

# **2025 NKU Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report to the Board of Regents**

Presented: February 26, 2025

by:

## **Committee Members**

Vanessa Steele, Chair

Chris Bowling

Inna Pylyayeva

Lori Thaxton

Terri Smith

## Executive Summary

This document outlines the results of the staff survey done by the Advocacy committee and provides recommendations based on those priorities to enhance the well-being and satisfaction of our staff, ensuring a supportive and equitable work environment at NKU.

These are prioritized to address key concerns:

1. **Annual Cost-of-Living Adjustments:** Integrate yearly increases for staff and faculty into the annual budget process **as the top priority**. These adjustments should take precedence over all other expenses, recognizing that the well-being and retention of our employees is essential to effectively support our students.
2. **Equitable Distribution of Increases:** We recommend the proposed raise for fiscal year 2026 be distributed evenly by dollar amount across all employees rather than by percentage. This approach ensures a fair allocation of resources that would advance lower-paid full-time staff closer to a livable wage than a percentage of their current salary would provide.
3. **Employee Retention and Growth:** Establish clear paths to growth and promotion for all positions, accompanied by appropriate pay grade increases with experience. This initiative aims to foster career growth and development, motivating employees by providing transparent and attainable advancement opportunities.
4. **Parking Fee Reconfiguration:** Reconfigure parking fees to be based on employee pay rates. This adjustment will create a more equitable system, ensuring that parking costs are proportionate to income levels.

By addressing these key areas, we aim to create a more supportive environment for NKU employees, ultimately enhancing our ability to serve our students effectively.

## Table of Contents

<b>2025 NKU Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report to the Board of Regents .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Table of Contents.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Summary of Staff Survey Results (2025) .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Satisfaction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Opportunities for Advancement .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Secondary and Tertiary Jobs .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Likelihood that staff would recommend working at NKU.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Comments and Feedback Summary.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Comment Exemplars .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Staff Priorities as Ranked .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>NKU Staff Congress Staff Advocacy Committee Recommendations .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Supporting Data .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Figure 1: NKU Merit and Cost of Living Adjustments in Relation to US Inflation Rates 2009-2024*</b>	
.....	<b>13</b>
Summary.....	13
<b>Figure 2: NKU Pay Increases in Relation to Cost of Living 2008-2024 .....</b>	<b>14</b>
Summary.....	14
<b>Figure 3: Poverty Level in Campbell County, KY Compared to NKU Salaries.....</b>	<b>15</b>
Summary.....	15
<b>Figure 4: NKU Staff Retention Rates (Last 5 Years).....</b>	<b>16</b>
Summary.....	16
<b>Figure 5: Number of Full-Time Staff 2009-2024 .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Summary.....	17
<b>Figure 6: Benefits and Other Costs Compared to NKU Salaries 2009-2025.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Figure 7: Comparison of Different Salary Levels to \$429 Parking Fees .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Figure 8: Salary Inequity .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Summary.....	21
<b>Figure 9: Salary Increases for Employees Making Over \$100,000 Compared to Employees Making Under \$100,000 2011-2024.....</b>	<b>22</b>
Summary.....	22
<b>Figure 10: Changes in the Number of Administrators vs Support Staff 2010-2024 .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Summary.....	23
<b>Sources.....</b>	<b>26</b>

Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report

**APPENDIX 1 .....27**  
    **Recommendations to Previous Administration in 2021-2022.....27**  
**Background Information .....29**  
**Disclaimer.....34**

## Summary of Staff Survey Results (2025)

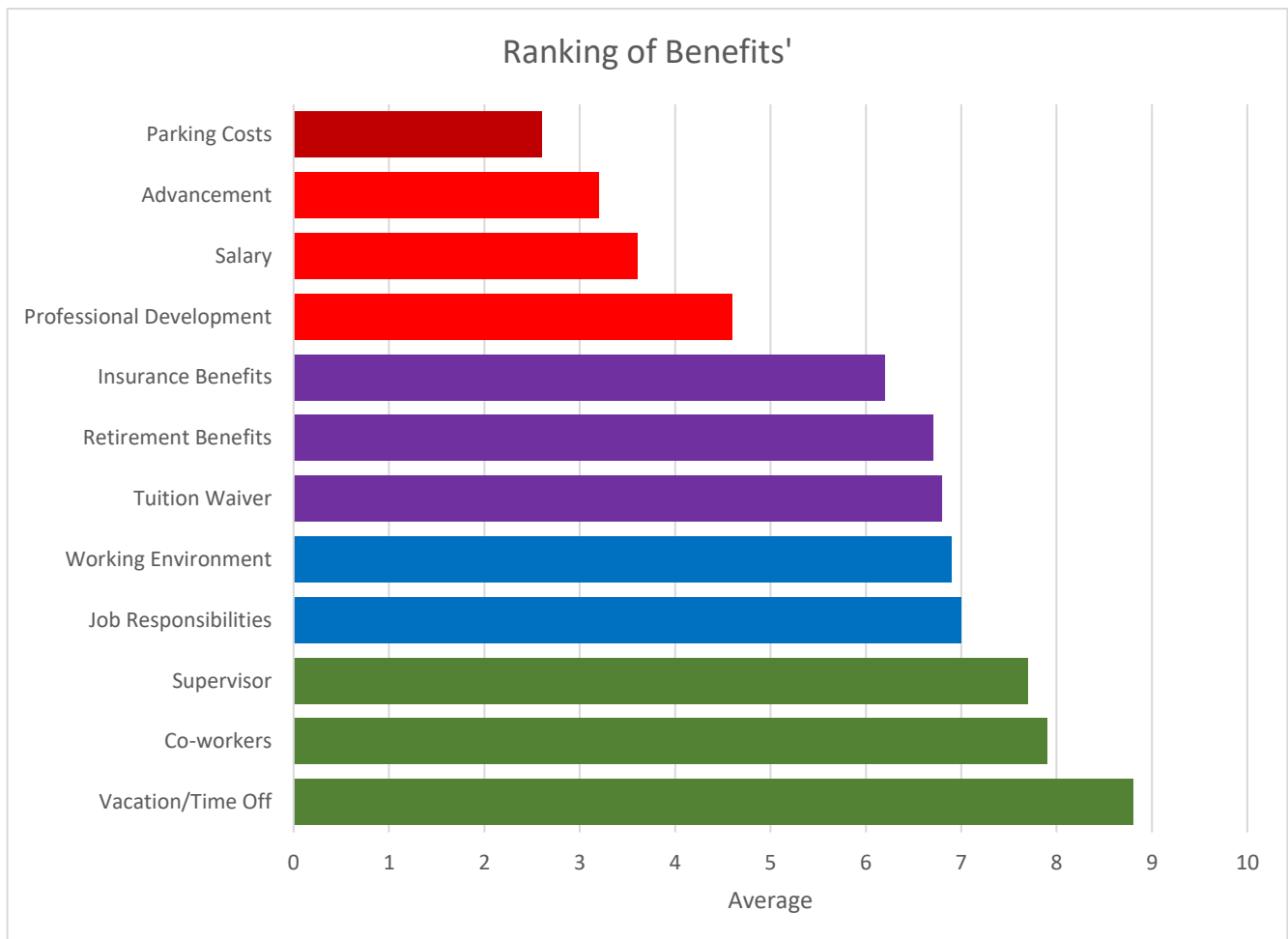
- 249 people responded (listserv 957) for a total rate of 26%
- 57% answered that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs while 43% shows real room for improvement.
- Staff identified consistent lack of raises and no opportunities for promotion as top reasons for dissatisfaction with work
- 44% of staff respondents are working at least 1 other job to make ends meet
- Several employees described stress levels as most affected by inability to pay bills on their current wages.

---

*“I have a second job and utilize FUEL because I don't make enough money in the position I have ...”*

---

### Satisfaction



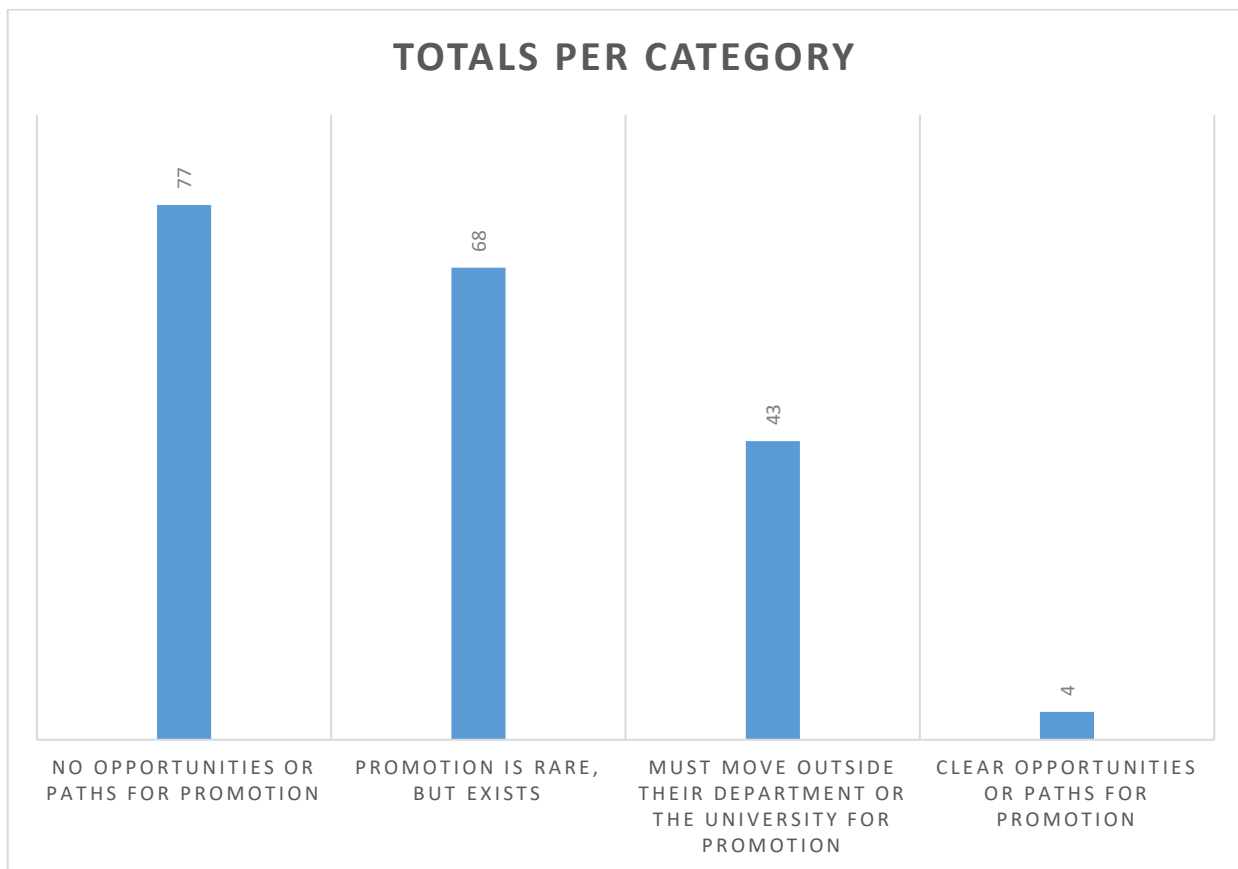
## Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report

The highest ranked categories for staff satisfaction involves the generous time off, followed by colleagues and supervisors. People like working at NKU because they enjoy the work they do and the people they work with.

