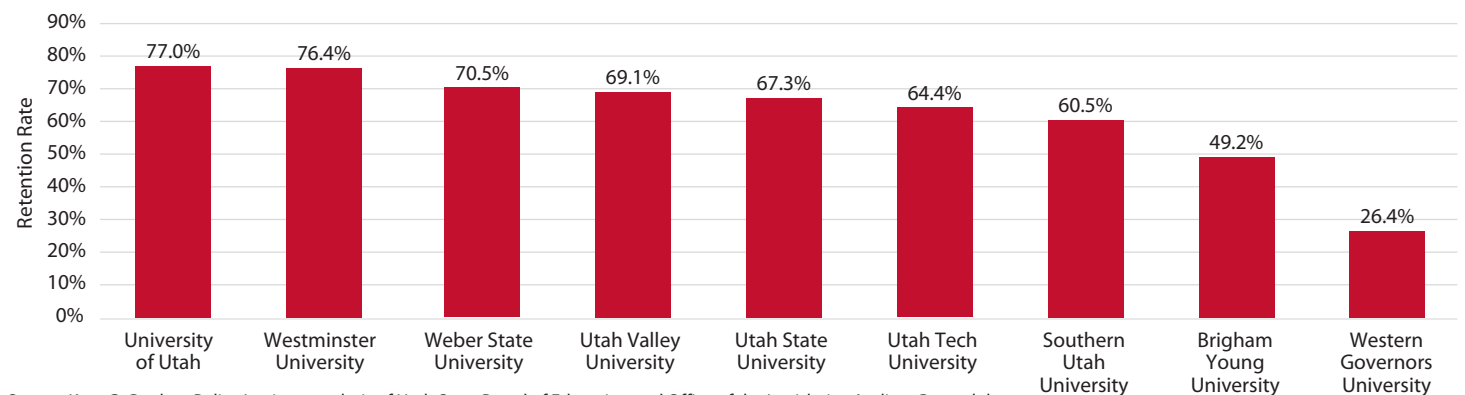
New Teacher Retention

New teachers are less likely to stay in the profession. For example, while 73.4% of all teachers who were teaching in the 2018-19 cohort were still in education five years later, only 61.0% of teachers who *started* teaching in the 2018-19 cohort were still teaching five years later (Figure 16). However, this may be primarily due to teachers entering the profession without a professional license and the associated training. For example, among first-year teachers in 2021-22, 88% of those with a professional license were retained the following year compared to 85% of those with an associate license and 75% of those with an LEA-specific license.

Retention by Educator Preparation Program (EPP)

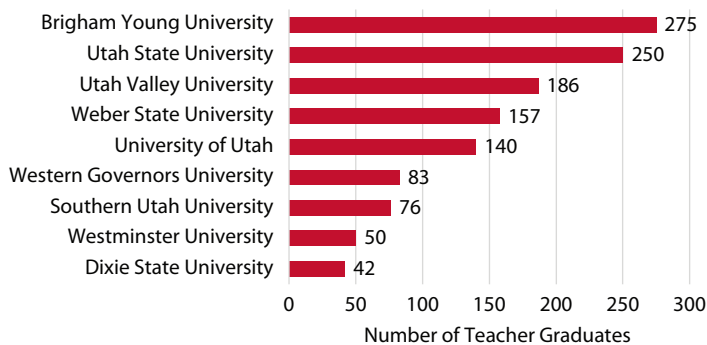
Retention rates also vary by EPP and some teachers who graduate from an EPP do not teach in Utah’s K-12 public school system. Western Governors University shows the smallest share of graduates teaching in Utah’s public schools, likely due to their large share of out-of-state students. Based on a 10-year average from the 2010-11 school year to the 2020-21 school year, the share of teacher graduates teaching in a Utah public

Figure 17: Share of Teacher Graduates Teaching in a Utah Public School Within One Year of Graduating, 2010-11 to 2020-21 School Years (10-year Average)



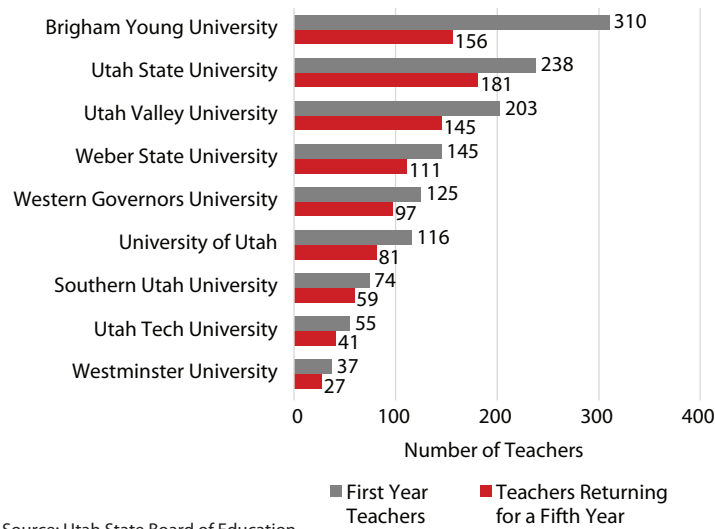
Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute analysis of Utah State Board of Education and Office of the Legislative Auditor General data

