

Sudbury Public Schools and Lincoln Sudbury Regional School District Finance Committee Report on Teachers' Compensation Review

Introduction

In the fall of 2003, the Sudbury Finance Committee, Lincoln Sudbury Regional School Committee, and the Sudbury Public School Committee authorized a review of their respective teacher contracts with the goal of understanding teachers' compensation in the Sudbury Public Schools (SPS), the Lincoln Sudbury Regional School District (LSRD), and their appropriateness in comparison to compensation offered by other towns with similar demographics. The parties jointly developed a "Teacher Contract Template" to highlight items for study. The School Committees identified, and the Sudbury Finance Committee concurred with, the comparative school districts included in the study. The school districts identified for this review included: Acton, Acton Boxborough Regional School District, Concord, Concord Carlisle Regional School District, Dover, Sherborn, Dover-Sherborn Regional School District, Lincoln, Wayland, Weston, and Wellesley. Hudson was added at a later date. Resources used for the completion of this review included teacher contracts submitted by each of the districts for the 2003-2004 school year, the Department of Education's website, and a questionnaire forwarded to each of the districts.

Summary

Contracts submitted by each of the districts identified for this benchmark indicated, that with the exception of Boxborough, Lincoln and Sudbury all school districts shared a common salary structure with their regional counterparts. All teachers in the towns reviewed were paid from the same salary schedule for both the K-8 and high school except the SPS and Lincoln who did not share a salary schedule with their

regional counterpart the LSRD. Further review indicated that those districts that do share a salary schedule, also share a single administration, which Lincoln and Sudbury do not.

A review of the salary structures in each contract indicated that due to the disparity in the districts' adoption of lanes (defined by the educational credentials held by the teacher and visualized as columns on a grid), and steps (loosely defined as a year of experience and visualized as rows on a grid), which range from 3 to 10 lanes and 13 to 17 steps, versus the SPS's 4 lanes and 17 steps, and LSRD's 6 lanes and 16 steps, meaningful analysis could only be obtained by isolating those lanes where each of the selected districts were represented. Therefore, the review was restricted to the following lanes: Bachelors, Masters, Masters +30, and Top Lane (defined as the highest level of educational credentials recognized by the district).

Based on the salary grids gathered for 2003-2004, for all of the steps that SPS shares with other school districts, the SPS teachers are consistently paid lower than comparable teachers employed by the districts in the sample. However, since they have more steps than most other schools, by the time teachers reach their maximum salary, their pay is close to average.

Again, based on the salary grids gathered for 2003-2004, the LSRD teachers starting pay per the Bachelors and Masters Lanes (step 1), is close to average, with one exception, the Top Lane where starting pay is below average. In the middle years, pay per the Bachelors Lane is the third lowest; the Masters Lane is second lowest. And again, since they have more steps than some other districts include, their salaries are mid range by the time they reach their maximum salaries per the Top Lane.

Historical data obtained from the Department of Education (DOE), indicates that Sudbury had the lowest average teacher salary of the districts surveyed and was also

below the state average in each year for FY00, FY01, and FY02. A review of all lanes regardless of participation by all districts yielded zero occurrences where Sudbury, or LSRD teachers, at the minimum or maximum salary, was the highest paid of the districts analyzed.

Other historical data examined to provide context to the information contained in this review included FY02 per pupil spending in regular education and special education, as well as salary costs per student. In regular education, per pupil spending by SPS was below the median spending of the districts reviewed, while LSRD's spending was above the median. Special education per pupil spending for both SPS and LSRD was marginally above the median. The SPS salary cost per student was below the median while the LSRD exceeded the median. Additionally, an effort was made to identify any correlation between teachers' salaries for the districts reviewed and distance from Boston, median house price, and residential tax rate. No correlation could be determined.

A review of available benefit information found only slight disparities among the districts reviewed with the exception of health insurance and tuition reimbursement. Teachers generally receive the same health insurance benefits as other employees in the town in which they are employed. The districts reported they contribute from 50% to 90% of the premium associated with an individual or family plan with the individual teachers contributing the balance. The SPS plan was at the top of the scale offering 70% to 90% depending on the plan chosen. Most other districts offered a flat reimbursement rate. SPS was the only district to offer dental insurance for which it makes a 75% contribution. LSRD contributes a flat 75% for all medical insurance plans and offers dental insurance for which the participant pay 100% of the premium.

Most districts offered tuition reimbursement incentives. Each of the districts' policies is subject to Superintendent approval, and or discretion. However, there is a wide range of guidelines from per course or teacher caps that average \$400 to \$800. The next highest cap is \$1,350 per teacher, subject to a specified contractual budget cap. The SPS tuition reimbursement plan offers teachers reimbursement of up to \$3,200 per teacher, subject to budget constraints.

The number of contract days per year in the sample ranged from 182 to 185 with the majority requiring 184 to 185 days. SPS requires 183 and the LSRD 184. SPS allows the highest allocation of personal days at seven. LSRD allows five. Most districts allow three personal days with two districts offering five. Longevity or Senior Service plans were also included in the agreements with eight districts offering various plans. These plans ranged from lump sum payments of \$500 for five years of service to \$3,600 for 25 years of service. Two districts calculated their payments as a percentage of current salary. LSRD has a generous, but competitive longevity payment plan, which commences after 5 years of employment with a maximum payment of \$2,500 for 25 years of service. SPS has discontinued its longevity plan but is still making payments of \$34,500 annually to 22 teachers who are being grandfathered under an old plan. Additionally, SPS is the only district to offer a matching 403B contribution of up to \$200 per year per teacher.

Conclusion

Based on this review of teachers' compensation and benefits, in the opinion of the Finance Committee, it would appear that any claims made that the Sudbury Public School's or Regional District's teachers are overpaid in comparison to peer districts is erroneous and unsupported by the facts.