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Let's save the super pay for super civil servants

By John Collins

If Frank Moscati was not the highest compensated civil servant in Orange, Ulster and Sullivan counties, then the Monroe-Woodbury School Board is setting out to ensure it hires that highest-paid person. The M-W district has some of the highest- paid civil servants in the tricounty area. More than 26 employees make more than six figures in salary alone. Including benefits their total compensation is more than \$3.2 million.

The former superintendent, who resigned/retired after a mere eight months of a three- year contract (a contract that had no penalty clause for not fulfilling his obligation to serve) was paid \$175,000 plus \$43,000 in benefits for a total of \$218,000. Not bad for a civil servant.

In the July 1 edition of the TH-R it was reported that Clare Perez stated that the next superintendent would be offered a salary of about \$185,000. Coupled with \$43,000 in benefits, we will be paying more than \$228,000. And all this to run an average- performing school district. It is, arguably, Orange County's best-performing district, but compared with the wider view of the state it's just plain average.

M-W ranks about 131st of more than 500 districts in New York for performance, according to schoolmatters.com. So why are we paying so many people so much money? That's a very good question. You'll have to ask the school board why.

Let's start with performance compared with lower per student instructional and operational costs. A total of 31 school districts outperformed M-W for one year in both Math and Reading Proficiency while having both lower instructional and operating expenditures per student. One Orange County district outperformed M-W along with one Dutchess County district and three from Nassau County. So much for the cost of living argument. For three years running, 19 districts outperformed M-W and were cheaper in both areas. Four of these are on Long Island.

What should superintendents do? Get excellent performance at costs the taxpayers can afford. We don't need to pay someone such exorbitant money just because this school board thinks we need to. People who want that kind of money are people we don't want or need running this district. They are in it only for the money. "For the children" is a slogan that few believe in. If they got a superintendent for \$150,000 (too much if you ask me, but they have to pay more than her subordinates make) it would probably be someone "for the children." We need that person. Someone who could make this district outperform for cheaper costs and do it with passion.

The Denver City School District, a place whose cost of living is not much different from here, recently hired a superintendent. He presides over 13,000-plus employees who teach 72,000-plus students in 154 schools. Although offered \$200,000 he turned it down, instead accepting a salary of \$160,000 with incentives of \$40,000 if he does what he said he'd do to turn around the district. We need to hire someone like this.

Another superintendent grossly underpaid by M-W standards is the lieutenant general that runs West Point. He just runs a small city that includes a hospital, a college, an elementary school and everything else needed to run the place. And he does it with only three deputies who get just over \$120,000 in pay and benefits. The superintendent? He gets about \$184,000 in pay and benefits.

So now you tell me, who has the tougher job?

This problem isn't limited to just M-W. Other districts are doing the same thing. It has to stop. Taxpayers need to tell the board to get costs under control. Parents need to tell the board to get performance up. Much more information can be seen at our Web site: ctmw.org, the home page of Concerned Taxpayers of Monroe Woodbury.

John Collins is a retired Army master sergeant who settled in Monroe "for the schools." He is the public spokesperson for the Concerned Taxpayers of Monroe Woodbury.

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