Figure 18: Number of Teacher Graduates Teaching in a Utah Public School Within One Year of Graduating, 2010-11 to 2020-21 School Years (10-year Average)



Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute analysis of Utah State Board of Education and Office of the Legislative Auditor General data

Figure 19: Number of First-year Teachers and Teachers Retained 5 Years Later by Utah Education Preparation Program, 2017-18 Cohort



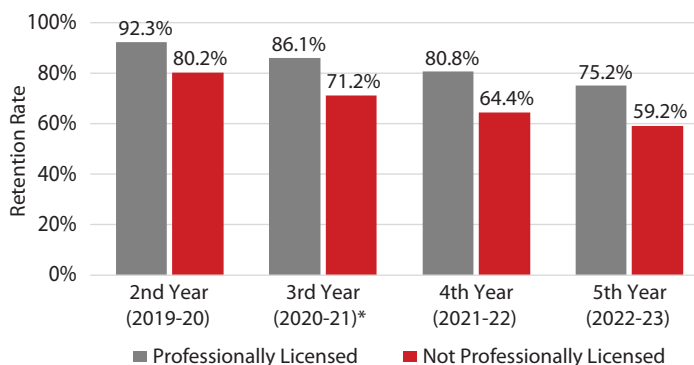
Source: Utah State Board of Education

school within one year of graduation ranges from 49.2% at Brigham Young University (BYU) and 77.0% at the University of Utah (Figure 17).

That said, some of the EPPs with rates in the low- to mid-range produce the largest numbers of teachers. For example, while only about half of BYU teacher graduates teach within one year of graduation, this amounts to 275 teachers, more than any other program. Conversely, Westminster University has the second fewest (50, Figure 18).

Five-year retention rates also vary across EPPs. For the 2017-18 cohort, BYU had the most first-year teachers (310), while Utah State University had the most teachers returning five years later (181, Figure 19). Most Utah EPPs have similar retention rates with eight of the ten programs' 5-year retention rates falling within a 10-percentage point range (from 69.8% at the University of Utah to 79.7% at Southern Utah University). BYU has a lower

Figure 20: Retention Rates of Utah Educators With and Without a Professional Teaching License, 2017-18 Cohort



*International Guest Teachers prior to 2020-21 had been given an alternative license (non-Licensed). Due to their Visa, beginning 2020-2021 all are given a professional license. Note: Teachers who are not professionally licensed include those with an associate license, LEA-specific license, or no license. More than 99% of Utah teachers without a professional license have an associate or LEA-specific license. Source: Utah State Board of Education

retention rate at 50.3%. Retention rates may vary for a variety of reasons (e.g., the proportion of out-of-state students in the EPP, graduate school enrollment rates, student demographics and backgrounds, etc.) These data represent a single cohort and may not be representative of a long-term pattern.

Barriers to Teacher Retention

USBE conducts an Educator Exit Survey to understand reasons why educators choose to leave the profession.¹⁸ Educators leaving the profession after the 2020-21 school year received a list of 10 factors and were asked to indicate if each had a major, moderate, minor, or no influence on their decision to leave their position. The top two reasons for leaving were emotional exhaustion/burnout and job-specific stressors, with salary coming in third (Figure 21). The survey asked those who indicated emotional exhaustion/burnout and job-specific stressors to expand on contributing causes to these feelings. An analysis of these additional responses found the following themes:

- Unrealistic workload expectations (35.8%)
- A lack of recognition, respect, or general accountability (20.4%)
- Lack of training, support, and/or resources (19.0%)
- Lack of professionalism (15.9%)
- Extremes in student behavior (12.4%)

The 2021 legislative audit included interviews of more than 200 Utah teachers that supported these findings with stress and workload being teachers' top concerns.¹⁹

USBE's Educator Exit Survey also presented departing educators with a list of factors and asked if each would have had a major, moderate, minor, or no influence on encouraging them to remain in the profession. While only 26.0% of departing educators indicated better salary and/or benefits as a major or moderate influence on their decision to leave, 39.3% indicated

that an increase in pay would have had a major or moderate influence encouraging them to stay. The next most reported factors were less stressful job responsibilities, smaller class size, and more time for planning (Figure 22).