The lowest rankings in terms of satisfaction are parking fees, which ranked the least in satisfaction, followed by opportunities for advancement and salary. However, salary was mentioned most often in the comments and feedback.

### Opportunities for Advancement

Opportunities for promotion within NKU are rare or nonexistent, making it difficult to retain experienced and knowledgeable staff. 77 people responded that there are no opportunities, while another 68 said they exist, but they are rare and another 43 said they must move outside of their department or leave the university to obtain a promotion, leaving only 4 to state that they have a clear path or opportunity for promotion.



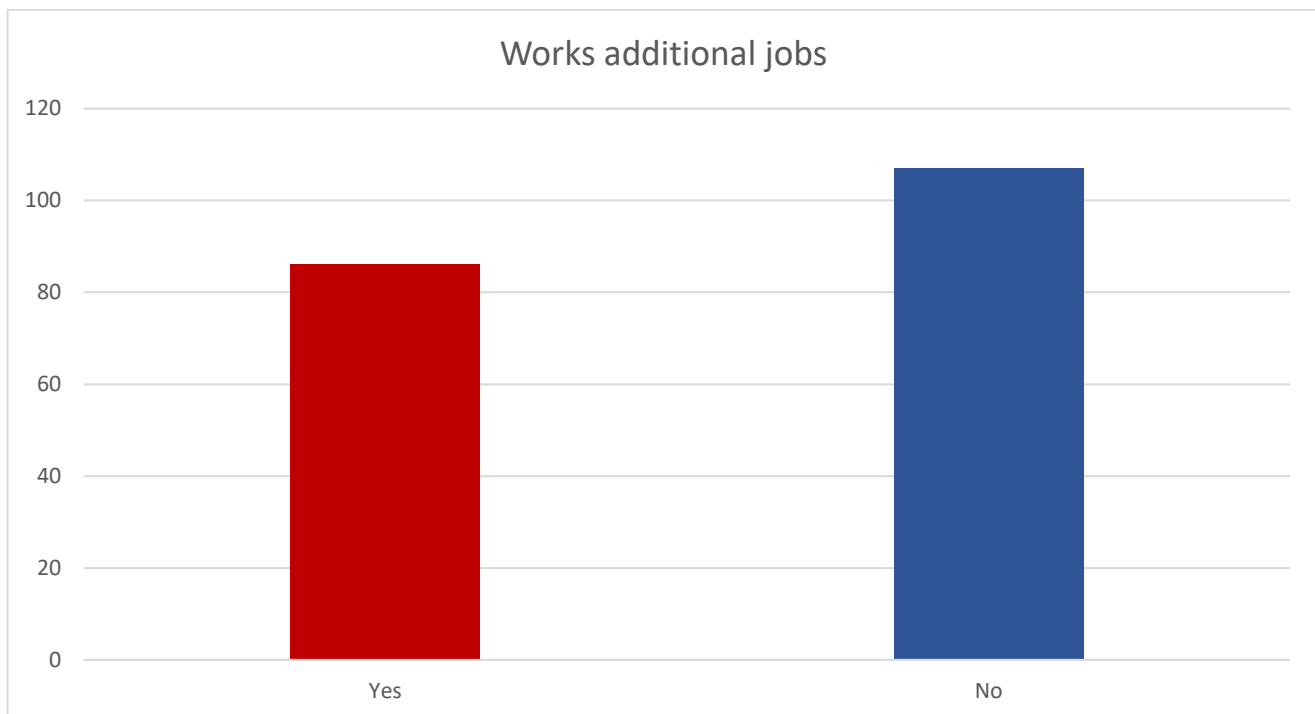
Thus, we must conclude that we are not rewarding loyalty to NKU in promotions or in raises. According to [livingwage.mit.edu/states/21](https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/21), the living wage for a single adult with no dependents is \$20.86 per hour (as of February 2025). For a 40-hour work week, that comes out to \$43,388.80 to

## Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report

meet the standards of a living wage. We have 213 full-time staff who fall below this minimum (and another 31 faculty).

### Secondary and Tertiary Jobs

Have Jobs outside of NKU	Yes/No
Yes	86
No	107
Total	193



In addition, 45% of the respondents to the survey (86 out of 193) stated that they are working part time jobs outside of NKU in addition to their roles at NKU. Several respondents also stated that they have resorted to using both on-campus (FUEL) and off-campus food pantries.

---

*“I love my job, the environment and people and feeling like what I do has impact ... however, stress related to money **and not having enough to live on** as well as income not keeping up to inflation and outside changes is very frustrating. **I would love to stay at NKU for many more years**, but I'm not sure if it is feasible as I am going backward monetarily on an ongoing basis and do not see any indication that these pressures will subside anytime soon...**I have broken down and started going to a food pantry and having medical bills written off.** NKU professional employees*

## Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report

*should not have to live this way. The pay compensation for experience and knowledge is not commensurate.”*

---

### **Likelihood that staff would recommend working at NKU**

Out of 199 responses to this question, there was a fairly even spread, with slightly fewer scoring at a 6-10 range (96) than 5 or below (103). This indicates that there are some reservations about whether employees would be willing to recommend working here to friends and family. Again, this can likely be attributed to the lack of opportunities for advancement and the low pay.



## Comments and Feedback Summary

- I. Staff are struggling to make ends meet on their current wages. Several are being forced to seek assistance from both on-campus and off-campus food pantries, work second and third jobs, and cannot afford medical services, even with insurance. This is impacting their overall well-being and the university's ability to retain knowledgeable employees, which has a direct impact on student satisfaction, enrollment, and retention.
- II. People are doing more work, often with little to no backup or support, because vacancies have not been filled. This has increased the stress level as well as the feeling that they are doing more for less money. The reduction in benefits and the increase in parking exacerbates the problems with take-home pay.
- III. The perception is that bonuses and raises are given to those at the top with no regard for the efforts made at all levels of employment, and employees expressed frustration that their work is not seen or appreciated even though it directly and indirectly impacts the overall success of our university. They would like to see a significant shift in how salary increases and bonuses are provided changing to bottom up rather than from the top down.

### Comment Exemplars

*"The fact that I can no longer afford fresh produce most of the time and our president just received a \$125,000 bonus? Absolutely insane. Even the fact that someone who is merely two positions above me makes 3x my salary is mind-boggling to me. The salary disparities here are simply dystopian."*

*"I've been working here for 20 years and I haven't had raises for 15 of them."*

*"Not knowing whether or not I'll be able to afford my car payments in the spring because the cost of living and rent continue to increase while my salary stays the same is a major cause of stress for me. Especially with knowing it doesn't matter how well I do at my job, because everyone is going to receive the same minuscule raise in the next budget."*

*"Not earning a living wage is a major source of stress for me. My current salary does not cover essential living expenses, which forces me to constantly worry about finances. This financial strain affects my overall well-being and significantly diminishes my job satisfaction. It is challenging to maintain a decent quality of life and focus on work when basic financial stability is out of reach. Increasing wages to a living wage level would greatly alleviate this stress and enhance my job satisfaction."*

## Staff Priorities as Ranked

We asked staff survey respondents to rank their priorities on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the highest. Of the categories, Getting Raises in 2025 ranked the highest with an average rank of 1.4, followed by Reintroducing the 5x5 Compensation Plan (4.6 average ranking), and Tiered parking based on salary and Paths for Promotions tied for third, with a ranking of 4.8 each. Free comments also included free or reduced parking for everyone, and full tuition waivers for staff and faculty/family.

Priority for Advocacy	Average Ranking (with 1 being highest and 10 being lowest)
Getting raises in 2025	1.4
Reintroducing/resume the 5x5 Compensation Plan or similar plan to address compression	4.6
Tiered parking based on salary	4.8
Paths for Promotions	4.8
More flexible work arrangements	5
Increased time off	5.5
Removing the fee requirements to use the campus recreation center	5.8
Opportunities for professional development for all staff	6.8
Diversity, equity, and Inclusion initiative for staff	7.4
<b>Other</b> (full tuition waiver for staff and families, 360 wrap around evaluations, full elimination of parking fees)	9

## NKU Staff Congress Staff Advocacy Committee Recommendations

For many staff, NKU is more than a job – it's more like a family. NKU has so many dedicated staff members who have stayed loyal to the university for a long time, through good times and bad.

Out of all NKU staff, approximately 29% have 15+ years of service, down from 34% in 2022 (see Addendum). About 42% of NKU staff have stayed at the university for at least 10 years, down from 58% in 2022. This is still better than the 4.1 median number of years that employees have worked for their current employer, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. However, these numbers have dropped significantly in just two years!

