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GUAM FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

AFT Local 1581 · AFL-CIO

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PAID LAST IN THE NATION: FEDERAL WAGE DATA PUTS GUAM AT OR NEAR THE BOTTOM OF THE COUNTRY IN 65 PERCENT OF OCCUPATIONS

Guam education workers are paid less than in any state or territory. Three quarters of Guam's public school classroom teachers, including the most senior and the master's degree holders, earn less than the average American teacher. GFT calls on the Legislature and the Governor to fund a wage study or appropriate the money to raise pay.

MANGILAO, GUAM: Guam workers earn less than their counterparts in almost every state and territory in the United States, according to an analysis of federal wage data released today by the Guam Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 1581. The union examined the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics May 2025 Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, the most recent available.

The analysis compared all 242 occupations BLS reports for Guam against the same occupations in 54 areas: the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In 152 of the 235 occupations that can be ranked, Guam pays the lowest or second lowest wage in the nation. That is 65 percent of the occupations measured. Guam is dead last in 54 of them.

The median Guam worker earns \$36,650 a year. The median American worker earns \$50,980, a gap of \$14,330, or 28 percent. Out of 54 areas, Guam ranks 53rd. Only Puerto Rico pays less.

"There is exactly one job on this island where Guam pays more than any state in the country, and it is the postal clerk, because Washington sets that wage," said Sanjay Sharma, PhD, Vice-President of the Guam Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 1581. "Where pay is set federally, our people are first in the nation. Where it is set here, we are last."

"Out of 54 states and territories, only Puerto Rico pays its workers less than we pay ours. If we were in a race to pay the least, we are on track to win it. That is not the island economy. That is a choice, and it is made in Hagåtña."

EDUCATION WORKERS PAID LESS THAN ANY STATE OR TERRITORY

The findings are sharpest in education. Taken as a whole, Guam education and library occupations have a median wage of \$46,250, the lowest of all 54 areas. The national median is \$60,570.

Within that group, the gap falls hardest on the classifications with no pay schedule behind them at all. Guam public school teachers are paid under the educator pay plan, which is established in law. Private and charter school teachers have no salary schedule in law, and GFT understands the lowest paid classifications to be concentrated in those schools. Guam also does not require a classroom teacher in a private or charter school to hold a teaching certificate, a requirement that applies in the public system. BLS does not publish Guam wages by employer type, so that breakdown reflects union knowledge of the workforce rather than a federal statistic. The wage figures themselves are federal. Teaching assistants on Guam earn a median of \$21,250 against a national median of \$36,780, last in the nation. Preschool teachers earn \$22,120 against \$38,140 nationally, also last in the nation. Short term substitute teachers earn \$27,210 against \$41,670 nationally.

Guam certified public school teachers, whose pay is set by the educator pay plan in law, do better than the rest of the education workforce, but they do not reach the national mark either. Measured against the National Education Association estimate of the average public school teacher salary for 2025-26, which is \$76,552, Guam certified elementary and secondary teachers average \$61,460. That is 80 cents on the dollar and a shortfall of about \$15,100 a year. Slotted into the NEA state table, Guam would rank 43rd of 52. Only nine states pay less.

THREE QUARTERS OF GUAM TEACHERS EARN BELOW THE NATIONAL AVERAGE

A separate GFT analysis of the Government of Guam FY25 fourth quarter pay schedule, covering all 1,325 core classroom teachers in pay grades ED-2 through ED-4, puts the average Guam classroom teacher at \$61,465, within five dollars of the independent federal figure. The median is \$63,227 and the third quartile is \$70,127, meaning more than three in four Guam classroom teachers earn below the \$76,552 national average.

The finding holds even at the top of the profession. ED-4, Teacher IV, is the largest grade and the one that carries the master's degrees and the longest service. Its median is \$65,880 and its third quartile is \$74,647. Both sit below the national average. The single most common salary among Guam classroom teachers, held by more of them than any other figure, is \$65,880.

The gap is also widening. When GFT completed the payroll analysis in February 2026 it measured the shortfall against the national average then in print, \$72,030, and found \$10,565 per teacher. The Guam figure has not moved. Against the 2025-26 national average of \$76,552 the same salary is now \$15,087 behind.

