

SHARED SUPERINTENDENT

A new experiment in certain NYS School Districts



Overview & Summary

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HUDSON VALLEY

PATTERN FOR PROGRESS

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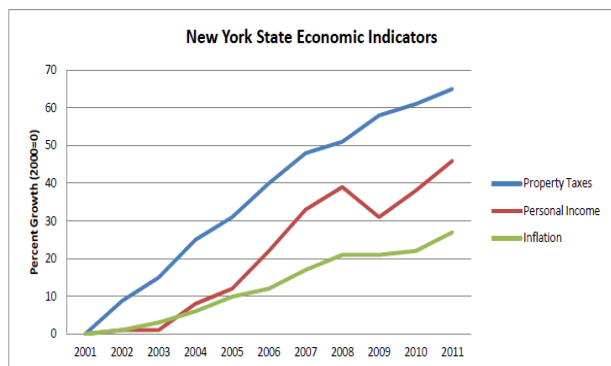
OVERVIEW: CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION FEELING FISCAL SQUEEZE

The sharing of a school superintendent, the top administrator in a school district, is an experiment in governance taking place in a handful of districts across New York State. While the format was made more formally possible by the passage of a 2012 law allowing the practice in very small districts, some school boards were trying it before that and, in at least one case, the share exceeds the 1,000-student per district parameters of the law.

Legal mechanisms and the scattered cases of shared superintendencies are cropping up at a high-stakes time for public education in New York State. The 2011 tax cap has imposed a powerful outside influence on the raising of local property taxes. The cap in turn has led many districts to draw down their reserves, and some now say they're approaching insolvency. At the same time, school enrollments are in decline in many of the state's regions but costs continue to rise. New York State remains the nation's leader in spending per pupil (1). The state also leads the nation in highest property taxes, a tax which has far outpaced personal income and inflation (see below), and a tax which is comprised primarily of local school taxes (2). It is too early to know if a rebate-based incentive to share services announced in the current state budget will help freeze property taxes. All of this, when set against the harsh fiscal effects of the recession, has contributed to an unusual amount of pressure on school

This overview provides a summary of Pattern for Progress research on the topic of shared school district superintendencies.

A more extensive report is available in digital format at pattern-for-progress.org/shared-superintendent. Additional elements include case snapshots in Newfane - Wilson (western New York) and Owen D. Young District plus Fulton-Hamilton-Otsego BOCES (human resources director); text of the enabling legislation; text of the enabling agreement between Roscoe and Downsville; selected results of a survey in Roscoe and Downsville.



Source: NYS Comptroller and U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis

administrations.

As the top official in any district, the superintendency can be particularly vulnerable to this pressure. With compensation rates that exceed local median household salaries by a multiplier of at least three to five, the attraction for seeking savings at that level has been enhanced. Indeed, Governor Andrew Cuomo has targeted high superintendent salaries as an area ripe for savings. Just as spending on public education leads the nation, compensation for superintendents also ranks among the highest. Those salaries and benefit packages are often more reflective of the property tax capacities of districts than they are of school enrollment or of any other single factor.

It is against this backdrop that experiments in shared superintendencies are occurring.

| HUDSON VALLEY SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT COMPENSATION 2014-2015 | | | | |
|--|------------|-----------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| District Name/County | Enrollment | Salary | Benefits & Other Compensation | Total Compensation |
| 5 Highest Compensations | | | | |
| SCARSDALE UFSD/ Westchester | 4,739 | \$312,263 | \$120,543 | \$432,806 |
| HARRISON CSD/ Westchester | 3,519 | \$297,214 | \$112,959 | \$410,173 |
| RYE NECK UFSD/ Westchester | 1,537 | \$304,116 | \$87,304 | \$391,420 |
| BRONXVILLE UFSD/ Westchester | 1,625 | \$284,720 | \$96,435 | \$381,155 |
| BEDFORD CSD/ Westchester | 4,412 | \$266,521 | \$100,996 | \$367,517 |
| 5 Lowest Compensations | | | | |
| BEACON CITY SD/ Dutchess | 3,143 | \$180,030 | \$23,805 | \$203,835 |
| COXSACKIE-ATHENS CSD/Greene | 1,481 | \$149,278 | \$54,092 | \$203,370 |
| PINE PLAINS CSD/ Dutchess | 1,016 | \$155,000 | \$43,258 | \$198,258 |
| HUDSON CITY SD/ Columbia | 1,861 | \$140,000 | \$53,417 | \$193,417 |
| GERMANTOWN CSD/ Columbia | 580 | \$132,500 | \$60,502 | \$193,002 |

(1) The New York State Education Department puts statewide average 2011-12 spending per pupil at \$20,906. The US Census puts the NYS per pupil figure at \$19,552. It's a number that leads the nation by more than 10% (\$2,084) over the next highest spender, the District of Columbia (\$17,468 per pupil).

