

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2009

DeKalb County Schools System as Mr. Potato Head?



Posted originally by Kim Gokce at [Community Radar](#) (be sure to sign up for his community reporting service!)

Parents in DeKalb County School System (DCSS) have been carrying on a conversation about things DCSS over at the excellent blog, DeKalb County School Watch. In one of the threads, we began discussing the published salary reports for DCSS that are available at the [State of Georgia "Transparency in Government" web site](#). A lot of parents were surprised and outraged to see many hundreds of employees earning north of \$100k. My cursory look at this led me to believe that salaries for individual titles are in line with those paid in Fulton County, for example. So, the question for me is not how much money one person makes but rather are the two systems relatively balanced in terms of Central Office vs. School resource \$\$\$.

Today, I sat down with Ella Smith to impose on her for her knowledge of DeKalb and Fulton job titles. We reviewed each of the over 300 titles (DeKalb accounted for 181 of these). After classifying each title as a title directly related to either an "in school" resource or to central services/admin resource, I ran the percentage of "Central Office Salary" / "Total Salary" for both DCSS and Fulton County School System (FCSS). We included things like Information Services and Transportation and Maintenance personnel (not school custodians) in the "Central Office" figures. Before sharing the numbers, I want to be clear that this "best effort" and in no way should be interpreted as a necessarily 100% accurate picture. The source data itself is questionable.

For example, Ella found 1 discrepancy in the Fulton file which incorrectly reported a principal as a substitute teacher with a salary \$80k below the range it should have been. Also, I noticed in both files (but particularly the Fulton file) many cases of what look to be potentially corrupt data values (truncated or duplicate titles, blank salaries, etc.)

Government-provided bad data? Never!

Ok. With all the disclaimers and snarks out of the way, here is what I found in the available data.

DCSS Total Salaries 2008: \$682,709,025.22

DCSS Admin/"Central Office" Salaries 2008: \$170,590,619.93

Ratio 2008: 24.987%

FCSS Total Salaries 2008 \$552,969,891.22

FCSS Admin/"Central Office" Salaries 2008: \$56,194,268.83
Ratio 2008: 10.162%

DeKalb is nearly 2.5 times more "top-heavy" than Fulton? What?! I nearly fainted. Please, someone tell me these data files are not to be trusted - that this is an absurd deviation. I was so floored by these numbers I repeated my own quality checks against my processing of the data.

I checked total salaries in the source files and in my transformation of this data and they match. I spot checked titles between the provided data and my data and they match. So, if there is an error, it is farther up-stream in the State of Georgia or County reporting process that created these data files. It is also possible that there are some other assumptions hidden in the source data of which I am ignorant (I'm generous).

Putting aside all these questions for the moment ... HOLY MR. POTATO-HEAD DCSS! I do not know what else to say ... no wonder you can't seem to get the system up and running again - your head is so big your chin is dragging on the ground! If anything close to these numbers hold up, we could postulate that DCSS ran with the "efficiency" of Fulton County in terms of central office salary costs versus in-school salary costs ... there's nearly \$100 million in the difference. Budget short-fall? What budget shortfall? Don't cut our schools when there is this apparent outrage in salary costs at the center of it all.

Many, many thanks to Kim Gokce and Ella Smith for compiling this data into a coherent article and especially to Kim who wrote this article and even provided the graphic. Many thanks also to all of the rest of the bloggers here at DCSW who downloaded the Excel file from the State and worked so hard to crunch these numbers - this was definitely a team effort. Mostly - thanks to "themommy" who came up with our group project idea in the first place!