

Deborah Henley
Editor
631-843-3663
deborah.henley@newsday.com

Doug Dutton
Associate Managing Editor
631-843-4650
doug.dutton@newsday.com

Shawna VanNess
Associate Managing Editor
631-843-3264
shawna.vanness@newsday.com

Tracy M. Brown
Assistant Managing Editor
Special Sections
631-843-2312
tracy.brown@newsday.com

Keith Herbert
Assistant Managing Editor
Investigations
631-843-3478
keith.herbert@newsday.com

Monica Quintanilla
Assistant Managing Editor
Public Safety, Crime, Courts
631-843-2917
monica.quintanilla@newsday.com

Jeffrey L. Williams
Assistant Managing Editor
Features
631-843-3630
jeffrey.williams@newsday.com

Monte R. Young
Assistant Managing Editor
Newsroom Multimedia
631-843-2102
monte.young@newsday.com

Don Hudson
Editor
631-843-3037
don.hudson@newsday.com

Robert Shields
Associate Managing Editor
631-843-4795
robert.shields@newsday.com

Ben Weller
Senior Assistant Managing Editor
Long Island news
631-843-2715
benjamin.weller@newsday.com

Margaret Corvini
Assistant Managing Editor
Business
631-843-2619
margaret.corvini@newsday.com

Robert Levin
Assistant Managing Editor
Breaking News
631-843-3108
robert.levin@newsday.com

Jack Sirica
Assistant Managing Editor
Government and Politics
631-843-4221
jack.sirica@newsday.com

Hank Winnicki
Assistant Managing Editor
Sports
631-843-4832
hank.winnicki@newsday.com

Joye Brown
Associate Editor, Columnist
631-843-2911
joye.brown@newsday.com

MULTIMEDIA

Robert Cassidy
Executive Director Multimedia
631-843-3027
bobby.cassidy@newsday.com

John Keating
Director Multimedia Newsgathering
631-843-5482
john.keating@newsday.com

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Pay is necessary to cope with high cost of living and draw candidates, unions say

ONLY IN NEWSDAY

BY JOHN HILDEBRAND
AND MICHAEL R. EBERT
john.hildebrand@newsday.com
michael.ebert@newsday.com

Long Island is home to one of the nation's largest concentrations of well-paid educators, with more than 31,000 teachers and other professionals earning \$100,000 a year and up, and more than 12,000 of those earning at least \$140,000, a Newsday analysis found.

That means a majority of educational professionals in the Nassau-Suffolk region — about 57% — have six-figure salaries.

Among those public school employees, 663 reported compensation packages totaling \$200,000 or more for the 2021-22 school year and 36 of them had packages worth at least \$300,000, Newsday learned. Teacher-union representatives said relatively high pay helps educators cope with the region's steep cost of living and also aids in recruiting job applicants.

Salaries of education professionals represent the biggest single cost item for public school systems, which accounts for more than 60% of property taxes in Nassau and Suffolk counties. Next month, school districts will start putting together their tax and budget proposals for 2023-24.

For its salary review, Newsday obtained records from the New York State Teachers' Retirement System, using the state's Freedom of Information Law. Records covered statewide payrolls for more than 253,000 teachers and other professionals, such as administrators, counselors and librarians. These included about 54,800 employees on the Island.

Total earnings commonly include payouts for unused sick and vacation days, as well as regular salaries, for individuals about to retire. In addition, many superintendents and

other top administrators are awarded extra dollars in the form of tax-deferred annuities and other benefits.

Marianne Cartisano, former superintendent in the Miller Place district, ranked at the top of the state's compensation list for public school employees. Cartisano retired in July with a final annual package of \$483,323, after working nearly 20 years in the district. Earnings included a \$270,487 salary, according to state records, together with payouts for unused sick days and other remuneration.

In a news release, the Miller Place district credited Cartisano with establishing a full-day kindergarten program and universal prekindergarten classes, as well as establishing a superior bond rating. The district in northern Brookhaven Town enrolls about 2,450 students and operates on a \$76.5 million annual budget.

Cartisano, in a phone interview, noted that she had served both as assistant superintendent for business and superintendent in Miller Place. She added that her long experience as an educator helped in expanding academic programs, bolstering school security and keeping classes running during most of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Leadership matters, stability matters, when you're the head executive officer of a \$76-million-a-year organization," she said.

Another district, Central Islip, had the largest number of employees ranked among the top two dozen earners. A total of six teachers in the district had packages ranging from \$324,013 to \$467,985, state records showed. The district's superintendent, Sharon Dungee, stated that all six professionals had retired, and that figures included payouts for unused sick and vacation days, as well as salaries.

LI average: Over \$111,000

Islandwide, earnings for full-time educators average \$111,262 annually, according to the Empire Center for Public Policy, a

WHAT TO KNOW

■ **One of the nation's largest concentrations** of public school educators earning six-figure salaries is located in Nassau and Suffolk counties, a Newsday analysis found.

■ **A recently retired school superintendent** was the area's highest compensated educator in 2021-22, with a final-year salary and payout of more than \$480,000.

■ **Competitive salaries help educators** cope with the area's high cost of living, teacher representatives said.

fiscally conservative think tank in Albany. That dollar amount is the highest for any region in New York State and also exceeds average salaries reported by other states.

