

Salary Transparency is Essential Step Towards Ensuring All Students Have an Effective Teacher

By Alyssa Noth

All students in DC deserve an effective teacher, and full salary transparency in DC's public charter sector is a crucial step towards making the teaching profession fairer and more sustainable. DCFPI supports the provision of Councilmember Allen's [Public School Transparency Act of 2019](#) that would require all public charter school Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to publish salaries of all teachers, just as DCPS is required to do. This transparency is not only a matter of treating all LEAs equally, but it could also help public charter school teachers earn a fair and adequate salary.

I know from personal experience that public charter school teachers often earn too little. In 2012, I began my teaching career at a public charter school in Ward 5. My annual salary was just below \$40,000, which was more than \$7,600 below the [minimum salary needed](#) to cover fair market rent for a one-bedroom apartment. I couldn't make ends meet, so I opted out of health insurance coverage to stretch my take-home pay and took on a second job as an after-school nanny.



Juggling multiple jobs meant that I couldn't devote my evenings to planning the high-quality, differentiated lessons my third graders needed. I worked nonstop, but never came close to feeling like I was doing enough for my students. My principal refused to negotiate my salary or provide me with a salary scale that would have enabled me to plan for the future. Physically exhausted and in financial distress, I couldn't be the effective teacher I knew my students deserved. I left after two years along with most of my colleagues.

Unfortunately, my story is not unique, and the lowest paid public charter school teachers are still not earning a living wage. The DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) [requires](#) all 62 public charter LEAs to disclose their highest, lowest, and average teacher salaries each year. The average base salary for public charter school teachers in DC is \$45,750, about \$15,000 below the minimum salary needed for fair market rent and about \$10,000 below a starting [DCPS teacher salary](#), according to most recent public charter school annual reports from school year 2017-18.

Low pay is likely to contribute to teacher turnover and stress, which most impact students considered "at-risk" of academic failure. DC's three-year average public charter teacher turnover rate is about [six-to-nine percent higher](#) than other large urban school districts. The impact of teacher turnover disproportionately

harms low-income DC students, as schools with the highest percentages of at-risk students lose almost a third of their teachers each year, [according to the State Board of Education](#). This means that students in the charter sector who experience homelessness or who are in foster care, behind grade level, or economically disadvantaged are more likely to have a new, inexperienced teacher who may be struggling under economic hardship.

The Public School Transparency Amendment Act of 2019 would require that all teacher salaries be made public annually in each charter LEA's annual report, while allowing public charter schools to continue to set salaries as they see fit. Charter schools are public schools funded by public dollars —their teachers, who generally lack union protections, should have access to the same pay transparency that DCPS teachers have through the [DC Department of Human Resources](#).

The current salary disclosure requirements of highest, lowest, and average salary for public charter school teachers fall short of decent transparency standards. A public charter school teacher cannot determine if they are paid fairly compared to their colleagues or what they can expect to earn over time. Full transparency itself will not ensure that all public school teachers in DC earn a living wage, but it will ensure they have the necessary information to effectively advocate for themselves and make informed decisions about where they choose to teach and grow in one of our city's most essential public service professions.

Read our full testimony from the Public Hearing on B23-0199, the Public School Transparency Amendment Act of 2019 [here](#).