We the staff do love NKU! It is truly an extraordinary place. These are some of the benefits that staff love and value about NKU:

- Wonderful coworkers!
- Helping students and making a difference in our community
- Extra holidays/days off
- Flexible work arrangements
- Better work/personal life balance
- Parental leave
- Education opportunities/tuition waiver

However, as good as the perks are, they provide little value if people's salaries cannot provide for their families and the time off is being used to find additional means of support. According to the MIT's Living Wage Calculator, **many of our employees are earning poverty wages**, making less than a living wage for our area. According to the survey conducted in 2024, almost 44% of employees surveyed have a second job, and some have a 3rd! That's up from 35% in the 2020 survey. **Several respondents stated that they have resorted to using both on-campus (FUEL) and off-campus food pantries to survive.** This is simply unacceptable.

Many staff feel they have hit a wall financially and in terms of growth. When no raises started in 2009, staff were willing to sacrifice short term to share the financial burden of budget deficit with the university, but the past 16+ years have pushed us to the tipping point. When the university tried to address this issue in 2022 with the 5X5 Compensation Plan, only the first step was completed (adjusting for people based on internal experience). After that, the plan was terminated and the information was removed from the website.

We have been doing more with less money and now less staff with no pay increase for too long. With 0% market adjustment **for 9 out of last 16 years**, many staff cannot make ends meet! As much as people love NKU, they are forced to seek other employment opportunities, both in addition to and increasingly, forcing them to leave NKU entirely. And now NKU is feeling that with the 16% turnover rate.

NKU Staff aren't just unhappy about the past 3 years; this has been an ongoing problem prior to the current and previous administrations and prior to the budget crisis. The feeling that staff are not

## Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report

appreciated causes many to leave, which further impacts our ability to serve our students, thereby creating a vicious cycle in which we struggle to maintain enrollment and retention because there is not enough staffing with the appropriate level of experience to do their jobs effectively across campus.

Therefore, the Staff Congress Advocacy group would like to call for a change in how the budget is created each year that would put staff at the top of the priorities EACH and EVERY year for a Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) to at least maintain pace with inflation and the livable wage. For this year, we call on the raises to be divided equally as a dollar amount among everyone, rather than a percentage of salary, which would continue to increase the wage gap between the lowest and highest earners. By doing it this way, this would put the lowest earners closer to the living wage they require while still recognizing the collective efforts across campus.

We have hit a point in which we are all doing far more work than is tenable, and this is affecting the quality of our output and taking a toll on our health, wellness, and NKU's reputation. Without reliable staff, this university does not run efficiently, and we are at grave risk of compounding the very issues that have plagued us for enrollment and retention. Enrollment numbers cannot continue to be the sole determining factor in which staff are given raises for the work they do.

In alignment with this goal, we call for **clear paths for promotion and employee development** to be created and outlines for every staff role, with opportunities for advancement based on number of years worked and satisfactory performance reviews. Given that even part-time faculty can get \$1,000 raises after a certain amount of time then staff, who are working full-time for all twelve months of the year and fully dedicated to this institution, should offered the same opportunities as well.

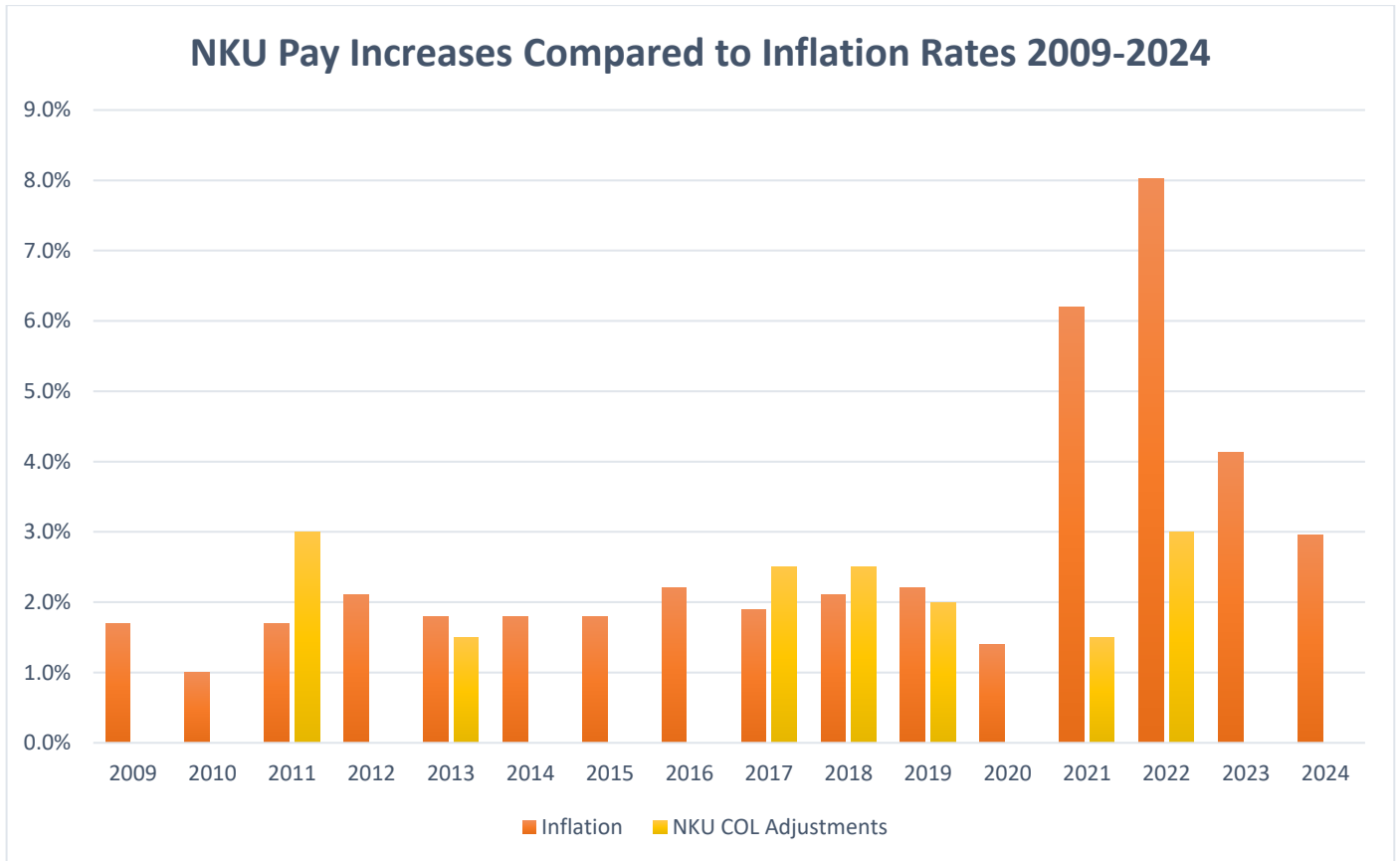
Finally, we call on the Board of Regents and Administration to make **changes to the parking fees structure** that would create pay rates based on a percentage of their take home pay. Staff Congress has for many years advocated for this and are prepared to continue to advocate, including assigning a task force to this goal.

**A note of gratitude:** We recognize that the Administration is moving to **remove the rec center fees** and restore free use of that to all employees. The benefits of having a healthy staff and faculty will reduce stress and potentially also reduce the amount we will pay out in terms of medical benefits and we thank everyone for recognizing the importance of this benefit to staff and faculty.

We have reached a crisis mode! These salary changes can't wait...they must happen now!

## Supporting Data

**Figure 1: NKU Merit and Cost of Living Adjustments in Relation to US Inflation Rates 2009-2024\***



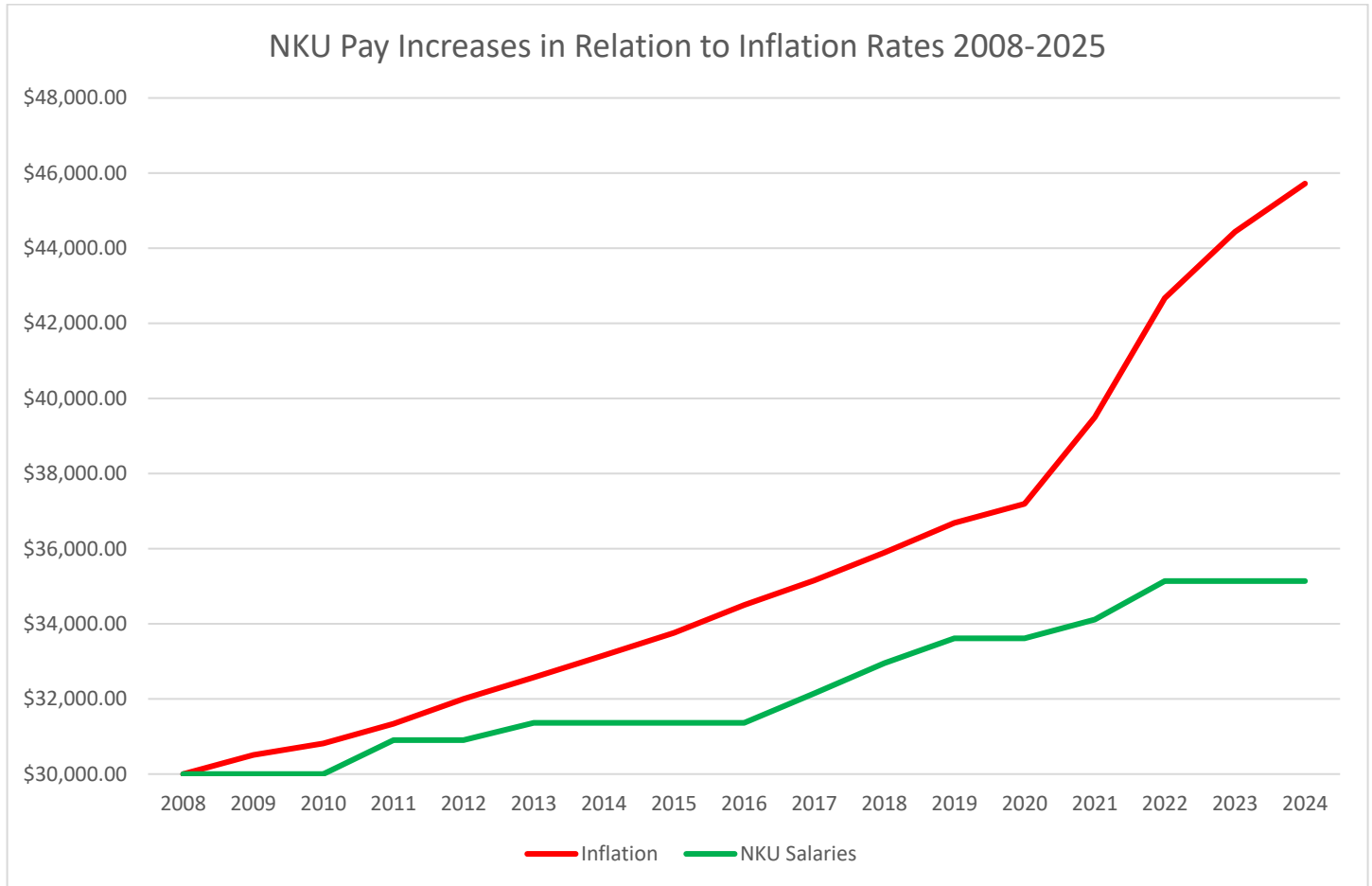
2009-2024 – out of 16 years:

- 9 years – no COLA/merit raises
- 7 years – received an increase
  - 3 years – the increase matched or exceeded the inflation rate
  - 4 years – the increase was below the inflation rate

### Summary



- Over the past 16 years, there were 9 years without merit or cost of living adjustments.
- Out of 7 years with COLA or merit adjustments, the increase met or exceeded the inflation rate in only 3 of those years.
- There are full-time employees who do not make a livable wage and are living in poverty
- Note: one-time/non-recurring bonuses are excluded

**Figure 2: NKU Pay Increases in Relation to Cost of Living 2008-2024**



**Summary**

From 2008 to 2025, inflation surged by 52.40%, while NKU salaries rose by only 17.13%, creating a significant and widening gap between rising costs and stagnant employee compensation. As a result, in 2025, NKU staff are effectively earning far less than they did in 2008.

	2008	2025	Change Rate
Salary Adjusted to Inflation	\$30,000	\$45,721	52.40% 
NKU Salary	\$30,000	\$35,138	17.13% 

**Figure 3: Poverty Level in Campbell County, KY Compared to NKU Salaries**

Poverty wage estimates for Campbell County, KY:

Source: <https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/21> and the Department of Health and Human Services' [Poverty Guidelines](#) for 2025 - last updated February 10, 2025

	1 ADULT			
	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children
Living Wage	\$20.86	\$36.34	\$45.31	\$58.04
Poverty Wage	\$7.52	\$10.17	\$12.81	\$15.46
Minimum Wage	\$7.25	\$7.25	\$7.25	\$7.25

The living wage shown is the hourly rate that an **individual** in a household must earn to support themselves and/or their family, working full-time, or 2080<sup>1</sup> hours per year. The tables below provide living wage estimates for individuals and households with one or two working adults and zero to three children. In households with two working adults, all hourly values reflect what one working adult requires to earn to meet their families' basic needs, assuming the other adult also earns the same.

**Summary**

Based on these poverty estimates, a single adult with no children would need to earn at least \$43,388.80 to afford basic living expenses in Campbell County. Currently, 213 full-time staff members are earning below this livable wage.

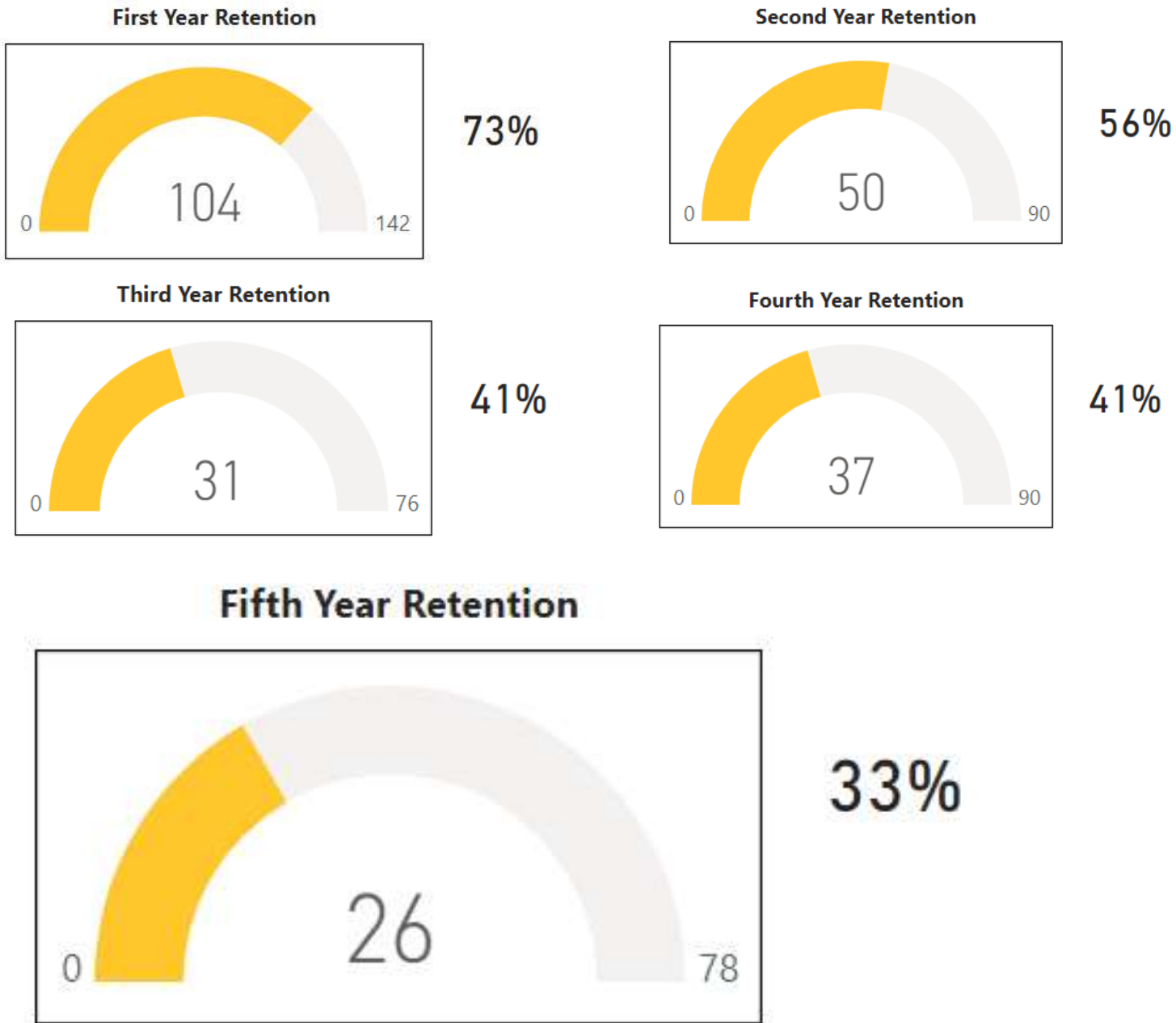
---

<sup>1</sup> Some NKU staff are hired in at 37.5 hours per week, which means that they would have to make \$22.39 per hour if they are hourly employees.

### Figure 4: NKU Staff Retention Rates (Last 5 Years)

Source: IR Staff Retention Dashboard

Legend: ● Did Not Return ● Returned



#### Summary

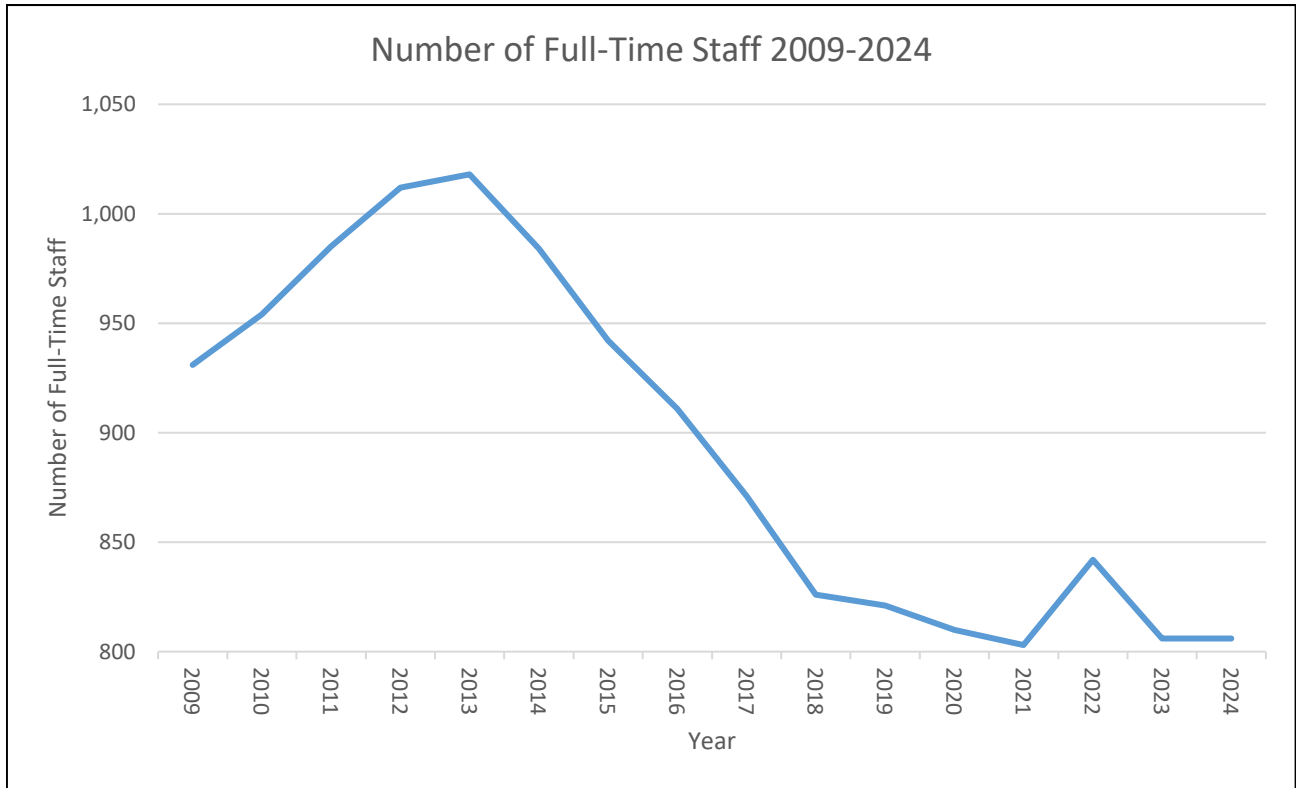
An alarming 67% of employees choose to leave NKU within just five years, highlighting a critical retention challenge! According to the *CUPA-HR 2023 Higher Education Employee Retention*



## Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report

Survey (ERS) conducted in 2023, average turnover rate among higher education full time non-exempt staff in 2022-2023 was 14.3%.