Finally, data indicate that a lack of a professional license can also pose a barrier to teacher retention. By their fifth year, retention rates differ by more than 15 percentage points between professionally licensed and not professionally licensed educators (Figure 20).

Teacher Salaries

Teacher salary is one of many factors that can impact teacher shortages and retention and the most cited factor that would encourage exiting teachers to remain in the profession. In Utah's 2023 legislative session, lawmakers passed H.B. 215 "Funding for Teacher Salaries and Optional Education Opportunities," which provided licensed educators with a \$4,200 pay raise (with an additional \$1,800 in benefits). S.B. 183 "Educator Salary Amendments" (2023) tied educator salary adjustments to the weighted pupil unit (WPU) growth rate, positively impacting the growth of teacher salaries over time. Most of the salary data presented in this section do not reflect these recent legislative decisions. These changes may impact Utah's teacher salary

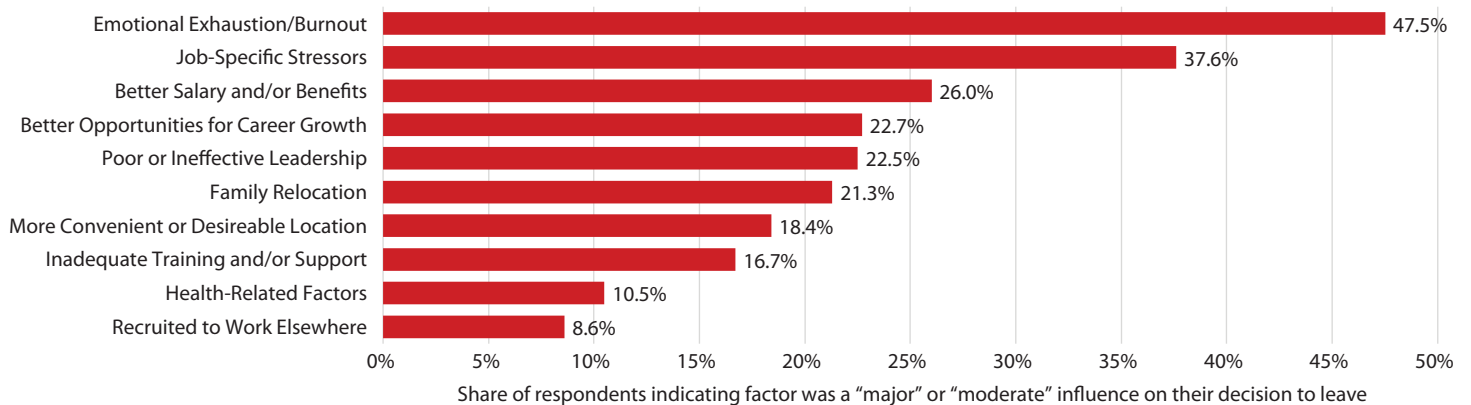
ranking nationally and school districts' relative rankings. Figure 28, however, shows beginning teacher salaries for the 2022-23 school year and the 2023-24 school year, which captures some of the impact from these legislative actions as well as recent efforts from local education agencies.

Teacher Salary Comparisons

When comparing teacher salaries across states, Utah's salary of \$58,619 ranks 26th after adjusting for cost of living for the 2021-22 school year (Figure 23). Utah's adjusted average salary falls below the national average (\$61,047) by a few thousand dollars. Utah ranks much higher for average starting teacher salaries. After applying the cost-of-living adjustment, Utah's starting salary of \$46,880 ranks second highest in the nation (Figure 24).

