

The Teacher Credential Ladder

Sources, scope, and a few interpretive notes for opportunitydata.org/teachers.html

Data sources

PSEO earnings. U.S. Census Bureau Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes (lehd.ces.census.gov/data/pseo_experimental.html). All-institutions release. Each row is one institution × 4-digit CIP × degree level, with earnings pooled across a 5-year graduation cohort window to clear Census privacy suppression. Year-1, year-5, and year-10 percentiles are as published.

OEWS wages. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, May 2024 state file (bls.gov/oes). Three K-12 teacher SOC codes appear on the page: 25-2011 Preschool Teachers (except Special Ed), 25-2012 Kindergarten Teachers (except Special Ed), and 25-2021 Elementary School Teachers (except Special Ed). Secondary (25-2031) and Special Education K-12 (25-2058) are not shown in this build; the same pattern extends to them. National medians are employment-weighted averages of state medians.

Living-wage benchmark. MIT Living Wage Calculator (livingwage.mit.edu), 1-adult / 0-children household, annual budget, February 2026 update. State-level values.

Scope

Focal CIPs. Three 4-digit teacher-prep CIPs: 13.10 Special Education and Teaching, 13.12 Teacher Education and Professional Development (Specific Subject Areas, largely secondary teachers), and 13.13 Teacher Education and Professional Development (Specific Levels and Methods, largely elementary and early childhood). PSEO publishes at 4-digit resolution.

Credential levels. PSEO degree codes 03 (bachelor's) and 05 (master's). Sub-associate certificate (01) and associate's (02) exist in CIP 13 but only at small scale and primarily within CIP 13.15 (Teaching Assistants/Aides), which is excluded from this analysis.

CIP 13.01 excluded. Education, General. Excluded from the focal cohort because its bachelor's cohort includes a large share of non-teaching exits (education tech, administration support, training, advocacy) that confound a credential-ladder comparison meant to describe the K-12 pipeline.

Why year 5 leads the headline numbers

PSEO year-1 is the first calendar year after exit. For a May graduate entering teaching, that calendar year captures only the September-December teaching contract pay plus a summer with no contract income, materially below an annualized teaching salary. Year-5 is the first horizon at which most graduates have had at least one full annualized contract year on the salary schedule. The year-1 numbers are still shown in the trajectory chart for transparency, but the headline KPI strip, the BA-vs-MA ladder distribution, and the state-by-state living-wage comparison all use year-5 medians.

Why PSEO sits below OEWS

PSEO captures every graduate of CIP 13 teacher-prep programs and follows their reported wages. OEWS captures only workers currently employed in K-12 teacher occupations. The gap is partly experience (OEWS averages across all current teachers; PSEO Y5 is ~5 years into a career and at the bottom of the salary schedule) and partly cohort composition (not every CIP 13 graduate becomes a licensed K-12 teacher; many enter preschool, paraprofessional, ed-tech, or non-teaching roles). The gap is informative: it is roughly the size of the pipeline leak between credential and licensed classroom job. The master's cohort has a smaller gap to the OEWS floor than the bachelor's cohort, which is consistent with master's graduates being more likely to enter and stay in K-12 teaching.

What the page does not capture

PSEO and OEWS both depend on wage reporting to state unemployment insurance systems or to BLS establishment surveys. Private schools that operate outside UI, charter networks with non-standard payroll structures, religious schools, substitute teachers paid hourly, and any unpaid or part-time teaching are partially or fully invisible. State coverage is limited to the ~25 states that have signed PSEO data-sharing agreements with the Census Bureau. California, Florida, Washington, Michigan, New Jersey, Georgia, and Arizona are absent from the state-by-state cuts.

Replication

Source script: *build_teachers.py* in the *opportunitydata/program-clustering* repository. Inputs: *pseoe_all.csv*, *pseo_all_institutions.csv*, *label_cipcode.csv*, and the cached OEWS state file. The script writes *teachers.html* with all chart data embedded inline as a single JSON blob, so the page is self-contained and reproducible from the script.

Citation

Rowe, Benazir. *The Teacher Credential Ladder*. Opportunity Data, June 2026.
opportunitydata.org/teachers.html.

Methodology note version 1.0 · June 2026 · Benazir Rowe, PhD · Opportunity Data