

Principals' Salaries, 2006–2007

Willa D. Cooke and Chris Licciardi

How do salaries of elementary and middle school principals compare with those of other administrators and classroom teachers? Are increases in salaries of principals keeping pace with increases in salaries of classroom teachers? And how have principals' salaries fared over the years when the cost of living is taken into account? There are reliable data to provide answers to these questions.

The data come from the *National Survey of Salaries and Wages in Public Schools*, conducted annually since 1973 by Educational Research Service (ERS). Each year, local school systems throughout the nation report salary and wage data to ERS for 34 professional and support positions. For the school year 2006–2007, 550 school systems reported data. These comprise a stratified sample of large, medium, small, and very small school systems selected by ERS to represent school systems of various sizes across the nation.

This information provides a national database for school management and policy decisions concerning staff compensation. For individual elementary and middle school principals, these data show how compensation in one local school system compares with that of other systems and with the U.S. Department of Labor's Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Current Salary Comparisons

The *National Survey of Salaries and Wages in Public Schools* reports \$82,414 as the mean of the average salaries paid to elementary school principals in the school systems reporting to ERS for the 2006–2007 school year. (Statisticians term this type of average the “mean of mean.”) For middle

school principals, the mean of the average salary is \$87,866. Table 1 shows comparable average salaries for these two, as well as eight other professional positions.

The salaries a school district pays its principals are generally related to three important variables: the region of the country; the enrollment size of the district; and the per-pupil expenditure level of the district.

The geographic region in which a principal's district is located can make a large difference in salary level. For example, school districts in the Mideast pay elementary school principals an average salary of \$97,131, which is 17.9 percent higher than the \$82,414 average paid by all districts reporting throughout the nation. In contrast, school districts in the Southwest pay their elementary school principals an average of \$69,611 or 15.5 percent lower than that of all reporting systems. These comparisons are shown in Table 2 for the eight geographic regions.

The second variable that can have an effect on salaries paid principals is the enrollment size of the district. For example, Table 3a shows that among large school systems (those with 25,000 or more pupils), a \$82,414 average salary would rank between the 40th and 50th percentiles of all the reported average salaries paid to elementary school principals in this enrollment group. In contrast, an average salary of \$82,414 would rank between the 70th and 75th percen-

Table 1. Average of salaries paid to personnel in selected professional positions in all reporting school systems, 2006–2007.

Position	Average salary
Superintendents (contract salary)	\$141,191
Assistant superintendents	111,963
Subject area supervisors	75,982
Principals:	
Elementary school	82,414
Middle school	87,866
High school	92,965
Assistant principals:	
Elementary school	67,735
Middle school	73,020
High school	75,121
Classroom teachers	49,294

Table 2. Average of salaries paid to elementary school principals in reporting school systems, by geographic region, 2006–2007.

Region*	Amount	Comparison to national average**
New England	\$90,390	+9.7%
Mideast	97,131	+17.9
Southeast	77,214	-6.3
Great Lakes	81,520	-1.1
Plains	78,395	-4.9
Southwest	69,611	-15.5
Rocky Mountains	72,793	-11.7
Far West	94,988	+15.3
Average all regions	82,414	

*States included in geographic regions: New England: CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT; Mideast: DE, DC, MD, NJ, NY, PA; Southeast: AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA, WV; Great Lakes: IL, IN, MI, OH, WI; Plains: IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD; Southwest: AZ, NM, OK, TX; Rocky Mountains: CO, ID, MT, UT, WY; Far West: AK, CA, HI, NV, OR, WA.

**These data may be subject to response variation and should be used only as general indicators of the current relationships among the regions. These data are not appropriate for year-to-year trends.

This salary is paid by a school district with an enrollment between 10,000 and 24,999 and in the highest per-pupil expenditure category. The average of the highest salaries paid elementary school principals in each of the reporting large systems (enrolling 25,000 or more students) this year is \$101,681. The average for the highest per-pupil expenditure group is \$95,583.