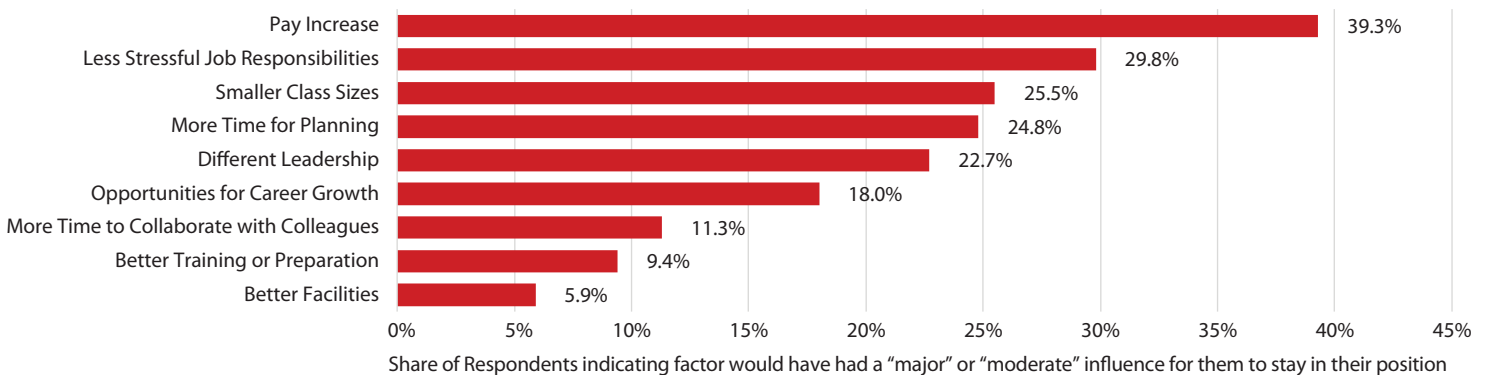
Teacher salaries are primarily government-funded and are impacted by economic downturns. Rather than comparing teacher salaries directly, Figure 25 shows the percent change in inflation-adjusted teacher salaries from the 2009-10 to the 2021-22 school year. While Utah's teacher salaries experienced a decline of 1.9% over this period, Utah fared relatively well compared with other states ranking tenth nationally. All but two states experienced declines in real teacher salaries over this period. Utah's ranking could indicate that the state has more

Figure 21: Factors that Influence Utah Educators' Decisions to Leave their Position, 2022



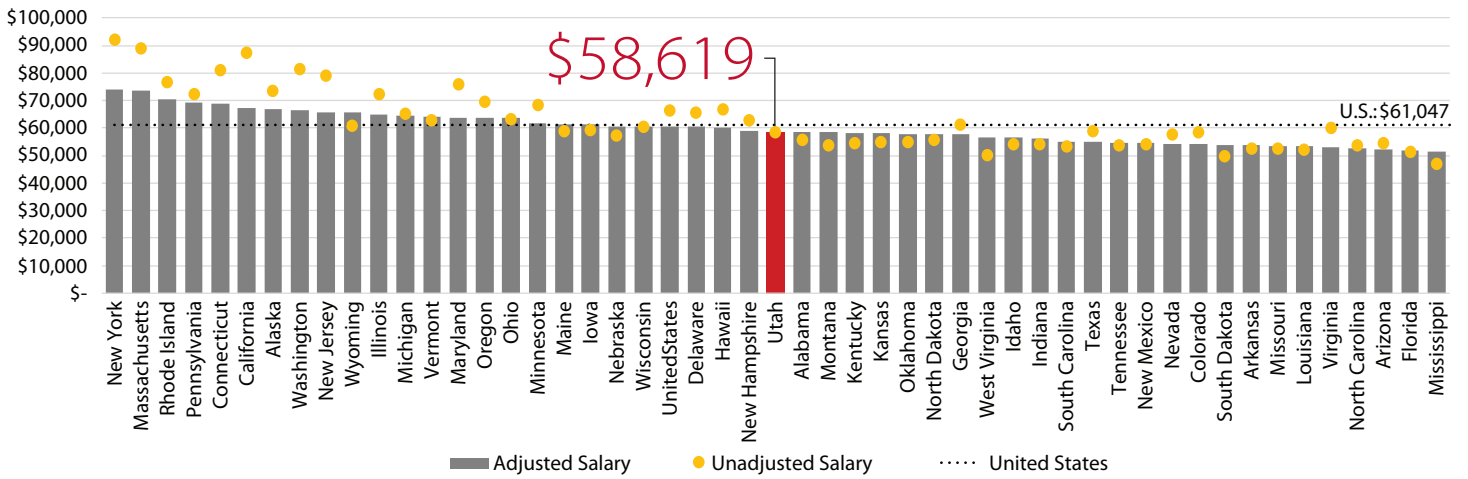
Note: Respondents noted whether each factor had a major, moderate, minor, or no influence on their decision to leave their position.
Source: Utah State Board of Education 2022 Educator Exit Survey

