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BROKEN LADDER

Summary findings:

Why Idaho lawmakers need to
re-examine the career ladder

RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY:
LINDSAY ATKINSON, POLICY ANALYST
FRED BIRNBAUM, VICE PRESIDENT

— INTRODUCTION —

KEY FINDINGS:

- Actual teacher pay in Idaho varies significantly, and does not correspond to Career Ladder appropriations. Thus, boosting Career Ladder appropriations won't guarantee teachers get paid equitably or receive pay corresponding to their level of experience.
- Throughout Idaho, 12.9% of teachers are paid less than their Career Ladder salary allocation. For example, more than 46% of public school Professional Level 1 teachers (a low Career Ladder rung) are paid less than their career ladder appropriation.
- Veteran teachers are not disadvantaged by the Career Ladder: The average veteran teacher's salary is far higher than their Career Ladder allocation.
- The Legislature should further study actual teacher pay at the district level in relation to the Career Ladder before providing additional Career Ladder funding.

The Career Ladder has been the focus of much debate in state government, but few people have a full understanding of what it is, what it does, and how it helps determine teacher salaries.

The Career Ladder is a salary-allocation schedule that defines how much money the state will give to each school district for a teacher with a given level of experience. Districts are free to pay more or less than this amount. For example, in Fiscal Year 2019, the state allocated \$35,800 for every new entry-level teacher on the first rung of the career ladder: Residency Level 1. Teachers move to higher rungs the longer they work in the district and by meeting the applicable performance criteria, such as having a master's degree. The state also gives districts extra money for teachers who have additional certifications, such as an occupational specialist certificate.¹

The Legislature sends each school district in the state a sum to match the total appropriation for all teachers in that district, based on their career ladder rungs and applicable additional allocations. The General Fund Career Ladder salary and benefit appropriation has increased from about \$704 million in FY16 to about \$959 million for FY20, a substantial increase in the state's commitment to improve teacher pay as well as adding teaching staff. This appropriation covers both instructional and pupil services staff, however instructional staff are the focus of this study.

But the state does not determine how much each teacher is actually paid. The only exception is that the state determines the minimum salary, which was \$35,800 for the 2018-19 school year; an amount that will rise to \$38,500 for the coming school year.² Each district has its own contract with teachers. As a result, most Idaho teachers are not paid the state-appropriated

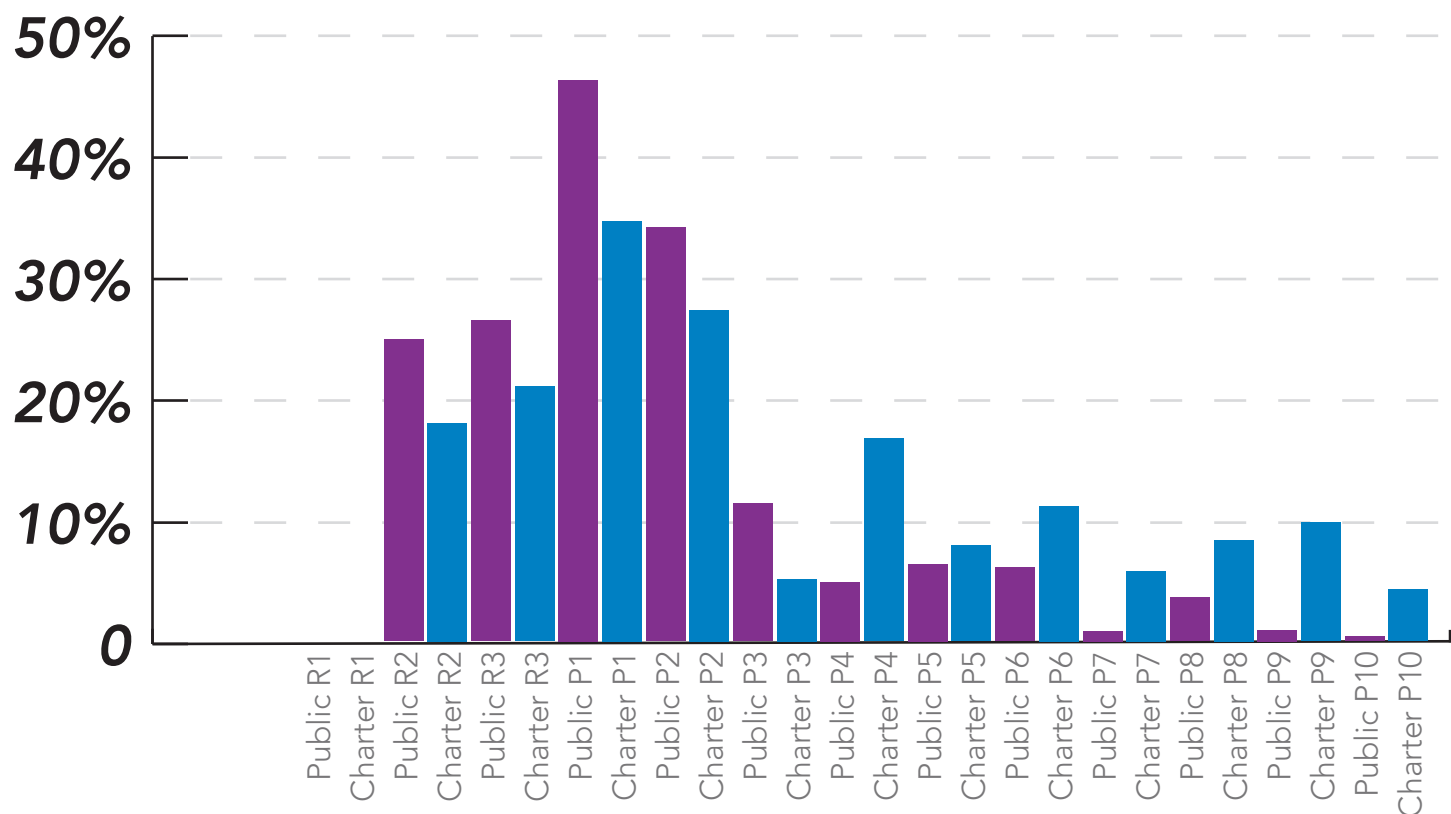
amount; some teachers receive less and others receive more.