Trends in Salaries

The average of annual salaries paid to elementary school principals in 2006–2007 is 67.2 percent above the average annual salary paid to K–12 classroom teachers (Table 5). Although the wide gap may not be too surprising, one question is frequently asked: Are increases in principals' salaries keeping pace with increases in teachers' salaries over time? Chart 1a confirms that during the past five years, the percentage increase in annual salaries paid to elementary school principals has generally kept in step with the percentage increase for classroom teachers. During the five-year period, principal salary increases averaged 2.5 percent a year, which is about the same percentage as the average teachers' salary increase (2.4 percent). Chart 1a also shows that annual principal salary increases have generally exceeded those of teachers, with the exception of 2003–2004 and 2005–2006 when their increases were 1.6 and 0.6 percentage points, respectively, lower than those of teachers.

Still, one of the best indicators of whether increases in principals' salaries are keeping on track with increases in teachers' salaries comes from a comparative analysis of trends in the maximum scheduled salaries for both professional groups. Table 5 reveals that, in 2002–2003, the average of the highest scheduled annual salaries for elementary school principals in each of the reporting school systems was 37.8 percent above the average of the highest scheduled salaries reported for classroom teachers by the same school systems. In 2006–2007, the difference between average salaries was slightly greater (40.6 percent).

titles among the averages reported by very small districts (those with 300 to 2,499 pupils).

Viewed in terms of the per-pupil expenditure level for current operations of the school systems, as shown in Table 3b, a \$82,414 salary for elementary school principals ranks between the 40th and 50th percentiles among districts spending \$10,000 or more per pupil. The same \$82,414 ranks between the 75th and 80th percentiles among districts spending less than \$7,000 per child.

Taken as a whole, Table 3 can be used to compare salaries paid in your school district with those paid by similar districts. The procedure is as follows:

1. Determine the average of principals' salaries (separately for elementary and middle schools) paid by your district for school year 2006–2007.

2. Determine the approximate pupil enrollment and the budgeted per-pupil expenditure for current operations of your district. (Please note that, in calculating the enrollment size, ERS requests that school systems count each half-day kindergarten student as half a pupil. Per-pupil expenditures are calculated by dividing a district's general operating

“...Salaries are generally related to three important variables: the region...; the enrollment size of the district; and the per-pupil expenditure...”

budget amount by its enrollment size.)

3. Locate the appropriate enrollment group in Tables 3a or 3c and find the percentile ranking for the district's average amount paid to principals.

4. Locate the appropriate expenditure level in Tables 3b or 3d and find the percentile ranking for the district's salary average.

This range of percentile rankings will indicate how the average of salaries paid to principals in your district ranks with school systems of similar enrollment size and expenditure levels.

Table 4 provides a comparison of the highest salaries paid to elementary school principals. The highest reported salary paid to an elementary school principal in 2006–2007 is \$156,456.

Table 3. Percentile distribution of average salaries paid to elementary school principals and middle school principals in reporting school systems, by enrollment group and by per-pupil expenditure of school system, 2006–2007.

Elementary School Principals

Table 3a Enrollment Group

Salary Distribution	All Reporting Systems	25,000 or more	10,000 or more	2,500 to 24,999	300 to 2,499
90th Percentile	\$104,072	\$108,494	\$105,022	\$103,883	\$97,797
80th Percentile	96,015	103,373	99,025	96,467	86,055
75th Percentile	91,913	95,052	96,363	93,120	83,062
70th Percentile	89,159	93,428	93,447	89,945	81,115
60th Percentile	84,126	88,136	90,253	84,908	76,524
50th Percentile	81,054	84,251	85,659	81,545	73,182
40th Percentile	76,811	81,986	82,205	78,697	68,915
30th Percentile	73,652	80,425	77,507	73,812	66,286
25th Percentile	71,491	79,756	76,000	72,273	63,972
20th Percentile	67,727	77,334	74,836	69,742	63,091
10th Percentile	63,424	75,716	69,166	66,000	58,000
Number Providing Data	504	62	109	172	161
Mean	\$82,414	\$88,762	\$87,266	\$83,235	\$75,807
Low	34,545	50,616	52,668	50,616	34,545
High	156,456	135,200	156,456	131,307	138,840

