

CBS 42 Investigates: Central Texas superintendents getting big bucks

Local School District Transparency Makes Creating News with Superintendents Salaries More Difficult" by Joe Smith - Good Morning - February 27, 2008

By Joe Smith
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Almost annually some reporters collect a few of the better paid superintendent salaries in their area and make these salaries and contracts the headlines, which are then posted on their websites and followed with stories containing words and phrases that question and insinuate that something is illegal, immoral or at least unethical connected with the local superintendents' salaries. Let me go ahead and say that I read many articles day after day that do great jobs of educating the public; I admire and appreciate the work reporters do.

Starting an [article](#) with words such as "you might be surprised to see what your superintendent's salary is" indicates the reporter hopes you are surprised, but the reporter is likely the only one surprised. Personally, I am offended at these attacks on these people who literally hold our future in their hands. But it goes with the turf and dealing with this is one of the reasons superintendents need to be paid well.

Some characterized a local tv expose as a "scathing report aired across the hill country over the weekend." Such reporting usually leads to a few other news organizations jumping on the bandwagon with stories on the same topic as if they were exposing undisclosed information.

If we must do articles about the local superintendents salaries, let's put them in context. If you are going to talk about our superintendents' salaries, put them in context with the salaries of CEO's of similar-sized corporations. Don't compare them to teachers who have an entirely different job description. Consider the facts below:

- Superintendents' salaries are negotiated in public meetings by the superintendents and school boards. The initial contract has a 21 day waiting period to give time for the public to investigate and ask questions and make comments. The meetings are posted.
- The final superintendent contracts are reviewed by the school's attorneys and then voted on in open meetings posted at least 72 hours in advance of the meetings.
- Most superintendents contracts are now available on the web or handed out with the AEIS reports. Citizens don't even have to request that information.
- The superintendent contracts are available at the school district's offices, along with the those of all certified employees, as public documents.

Superintendents are able to negotiate their salaries. It is currently a very competitive market. The superintendent leads the largest operation in most towns in Texas. He oversees the most employees, is the director of the largest fleet of trucks, heads the largest food service organization in the district and is responsible for the educational achievement of all students in the district. The school boards

that are elected by the people of the district negotiate the salary on the basis of the responsibility, training and what the district can afford – they recognize the need to pay a competitive salary in order to attract the best candidate. I know of school districts that have difficulty getting applicants because the salaries are too low.

Looking at your community and comparing the superintendent salary with CEO compensation for local governments and businesses located in each district's community would make a better story. I don't have the data for my Texas community, but I do suggest that a reporter wanting to do a story on superintendent salaries should be given the chart below as a model for gathering data that I would be very interested in reading and it may even contain an element of surprise.

Pulling together a group of superintendent contracts that are posted on the web, that were approved in a public meeting announced and posted in a public place 72 hours before the meeting and decided by a vote of elected representatives, recorded in minutes and made available to the public...is only a surprise to those not paying attention.

Real research, similar to this chart I found in an article titled "The Leader's Edge" from American Association of School Administrators, puts the superintendents salaries in context. If you are going to talk about superintendents' contracts, this is the way it should be done, not with a "you may be surprised to know" line.

A superintendent leading the local institution is responsible for educating the children of Texas is a calling of high importance and a very complex job and deserves a commensurate salary as negotiated by each local school board elected by the people in an open market.

I do not believe the data available supports the conclusion that superintendents are over paid. I am available to talk to any reporter that wants to know how I feel about this subject. My phone is 936-622-3411. My email is joe@texasisd.com – js webmaster@texasisd.com