On almost every level of the Career Ladder, some teachers receive less than the funding the state gives to their district for their position. Other teachers make more than their career rung appropriation. As a result, salaries are actually all over the map.

Contrary to what you may have heard, veteran teachers are not the ones who are disadvantaged by the career ladder. It is the teachers at the lower rungs on the ladder who often receive less than their appropriation.

For example, 46.1% of Professional Level 1 teachers (a low rung on the ladder) who work in traditional public schools are paid less than the \$40,750 appropriation given to their district. On average, across all rungs of the career ladder, 12.9% of teachers are paid less than their appropriated salary. 🦋

Graph 1. Percentage of teachers paid below the ladder for the 2018-19 school year



**Table 1. Percentage of teachers
paid below the ladder
for the 2018-19 school year**

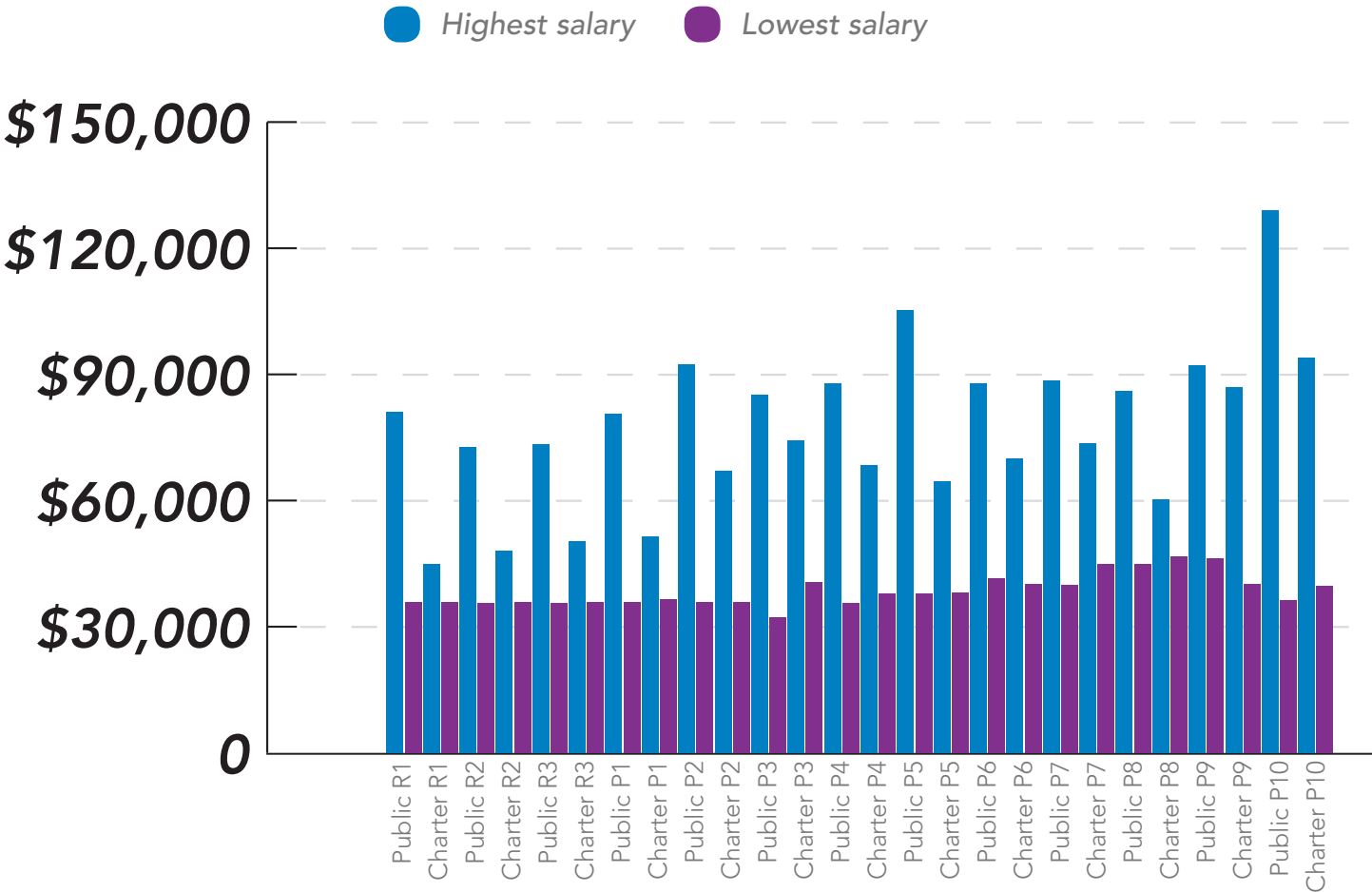
Career ladder pay rung	Career ladder appropriation	Percent of teachers paid below career ladder appropriation (base salary only)
Public R1 Charter R1	\$35,800.00 \$35,800.00	0.00% 0.00%
Public R2 Charter R2	\$36,750.00 \$36,750.00	24.81% 17.95%
Public R3 Charter R3	\$37,706.00 \$37,706.00	26.38% 20.95%
Public P1 Charter P1	\$40,750.00 \$40,750.00	46.19% 34.55%
Public P2 Charter P2	\$42,503.00 \$42,503.00	34.02% 27.24%
