

Daily Herald

Big Picture . Local Focus

Super pay for superintendents

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Published: 11/4/2007 5:28 AM

Running a public school system pays well.

Compensation for suburban school chiefs in the 2005-06 school year ranged from \$121,565 to \$394,995.

Among the 94 suburban districts surveyed by the Daily Herald, the average superintendent pay package was \$198,732.

Besides base salary, the pay packages included some combination of bonuses, stipends, annuities, auto allowance, reimbursement for unused sick and vacation days, and payments to post-retirement health and pension plans.

And that doesn't include what the districts pay for their leaders' health, dental and life insurance coverage.

How much a superintendent makes depends on a variety of factors, from experience, to the size of the district, to the elected officials who make up school boards.

When announcing a new hire or a contract extension, boards often point to prevailing market conditions. It takes top dollar to get the best people, they argue.

A competitive market requires a competitive salary, they say, and children's futures are the

SCHOOL FINANCE 101

Chapter 7

[Super pay for superintendents](#)

Here are the 2005-06 pay packages for area school superintendents, listing salary; bonuses (also includes all annuities, stipends, payments for unused sick and vacation days, and car allowance); pension costs (includes all payments by district to health pension and retirement pension plans); total pay package (does not include health, dental, life or disability insurance costs); years as superintendent in district; total years as a superintendent; ADA (district's average daily attendance); and number of schools in district. Note: * means district did not respond to survey; pay figure obtained from state report.

[View report](#)

Also available is a downloadable Excel file with the same information

[\[XLS document\]](#)

Chapter 6

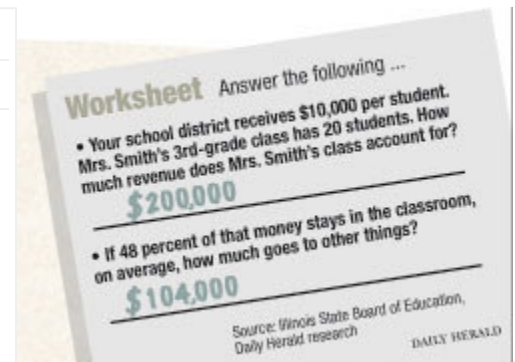
[Administrator pay vs. teacher pay](#)

[The numbers: Administrator vs. teacher pay](#)

Here is the average pay for teachers and administrators in area school districts as reported on the 1998 and 2006 school report cards, with the amount of change over the 8-year period. [View report](#)

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leverage.

Our analysis finds, however, job experience isn't the biggest factor in determining compensation. Neither is size of the district.

The biggest factor in determining the big-ticket salaries that drive up the average? Retirement.

Many superintendents have included in their contracts clauses that bump their salaries by as much as 20 percent in each of the final three years before retirement.

Though the state legislature changed the pension law that allowed for those hikes, contracts in place at the time were grandfathered in. And those folks still are working their way through the system.

The remainder pick from a panoply of perks to compensate for the change.

Retirement boost

Gary Catalani walked away from his job in the public sector at the top of the heap. In 2005-06, a year before he retired from Wheaton Warrenville Unit District 200, his pay package was \$394,995.

That included his \$306,000 salary, a \$12,000 annuity, \$26,485 for unused vacation days, an auto allowance and payments into the state's pension system on his behalf.

Chapter 5

[Non-class costs weigh heavy on schools](#)

[The numbers: Spending outside the classroom](#)

Here are the total amounts of revenue area school districts collected in the 2005-06 school year and the percentages of revenue spent on administration, support services and other costs. [View report](#)

Also available is a downloadable, 10-year look at area school districts and their total revenues, with expenditures on instruction, administration, support services and other costs each year, and the 10-year totals for each category.

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Chapter 4

[1 of every 2 education dollars stays in classroom](#)

[65-percent solution gains traction](#)

[The numbers: Spending in the classroom](#)

Here are the total amounts of revenue area school districts collected in the 1996-97 and 2005-06 school years; instruction expenditures each year; and the percentage of revenue spent on instruction. [View report](#)

Also available is a downloadable, 10-year look at area school districts and their total revenues, instruction expenditures, and the percent of revenue spent on instruction.

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Chapter 3

[Suburban taxpayers' heavy share](#)

[The numbers: A decade of local funding](#)

Here are the total amounts of local revenue area school districts collected in the 1996-97 school year, the average daily attendance that year, and the local revenue on a per pupil basis; then the same data for the 2005-06 school year; and finally, the total amount of local revenue received over the 10-year period. [View report](#)

Also available is a downloadable look at the amount of local revenue area school districts collected in each of the school years from 1996-97 through 2005-06. With each year's local revenue total is that year's average daily attendance (ADA) and the local revenue shown on a per pupil basis (pp). At the end of each row is the total amount of local funding

On top of the \$394,995 came more taxpayer-borne costs -- for health, dental, life and disability insurance.

Just two years earlier, his annual compensation was \$232,511, according to data supplied to the Teachers Retirement System. The \$150,000-plus jump was part of the preretirement pay padding aimed at boosting pension payments.

The day he left his job, Catalani, then 56, was eligible to collect a pension that would pay \$214,248 in the first year, and increase at least 3 percent each year until the day he dies.

Close on his heels was Mary Curley, whose \$334,708 package in Hinsdale Elementary District 181 included a \$249,600 base salary, \$21,761 annuity, \$10,000 bonus, \$9,600 in unused vacation pay, auto allowance and payments to the state's pension system.