Table 3b Per Pupil Expenditure Level*

Salary Distribution	\$10,000 or more	\$9,000 to \$9,999	\$8,000 to \$8,999	\$7,000 to \$7,999	Less than \$7,000
90th Percentile	\$113,746	\$97,000	\$96,363	\$101,538	\$90,868
80th Percentile	104,852	92,730	90,410	97,783	84,231
75th Percentile	102,246	88,084	89,438	88,271	81,282
70th Percentile	97,094	84,500	86,080	86,792	80,730
60th Percentile	91,714	82,075	82,870	82,610	76,509
50th Percentile	86,269	78,907	79,722	77,809	73,114
40th Percentile	82,391	73,652	75,550	75,428	70,151
30th Percentile	79,782	69,921	73,173	73,180	66,333
25th Percentile	77,409	68,266	71,149	71,562	65,081
20th Percentile	74,836	67,011	66,444	69,629	63,102
10th Percentile	67,500	62,124	63,161	65,371	55,300
Number Providing Data	167	74	112	91	60
Mean	\$89,438	\$79,173	\$79,532	\$81,318	\$73,903
Low	53,200	53,996	43,000	50,616	34,545
High	156,456	122,373	130,042	132,493	125,595

Middle School Principals

Table 3c Enrollment Group

Salary Distribution	All Reporting Systems	25,000 or more	10,000 to 24,999	2,500 to 9,999	300 to 2,499
90th Percentile	\$109,093	\$112,166	\$109,002	\$111,577	\$101,236
80th Percentile	100,416	106,436	102,249	102,171	88,984
75th Percentile	97,459	103,174	98,759	98,923	88,030
70th Percentile	95,197	98,514	97,559	95,433	85,000
60th Percentile	90,212	93,759	95,488	91,257	79,892
50th Percentile	86,200	90,212	90,573	88,224	75,954
40th Percentile	82,755	87,058	86,346	84,512	72,853
30th Percentile	79,075	83,750	83,876	79,989	70,100
25th Percentile	76,370	83,384	81,732	78,973	67,500
20th Percentile	74,256	80,992	79,862	76,006	64,668
10th Percentile	68,236	78,216	73,039	70,122	61,611
Number Providing Data	453	63	105	170	115
Mean	\$87,866	\$93,213	\$91,818	\$89,460	\$78,971
Low	35,820	53,400	58,535	55,278	35,820
High	161,334	138,144	161,334	135,505	139,270

Table 3d Per Pupil Expenditure Level*

Salary Distribution	\$10,000 or more	\$9,000 to \$9,999	\$8,000 to \$8,999	\$7,000 to \$7,999	Less than \$7,000
90th Percentile	\$120,640	\$101,763	\$100,665	\$109,002	\$90,064
80th Percentile	110,695	95,606	96,834	101,325	86,180
75th Percentile	107,347	94,050	95,759	98,615	85,611
70th Percentile	103,122	92,637	93,796	92,314	84,667
60th Percentile	97,919	86,439	89,400	89,327	82,815
50th Percentile	93,196	84,430	85,997	85,237	80,023
40th Percentile	88,959	79,328	81,600	82,191	78,705
30th Percentile	84,602	75,260	76,803	78,216	74,353
25th Percentile	80,992	74,500	75,113	77,393	72,003
20th Percentile	78,747	73,172	72,278	75,800	69,560
10th Percentile	67,754	63,371	68,377	70,680	65,113
Number Providing Data	150	66	99	86	52
Mean	\$94,499	\$84,008	\$85,137	\$87,812	\$78,911
Low	57,000	56,333	43,311	53,400	35,820
High	161,334	118,122	133,229	135,805	130,138

*Per-pupil expenditure levels may be subject to considerable sampling and response variation and should be used only as general indicators of the current relationships among the categories. These data are not appropriate for year-to-year trends.

All salaries reported in Table 3 were provided to ERS as “average salary paid” by districts providing data. Low and high figures, however, are the lowest and highest of all salaries reported for the position.

