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Education officials see pay increase amid deficit

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At least two Amarillo-area school superintendents are getting a raise while state legislators and agencies struggle to meet an estimated \$15 billion budget deficit.

School boards awarded Amarillo ISD Superintendent Rod Schroder a 2 percent raise and River Road ISD Superintendent Randy Owen a raise of nearly 7 percent.

With school district officials across the state talking about potential layoffs and cuts to personnel budgets, school boards should consider freezing raises, especially at the top, said Talmadge Heflin, a director for the Austin-based Texas Public Policy Foundation. The conservative think tank advocates limited government, individual responsibility and private enterprise.

"It's not like you're talking about the janitor," Heflin said. "You're talking about the highest paid person in the district."

A statewide survey of 80 percent of the state's school districts found about one-third of returning school superintendents went without pay raises for this school year, even before the brunt of the state's financial crisis hit, according to the Texas Association of School Boards.

The percentage not receiving raises grew from 24 percent of superintendents in last year's survey, said Mary Barrett, assistant director for compensation services for the school board association.

That means a majority of superintendents received raises, and school boards want to provide competitive salaries, Barrett said.

"Those contracts between superintendents and school districts are all very individual," Barrett said. "Even though schools are facing looming budget concerns, superintendent vacancies are still occurring."

Some districts add incentives or deferred compensation for meeting goals.

Schroder's contract with Amarillo Independent School District provided for a raise based on the salaries of his peers and his tenure, school board president Anette Carlisle said. He asked the board not to increase his salary, but because the board was pleased with his performance, it settled on the 2 percent raise. Schroder's salary is now \$265,980.

Schroder did not return calls and e-mails for comment.

Under Schroder, the school district of 32,000 students has launched a series of programs to raise student achievement and encourage students to continue their education after graduation,

Carlisle said. Elementary and middle schools have joined a national network of No Excuses University schools; campus and district staffs have adopted a team-planning concept; and teachers have employed a "lesson study" concept to learn how students respond to their teaching.

"All of those things really fit together like a puzzle to create a really vibrant district," Carlisle said. "If you want to keep good people, you've got to pay them commensurate with their role."

The average pay superintendents of school districts with 25,000 to 49,999 students is \$234,841. The top quarter of superintendents in that group earning \$252,876, according to the most recent survey of superintendent salaries by the Texas Association of School Boards.

River Road continues to grow and soon could become a Class 3A school district. Owen's previous raise was fairly small, and his salary is in line with those of superintendents in nearby districts, said Stacey Johnson, president of the River Road school board. Owen's recent raise brings his salary to \$117,500.






Owens did not respond to calls and e-mails sent for comment.

"When you've got somebody good and who really cares about the district, you want to hold onto them," Johnson said.

"A superintendent in our opinion can make or break your district. As long as he's pushing for excellence at River Road, we're going to let him know we're proud of his accomplishments."

River Road has about 1,500 students. The salary for superintendents of districts with 1,000 to 1,599 students on average is \$109,139, with the top quarter earning \$115,000, according to the state survey. Among districts with 1,600 and 2,999 students, the average is \$118,228. The district for a second year has earned the state's second-highest rating of recognized, one notch below exemplary, Johnson said. Willow Vista Intermediate School earned an exemplary rating. A recent study by the state comptroller's office gave River Road three out of five stars for its spending compared with academic performance, he said.

The school boards for Bushland, Canyon and Highland Park have renewed their superintendents' contracts, but have not yet made any decisions about raises. The superintendents are Don Wood, for Bushland; Mike Wartes, for Canyon; and Mike Brown for Highland Park.

-  [Amarillo Independent School District Superintendent Rod Schroder](#) [1]
-  [Highland Park ISD Superintendent Mike Brown](#) [2]
-  [Canyon ISD Superintendent Mike Wartes](#) [3]
-  [Bushland ISD Superintendent Don Wood](#) [4]
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