

Principals' Salaries, 2008-2009

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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? 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 districts throughout the nation report salary and wage data to ERS for 34 professional and support positions. For the school year 2008-2009, 862 school districts reported data. They comprise a sample of large, medium, small, and very small school districts selected by ERS to represent school districts across the nation. For elementary and middle school principals, the data show how compensation in their districts compares with a wide range of averages for principals, teachers, and other positions, as well as the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index.

Salary Comparisons: 2008-2009

The National Survey of Salaries and Wages in Public Schools reports \$88,062 as the mean of average salaries paid to elementary school principals in the school districts reporting to ERS for the 2008-2009 school year. (Statisticians term this type of average the "mean of mean.") For middle school principals, the mean of average salaries is \$93,478. Table 1 shows comparable average salaries for these two positions, as well as eight others.

The salaries a school district pays its principals are generally related to three important variables: region, enrollment, and per-pupil expenditure.

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 \$103,564, which is 17.6 percent higher than the national average. In contrast, school districts in the Southwest

pay their elementary school principals an average of \$74,415, which is 15.5 percent lower than the national average. These comparisons are shown in Table 2 for the nation's eight geographic regions.

The second variable that can have an effect on principals' salaries is the district's enrollment. Table 3a shows, for example, that among large school districts (those with 25,000 or more pupils) the national mean of average salaries for elementary school principals—\$88,062—would rank between the 40th and 50th percentiles of all the reported average salaries paid in this enrollment group. In contrast, the national average would rank between the 70th and 75th percentiles among the averages reported by very small districts (those with 300 to 2,499 pupils).

Viewed in terms of the per-pupil expenditure for school districts, as shown in Table 3b, the national average for elementary school principals ranks between the 30th and 40th percentiles for districts spending \$11,000 or more per pupil,

Table 1. Average of salaries paid to personnel in selected professional positions in all reporting school systems, 2008-2009.

Position	Average annual salary
Superintendents (contract salary)	\$155,634
Assistant superintendents	119,755
Subject area supervisors	80,290
Principals:	
Elementary school	88,062
Middle school	93,478
High school	99,365
Assistant principals:	
Elementary school	71,893
Middle school	77,476
High school	81,083
Classroom teachers	52,900

Table 2. Average of salaries paid to elementary school principals in reporting school systems, by geographic region, 2008-2009.

Region*	Amount	Comparison to national average**
New England	\$97,030	+10.2%
Midwest	103,564	+17.6
Southeast	82,175	-6.7
Great Lakes	87,473	-0.7
Plains	83,620	-5.0
Southwest	74,415	-15.5
Rocky Mountains	79,033	-10.3
Far West	100,596	+14.2
Average all regions	88,062	

*States included in geographic regions: New England: CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT; Midwest: 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.

Table 4. Trends in the relation of average salaries paid and maximum scheduled salaries for elementary school principals and classroom teachers, 2004-2005 to 2008-2009.

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'
2004-2005	76,182	45,884	166.0	86,093	61,203	140.7
2005-2006	79,496	48,160	165.0	90,583	64,283	140.9
2006-2007	82,414	49,294	167.2	93,484	66,510	140.6
2007-2008	85,907	51,329	167.4	98,565	69,512	141.8
2008-2009	88,062	52,900	166.5	100,352	71,409	140.5
Percentage Increase 2008-2009 over 2004-2005	15.6%	15.3%		16.6%	16.7%	

and between the 75th and 80th percentiles for districts spending less than \$8,000 per pupil.

Taken as a whole, the four parts of Table 3 can be used to compare salaries paid to elementary and middle school principals in your school district with those paid by similar districts. The procedure is as follows:

1. Determine the average of princi-

pals' salaries paid by your district for 2008-2009.

2. Determine the approximate pupil enrollment and the general operating budget for your district. (In calculating enrollment size, ERS requests school districts to count each half-day kindergarten student as half a pupil.) Calculate the district's per-pupil expenditure by dividing its operating budget 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 per-pupil 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 districts of similar enrollment size and expenditure level.

