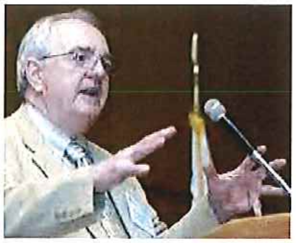
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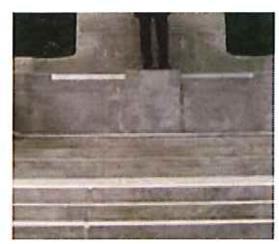


Teacher pay gap widens most at lowest level

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

The lowest-paid beginning teacher in Illinois in 2014-15 (the last year for which this ISBE record is available) had a salary of $20,343. That is over $2,000 less than the lowest-paid starting teacher got way back in the 2008-09 school year. But it is more than double the lowest salary allowed under the Illinois law (last revised in 1983).

It is a deceiving figure. I describes merely how little a particular district was able (and not too embarrassed) to offer a starting teacher in a particular year. After 2008-09, the lowest-paid figure rose to a high of $25,470 (2001-12 and 2012-13) and then dropped to $23,879 in 20013-14 and to the 2014-15 low point.

Better figures are the medians of all teachers' salaries (the exact middle figure in the entire range). They grew steadily during the seven years reported on most recently by ISBE. The median for starting teachers in 2008-09 was $33,761. The median rose a bit every year until it reached $36,927 - growing by $3,166 - in 2014-15.

How about the highest-paid teachers? The lowest salary on the highest pay schedule reviewed by ISBE for 2008-09 (may well have been for just one district) was $36,906. That figure also rose and fell and rose again during the seven years. It finished at $38,172 in 2014-15 - for just $1,266 in growth over seven years.

But at other defined points, higher-end teacher salaries soared. The median grew more than $7,000 during the seven years. Pay at the 75th percentile rose from $80,602 fo $88,212. The highest paid teacher(s) in 2014-15 earned $139,241, which is $16,453 more than the highest teacher salary - $122,788 - of 2008-09.

Our interest in teachers' salaries this week was stimulated by a recent Bloomberg report documenting a shocking erosion in teachers' pay relative to other types of employees in the economy who have similar education backgrounds. The bottom line in the report was that teachers are paid *just 78.6% of what those others receive*.

This report, based on the "teaching penalty" analysis by the Economic Policy Institute, does not take into consideration job responsibility. But teachers don't just educate children, they "care for" them in countless ways. By contrast, for example, video game marketers care only about sales - and otherwise seem irresponsible.

Before we examine the EPI findings, bear in mind that the EPI - unlike a certain presidential candidate - cannot simply pull numbers out of the air, or from *wherever*; they must use valid, objective, evidence-based data. For this study, they relied on population survey and employer cost data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Only full-time (35 hours per week at least) public school elementary, middle and secondary (not kindergarten, preschool, adult education or special education) teachers are included in the database. Also, the EPI calculations are based solely on data that is included in survey responses; no "imputed data" are included.

They adjust dollar-figure comparisons over time to account for changes in the Consumer Price Index. They also take into consideration the value of "benefits" afforded to teachers relative to other college graduates. (As might be expected, this tends to reduce the "teaching penalty" a bit - but it is still large and growing.

Back in 1994, the penalty was relatively small. For that year, the EPI calculated that teachers were compensated at rates just 1.8% lower than were other employees with similar educational attainments. Female teachers, in fact, earned 14.7% *more* than similarly educated women in non-teaching positions.

But now, EPI calculates that female teachers are paid 13.9% less than college-educated employees in other professions. Male teachers? They paid a huge 22.1% penalty in 1979. That shrank to 15% in the mid-1990s, but then rose again and stood at 24.5% in 2015. The average male and female teacher pay gap is 17%.

The institute does recognize the fact that benefits in addition to salary are more important to teachers than are considered so by non-educator professionals. As a consequence of negotiations and other influences in that regard, the total penalty in 2015 was 11% - a 17.% salary gap offset somewhat by a 5.9% benefit advantage.

The EPI data are consistent with findings reported over the years by Christopher Lubienski, a prolific researcher/author at the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana for several years - but who it seems may have moved to Indiana University (the uncertain Illinois budget situation has caused such brain drain).