Figure 22: Factors that Influence Utah Educators to Stay in their Position, 2022



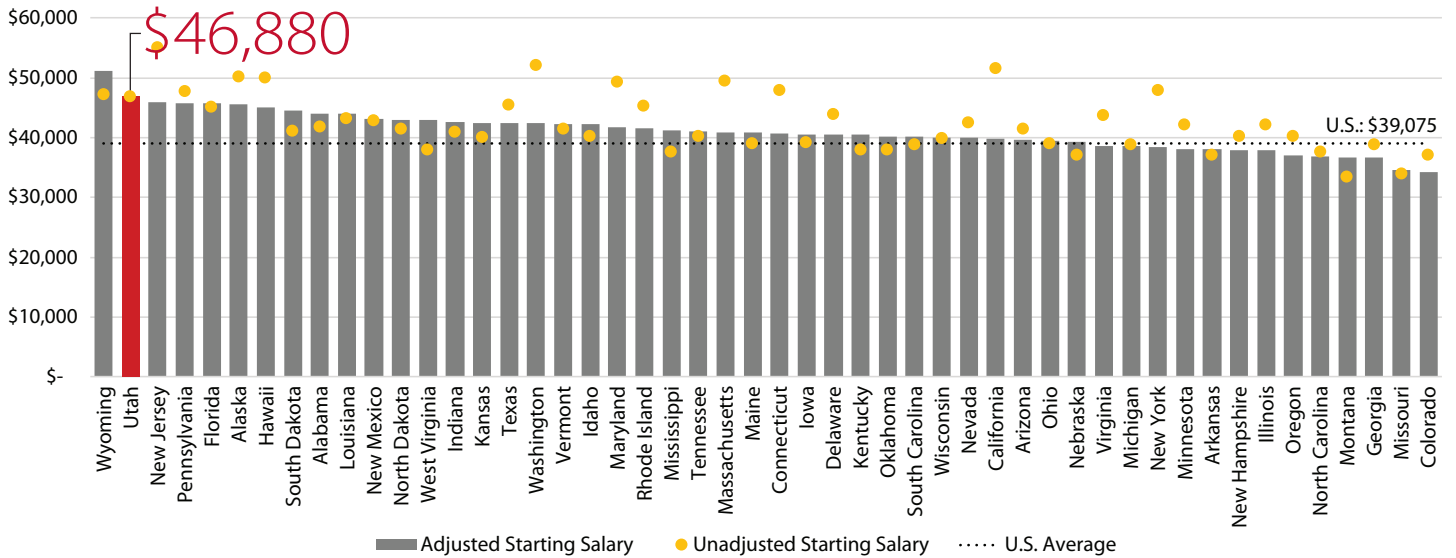
Note: Respondents noted whether each factor would have had a major, moderate, minor, or no influence on encouraging them to stay in their position.
Source: Utah State Board of Education 2022 Educator Exit Survey

Figure 23: Average Annual K-12 Teacher Salary by State, 2021-22 School Year



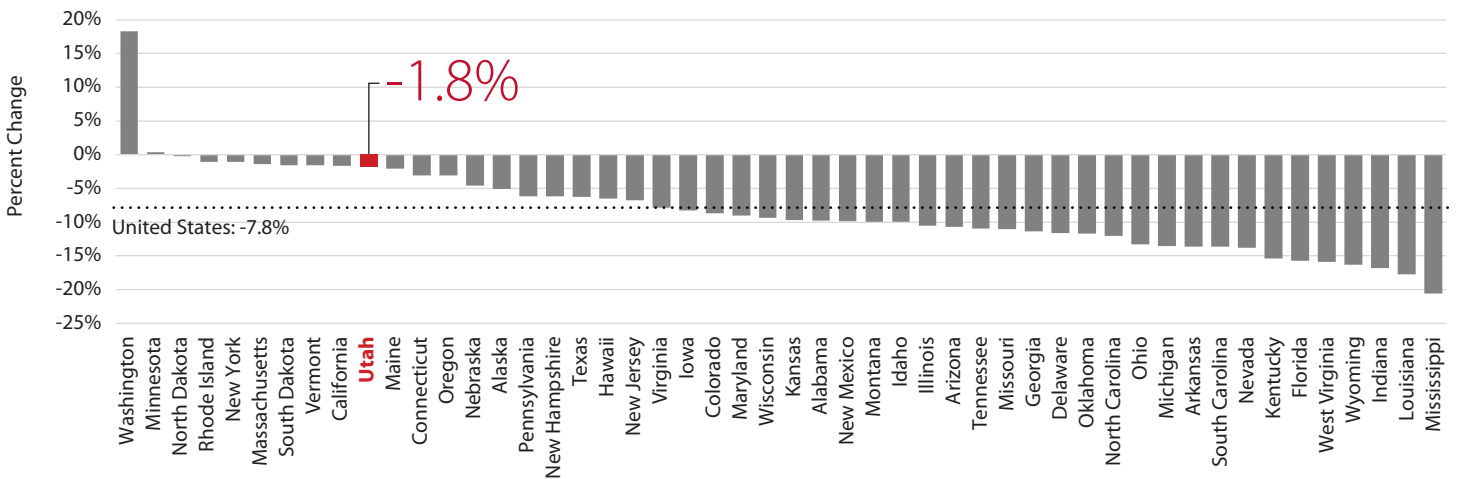
Note: Adjusted salaries are adjusted using the 2021 Comparable Wage Index for Teachers (CWIFT) where Utah's Index is equal to 1.
 Source: National Center for Education Statistics Table 211.60 and Comparable Wage Index for Teachers