The average of the highest salaries paid to elementary school principals in large districts (enrolling 25,000 or more students) is \$106,709, while the comparable figure for the smallest districts is \$81,799. The average for the highest per-pupil expenditure group is \$100,867, while the comparable figure for low per-pupil expenditure districts is \$87,710. The highest reported salary paid to an elementary school principal in 2008-2009 is \$157,620, by a school district with an enrollment between 10,000 and 24,999 students, and in the \$11,000 or more per-pupil expenditure category.

In comparison, the average of the lowest paid salaries to elementary school principals spans from \$79,142 in the smallest districts to an average of \$84,419 in the districts enrolling 2,500 to 9,999 students. The average for the lowest per-pupil expenditure group is \$75,160, while the comparable figure for high per-pupil expenditure districts is \$88,308. The lowest reported salary paid to an elementary school principal in 2008-2009 is \$45,300, by a school district with an enrollment between 300 and 2,499 students, and in the \$9,000 to \$9,999 per pupil expenditure category.

Table 4 provides two additional comparisons of 2008-2009 salary data. It shows that although elementary principals are being paid, on average, 66.5 percent more than classroom teachers, this gap decreases to 40.5 percent when the averages of maximum scheduled salaries for the two groups are compared. This second comparison is important, since the difference between what an experienced teacher is making and

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, 2008-2009.

Elementary School Principals

Table 3a. 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	\$111,639	\$115,187	\$113,229	\$112,008	\$105,383
80th Percentile	101,653	106,661	104,396	102,009	93,301
75th Percentile	98,563	102,868	101,401	99,641	89,144
70th Percentile	95,545	100,068	99,820	97,222	85,877
60th Percentile	90,128	94,740	92,575	92,958	80,683
50th Percentile	85,877	89,629	88,231	89,301	76,819
40th Percentile	81,643	85,448	84,247	85,325	73,626
30th Percentile	78,024	82,718	81,337	81,581	70,000
25th Percentile	75,920	81,375	79,463	78,978	68,812
20th Percentile	73,814	79,512	77,713	76,469	65,966
10th Percentile	67,789	76,321	73,547	70,753	61,980
Number Providing Data	793	114	165	279	235
Mean	\$88,062	\$92,774	\$91,209	\$90,604	\$80,549
Lowest Salary Paid	45,300	53,269	49,884	51,500	45,300
Highest Salary Paid	157,620	148,962	157,620	155,104	149,811

Table 3b. Per-Pupil Expenditure Level*

Salary Distribution	\$11,000 or more	\$10,000 to \$10,999	\$9,000 to \$9,999	\$8,000 to \$8,999	Less than \$8,000
90th Percentile	\$120,502	\$106,055	\$104,537	\$105,242	\$103,990
80th Percentile	111,485	99,782	100,680	99,705	90,495
75th Percentile	106,050	97,900	97,371	95,000	87,134
70th Percentile	102,268	94,523	95,725	91,773	84,440
60th Percentile	96,405	90,199	90,319	86,977	82,560
50th Percentile	92,014	85,073	86,579	81,842	78,220
40th Percentile	88,131	80,972	82,307	79,427	75,100
30th Percentile	84,442	78,121	79,153	76,152	72,485
25th Percentile	81,523	76,093	76,226	74,667	70,650
20th Percentile	78,924	72,868	74,000	71,800	67,802
10th Percentile	74,030	68,272	67,647	67,000	62,866
Number Providing Data	270	104	134	137	148
Mean	\$94,905	\$86,336	\$87,052	\$84,964	\$80,575
Lowest Salary Paid	55,630	52,700	45,300	49,884	51,500
Highest Salary Paid	157,620	132,339	140,148	142,194	140,743