When she retired at 55, she began collecting a pension that started at

\$185,187. That's more than she made in a year three years before she retired, when her compensation was \$178,261.

The superintendent who perhaps has drawn the most fire recently, though, is Elgin Area School District U-46 Superintendent Connie Neale, who in January received a controversial \$60,000 pay hike and bonus.

In 2005-06, Neale had the third-highest pay package in the region at \$323,288, which included a \$44,688 annuity and \$21,000 additional payment to the retirement system.

January's increase pushed Neale's compensation package for 2006-07 past \$410,000.

Citing health issues, Neale last month submitted her resignation, which will take effect in February.

Extra padding

each district received over the 10-year period, and how much the revenue, attendance and per pupil revenue changed over those 10 school years.

[\[XLS document\]](#)

Chapter 2

[Unequal state equalizer](#)

[Big difference: funding varies between districts](#)

[School finance by the numbers](#)

[The numbers: Revenue and attendance](#)

Here are the total amounts of state revenue area school districts collected in the 1996-97 school year, the average daily attendance (ADA), and the state revenue on a per pupil (pp) basis; then the same data for 2005-06; and finally, the total amount of state revenue received over the 10-year period. [View report](#)

Also available is a downloadable look at year-by-year state revenue for area school districts, also with average daily attendance (ADA) and per pupil (figures), and more.

[\[XLS document\]](#)

Chapter 1

[Schools' revenue growth outpaces inflation](#)

[The numbers: Total revenue amounts](#)

Here are the total revenue amounts area school districts collected in the 1996-97 school year, the 2005-06 school year, how much that amount changed over the 10-year period, and the total amount of money received over the 10-year period. [View report](#)

Also available is a complete, downloadable look at year-by-year total revenue for area school districts. - [\[XLS document\]](#)

Superintendents draw extra compensation from a wide range of sources.

Two out of three area superintendents received some kind of vehicle allowance in 2005-06, with Aurora West District 129 and Arlington Heights District 25, both elementary districts, forking out \$12,000 for their top administrator.

At least 17 superintendents received a bonus. Maine Township High School District 207 led the way with a reported \$20,000 bonus.

Forty districts reported compensating their leader for unused vacation days, with Hawthorne Elementary 73 in Lake County listing the highest figure at \$28,857.

Only three districts reported paying the boss for unused sick days. Glendale Heights Elementary 16 furnished its chief \$23,510 in this category. Superintendent James White is on the brink of retirement and cashing in sick days accumulated over many years. The payments will help boost his pension.

Those that he and others don't turn in for cash can be credited for years of service with the Teachers Retirement System.

Generally, payments to postretirement health and pension plans were the most costly items after salary.

Both the Teacher Health Insurance System and the Teacher Retirement System require districts to make employer contributions for each employee, based on a percentage of compensation. Employee members also must pay a percentage.

Two-thirds of area districts also chose to cover their superintendent's contribution to the health fund -- a small expense, as the most costly submission reported was \$3,175.51 by Lake Villa District 41.

A total of 76 districts reported covering some or all of the superintendent's contribution to the pension fund. The largest payment reported by a district paying its superintendent's pension contribution for him was \$35,741.34 by District 200.

Payments made on the superintendent's behalf to at least one post-retirement fund were reported by 85 of the 94 area districts, with U-46 reporting the largest total, \$43,837.62, paid to the health and pension funds.

At least one-third of area districts went beyond pension funds, and contributed to an annuity on their super's behalf, with the largest payment being \$44,688 in U-46.

Three-tiered system

Let's take a look at the numbers another way.

There are three types of school systems: elementary, high school and unit districts.

We already know Catalani topped the charts for the unit districts, but did he have the most experience at the job among his peers?

No, that was Joel Morris in Elmhurst Unit District 205, who spent 34 years as a superintendent and was paid \$179,110 in his seventh year in the district. He oversaw 13 schools, an average enrollment of 7,571 and was paid the equivalent of \$24 per student.

The average pay package for a unit district leader was \$217,786.

What about the high school districts?

Steve Humphrey in the two-school DuPage District 88 led the way among his peers with a package totaling \$249,864. His 15 years as a superintendent, six of them with District 88, translate into \$62 per student.

But he's not the most experienced high school superintendent. That title goes to Lee Reick, the top administrator in West Chicago's Community High School District 94, whose 29 years convert into a far more conservative deal at \$185,524.

It is, however, a one-school district, so when you take into account the daily attendance of 2,132, Reick was paid \$87 per student.

High school district leaders came in with an average pay package of \$210,000.

The retiring Curley far surpassed her fellow elementary school administrators on the pay scale in 2005-06 at \$334,708, but fell right in the middle of the pack with experience, eight years.

The veteran of the group among elementary school superintendents, Robert McKanna in Palatine Township Elementary District 15, who has announced his retirement in June 2008, had a total package of \$227,746 in 2005-06.

Among the three groups, elementary district superintendents have the widest variation in per-pupil salary.

The leader of Rondout Elementary District 72 made \$132,945, one of the lowest salaries among the districts surveyed. But the district has only one school and 139 students. That pay is equivalent to \$956 per child, the highest ratio among any school chief.

The average pay package for an elementary district leader was \$188,738.

Next week: Elementary/high school districts versus unit districts.