Figure 24: Average Annual K-12 Teacher Starting Salary by State, 2021-22 School Year



Note: Adjusted salaries are adjusted using the 2021 Comparable Wage Index for Teachers (CWIFT) where Utah's Index is equal to 1. The unadjusted national average starting salary is \$41,770.
 Source: National Education Association Teacher Salary Benchmark Report

Figure 25: Percent Change in Inflation-Adjusted Teacher Salary by State, 2009-10 to 2021-22 School Year



Source: National Center for Education Statistics Table 211.60

stable teacher salaries that are less influenced by economic changes compared to other states.

While inflation-adjusted teacher salaries fell in the 1980s and 1990s across the country, they began to stabilize and show moderate improvement after this period. However, Utah's inflation-adjusted teacher salaries have remained fairly flat over the last few decades and do not significantly differ from the 1970 average (Figure 26).

That said, Utah teacher salaries differ across school districts. The Utah Office of the State Auditor collects and provides data on instructional wages for Utah school districts and charter schools. Based on these data, after adjusting for cost of living, Salt Lake City School District shows the highest instructional wages at \$88,178 while charter schools show the lowest instructional wages at \$52,108 (Figure 27). Teacher salaries for the 2023-24 school year show 40 of 41 school districts have a

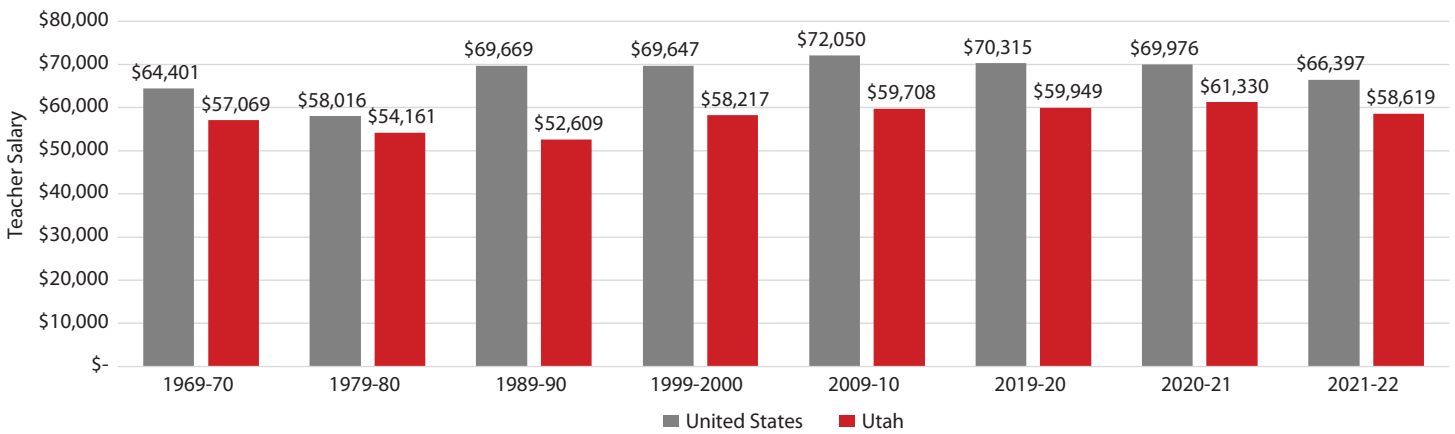
starting teacher salary of \$50,000 or higher. These data reflect recent investment in teacher salaries both at the state and school district level (Figure 28).

Teachers vs. Other Occupations

While schools may compete against each other for effective teachers, they also compete with employers in other industries. Utah's tight labor market and low unemployment rate provide opportunities for teachers to explore other career fields.