Public P3 Charter P3	\$42,765.00 \$42,765.00	11.34% 5.13%
Public P4 Charter P4	\$44,538.00 \$44,538.00	4.89% 16.67%
Public P5 Charter P5	\$44,820.00 \$44,820.00	6.38% 7.89%
Public P6 Charter P6	\$46,614.00 \$46,614.00	6.06% 11.11%
Public P7 Charter P7	\$46,918.00 \$46,918.00	0.84% 5.80%
Public P8 Charter P8	\$48,734.00 \$48,734.00	3.59% 8.33%
Public P9 Charter P9	\$49,061.00 \$49,061.00	0.93% 9.76%
Public P10 Charter P10	\$49,401.00 \$49,401.00	0.41% 4.27%

While some teachers are paid less than their appropriated salary, others are paid significantly more. The highest-paid teacher in the Idaho Public School System made \$129,080 during the 2018-19 school year. This instructor teaches government and economics in Eagle and is at Professional Level 10 on the career ladder. In comparison, the lowest-paid teacher in Idaho is a Professional Level 3 English instructor in Boise, who made \$32,136.50 during the 2018-19 school year.

When the highest, lowest, average, and median salaries are lined up side by side for each career ladder rung, it is easy to see that salaries range wildly at both traditional and public charter schools. It is also clear that the ladder does not guide salaries from one step to another. In some cases, the highest-paid teacher on one level of the career ladder is paid more than the highest-paid teacher on the next level.

So salaries are not always commensurate with the career ladder rungs.