Center analysts reported that the number of educators statewide receiving six-figure salaries grew by 50% over the last 10 years, and that the Island's figure increased 1.7% between 2020-21 and 2021-22.

Tim Hoefer, the Empire Center's president, questioned whether New York's taxpayers were getting their money's worth. He noted that state testing last spring of students in grades 3-8 showed "mediocre" results — for example, with just over 40% of Island students scoring proficient or better in math.

"Despite educational results that continue to hover around mediocre, pay for educators has continued to climb, especially on Long Island," Hoefer said in a recent message to Newsday.

New York State United Teachers, a union umbrella group, responded with its own statement, noting that teachers statewide are required to hold master's degrees and undergo periodic professional training.

"Our educators should be paid like the highly trained and skilled professionals they

THAN 31,000 EDUCATORS ON LI

LI'S HIGHEST-PAID EDUCATORS

Below are the 10 highest earners among Long Island educators for the 2021-22 school year, according to data reported to the New York State Teachers' Retirement System obtained under the state's Freedom of Information Law. Gross pay for most

educators in the highest brackets includes both payouts and other compensation in addition to salaries, especially for those who recently retired. See more figures for teachers and administrators across Long Island and New York State here.

Employee	Date of Membership	District	Title	Status	Gross pay
Cartisano, Marianne F*	12/17/91	Miller Place Union Free Schools	Superintendent	Retired	\$483,323.49
L'Hommedieu, Marlene A*	9/1/88	Central Islip Union Free Schools	Teacher	Retired	\$467,985.98
Hawley Turnowski, Mary J*	3/2/81	Central Islip Union Free Schools	Teacher	Retired	\$440,049.72
Schwartz, Susan Rhonda*	10/20/80	Central Islip Union Free Schools	Teacher	Retired	\$417,945.57
Kuncham, Kishore	8/14/89	Freeport Public Schools	Superintendent	Employed	\$405,163.78
Pedisich, Cheryl P	9/1/84	Three Village Central Schools	Superintendent	Retired	\$395,613.60
Turcios, Ilma C*	9/2/03	Central Islip Union Free Schools	Teacher	Retired	\$379,550.98
Menzies-McFadzean, Josephine A*	9/1/97	Central Islip Union Free Schools	Teacher	Retired	\$369,139.80
Grishman, Henry L	9/1/67	Jericho Union Free Schools	Superintendent	Employed	\$356,936.30
Lipshie, Seth A**	9/6/89	Miller Place Union Free Schools	Deputy superintendent	Employed	\$351,306.31

* Received payout

** Promoted to superintendent in 2022-23

SOURCE: NEW YORK STATE TEACHERS' RETIREMENT SYSTEM, CENTRAL ISLIP UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT



NEWSDAY / JOHN PARASKEVAS

Superintendent Marianne Cartisano of the Miller Place district. ■ Video: newsday.tv

are,” stated the union, which represents more than 600,000 teachers and other professionals statewide. “It’s common knowledge that the cost of living on Long Island is higher than in other parts of the state. As a result, teachers in this region receive salaries commensurate with the cost of living, as do professionals in other fields.”

‘Above and beyond’

Locally, teacher representatives noted that they often faced an uphill struggle in delivering lessons to students during the COVID-19 pandemic, when much of the instruction had to be delivered to students’ homes via the internet.

“Teachers have worked incredibly hard under incredible circumstances for the last several years,” said Tony Felicio Jr., president of a 640-member teachers union in the Connetquot district. “They continue to go above and beyond to work, not only on academics, but on the myriad social and emotional experiences that children bring to school on a daily basis.”

Some advocacy groups contend that, even in New York State, where pay scales are relatively high, teachers are losing ground financially to professionals in other fields. The Economic Policy Institute, a liberal Washington, D.C., think tank, reported in August that teachers in this state faced a 13.2% gap in weekly wages, compared with earnings for professionals in other fields.

The report’s author, Sylvia Al-

MORE ONLINE
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[newsday.com/data](https://www.newsday.com/data)

legretto, told Newsday that pay gaps stemmed from the fact that public education, like nursing, historically enlisted women, because they had fewer options than men and were willing to work for less money. Allegretto added that in the future, schools could face increasing difficulty in recruiting female job candidates as their options widen in other career fields.

“Teaching should be one of the most sought-after professions in the country, because we want the best and the brightest attracted to the profession,” said Allegretto, a senior economist and researcher. “The only way you can do that is with highly trained, highly paid, highly sought-after kids who are considering college now and are just not opting for degrees in education, because it’s just not attractive.”

HIGHEST EARNERS BY DISTRICT

Long Island public school districts account for 554 of the 1,000 highest-paid educators for the 2021-22 academic year in New York State public schools. Below are the LI districts that had at least 10 employees among the top 1,000.

School district	Employees in state schools' top 1,000 earners
Central Islip Union Free Schools	32
Brentwood Union Free Schools	24
Jericho Union Free Schools	22
Great Neck Public Schools	21
Half Hollow Hills Central Schools	14
Syosset Central Schools	14
Copiague Union Free Schools	12
Three Village Central Schools	12
Bay Shore Union Free Schools	10
Longwood Central Schools	10
Miller Place Union Free Schools	10

SOURCE: NEW YORK STATE TEACHERS' RETIREMENT SYSTEM