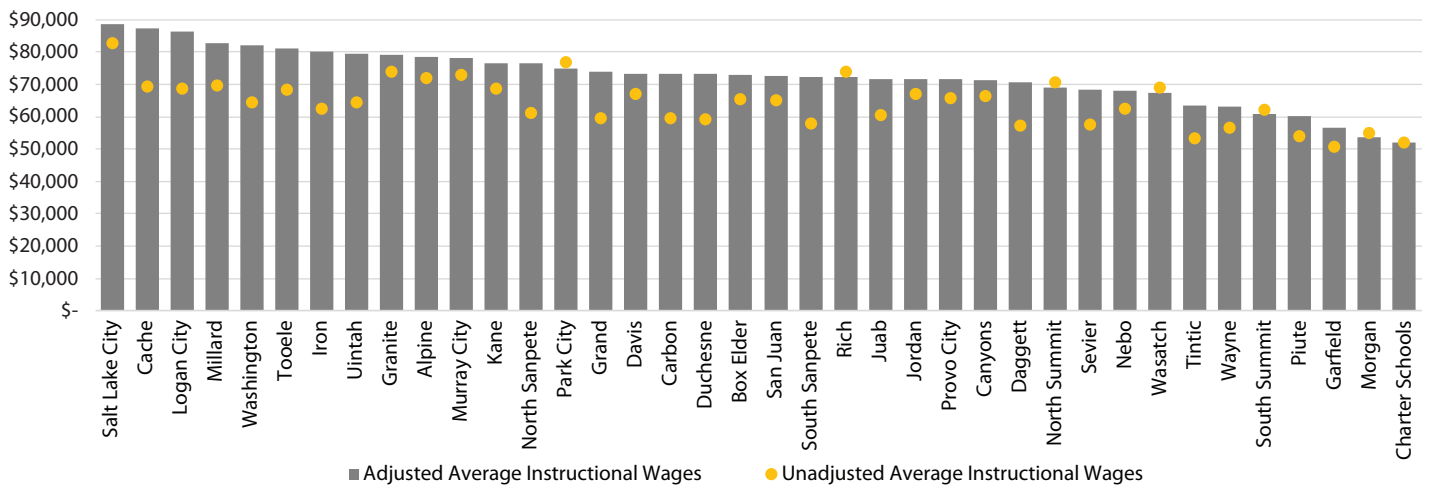
Comparing teacher salaries to other occupations is complicated given the uniqueness of teachers' nine-month contracts. One approach is to adjust teacher salaries up 33% given they are generally contracted to work nine months. While this approach better represents contract time, it does not acknowledge that many teachers spend much of their non-contract time engaging in professional development, planning for the coming school

Figure 26: Utah and U.S. Inflation-Adjusted Average Teacher Salary, 1969-70 to 2021-22 School Years



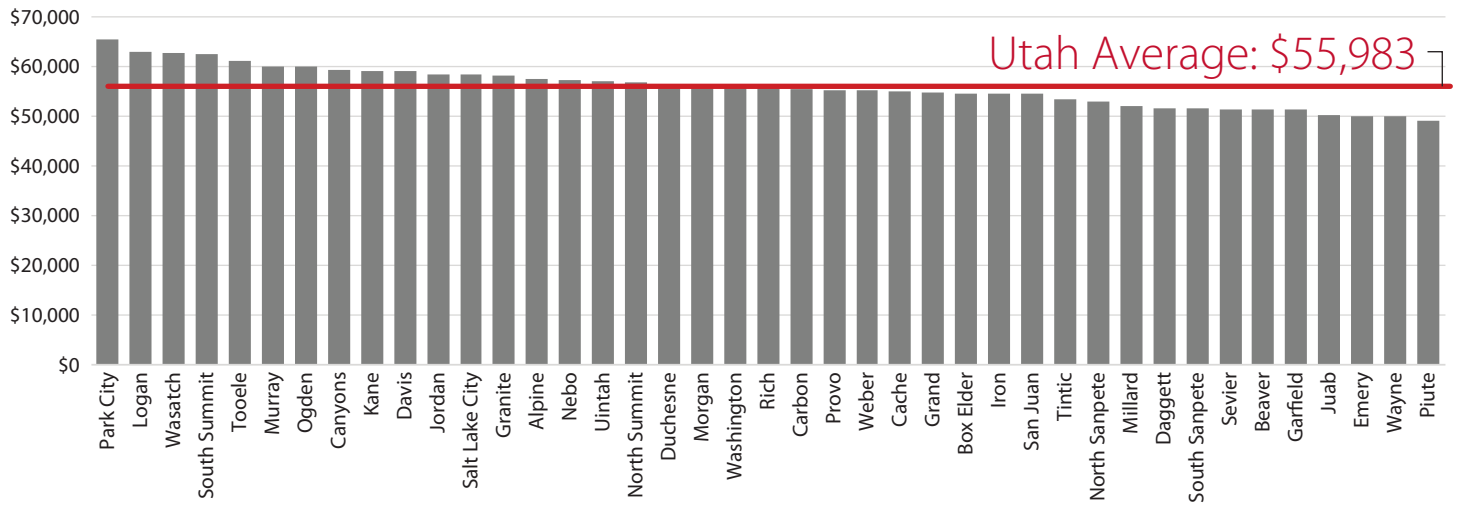
Source: National Center for Education Statistics Table 211.60