During the period from 2002–2003 to 2006–2007, the percentage increase in the average of the maximum salaries scheduled for elementary school principals (11.2 percent) was moderately higher than that of classroom teachers (9.1 percent), according to data from the reporting school systems. This consistency occurred despite the fact that few districts still index principal schedules to teacher schedules.

But what about the salaries of elementary school principals and central-office administrators? Traditionally, central-office administrators have had an edge over elementary school principals when it comes to percentage increases in salaries. Chart 1b shows that the percentage increase in the average salaries paid to elemen-

year for classroom teachers averages 187 days. Thus, the work year for principals is typically 20.3 percent longer

than that for teachers. How do the average salaries paid to principals and the average salaries paid to teachers

“...Annual salaries for elementary school principals are moving in tandem with those of classroom teachers as well as central-office administrators...”

tary school principals during the five-year period generally was lower than those of central-office administrators (with the exception of 2002–2003 and 2005–2006, when their increases were actually 1.8 and 0.9 percent higher). Chart 1c indicates that increases in principals’ salaries also have kept pace with increases in the average annual salaries and wages paid to other school employee groups surveyed. It becomes clear from analyzing different types of data that annual salaries for elementary school principals are moving in tandem with those of classroom teachers, as well as central-office administrators and public school employees generally.

One question remains in comparing annual salaries: the contract year for elementary school principals averages 225 days on duty, while the contract

Table 4. Average of highest salaries paid and highest salary reported for elementary school principals in reporting school systems, by enrollment group and per-pupil expenditure group, 2006–2007.

Enrollment Group	Average of highest salaries paid	Highest salary reported
25,000 or more pupils	\$101,681	\$135,200
10,000 to 24,999	94,560	156,456
2,500 to 9,999	88,837	131,307
300 to 2,499	76,977	138,840
Per-pupil expenditure group		
\$10,000 or more per pupil	\$95,583	\$156,456
\$9,000 to 9,999	83,680	122,373
\$8,000 to 8,999	84,833	130,042
\$7,000 to 7,999	87,001	132,493
Less than \$7,000	79,940	125,595
All reporting systems	\$88,008	\$156,456

Table 5. Trends in the relation of average salaries paid and maximum scheduled salaries for elementary school principals and classroom teachers, 2002–2003 to 2006–2007.

Year	Average Salaries Paid			Maximum Scheduled Salaries		
	Elementary Principals	Classroom Teachers	Principals’ Salaries as Percentage of Teachers’	Elementary Principals	Classroom Teachers	Principals’ Salaries as Percentage of Teachers’
2002–2003	\$75,291	\$45,026	167.2%	\$84,050	\$60,986	137.8%
2003–2004	75,144	45,646	164.6	83,690	60,943	137.3
2004–2005	76,182	45,884	166.0	86,093	61,214	140.6
2005–2006	79,496	48,160	165.0	90,583	64,283	140.9
2006–2007	82,414	49,294	167.0	93,484	66,510	140.6
Percentage Increase, 2006–2007 over 2002–2003	9.5%	9.5%	...	11.2%	9.1%	...

Table 6. Average daily rates paid to elementary school principals and classroom teachers in reporting school systems, by enrollment group, 2006–2007.

Enrollment Group	Mean Average Elementary Principals	Daily Pay Rates Classroom Teachers	Principal Pay above Teacher Pay	Principal Pay as Percentage of Teachers’
25,000 or more pupils	\$387.18	\$265.97	\$121.21	145.6%
10,000 to 24,999	392.23	269.75	122.48	145.4
2,500 to 9,999	372.50	270.75	101.75	137.6
300 to 2,499	324.77	251.13	91.64	136.5
All reporting systems	\$369.02	\$263.55	\$105.47	140.0%
Days on Duty		225	187	

Chart 1. Trends in percentage increase in average salaries paid to elementary school principals compared with three other groups and the Consumer Price Index, 2002–2003 to 2006–2007.