**Figure 5: Number of Full-Time Staff 2009-2024**



Year	2009	2024	Change
Full-Time Staff	931	806	13% ↓

### Summary

Since 2009, NKU's full-time staff workforce has shrunk by 13%, from 931 employees in 2009 to just 806 in 2024, forcing fewer staff to shoulder an increasing workload. This reduction in personnel has led to burnout, diminished morale, and unsustainable expectations, as employees are supporting more students and providing more services. Staff are pushed to do more with fewer resources.

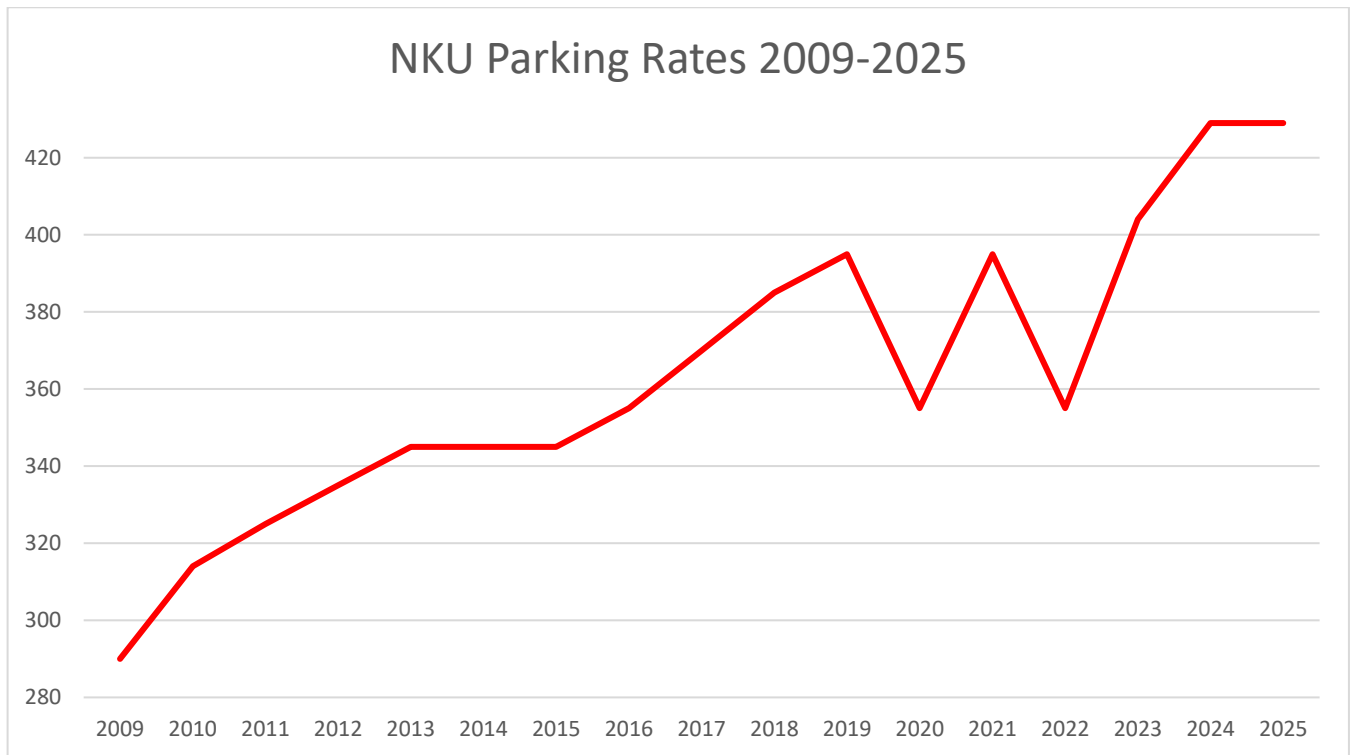
**Figure 6: Benefits and Other Costs Compared to NKU Salaries 2009-2025**

	2009	2025	Change Rate	
Medical*	\$791.16	\$2,244	184%	↑
Dental**	\$447.48	\$800.64	79%	↑
Parking	\$290	\$429	48%	↑
Inflation			52.40%	↑
NKU Salaries***			17.13%	↑

\*High Deductible Plan HDHP 2500 for Employee and Family annual premium. Besides the increase in premiums, benefits have shrunk, and deductibles have increased.

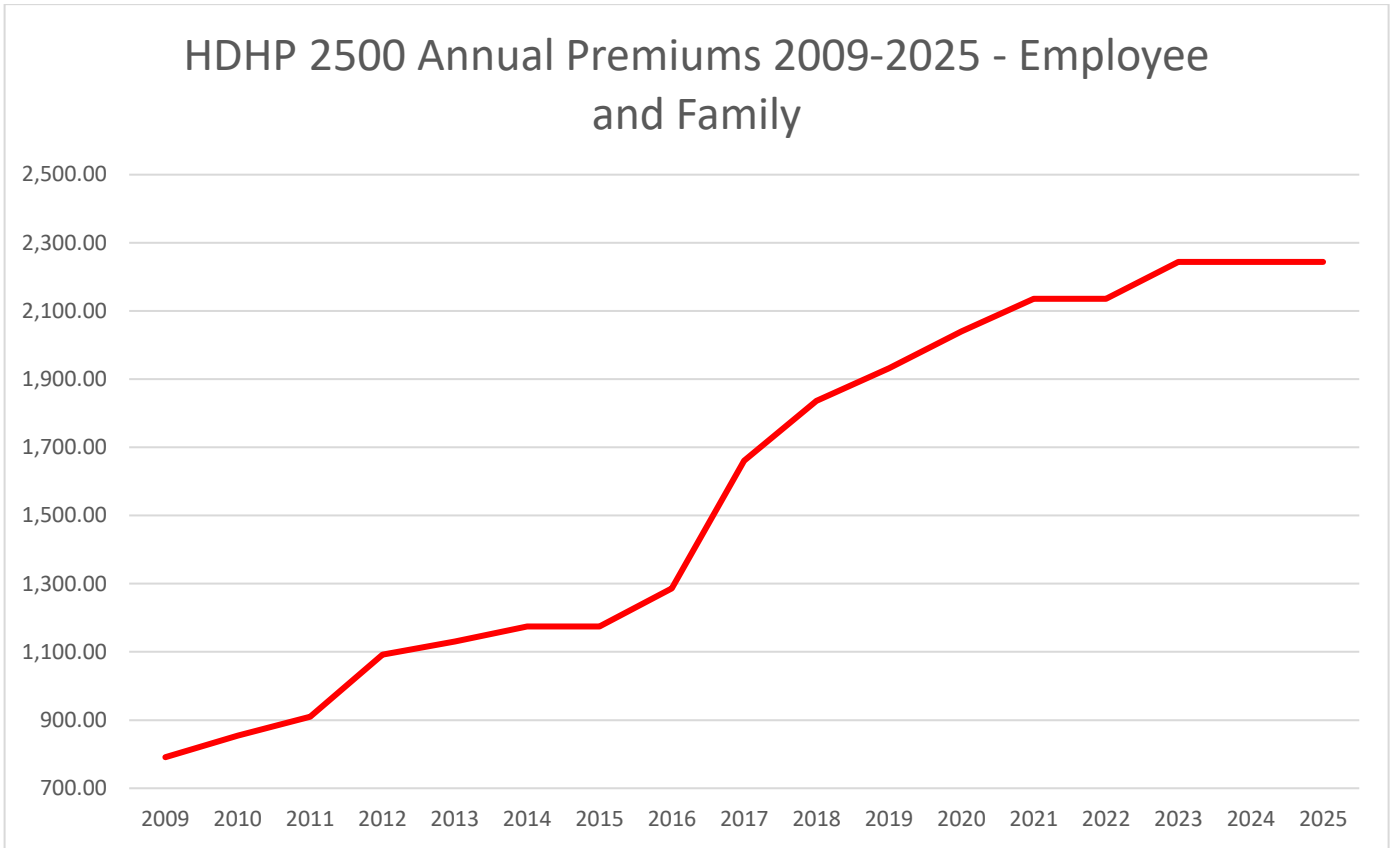
\*\* Basic Dental for Employee and Family annual premiums.