"People assume a contract sets our wages. It does not," Sharma said. "We hold a collective bargaining agreement, but we are not permitted to bargain pay. Our certified teachers are paid under the educator pay plan, which sits in law, and only the Legislature and the Governor can move it. It takes a bill and it takes a signature. We bring the data, we lobby, and we wait. Under that plan, three out of every four of our classroom teachers earn less than the average American teacher, and that includes our most senior people, the ones with the master's degrees. Our private and charter school teachers have no schedule in law at all, and Guam does not even require them to be certified. A preschool teacher in Guam earns 58 cents for every dollar a preschool teacher earns stateside. Same children, same island. One group waits on lawmakers. The other waits on no one."

SELECTED FINDINGS: ANNUAL MEDIAN WAGE, MAY 2025

Occupation	Guam	U.S.	Guam rank
All occupations	\$36,650	\$50,980	53rd of 54
All education occupations	\$46,250	\$60,570	54th of 54
Teaching assistants	\$21,250	\$36,780	54th of 54
Preschool teachers	\$22,120	\$38,140	54th of 54
Substitute teachers	\$27,210	\$41,670	47th of 51
Certified teachers (NEA basis)	\$61,460	\$76,552	43rd of 52

Rows 1 to 5 are BLS annual medians, ranked among the 54 areas reporting that occupation, where 1 is the highest paying. The certified teacher row is the BLS average for Guam certified elementary and secondary teachers against the NEA estimated national average for 2025-26, ranked among the 50 states and the District of Columbia plus Guam. Sources: BLS OEWS May 2025; NEA Rankings and Estimates, April 2026, table E-6.

WHAT GFT IS CALLING FOR

The current budget does not address wage disparity in either the public or the private sector. The last meaningful increase to the educator pay plan took effect in 2022, delivering a 20 percent base adjustment, and the wage data behind it predates the Covid-era inflation that followed. GFT is calling on the Guam Legislature and the Governor to fund a comprehensive wage study establishing what it costs to live and work on Guam and what competitive pay would be, or to appropriate the money to raise wages directly. For core classroom teachers the union puts the target at 95 to 100 percent of the national average, roughly \$72,700 to \$76,600.

GFT is asking for four further changes: indexing educator pay to national benchmarks with automatic adjustment; a three to five year stabilization plan with annual public reporting on recruitment, retention and vacancy rates; authority to bargain over salary, which the union currently does not have; and full funding of the Yamashita Educator Corps Scholarship to build a local teacher pipeline. The union is also calling for a certification requirement covering every classroom teacher on the island, public, private and charter, with pay that mirrors the public sector schedule once that certificate is held.

The union points to chronic vacancies as evidence the problem is already operational rather than prospective. The Guam Department of Education opens each school year with several dozen classroom positions unfilled, with shortages concentrated in secondary content courses, and covers the gap with long term substitutes, combined classes and understaffed courses.

“Fund the study or fund the raises,” Sharma said. “What we cannot keep doing is neither. We have been told for years that there is no data. The data has always been available. What has always been lacking is the backbone to set things right. We have robbed and cheated our own residents of a decent life on this island. Paid last in the nation is not a slogan we invented. It is what the federal government’s own numbers

say about Guam, and it is what our own pay schedule says about the people who teach our children. And while we argue about it, they are leaving. The question in front of the Legislature and the Governor is no longer whether the problem exists. It is what they intend to do about it, and how many more teachers walk onto a plane before they do it.”

GFT is releasing its full analysis alongside this statement, including a short summary for lawmakers and a complete report with all supporting figures. Both are available on request.

ABOUT THE DATA

Wage figures are from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics program, May 2025, all ownership types across all industries, and are not adjusted for cost of living. BLS reports Guam at all ownership types combined and does not break the territory out by public, private or charter employer. Ranks cover the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Guam wages are suppressed for 7 of its 242 reported occupations, including registered nurses, and those are excluded from ranking. The certified teacher comparison uses the National Education Association Rankings and Estimates report of April 2026, table E-6, which estimates the national average public school teacher salary for 2025-26 at \$76,552. NEA does not include Guam, so the Guam figure in that comparison is the BLS average for certified elementary and secondary teachers. Averages are compared with averages throughout. Pay grade distributions, quartiles and the \$61,465 mean are from the Guam Federation of Teachers, Statistical Analysis of Core Classroom Teacher Salaries, ED-2 through ED-4 Positions, FY25 Fourth Quarter Data, February 2026, built on the Government of Guam FY25 fourth quarter teacher pay schedule for 1,325 teachers.

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