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	\$115,480	\$115,933	\$116,882	\$117,101	\$106,156
80th Percentile	106,640	109,540	109,061	109,008	95,203
75th Percentile	103,174	106,299	106,657	104,493	93,996
70th Percentile	100,895	102,707	104,702	102,287	89,548
60th Percentile	96,502	97,979	99,879	98,416	83,605
50th Percentile	92,747	93,770	94,830	95,673	80,988
40th Percentile	88,184	90,393	90,478	92,399	77,736
30th Percentile	82,920	87,216	86,614	86,878	73,584
25th Percentile	81,024	86,211	84,854	83,391	71,410
20th Percentile	79,169	85,221	81,224	81,836	69,061
10th Percentile	72,868	81,000	78,722	76,689	63,750
Number Providing Data	720	112	159	281	168
Mean	\$93,478	\$96,863	\$96,649	\$96,408	\$83,319
Lowest Salary Paid	45,431	54,948	58,850	48,514	45,431
Highest Salary Paid	167,122	145,981	165,827	167,122	154,818

Table 3d. Per-Pupil Expenditure Level*

Salary Distribution	\$11,000 or more	\$10,000 to \$10,999	\$9,000 to \$9,999	\$8,000 to \$8,999	Less than \$8,000
90th Percentile	\$127,599	\$112,370	\$110,034	\$112,925	\$106,156
80th Percentile	114,918	105,658	104,884	102,707	95,134
75th Percentile	109,581	103,205	101,300	100,673	92,876
70th Percentile	106,991	102,190	99,782	98,113	89,834
60th Percentile	102,287	97,979	96,000	93,350	87,805
50th Percentile	98,397	92,958	93,748	88,921	83,926
40th Percentile	94,487	86,731	90,136	85,614	80,967
30th Percentile	90,169	82,450	84,897	82,123	78,368
25th Percentile	88,392	80,818	81,500	79,398	76,210
20th Percentile	84,854	80,000	78,891	78,040	73,125
10th Percentile	77,736	73,762	73,000	72,824	67,214
Number Providing Data	238	92	123	128	139
Mean	\$100,673	\$93,342	\$92,068	\$90,973	\$84,803
Lowest Salary Paid	55,625	54,997	48,514	47,931	45,431
Highest Salary Paid	165,827	167,122	137,807	145,981	134,949

*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.

Note: Mean and percentile salaries reported in this table 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.

Chart 1. Trends in percentage increase in average salaries paid elementary school principals compared with three other groups and the Consumer Price Index, school year 2004 to 2008.

