



A \$200,000 Retirement Benefit and a \$250,000 Salary? Deal!

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Ah retirement . . . that glorious time at 57 years of age when you can begin drawing roughly \$200,000 annually for the rest of your life while simultaneously continuing to work and earn an additional \$250,000.

What, that's not the norm? Well, it is exactly what the "retiring" Pattonville superintendent will be doing soon.

The [Kansas City Business Journal](#) is reporting that the longtime superintendent will be retiring from Pattonville this year and taking up the superintendent position in the Shawnee Mission School District in Kansas. This move will allow him to retire from the pension system in Missouri and begin drawing his guaranteed benefit while also earning a salary in his new district, because the two school districts are in different pension systems.

According to the [St. Louis Business Journal](#) , the Pattonville superintendent earned \$267,232 in 2016–17. In Missouri's Public School Retirement System, members can earn 75% of their final average salary (defined as their three highest consecutive years). This would easily put his annual retirement benefit over \$200,000, because the listed salary does not include other benefits, such as medical, which are also included in the final average salary.

There are three important things to take away from this.

First, we have to ask if it is wise to have a system that [pushes effective leaders](#) out at a relatively early age. This superintendent, who might likely work for another decade or more in Kansas, will begin drawing his retirement immediately and will draw it for the rest of his life. Indeed, there is a tremendous incentive for individuals to retire at this point in their career.

This leads us to our second point, [pushing out effective educators](#) may not be an effective strategy if we want to improve the quality of education. This superintendent will take his services elsewhere, but many terrific teachers, principals, and superintendents are pushed out of education all together.

Finally, when people ask why the pension system is underfunded, this should be one of the prime examples you give them. The problem is that individuals like this superintendent often do not contribute enough to the system to cover their pension benefits. He is a big time pension winner, who will be receiving much more in benefits than he contributed to the system.

Don't get me wrong: I applaud the superintendent's decision. It's a smart one, and we should all be so lucky. The problem is that we *can't* all be so lucky. Lavish benefits like this must be paid for by someone. As [I have shown before](#), they are paid by teachers who leave money in the system, by [low-paid teachers in other districts](#), and ultimately by taxpayers.

Superintendents and others like Pattonville's are not simply getting what they put into the system; they are getting much more. Let me ask you which system seems fair: this one, or a system in which retirees receive benefits that are in line with their contributions? If you ask me, the answer seems obvious.

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