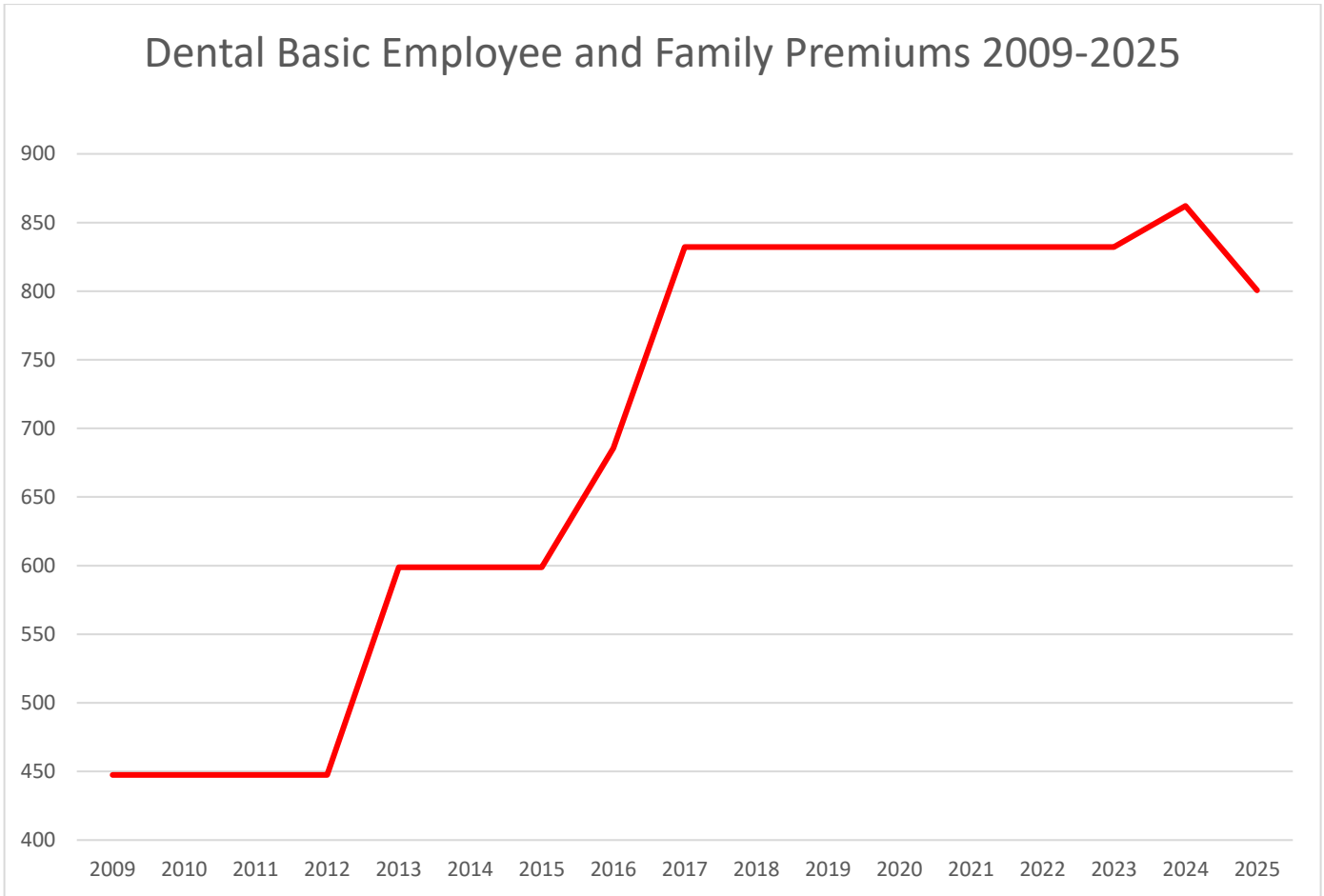
\*\*\* Based on annual market adjustments; assuming employee remained in the same position and only received annual market adjustments.



\*In 2020, parking fees had a temporary 10% reduction due to the pandemic.

Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report





**Figure 7: Comparison of Different Salary Levels to \$429 Parking Fees**

While NKU does not have much control over rising medical and dental costs, the university can do something about its parking fees. The impact on salaries is disproportionately high comparing the staff over \$100k as compared to the lowest full-time paid staff.

Employee Salary	Average Salary	Parking Cost as % of Employee Salary - 2025
5 lowest paid FULL-TIME staff	24,876	1.7%
Average salary for full-time staff (under \$100,000)	52,470	0.82%
Athletics staff	76,226	0.56%
Average full-time faculty salary	83,012	0.52%
10 highest paid full-time staff (over 100,000)	120,788	0.36%
Average Administrator	141,210	0.3%

**Figure 8: Salary Inequity**

Summary

- 29 full-time staff (1.58%) earn less than \$30,000 annually, which is not a livable wage.
- Combined, **administrators, athletics staff, and high-earning full-time staff** (65 individuals) make up only **3.55%** of all employees but consume **10.84%** of HR expenses.
- Shockingly, 13 part-time staff and 32 part-time faculty members earn more than the lowest-paid full-time staff, highlighting significant inequities in compensation.

Employee Type	Total Number	Average Salary	% of Total Number of Employees	% of Total Amount of HR Expenses
Staff – Full Time (under 100,000)	691	52,470	37.72%	37.08%
Staff – Full-Time (above 100,000)	10	120,788	0.55%	1.24%
Staff – Part-Time	39	24,892	2.13%	0.99%
Faculty Full-Time	506	83,012	27.62%	42.95%
Faculty Part-Time	481	9,699	26.26%	4.77%
Administrators	72	141,210	3.93%	10.4%
Athletics	33	76,226	1.8%	2.57%

Breakdown of full-time staff salaries:

Employee Type	Total Number	Average Salary	% of Total Number of Employees	% of Total Amount of HR Expenses
Full Time Staff (under 30,000)	29	26,939	1.58%	0.8%
Full Time Staff (30,000-39,999)	127	35,742	6.93%	4.64%
Full Time Staff (40,000-49,999)	200	45,117	10.92%	9.23%
Full Time Staff (50,000-59,999)	129	54,411	7.04%	7.18%
Full Time Staff (60,000-69,999)	103	63,939	5.62%	6.73%
Full Time Staff (70,000-79,999)	49	74,453	2.67%	3.73%
Full Time Staff (80,000-89,999)	35	82,985	1.91%	2.97%
Full Time Staff (90,000-99,999)	19	92399	1.04%	1.8%

Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report

Full Time Staff (above 100,000)	10	120,788	0.55%	1.24%
---------------------------------	----	---------	-------	-------

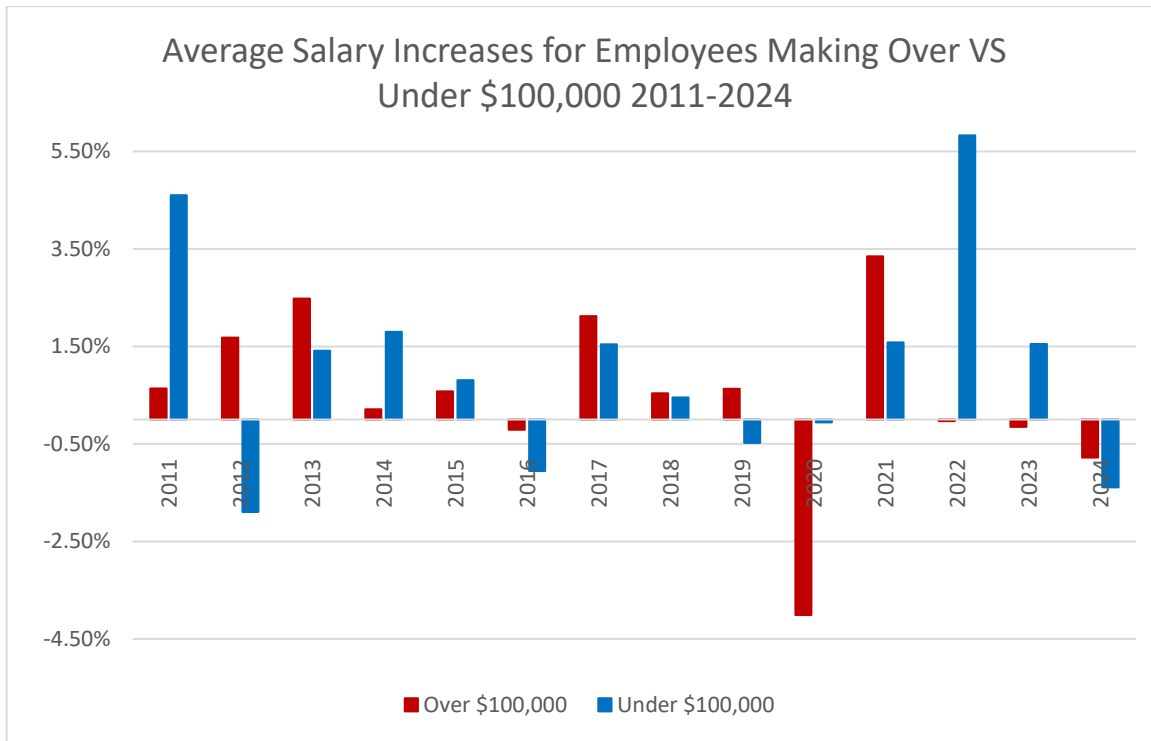
**Figure 9: Salary Increases for Employees Making Over \$100,000 Compared to Employees Making Under \$100,000 2011-2024**

Summary

Over the past 14 years since 2011, employees earning over \$100,000 experienced higher average salary increases than those earning under \$100,000 in 8 of those years. This trend underscores a disproportionate focus on higher earners, further widening the financial gap between employee groups and highlighting inequities in salary adjustments.