(2) According to the NYS Office of Real Property Tax Services, the proportion of residential property taxes in the Hudson Valley devoted to public education ranges from a low of 58% in Sullivan County to a high of 73% in Putnam. For more, see pattern-for-progress.org/shared-superintendent.



SHARED SUPERINTENDENT IN THE HUDSON VALLEY

In the nine-county area served by Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress, the one shared superintendency is taking place across county borders on the far western edge of the region. As school superintendent, John Evans is shared between the Roscoe School District in Sullivan County (Hudson Valley Region) and the Downsville School District in Delaware County (Catskills Region) each a rural district with a single k-12 building. *Find other shared superintendent interviews at pattern-for-progress.org/shared-superintendent*

ROSCOE-DOWNSVILLE STORY

Roscoe Superintendent John Evans was contracted by the Downsville school district in July 2013 to evenly split his time between the two small districts, 14.4 miles apart. Downsville had been served by six different superintendents in five years and was again looking to fill the district's top job. After Downsville could not find a viable candidate, the two districts entered into the one-year experiment. Many of the Roscoe-Downsville sports teams merged at this time as well. Evans, a graduate of Roscoe High School, had been the superintendent at Roscoe since 2009. Smaller and getting smaller, Roscoe (303 in 2000 and 235 in 2012) has considered merging with its neighbor 8 miles to the east, Livingston Manor (683 in 2000; 462 students in 2012), the consolidation effort has never gotten off the ground, leaving Roscoe with a graduating class of 14 as of 2013.

