



# From Frugal to Flush: The Benefit Boost

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*By: Cynthia Juedemann*

This morning, I randomly selected a stack of superintendent contracts from Audrey's files, in addition to a sampling she had already given to me. She's talked about some specific cases and oddities (like the [\\$50,000 bond](#) St. Louis requires its superintendents to post) and she's laid out the [basic format of superintendent contracts](#) .

Some contracts are sparing with benefits, others chock full of them. But how big is the benefit boost?

Well, it can be very significant.

Take [Pattonville R-3 School District](#) . The superintendent's salary for the 2007–2008 school year was \$170,000. Pattonville is a district with more than 5,000 students. In comparison to other Missouri school districts, the benefit package is generous. A few of the bigger benefits are:

- A \$600-per-month automobile allowance (plus reimbursement in the amount of 48.5 cents for each mile traveled outside Pattonville)
- \$5,000 for an annuity (a tax-sheltered savings account)

- A \$300,000 term life insurance policy
- \$6,207 per year for medical, hospitalization, and dental insurance
- \$700 per month for dependent health insurance
- 25 vacation days per year
- A district cellphone

Minus the life insurance, vacation time and cellphone, the benefits listed above come to \$26,807. That's more than 15 percent of the \$170,000 salary.

For the 2008–2009 school year, the [Springfield R-12 School District](#) superintendent got a \$44,000 annuity on top of his salary. In a faxed salary breakdown the district sent us in May, the superintendent's total salary was listed at \$156,489, and his total benefits at \$80,508.09 — more than 50 percent of his salary.

So, benefits can be a big deal. Or they can be fairly small.

The [Ava R-1 School District](#) contract explicitly provides for 15 days vacation per year, but is silent on other benefits — except to say that the superintendent "will be entitled to any other additional benefits as approved by the Board."

Surprisingly, the St. Louis superintendent has a contract that seems to fall squarely in between Ava's sparseness and the flushness of Springfield and Pattonville. And she leads the largest school district in Missouri. While she makes \$210,000 in salary per year, according to the contract that the district sent, no annuity is listed, she does not receive benefits for her dependents, and she receives the same medical, dental, vision, and disability insurance as other administrative employees in St. Louis. But she does get the largest car allowance we've seen: \$900 per month.

While larger school superintendents tend to make more than smaller ones, student enrollment doesn't explain all of the differences in pay. We have a hunch that local wealth plays a part.

My intent with this post is not to label school districts as angels or demons, but to comment on the broad array of benefits in Missouri superintendent contracts. And to point out that they can make a big difference. Suffice it to say that pay is not as simple as salary.

*For those of you who have been following my posts about county clerks and school district voter turnout, I will get back to that. But while I'm finishing up the data entry, I thought I'd switch tacks and provide a second perspective on superintendent contracts.*

As always, I'm interested in what you have to say or add to what I've written here. Feel free to leave a comment below, or [email me](#).

## About the Author



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