What about Illinois as a place to teach? If you scroll down to Figure G on the EPI article page, you will see that Illinois is ranked about in the middle among the states as its compensation of teachers is calculated as a ratio of compensation that similarly educated non-educators are paid. That ratio is 79%.

There is a web page posted by "WalletHub.com" (see Christopher Lubienski listed among the "experts" who helped the site to understand and provide its data) in which Illinois is portrayed as a fairly attractive place to teach. WalletHub gives Illinois an overall rank of 11th among the states.

On the factor of "job opportunity and competition" Illinois was ranked 18th, and on "academic and work environment," the state came in 12th. A factor which surely drove Illinois' rating up for WalletHub was "highest annual salaries (adjusted for cost of living)." There Illinois ranked 2nd, behind only Michigan.

"Most educators don't pursue their profession for the money," the WalletHub site asserts. "But that doesn't justify paying teachers any less than they deserve, considering the profound difference they make in people's lives."

From my close association with educators, not just since 1995 when I started ISNS but for decades before that, I would echo the observation that most teachers don't enter the profession for the money. Also, the good teachers don't leave it for the lack of money. Here's a sad story in that regard.

There's no pleasure in correctly reporting a train wreck. Jim Day, an exceptional reporter for *The News Gazette* in Champaign, crafted an excellent article a couple of weeks ago, based on a trip down memory lane that reported in the Chicago Fed Newsletter, a Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago publication.

The Chicago Fed piece was written by Thomas Walstrum, a business economist in the Fed's economic research department and a man who, according to Dey, is a "major-league pointy head." (A pdf of Walstrum's report, complete with charts and graphs and footnotes, can be downloaded from this link.)

Walthrum puts the state's fiscal history under a microscope, examining the data on revenue and expenditures since the 1980s. From its status as a "low-expenditure, low-revenue" state in the 1980s, spending surged in the 1990s along with the consequences of some truly bad decisions - about pensions for example.

I offer this as a counterpoint to the argument (mostly from GOP lawmakers) that Illinois "doesn't have a revenue problem, it has a spending problem." Be aware that most who make that argument know while they do so that it is false. Walstrum documents what ISNS has been reporting annually for many years.

A painful remedy (probably just a half-measure) can be expected to become law in the first week of January, 2017.

Gov. Bruce Rauner is counting on voter ignorance. As political journalist Rich Miller reports, the governor has spent a pile of money on television ads promoting "term limits," the anti-democratic substitute for voters' efforts to become aware of what the candidates for public office would likely do once they are elected.

To believe term limits would improve the quality of the legislature or the functions of the constitutional offices just brings to mind the sad truth that credulity, unfortunately, is not illegal. No, it's not believing term limits would be effective that smacks of ignorance - it's believing that the legislature can make it happen soon.

The earliest that a term limits amendment to the constitution can be on the ballot would be November of 2018. Even then, there would be legal questions about when it could take effect. And even if it takes effect, no legislators would be affected by if for at least a decade - the amount of time they would be "limited" to.

If legislative action is to be taken on term limits, it should not be done in the "next session of the General Assembly," as Rauner's phoney "pledge" form suggests. It should be in the 2018 spring session, after the subject has been debated for a year or more. By then, most engaged citizens will surely have dismissed the notion.

Why are term limits a bad idea, an undemocratic idea? Because it amounts to a future in which people who lived in the past, most of them not even residents of the legislative district where I live, preventing me from voting for a legislator who has been effective in support of policy that I also support for a decade.

If your argument it that House Speaker Michael Madigan and Senate President John Cullerton illustrate the need for term limits, I'd say your argument is ill-informed and shallow. I see no benefit in shifting power from an official I can vote for (or against) to unelected lobbyists and bureaucratic staff. That's an effect of term limits.

Is there an argument to be made for the social benefits of Madigan's departure from the legislature? Oh, yeah, and I have made that argument at least three times, suggesting that he retire while he still has a fairly positive reputation. I can see benefits from his departure, but not as a result of term limits.

My calls for Madigan's retirement were all published before Rauner became our governor. Given the current situation in that regard, I'm thinking it would be best for Madigan to hang around a bit longer - at least until 2018.

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