Chart 1a. Classroom Teachers

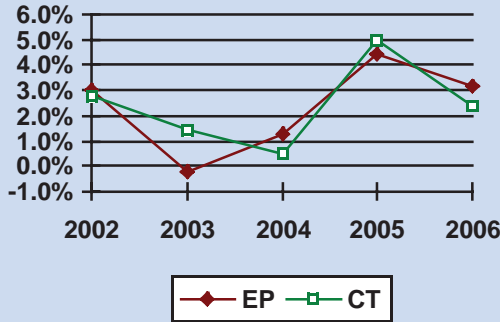


Chart 1b. Central-Office Administrators

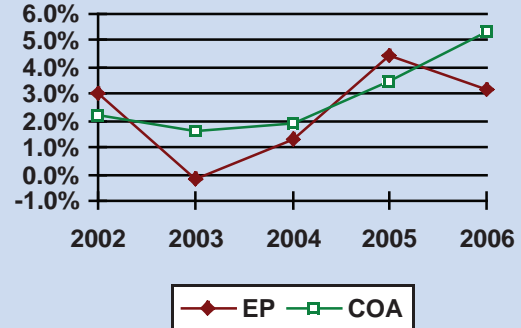


Chart 1c. Public School Employees

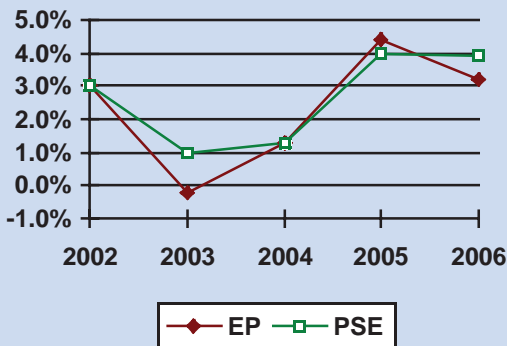
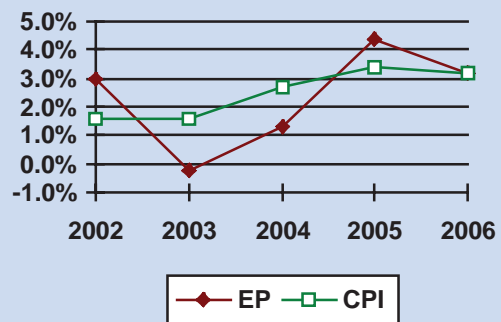


Chart 1d. Consumer Price Index



compare on a daily rate basis? Table 6 provides the data to answer this question. In contrast with the 67.2 percent more that elementary principals are paid than teachers on the basis of average annual salary, the principals make just 40 percent more per day (\$369.02 compared with \$263.55) than teachers.

Finally, increases in the cost of living can have an important impact on average salaries of principals over the years with respect to present dollar values. An important question remaining, therefore, is: Considering increases in the cost of living over the years, are principals faring as well today as they were several years ago? Chart 1d shows that, during the past few years, there has been some fluctuation in principal salary increases relative to the cost of living as measured by the CPI. Dur-

ing the five-year period as a whole, increases in the CPI have averaged a slightly higher percentage per year than principal salary increases (2.6 percent compared with 2.5 percent a year, respectively). In addition, the CPI has increased by a cumulative total of 13.8 percent during the past five years, while elementary school principals' salaries have increased by 12.7 percent during the same period.

To put that in terms of real dollars, the 2002–2003 reported average salary for elementary principals (\$75,291) would be equivalent to \$84,702 in 2006–2007 dollars. However, elementary principals earned an actual average salary of \$82,414 in 2006–2007—a decrease in present dollar value of \$2,288 (or 2.7 percent) during the five-year period. [P](#)

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Reference

The data contained in this article were taken from the ERS publication, *Salaries & Wages for Professional and Support Personnel in Public Schools, 2006–2007*. Readers interested in information about the data or how they were computed are referred to this publication, which is available for purchase from ERS. To order, contact Educational Research Service, 1001 North Fairfax St., Suite 500, Alexandria, VA 22314. Phone: 800-791-9308. Fax: 800-791-9309. Web site: www.ers.org.

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