Graph 2. Highest and lowest salaries per career ladder rung



**Table 2. Highest, lowest, average,
and median base salaries
for the 2018-19 school year**

Career ladder pay rung	Highest salary paid	Lowest salary paid	Average base salary	Median base salary
Public R1 Charter R1	\$81,000.00 \$45,500.00	\$35,800.00 \$35,800.00	\$37,255.50 \$36,861.49	\$35,800.00 \$35,800.00
Public R2 Charter R2	\$72,598.00 \$48,000.00	\$35,638.00 \$35,800.00	\$37,460.43 \$37,688.51	\$36,750.00 \$36,756.00
Public R3 Charter R3	\$73,471.00 \$50,408.00	\$35,664.00 \$35,800.00	\$38,933.13 \$39,152.98	\$37,833.00 \$38,000.00
Public P1 Charter P1	\$80,706.00 \$51,550.00	\$35,800.00 \$36,565.00	\$40,775.81 \$41,621.69	\$40,750.00 \$40,750.00
Public P2 Charter P2	\$92,368.00 \$66,950.00	\$35,800.00 \$35,800.00	\$43,912.59 \$44,457.72	\$42,548.00 \$43,400.00
Public P3 Charter P3	\$85,222.00 \$74,263.00	\$32,136.50 \$40,500.00	\$48,570.04 \$49,488.51	\$46,922.00 \$47,669.00
Public P4 Charter P4	\$87,807.00 \$68,503.00	\$38,598.00 \$37,970.00	\$51,051.67 \$49,663.42	\$49,830.00 \$49,100.00
Public P5 Charter P5	\$105,374.00 \$64,599.00	\$37,797.00 \$38,000.00	\$51,667.40 \$50,808.95	\$49,600.00 \$50,205.00
Public P6 Charter P6	\$87,754.00 \$70,000.00	\$41,446.00 \$40,223.00	\$53,334.71 \$52,863.04	\$52,133.00 \$51,650.00
Public P7 Charter P7	\$88,631.00 \$73,620.00	\$39,861.00 \$44,836.00	\$56,465.95 \$55,134.87	\$55,696.50 \$53,975.00
Public P8 Charter P8	\$86,024.00 \$60,292.00	\$44,950.00 \$46,807.00	\$58,364.03 \$53,913.83	\$56,329.50 \$53,500.00
Public P9 Charter P9	\$92,187.00 \$86,880.00	\$46,139.00 \$40,223.00	\$59,510.31 \$57,818.29	\$58,572.00 \$57,700.00
Public P10 Charter P10	\$129,080.00 \$94,000.00	\$36,360.00 \$39,744.00	\$62,181.31 \$60,565.40	\$61,600.00 \$61,277.00

These are preliminary findings, and we believe that much more research is needed before the Legislature and governor make any further commitments to the Career Ladder. The Career Ladder allocation places a premium on accumulating education credits and years of service, but the use of state-appropriated dollars are not consistently being applied to this goal.

The range of actual teacher salaries demonstrates that policymakers should further review how salaries are distributed at the district level. A detailed review of this data, broken down by school district, will be forthcoming.

Methodology

We began with a list of every Idaho school district employee who holds a teaching certificate. We cut from that list all part-time positions, as well as any positions where the school district was not able to report the contracted salary for the 2018-19 school year.

Additionally, we cut out administrative and pupil service positions. We considered the following to be administrative and pupil service positions:

- Principals
- Administrators
- School counselors
- School social workers
- School nurses
- Athletic facilitators
- College and career ready advisors
- CTE administrators
- Migrant education administrators
- Special education directors
- Assistant principals
- Librarians
- Community resource workers
- Occupational therapists
- Physical therapists
- Speech and language pathologists
- Audiologists
- Homeless liaisons
- Coordinators
- Office/library/classroom aides

If these employees held dual roles and worked as instructional teachers in addition to working in these administrative and pupil service roles, then they stayed on the list.

After these exclusions, we ended with a list of 15,813 full-time teaching positions across the state. We separated this list in two: one for 14,793 traditional school teachers and another for 1,020 charter school teachers.

Only base salaries were used in the analysis, so we excluded any extra pay that these teachers received for the year.³ The estimated extra pay amounts to over \$16.8 million, for teachers, for the 2018-19 school year, and not all teachers received extra pay.⁴ Extra pay can come from several sources. For example, there is a separate line item for Leadership Premiums to be paid when teachers occupy a hard to fill position or teach a dual-credit course.⁵ The following is a list of extra pay:

- Bonuses
- National board certification benefits
- Leadership premiums
- Summer contracts
- Department head positions
- Fringe benefits
- Driver training
- Extracurricular instruction/coaching

Disclaimer: In some cases, the highest and lowest salaries may be affected by factors that cannot be discerned by simply reviewing salary data. For example, two teachers were paid less than the minimum salary, but the data does not reveal the reason, such as a shift to teaching from another position during the school year. 🦋

Endnotes

1. Idaho Code Section 33-1004B, Career Ladder
 2. Ibid.
 3. "2018-2019 SCHOOL YEAR: ISEE Staff Data Guidance Manual." Page 38. Available at: <http://www.sde.idaho.gov/finance/shared/2018-2019/2018-2019-ISEE-Staff-Data-Guidance-Manual.pdf>.
 4. Idaho State Department of Education, Basic Education Staffing System, Statewide Certificated Staff Salary Report, 2018-2019
 5. Idaho Code Section: 33-1004J, Leadership Premiums.
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Idaho Freedom Foundation

802 W. Bannock Street, Ste. 405
Boise, Idaho 83702
208.258.2280

Contact the authors:

Fred Birnbaum: Fred@IdahoFreedom.org
Lindsay Atkinson: Lindsay@IdahoFreedom.org

IdahoFreedom.org/Education