Figure 27: Utah Average Annual K-12 Instructional Wages by School District, 2021-22 School Year



Note: Adjusted instructional wages are adjusted using the 2021 Comparable Wage Index for Teachers (CWIFT). The charter school average was not adjusted for cost of living due to the geographic diversity of charter schools. Data for Beaver, Emery, Ogden City, and Weber school districts were unavailable. Source: Utah State Board of Education

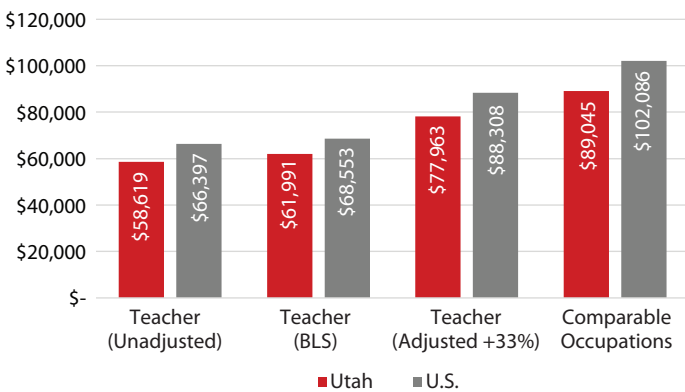
Figure 28: Utah Starting Teacher Salary by School District, 2023-24 School Year



Note: As reported by School Districts, Annual Negotiations Report, not adjusted for cost of living.
Source: Utah School Boards Association & Utah School Superintendents Association

year, supporting extra-curricular activities, or participating in other work-related tasks. Full-time U.S. public K-12 teachers are contracted to work an average of 38 hours per week but report spending an average of 52 hours per week on all school-related activities.²⁰ This may support leaving teacher salaries unadjusted or applying a smaller adjustment. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), for example, reports salaries by occupation by calculating what the full-time salary would be based on an hourly wage, potentially allowing for more direct comparisons.

Figure 29: Average Utah and U.S. Teacher Salaries Compared to Other Occupations, 2021



Note: Comparable occupations include all BLS detailed occupations that require a bachelor's degree or higher that were not missing needed data.²¹
Source: National Center for Education Statistics Table 211.69, and Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics

Average unadjusted teacher salaries, teacher salaries adjusted by 33%, and the BLS adjusted teacher salary are included in Figure 29. The ideal adjustment likely lies somewhere between these estimates, indicating that teachers earn between 12.4% and 34.2% less than other occupations that require a bachelor's degree for entry (national data shows a similar pattern). Teachers in certain subject areas are likely to have even greater opportunity costs. For example, teachers with degrees in high-demand fields (e.g., mathematics, computer science, etc.) may be able to move to a higher paying job in another industry.

Conclusion

Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Utah maintains low teacher vacancies, high teacher retention rates, and teacher salaries aligned with the national average. However, certain indicators, such as lower retention among early-career and underqualified teachers, relatively high student-teacher ratios, and specific subject area shortages, serve as potential warning signs for the future. A comprehensive understanding of Utah's teaching landscape, encompassing teacher shortages, retention dynamics, and salary comparisons, equips state leaders to plan effectively for the future needs of both educators and students.

Endnotes

1. 15-1241 Computer Network Architects, 15-1243 Database Architects, 17-2041 Chemical Engineers, and 29-1129 Therapists, All Other were excluded from the Utah comparable occupations estimate due to missing employment or wage data. The following occupations were included for teachers, 25-2012 Kindergarten Teachers, Except Special Education, 25-2021 Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education, 25-2022 Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education, 25-2023 Career/Technical Education Teachers, Middle School, 25-2031 Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education 25-2032 Career/Technical Education Teachers, Secondary School 25-2051, Special Education Teachers, Preschool 25-2052 Special Education Teachers, Kindergarten and Elementary School, 25-2057 Special Education Teachers, Middle School, and 25-2058 Special Education Teachers, Secondary School
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15. K. Campbell, Utah State Board of Education (personal communication, November 22, 2023). These shares exclude "targeted" Title 1 schools which are generally charter schools and use different qualifications to receive title 1 status. 73.5% of teachers in these schools are fully qualified.
16. As reported in the 2021 legislative audit on teacher retention, Utah uses a survey to collect teacher shortages information. USBE recently found that the survey responses is inconsistent with administrative data and intend to determine shortage areas based on nonprofessionally licensed teachers in certain areas rather than using survey responses moving forward.
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