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GTU, Education Ministry in battle over salary figures

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Headmaster of the Essequibo Islands Secondary School Sheikh Ahmad and Headmistress of The Bishops' High School Shandrina Welcome-Lee participating in a government-organised television discussion about the teachers' strike.

As a teachers strike entered its third day on Wednesday, the Guyana Teachers' Union and the Ministry of Education were comparing salaries for lowest paid teachers.

While the Education Ministry and several government parliamentarians posted on their Social Media pages a list of positions and their salary increases from 2019 to 2024, the GTU opted to focus on two categories- Untrained teachers and Temporary Unqualified Master and Mistress.

The basic salary for Temporary Qualified Master/Mistress is GY\$104,003 but after National Insurance Scheme and Income Tax deductions,

that teacher takes home \$94,489, while an Unqualified Master/Mistress' gross salary is GY\$91,176 and the take-home pay is GY\$84,860. The pay slips shown by the GTU also included deductions for two insurance premiums which means the net salaries for both positions are lower.

In boasting about a 20 percent increase in teachers' salaries since 2020, the Ministry of Education made no mention of Temporary Qualified Master/Mistress or Unqualified Master/Mistress'. Instead, the Education Ministry's listing does not include the take-home pay for the various teaching positions and starts with trainee teacher whose gross salary is today GY\$104,003 compared to GY\$12,466 in 2019.

The highest paid teaching position in the public education system is the principal of the Government Technical Institute/ Linden Technical Institute or Cyril Potter College of Education at a gross of GY\$409,632. At the school level, a Graduate Head of a 6th Form School gets GY\$389,352 gross.

The Ministry of Education, in reaction to the GTU's posting of the two pay slips, explained that a Temporary Qualified Master/Mistress is Secondary Schools Proficiency Examination (SSPE) qualified at maximum or attained 3 subject CXC subjects without English or Math , or 4 subjects minimum without English or Math. In relation to Temporary Qualified teachers, they attained 4 CXC subjects, with English at 1 sitting or 5 CXC's with English at 2 sittings or success at GUIDE Programme and earn GY\$104,207. The Education Ministry reiterated that steps were being taken to ensure all teachers are trained in the near future.

Meanwhile, Headmaster of the Essequibo Islands Secondary School Sheikh Ahmad said he could not "walk away from students" who were now preparing for Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examination. Further, he said his take home salary has increased from GY\$168,000 in 2019 to GY\$259,000 in 2023. "I would be ungrateful to walk away from my classroom, having got such a large increase," he said on a government-organised discussion broadcast on the state-owned National Communications Network. He also accused the union of showing little or no interest in teachers' welfare especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. "GTU's issue is that you need to go to the grassroots level, go to the classrooms. Some of them have been in the executive for so many years, they have forgotten what the classroom looks like," he added.

Headmistress of The Bishops' High School Shandrina Welcome-Lee said she did not participate in the industrial action but "I didn't strike because I don't believe in the strike." "I'm seeing a lot of back and forth

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Hussain for doing a lot for teachers.

The headteachers praised the government for giving schools countrywide cash grants to buy supplies, but the GTU and a number of the striking teachers say they personally need cash in their pockets through increased salaries and allowances.

The Ministry of Education said 25 of the 41 requests by the GTU had been accepted and implemented. Government has deemed the strike unlawful and has since stopped deducting union dues. The ministry said it would be deducting money from the salaries of teachers who are on strike.

The opposition A Partnership for National Unity+Alliance For Change and the Working People’s Alliance have come out in support of the strike and promised to pay the teachers more if they are elected to govern Guyana at the 2025 general and regional elections.

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