Year	Over 100k	Under 100k
2011	0.64%	4.60%
2012	1.68%	-1.90%
2013	2.48%	1.41%
2014	0.21%	1.80%
2015	0.58%	0.81%
2016	-0.21%	-1.06%
2017	2.12%	1.54%
2018	0.54%	0.45%
2019	0.63%	-0.48%
2020	-4.01%	-0.06%
2021	3.35%	1.58%
2022	-0.03%	5.83%
2023	-0.15%	1.55%
2024	-0.78%	-1.39%

Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report



\* 2020 shall be excluded from this analysis due to the salary reduction for everyone making over 100,000 that year

**Figure 10: Changes in the Number of Administrators vs Support Staff 2010-2024**

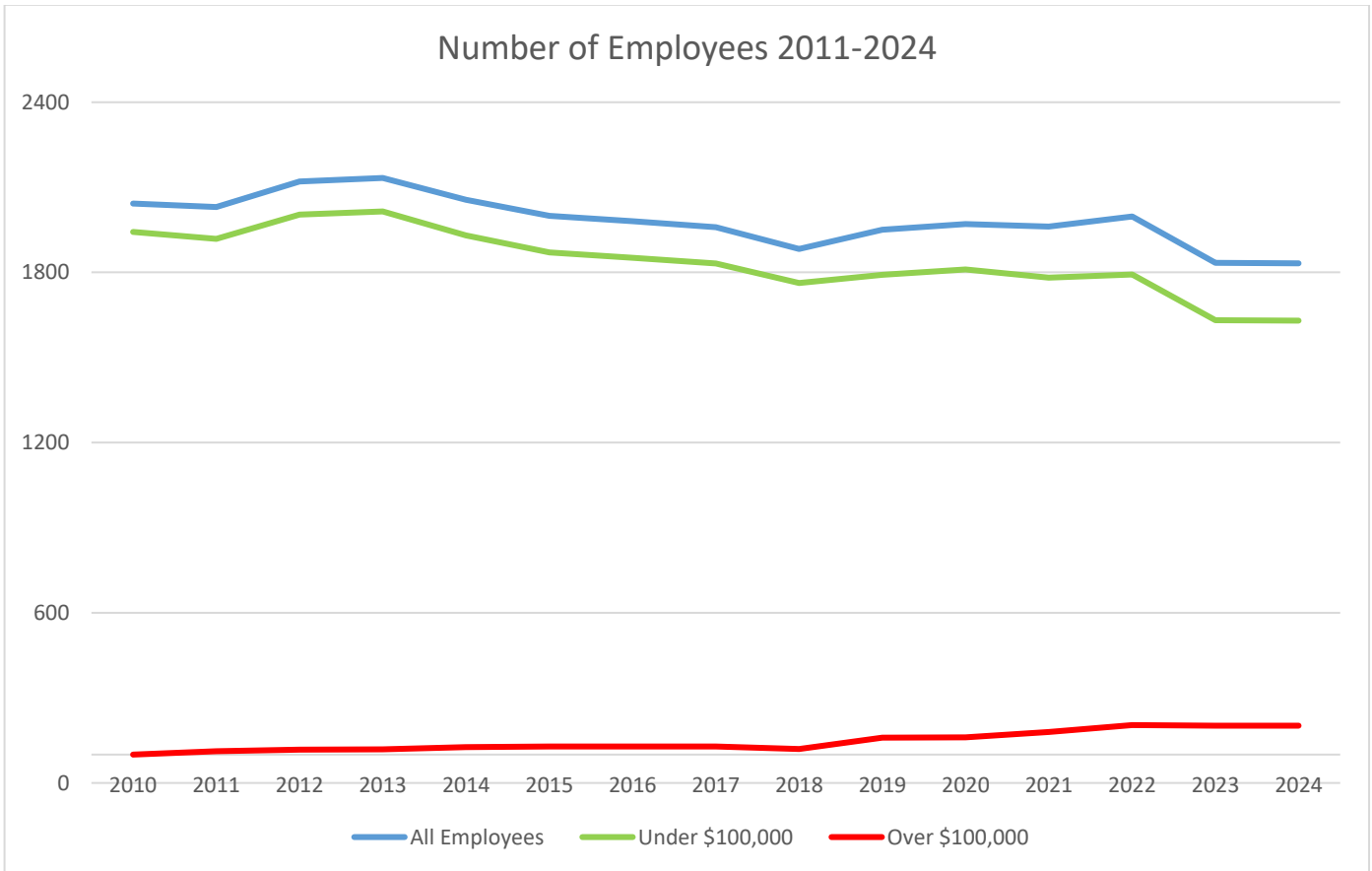
Summary

- Over the past 14 years, the number of lower-paid full-time staff (earning less than \$100,000) has declined in 9 of those years:
  - 2023 had the largest drop of 161 employees, followed by
  - 2013 that had a drop of 85 employees and then by
  - 2018 that had a drop of 68 staff
- In contrast, higher-paid full-time staff (earning over \$100,000) saw declines in only three years
- This shift suggests a growing disparity in staffing levels, where there are fewer and fewer lower-paid employees who are supporting an increasing number of higher-compensated staff.

Year	Employee Count	Net Gain/Loss	Over 100k	Under 100k
2010	2043			
2011	2030	-13	+12	-25
2012	2121	+91	+5	+86
2013	2133	+12	+1	+11
2014	2056	-77	+8	-85
2015	1999	-57	+2	-59
2016	1981	-18	+1	-19
2017	1959	-22	-1	-21

## Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report

2018	1883	-76	-8	-68
2019	1951	+68	+40	+28
2020	1971	+20	+1	+19
2021	1962	-9	+19	-28
2022	1997	+35	+24	+11
2023	1834	-163	-2	-161
2024	1832	-2	0	-2





Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report

Changes in the Number of Administrators vs Support Staff 2011-2024



## Sources

### Salary Reports

<https://dspace.nku.edu/collections/a6b8aacd-1351-41e3-b151-ce8229f27ff5>

### IR reports

<https://inside.nku.edu/ir/Reports.html>

[https://inside.nku.edu/content/dam/IR/docs/FacultyAndStaff/Hdcnt\\_FT\\_PT\\_2025.pdf](https://inside.nku.edu/content/dam/IR/docs/FacultyAndStaff/Hdcnt_FT_PT_2025.pdf)

### IR Staff Retention Dashboard

<https://app.powerbi.com/groups/me/apps/258ec764-0769-431e-86fd-8e635e779bfb/reports/4a07e3b5-fe5e-48a5-a951-816d543b8844/ReportSection?ctid=ac321855-1f55-4d0b-b2fa-531085ca3022&experience=power-bi>

### Bureau of Labor Statistics:

<https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/inflation/current-inflation-rates/>

[https://www.bls.gov/regions/midwest/news-release/occupationalemploymentandwages\\_cincinnati.htm](https://www.bls.gov/regions/midwest/news-release/occupationalemploymentandwages_cincinnati.htm)

### CUPA HR Retention Survey

<https://www.cupahr.org/surveys/research-briefs/higher-ed-employee-retention-survey-findings-september-2023/>

### Cost of Living

<https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/21>

### Poverty Guidelines

<https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>

### Forbes articles:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/billconerly/2018/08/12/companies-need-to-know-the-dollar-cost-of-employee-turnover/#79e9e883d590>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnhall/2019/05/09/the-cost-of-turnover-can-kill-your-business-and-make-things-less-fun/?sh=61dd969c7943>

## APPENDIX 1

### Recommendations to Previous Administration in 2021-2022

**Note:** We have attached the previous report by the Advocacy subcommittee (previously known as the Benefits committee) to previous Board of Regents and Administration to highlight the longevity of some of the issues faced and as a continuation of the work of this group. This is meant to be for reference and is not part of our current call to action.

Immediate recommendations:

- NKU Staff Congress urges University leadership to prioritize investing in **existing** staff by allocating the funds needed to complete the implementation of the Human Resources salary market adjustment by the start of fiscal year 2022/23; directly supporting NKU's Success By Design strategic framework.
  - Existing positions/salaries must be updated to **at least** match new hires in the same position, doing the same job
  - All positions must be upgraded so that they **do not make less** than they did in the past compared to the cost of living
  - The ultimate goal shall be to bring everyone to market level
  - Director level administrators and above shall be excluded from this initiative
  - Evaluate positions that have been combined to determine if responsibilities need to be reduced or additional pay offered

Long-term process improvements:

- We need NKU leadership's commitment to making staff compensation an ongoing priority for the university:
  - We request commitment in writing that market adjustments will be a priority in every budget and will occur annually
  - We request commitment in writing that annual increases will at minimum cover cost of living increases:
    - This was the case prior to 2009 and needs to resume going forward
    - It is critical to ensure our staff do not make less every year
  - Going forward, the number of staff must increase as the number of students and faculty that need services and support increases
- Create a culture that provides professional growth and creativity. Develop programs to incentivize staff to stay and go beyond:
  1. Create a career path/career ladder program to allow professional growth for staff
  2. Reward outstanding performance – commit to having merit increase on an annual basis
  3. Address reclassification process issues
    - Reclassification decisions should primarily be made by employee departments – they are the subject matter experts who know the specifics of the industry and job

## Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report

requirements. They should determine who works above their expected level and deserves to move up

- If needed, final review and decision should be made by a committee; a single HR staff member should not determine who can or cannot be reclassified.
- Conduct an audit of past reclassifications across departments and determine improvements that ensure university-wide equality and process consistency going forward
- Flexible work schedule – currently, not available to all employees; this needs to be a permanent benefit, and NKU needs to find a way to allow more employees to use it
- Create a culture that values education:
  - Offer competitive pay for positions that require college education and/or advanced education
  - Enhance tuition waiver for dependents to 100% coverage to match regional competition
- Analyze and restructure parking fees to ensure equity across salary levels
- If not completed yet, perform turnover cost analysis – the university needs to know the cost of replacing a person and apply that in staffing decisions

## Background Information

Employee retention has been a challenge for NKU for years. Unfortunately, the issue has deteriorated in the last several years. NKU's turnover rate (of non-exempt staff) has increased to 17% this year (Figure 1). High staff turnover has a direct negative impact on student services and faculty support. Staff are essential to success.

Addressing staff retention now is more important than ever. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the labor pool is depleted. It now takes longer to fill some positions, often with less experienced staff. For example, there are positions in IT that have not been filled for several years. Many NKU IT positions require qualifications that job seekers expect double the salary NKU offers.

Staff Congress appreciates that NKU administration is recognizing that the University is facing a high employee turnover rate and taking steps to address hiring issues across campus. However, the root cause for the high turnover is poor staff retention. Yet instead of first addressing retention issues that have been accruing for the past ten+ years, NKU raised pay levels for new hires, leaving current employees feeling frustrated and unappreciated. If instead of focusing on hiring new staff, NKU could focus on retaining experienced staff, hiring challenges would subside, as there would not be so many vacancies to fill.

