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ONLY IN THE WORLD-HERALD **Escalating salaries alarm governor**

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Date: April 3, 2011 **Section:** News

Heineman suggests linking a **school** superintendent's pay to the district's academic performance. Gov. Dave Heineman says he's alarmed at "ever-escalating superintendent salary" increases and took particular issue with **Omaha Public Schools** Superintendent John Mackiel's compensation.

In an interview, Heineman also said Nebraska **school** boards should look for a way to link superintendent pay to the academic performance of their **school** districts.

"You respond to how you're paid, and if part of your salary is based on academic performance, you're going to put a greater emphasis on it," he said last week.

Heineman reacted to a recent World-Herald review of 20 superintendent contracts throughout the state, including Mackiel's.

Heineman said "hundreds of citizens" have talked to him about Mackiel's estimated total pay of \$413,607.

"We're paying a superintendent more than \$400,000 a year, and yet if you look at the latest reading test scores, reading assessments, some of the worst are in the **Omaha Public Schools**," Heineman said.

Statewide, 69 percent of students scored proficient on last year's reading test. In OPS, 52 percent of students were proficient.

Heineman also acknowledged the challenges facing OPS. Mackiel oversees not only the biggest district, but also the district with the biggest population of disadvantaged children.

"I want to be clear: To have a good superintendent in a major urban area, you're going to have to pay a good salary," said Heineman, who is paid a \$105,000 annual salary.

Among the contracts studied by The World-Herald, base pay alone has risen by nearly 75 percent since 1999-2000. That's more than double the rate of inflation, without factoring in extra benefits.

Mackiel receives a base salary of \$258,107, which is 62 percent of his total estimated compensation.

Mackiel has referred questions about his compensation to **school** board President Sandy Jensen.

Jensen has said she would oppose a contract with straight pay alone. She said it's important to reward Mackiel for remaining with OPS.

The 61-year-old Mackiel has worked for the district for his entire 38-year education career.

The newspaper's analysis revealed six other contracts in which the CEO gets at least \$10,000 a year more than their base salaries.

That practice should stop, Heineman said. "It ought to be a relatively simple contract that clearly indicates what they're paid," he said. "You've got to ask the **Omaha school** board why there isn't more transparency."

At least two **Omaha school** board members want the board to discuss Mackiel's contract, especially a provision that allows him to cash out unused vacation.

Last year, he cashed out \$25,000 worth. For this year's contract, the board voted to increase his vacation time from six weeks to nine.

Jensen has said the board gave Mackiel more vacation time so he could use it. But as superintendent, Mackiel has never used his full allotment.

"Probably that needs to be re-aligned," said board member Mary Ellen Drickey.

She said the board may want to look at a "use-it-or-lose it" policy, where Mackiel wouldn't be eligible for cash payouts if he didn't use all his vacation.

"**School** board members could give everything a close discussion and come to some reasonable solutions," Drickey said.

Board member Justin Wayne, who was sworn into office in January, also questioned the compensation provisions of Mackiel's contract. He said he's talked to 30 to 40 people who have also raised questions.

"I'm just concerned with how the contract is set up, particularly the vacation," Wayne said.

Board members Shirley Tyree, Mary Morrissey, Nancy Kratky and Bambi Bartek all voted to support Mackiel's contract when the board unanimously approved it in October. In interviews, they said changes aren't necessary.

Bartek said she has received only positive feedback from constituents. "Keep up the good work. We believe in you," she said of what people have told her.

Board members Kersten Borer, Barbara Velazquez and Marian Fey declined to comment, and board members Nancy Huston and Freddie Gray did not return phone messages seeking comment.

Mackiel's contract runs through Aug. 31, 2013.

In any organization, including private companies, Heineman said, it's unhealthy when the leader's pay far exceeds that of the average worker.

A first-year OPS teacher with a bachelor's degree makes \$33,460.

Heineman suggested that **school** boards link from 10 percent to 25 percent of a superintendent's pay to how well the **school** district performs on graduation rates, state assessments and ACT tests, among other benchmarks.

"There's got to be a better relationship between superintendent salaries and the performance of their **schools**," he said.

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