



# 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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