The initial phase of the salary market adjustment started this fiscal year with the creation and implementation of a new NKU Staff Pay Grades and Ranges.<sup>1</sup> The initial implementation used the new pay ranges only for new hires and those employees who were currently below their new minimum salary rate. It exacerbated the salary compression caused by no or low salary increases (5/10 years with no increase) since the last market adjustment in 2010. Basically, it gave only new or recently hired employees higher salaries and further eroded longer term employee morale. This is now a crisis, and adjusting compensation for existing employees cannot wait.

Initial efforts of the compensation plan were implemented without any input or feedback from the stakeholders. Human Resources presented information to Staff Congress on the first phase just prior to its implementation. Alternative options were not presented to Staff Congress. Staff Congress did not have an opportunity to give their input prior to the implementation of this process nor did they get to review, discuss, or recommend alternative implementation strategies.

Staff Congress advocates for staff, provides essential feedback, and collaborates with University management on all important efforts. We need to be part of this discussion without delay.

To begin this collaboration, the Staff Advocacy Committee has analyzed public salary information and gathered feedback from staff across campus on top reasons for the high turnover. The committee has recommendations on improving retention, compensation, advancement, and more (see Recommendations) to address the following reasons causing a high turnover:

- **Long term salary compression** is a strong contributing factor to increasing staff turnover at NKU.

## Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report

- NKU raises have not kept up with inflation since 2008. (Figure 2). Seven out of the last 13 years had zero compensation or market adjustments. Three out of six years we received adjustments, they were lower than the inflation rate. As a result, NKU salaries have been declining compared to inflation and cost of living.
- According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, over the last 12 months, the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) rose 6.2 percent for the 12 months ending October 2021, the largest 12-month increase since the period ending November 1990.<sup>2</sup> (Figure 3)
- As a result, if a staff member has remained in the same position and only received annual market adjustments, in 2021, they now make 13.6% less than they did in 2008 (Figure 4) compared to inflation and the cost of living.
- Increasing pay for new hires has led to increased pay inequity where new hires get paid more to do the same work as experienced employees who have many years of experience. In some cases, current employees even have to train new hires who get paid more.
- NKU salaries are not competitive with the local job market. The fact that the University had to increase pay for new hires to be able to fill open vacancies demonstrates the point and proves that the University recognizes this issue. (Figure 5)
- Some NKU positions require a Master's degree, but pay as little as \$30,000 a year. This also sets the precedent that education is not valued at this place of employment, and unarguably, this is not the culture to project for an education institution.
- Many staff cannot make ends meet. According to the survey conducted in 2020, almost 35% of employees surveyed have a second job, and some have a 3rd!
- University raises and other compensation processes have only increased the gap between new hires and tenure employees doing the same job:
  - Raises based on percentages increase the inequity gap as new employees making more receive a larger increase amount
  - Bonuses are based on a percentage, so new hires will receive a larger amount than tenure staff
  - New employees were not required to take a furlough in 2020 while tenure employees were
- Based on the analysis of the public salary data<sup>3</sup>, on average, those employees making over \$100,000 have received a higher percentage increase than those making below \$100,000 (Figure 6) for several years
  - Out of last 10 years, 6 years resulted in a higher percentage of raise (or a lesser loss) for administrators making over \$100,000. Please note that this data does not refer to the raise amounts – these are raise percentages

## Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report

- This is a result of the number of administrators rising while the number of supporting staff has dropped
- Impact of vacancies on **employee burnout**
  - NKU staff are doing more with less and have been for some time. NKU staff population has decreased over the last several years while the number of faculty and administrators keeps rising.
  - According to the data published by Institutional Research<sup>4</sup>, the number of full-time staff has dropped by 13% since 2009 while the number of faculty increased by 7% (Figure 7).
  - According to the data presentation by the CFO last year during pension sessions, the numbers look even worse. In 2020, compared to 2015:
    - Staff dropped by 14%
    - Administrators increased by 6.6%
    - Faculty increased by 7.6%
  - Since 2012, NKU hiring of upper level positions making over \$100,000 has been consistently higher than hiring employees making below \$100,000. This demonstrates that NKU hires more and more administrators while support staff keeps decreasing. (Figure 8)
    - Staffing vacancies increase the workload on remaining employees, leading to burnout, institutional and positional resentment, and therefore higher levels of resignations.
    - Staff searches, in many cases conducted more than once before a position is filled add to the workload of remaining employees
    - Training new hires also falls on existing employees. It takes new employees time to learn the job, so the workload falls on tenure employees taking on more than their fair share
    - In some cases, when employees leave, their responsibilities get distributed among remaining employees “on a temporary basis”, but then it becomes a permanent change where employees do responsibilities of two or more positions.
- The absence of career growth opportunities
  - In addition to the long-term salary compression, there are minimal advancement opportunities across campus. Incentives to go above and beyond one’s regular job duties are few or not enough.

## Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report

- There is no career path for employees to move up with years of experience as they gain more expertise and become more knowledgeable in their job. Years of service, expertise, institutional knowledge, or additional education are not valued and not rewarded. When employees go above and beyond their required level, there is no career path – no prospects.
- Outstanding performance is also not appreciated and not rewarded. The perception across campus is that job evaluations have no value and are not taken seriously. If you do your job well or even go above and beyond of what is expected, all you get is a pat on the back. Even worse, sometimes, being a productive, efficient, and good worker backfires – you get additional responsibilities with no additional pay.
  - Other than applying for another job on campus, reclassification is the only other way to move up. However, that it an extremely difficult process that has many roadblocks and takes a long time to achieve if successful. We have heard from several areas on campus, and the feedback has been consistent across the board – the HR department is perceived as a roadblock to professional advancement, always saying ‘no’ to advancement and reclassification requests. If true, HR needs to be become a partner dedicated to the professional growth of NKU staff.
  - With compensation and pay inequity issues escalating across campus over the last ten years, advancement processes have not been consistent. According to the analysis of the public salary information posted in library archives<sup>3</sup>, it seems easier to get reclassified in some departments than others.
    - For example, in one department, 57% of all positions are director level.
    - Another example (data available upon request): in 2018, when the University had to cut positions across campus, and several staff lost their jobs, some staff in other areas got re-classified and received a substantial pay increase that was much higher than the average NKU market adjustment that year.
- NKU’s tuition waiver for dependents is not competitive compared to neighboring higher education institutions.
  - The following local universities offer a more competitive tuition coverage for dependents:
    - University of Cincinnati – 100% tuition coverage
    - Thomas More – 100% tuition coverage
    - Xavier – 90% tuition coverage
  - While paid family leave is an attractive benefit for retaining younger workforce, full tuition coverage for dependents would be a great retention tool for tenure employees with older dependents
  - These employees most likely to have more experience and may look to go elsewhere for these benefits
  - If necessary, this could be a benefit earned with an X number of service years



## Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report

- A more competitive tuition waiver policy would ensure NKU retains seasoned employees. In addition, this will be an incentive for new employees, fostering a diverse workforce and age-friendly campus.
- Benefit-premiums and other costs keep rising while salaries have dropped by almost 14% (Figure 9)
  - Medical premiums have increased over the last 10+ years by 170% while benefits have shrunk
    - Ex. In 2015, employer HSA contributions decreased.
    - Ex. For 2022, premiums remain the same, but co-insurance cost for the high deductible plan will increase from 10% to 15%, which could result in a substantial jump for people using this plan
  - Dental costs have also increased by 86% since 2009
  - Parking fees have gone up by 36% since 2009
    - Low level employees pay same amount as higher paying positions
    - Multi-tier parking is needed so that employees can have options relative to pay scales

All of these reasons are important enough to re-evaluate University's employee retention efforts, but perhaps the most convincing reason to address the turnover problem is the cost associated with replacing positions. Numerous studies have been conducted and offer an estimate on employee replacement costs. According to an August 2018 Forbes article titled "Companies Need To Know The Dollar Cost Of Employee Turnover", it costs around 50% of an employee's salary to replace an entry level position and 125% for a mid-level position.<sup>5</sup> Forbes also discusses the importance of employee retention and valuing years of service: "one in three hires will leave a company within two years".<sup>6</sup>

Focusing on and incentivizing longer term employees to remain with the University is a cost saving and sound business decision.

- Filling vacancies is an expensive and time consuming process, especially in the difficult COVID hiring times
- In most cases, new hires start at a higher rate. If the University would give the existing employee a raise, it would be much cheaper than hiring their replacement
  - Ex. an IT person left in 2019. They had many years of experience and were very good at what they did. Their replacement was hired at 7.6% higher starting salary. It is taking this person a long time to learn the job. If NKU gave the tenure employee a 5% raise, it would have been cheaper to keep the tenure employee. These calculations do not include the cost of the hiring process and the transition time for learning the job. Plus, the tenure employee would have felt valued and appreciated, which in turn would encourage them to do their best and be creative.
  - New hires typically do not have the same level of experience as tenure NKU employees. Staff employees with longer tenure at NKU possess valuable institutional knowledge and expertise. It takes new hires time to learn the job and NKU culture.

## Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report

Staff Congress urges University leadership to prioritize investing in current staff by allocating the funds needed to complete the implementation of the Human Resources salary market adjustment by the start of fiscal year 2022/23.

NKU's Success By Design strategic framework focuses on student success. The availability of experienced and knowledgeable staff support for faculty and students is crucial to student success. Investing in staff retention will enhance NKU's commitment to Success by Design and the goals of equity and inclusion.

### **Disclaimer**

The data analysis presented below has been compiled based on the public salary data available on the KY transparency web site, NKU public website for IR reporting, and NKU library archives.

The committee bases its recommendations on the information that has been made available to the committee by the University administration.

Data sources used in this recommendation are available upon request.

In some cases, year 2020 and 2022 require special consideration in the data analysis as they were off years (COVID year + 5X5 first year), and data for those years may be skewed.

## Staff Congress Advocacy Committee Report