



INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS SERVICES

15 Roszel Road | PO Box 5910
Princeton, New Jersey 08543-5910 USA

tel: 609.452.0990
fax: 609.452.2690

www.iss.edu

Salary Negotiation For School Heads

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Having a great interview doesn't necessarily mean your job search is over. Nearly all announcements for head of school positions mention in the Salary and Benefits section that "the salary is competitive and depends on the qualifications and experience of the successful candidate". Although we ask schools to share information about the financial package with finalist candidates before final interviews take place, often only minimal information is made available, and sometimes the financial package is not shared at all! Rarely is the salary / benefit package provided to the candidate in sufficient detail for a contract to be written. When the offer for employment has been made, and after you have expressed your definite interest in the position, a salary must be negotiated before a contract can be written. Until the contract has been written and signed by both parties, the job search is not over! Negotiating a fair salary is often the final step in the search process, and it's critical for the successful conclusion of the search.

Before you leave for the final interview, it's important to know the range of salaries for international schools of similar size in the region. The firm assisting the school with the search can be a good source of this information. Another good source is the ISS salary survey that is compiled annually by ISS from salary information we receive from schools attending the February recruiting conferences. Salary ranges for teachers and principals are given in the survey for attending schools. A reasonable approximation of a typical principal salary is between 1.5 and 2 times the salary of a teacher with an MA and 8-10 years of experience. The salary ratio for a head of school often ranges between 2-4 times the salary of the same teacher. Of course, each school is different, and the starting salary of an administrator also depends on a variety of factors that include qualifications, years of experience, size of the school, tuition levels of students, how closely the candidate matches the desired profile, and how much the school wants him/her to sign the contract.

It is also important to assess your own needs. How much income will you need for basic local expenses in your new home? How much do you need in US dollars or other hard currency to make mortgage payments, meet college/university expenses, or other financial obligations while you are living abroad? How much should you save for retirement in addition to the school's retirement plan?

Most schools will present finalist candidates with a benefit package and a salary range either before or during the site visit and final interviews. When the school offers you the position as their first choice candidate, you can then work with the Board or Finance Committee to determine the starting salary. You need to have an idea in advance of what the minimum salary

must be to enable you to consider the position. If the Board or Search Committee asks you to name a salary, responding with a salary range would be best – where the lower figure is above the minimum salary you feel you could accept.

When considering the offer, you should consider the entire package – including the school's health insurance, retirement plan, housing, home leave, and other benefits provided. Many directors engage in some form of negotiation before the final contract is signed. Board members are often business people and are familiar with negotiating a fair salary. The worst the Board can say to a request for a higher salary is no, and you never know what will happen unless you ask. The important point here is to remain reasonable and flexible. Making excessive demands or being inflexible could damage your relationship with the Board at the very beginning of your contract, or even cause the Board to retract their offer of employment. If you are flexible and remain respectful and reasonable throughout the negotiation process, and if you do your research and set your limits, it is probable you will end up with a fair contract that is favorable for both you and the school.