



Motive

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By: Audrey Spalding

"You don't just file that sort of request without expecting to find something," said one Missouri superintendent when I called to ask for a copy of his employment contract.

A few superintendents have asked about [Rex Sinquefield](#)'s involvement (directly, next to none), or how closely these requests are tied to the Show-Me Institute's apparent [support of charter schools](#) (we have sent several requests to charter schools as well). Many simply want to know why I am filing a Sunshine Law request for each and every Missouri superintendent's contract. I do not need to justify my request, nor does anyone else asking for public information. But the question itself is fair.

The point of these requests is not, as I see it, to publish each superintendent's name and annual pay and then highlight every six-figure salary as excessive. Yes, perhaps it is fair to scrutinize a contract that pays \$8,000 or so to a superintendent for his dependents' health care, regardless of whether he has any. From here, that looks like a salary bonus for not having children.

But, in general, the contract between a superintendent and a school district can tell us a lot about what a school district values, and where it is struggling.

The Anatomy of a Superintendent's Contract

Nearly every contract has been different. But because some school districts use form contracts, and because most school districts have similar expectations of superintendents, a lot is the same.

Most contracts include:

1. Responsibilities □ what the superintendent is expected to do.
2. Certification □ the superintendent is required to keep unexpired certificates and licenses to serve as superintendent in a Missouri public school.
3. Professional Development □ at the cost of the school district, the superintendent can attend seminars, courses, etc., held by the National School Boards Association and other similar organizations.
4. Compensation □ salary, and how raises will be determined.
5. Benefits □ varies widely by district. Has included:
 - a. Annuities, basically savings accounts (sometimes as high as \$40,000 per year).
 - b. Life insurance, or health insurance on top of what the district provides for its other employees.
 - c. Health insurance and medical care for a superintendent's spouse and/or children.

- d. Vacation days.
 - e. Stipends that the superintendent can use to donate to community organizations.
6. Expense Reimbursement □ varies widely by district. Has included:
- a. A car allowance, around \$6,000-\$7,000 per year; some school districts provide an actual car, insurance paid.
 - b. A cellphone.
 - c. Costs of moving to the school district.
 - d. Membership dues to organizations such as the Rotary Club.
7. Evaluation.
8. Contract extension, or not □ includes what happens if the superintendent retires, dies, is disabled, or is fired.

Annual salary is, at best, a number that tells a very incomplete story. For example, who is paid more: a superintendent who earns \$100,000, or one who earns \$75,000, along with \$50,000 in annuity, car, and family health benefits? The second certainly costs a school district more.

What is often the most telling is what makes a contract different □ bonuses, different retirement packages, or the occasional [odddity](#) . So far, here's what I see when I look at the provisions school districts and superintendents add to the basic form of a contract:

It's often hard to get a superintendent to stick around.

Some school districts use contracts to encourage superintendents to stay: One district, upon hiring a superintendent, puts several thousand dollars into a savings account. The money, plus interest, is given to the superintendent after he has been with the district for five years.

Some superintendents think they don't need any more money.

Occasionally, superintendents themselves tell school districts that they're earning too much. Several Missouri superintendents have refused raises from their districts' school boards.

Fair is not fair everywhere.

Some school districts tie superintendent salary increases to the percentage increase awarded teachers that year. Others give raises based on how school board members rated the superintendent's performance on a numerical scale. Many contracts list salary increases two or three years into the future, regardless of superintendent performance.

If you have any questions about superintendent contract specifics, or other comments, please [email me](#).

About the Author



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Mission Statement

Advancing liberty with responsibility by promoting market solutions for Missouri public policy.

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