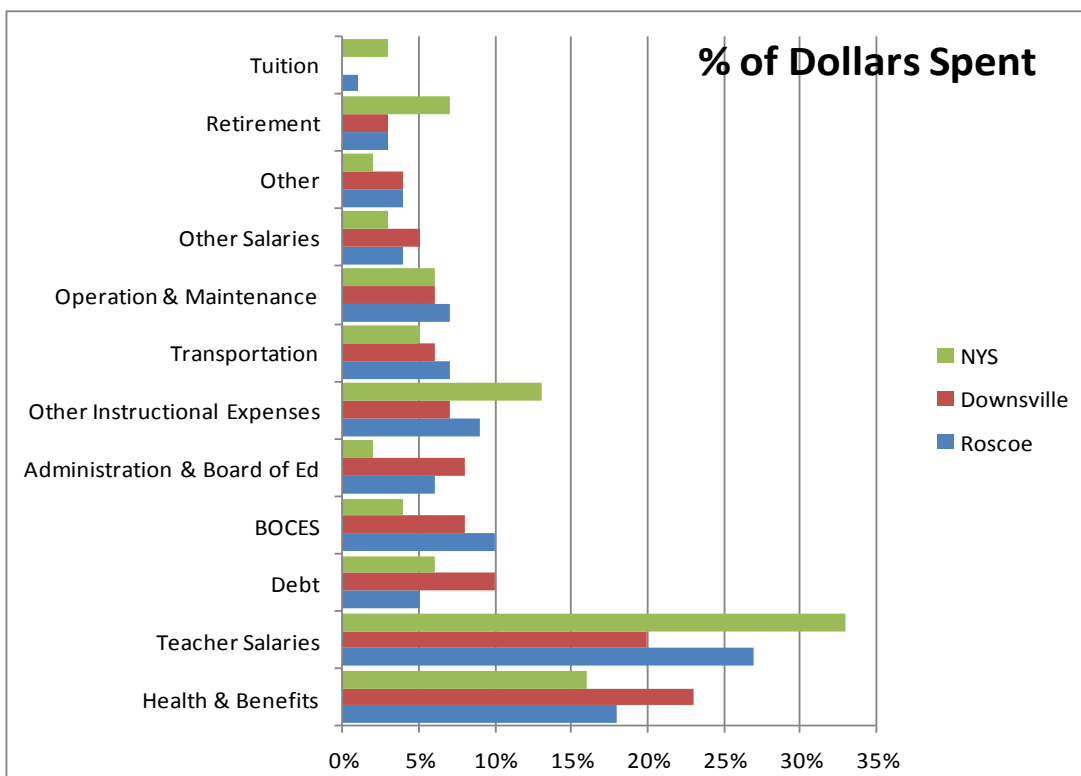


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The arrangement, with Evans making \$165,000 per year, gave the Superintendent a \$32,440 pay hike. It saves each district \$40,000 in salary costs and requires only one benefits package. As a result of the share, the districts pay stipends to the current principals, assistant principals and business officials for their increased responsibilities. Combined, the amount is \$25,000.

Evans says that the savings amount to roughly one percent of the budget, which could mean the salary of one teacher. Alternatively, he said, it's an amount that can help the districts stay within the tax cap. In small districts, costs of central administration tend to be especially high because there are few economies of scale (see below).

Savings alone however are not enough of a reason to enter such an arrangement, Evans said. There can be other benefits. Evans believes being the head of two districts has allowed for swifter collaboration, knowing both districts in-depth allows him to "cross pollinate" in ways which make most sense of both districts. For instance, one language teacher provides the class to both districts; a science teacher may follow suit.



A problem in small rural districts is fast turnovers in staff. Experienced staff often leave for higher paying jobs in wealthier districts. Sharing a superintendent allows districts to offer more competitive salaries which can lead to stability in the administration.



Interviewees and media reports have echoed concerns that the individual in the shared superintendent role has a high potential for burnout. They have cited double the board meetings, double the teacher evaluations, double the events. “It’s two full time jobs,” Evans said, “I am no longer a leader; I am a manager.” Evans now spends more time in his office and is less involved in the day-to-day activities than when he was superintendent of only Roscoe. Lack of a presence in the districts and community was, in fact, a leading concern of those responding to a Pattern for Progress survey in Roscoe and Downsville, Respondents – primarily teachers – also cited a lack of communications regarding their access to the superintendent and when they might expect to have “face time” with him. See survey results at pattern-for-progress.org/shared-superintendent

SUMMARY FINDINGS

Rural districts within upstate New York have started sharing superintendents and from the surface it may appear to be a cost saving approach. However, in these cash-strapped communities, a closer look reveals that direct savings are usually small, but that the effect of having one individual at the head of two bodies has high potential to lead to other sharing and other savings. In some cases, the practice may lead to an improvement in the level of services delivered as in the case of one science teacher who may travel back and forth between two districts. While money is a major concern, a shared superintendent can help address other issues such as keeping a qualified employee, forestalling a high turnover rate, providing richer course offerings and exploring the potential for a merger. These are common issues and possible benefits in communities where both the school enrollment and the district tax base are continually shrinking.

SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS

- Address Potential Burnout with More Sharing, Not Less—A number of sources emphasized the possibility of burnout for the individual who is the shared superintendent. It can be a valid concern. However, sharing a school superintendent between two small or mid-sized districts can pave the way toward greater efficiencies and better educational offerings and in some cases, savings. In instances where burnout is imminent, districts might consider further sharing. These steps might include joint school boards or joint meetings of school boards. Districts might also share additional personnel such as a business manager, or director of curriculum or district clerk. In this way, districts might prevent burnout and build toward a functional, administratively merged district but one with two different identities.
- Create a Central Repository— A central, searchable public repository for data regarding shared services could require that the Office of the State Comptroller in its audits of school districts and municipalities include an analysis of shared services - positive or negative - that point out any savings or increased costs resulting from efforts to do so and include reports from other sources.
- Take Steps to Preserve Savings —Districts that share a superintendent will have to whether additional workload on lower-level administrators warrants additional stipends to those individuals. However, once stipends are paid districts will have to resist any tendency to add administrative staff due to sharing or any savings will be diminished or disappear.



Find more on recommendations at pattern-for-progress.org/shared-superintendent

Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress is the policy, planning and advocacy organization that creates regional, balanced and sustainable solutions to quality-of-life issues by bringing together business, nonprofit, academic and government leaders to collaborate on regional approaches to affordable/workforce housing, municipal sharing and local government efficiency, land use policy, transportation and infrastructure issues that most impact the growth and vitality of the regional economy.

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