Chart 1a. Classroom Teachers

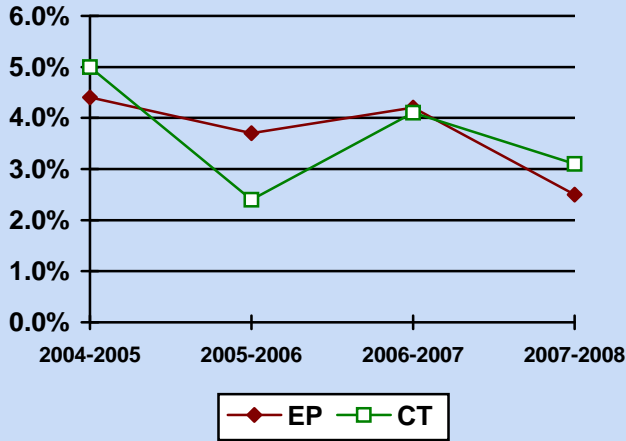


Chart 1b. Central-Office Administrators

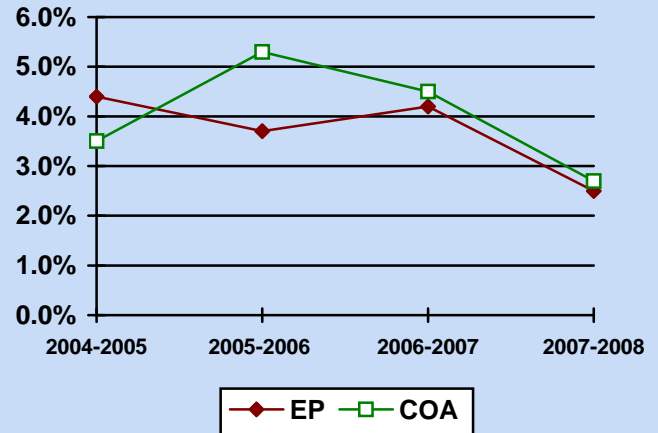


Chart 1c. Public School Employees

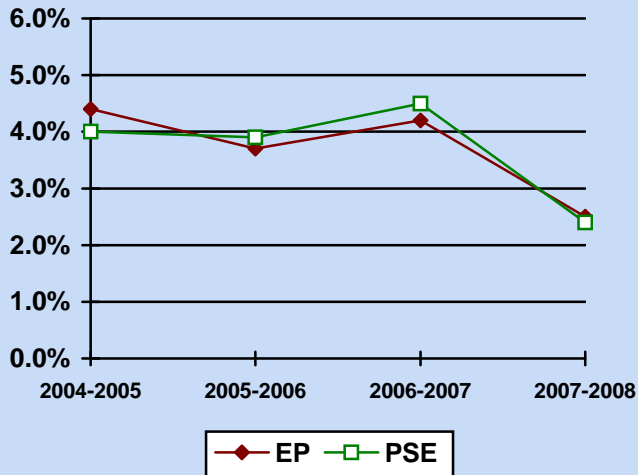
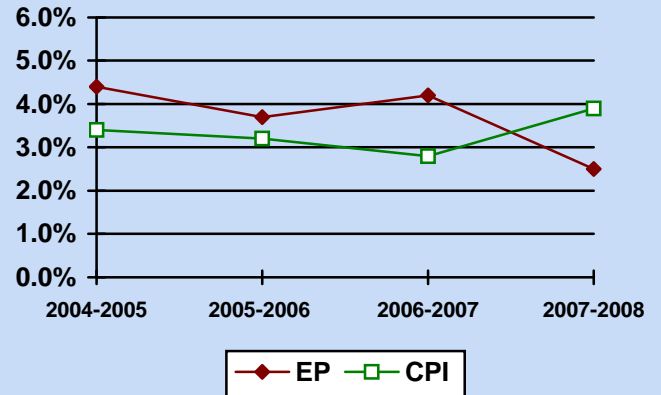


Chart 1d. Consumer Price Index



could make as a principal may impact the decision to take on the more time-consuming and challenging position.

Trends in Salaries

Table 4 also shows that the ratios of average salaries paid to elementary principals and teachers have remained fairly close over time. For example, the ratio of principals' average salaries to teachers' salaries was 166.0 in 2004-2005 and 166.5 in 2008-2009. In other words, elementary principals, on average, are being paid about two-thirds more than teachers in recent years. Chart 1a provides a graphic representation of the annual year-to-year increase in the average salaries of these two groups.¹ The closeness of their patterns shows that neither group has gained or lost substantially in comparison to the other.

Chart 1b shows that the percentage increase in the average salaries paid to elementary school principals during the past four years was slightly lower than

those of central-office administrators, while Chart 1c indicates that increases in principals' salaries have kept pace with increases in the average annual salaries and wages paid other school employees.

Finally, increases in the cost of living can have an important impact on average salaries of principals with respect to purchasing power. Are principals faring as well today as they were several years ago? Chart 1d shows that, during the past few years, increases in the Consumer Price Index have averaged a slightly lower percentage per year than principal salary increases. To put that in terms of real dollars, the 2004-2005 reported average salary for elementary principals (\$76,182) would be equivalent to \$86,847 in 2008-2009 dollars. However, elementary principals earned an actual average salary of \$88,062 in 2008-2009—an increase in dollar value of 1.4 percent. **P**

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Note

¹ Charts 1a, 1b, 1c, and 1d can be found in the online version of this article at www.naesp.org/principal.

Reference

The data contained in this article were taken from the ERS publication, *Salaries & Wages for Professional and Support Personnel in Public Schools, 2008-2009*. Readers interested in information about the data or how they were computed are referred to this publication, which is available for purchase from Educational Research Service. To order, contact ERS at 800-791-9308 or visit www.ers.org.

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