

# MODERNIZING TEACHER PAY IN MAINE 207

*by Eric Scott Leys*

*candidate for re-election to the Maine Township High School District 207 Board of Education*

## *Eric Leys' Proposal to Enhance Student Performance while rewarding High Performing Educators*

*Eric Leys, a member of the District 207 Board of Education, is currently facing a crowded field as he seeks re-election to a third term. A reform-minded education innovator during his eight years on the board, Leys embraces fiscally conservative principles with a steadfast interest in continuous academic improvement. Merit pay for teachers is, Leys believes, a natural next step as he pursues educational excellence in District 207. Read Leys' plan and find out how he plans to bring performance-based pay to teachers in Maine 207 as he seeks to expand educational opportunities for all students throughout Maine Township.*

### FACTS ABOUT MERIT PAY

- Many community members—including parents—do support performance pay for teachers and the results that follow
- Many teachers' unions don't support any component of pay tied to student achievement
- President Barack Obama and Senator John McCain both support performance-based pay for teachers; it's an issue that transcends politics—and it's time to bring it down from the lofty confines of Presidential politics—to the grassroots level of your local school board

### THE LEYS PAY-FOR-PERFORMANCE PLAN

#### ***How we got here...***

No one has ever answered the question: how does a teacher certificate guarantee that someone is a good and effective teacher? How does “years + college credits = pay” salary matrix actually ensure good teaching for our students? Eric Leys believes that it's time we changed the way teachers are paid. Instead of rewarding years of service, teachers should be compensated based on student achievement. Educators should be rewarded for what they achieve in the classroom.

The public-sector needs to start embracing lessons learned in the private-sector where sophisticated merit-based compensation has been a hallmark of high-performing businesses for decades. Private-sector compensation experts teach us that in business, merit pay is a way to get everyone to follow common goals. This can be applied to the public-sector, as Eric Leys has proposed for Maine 207, as well. Of course, the bottom line in District 207 is not **profit**—but rather, **student achievement**.

### ***Why now is the time...***

Maine Township High School District 207 has long been at the forefront of many positive educational initiatives. During Eric Leys' eight years on the school board, a clear focus on student achievement has emerged that will pay dividends for Maine students well into the future.

- Graduation requirements – Shortly after Leys joined the board in 2001, graduation requirements were bolstered to bring added emphasis to the “core curriculum.” As a consequence of these changes, every Maine graduate is academically prepared for entrance into any Illinois State University.
- Expanding educational offerings – Maine has long been known for the rich array of elective offerings available to students. Following adoption of the core curriculum initiative, the board expanded student's schedules to a 9-period day to allow students greater access to fine arts, business, foreign language, applied arts and technology and many other areas of study.
- Fiscal responsibility – During Leys' tenure on the board, District 207 has lived within its means. Taxpayers have generously supported the schools over the years and prudent management of these public funds is the surest way to honor this support. District 207's financial stability allows it to continue to innovate for the benefit of students, while many school districts are struggling.
- We already have performance pay for administrators – Early in Leys' tenure, the board adopted performance pay for building-level administrators. This was not a bonus, but rather a reward for the best and helped with recruiting top-notch talent to Maine. This was soon expanded to District-level administrators. And for the past four years, Maine 207 has been one of the only public high school districts in the state to write a merit-based component into their Superintendent's contract. During Eric Leys' tenure on the board, the groundwork has been laid to expand merit pay to a new group—teachers—and bring achievement-focused work even closer to students.

So now we have realigned administrator compensation to keep a strong focus on student achievement. The Board of Education and the Maine Teachers Association settled a contract that is fair to both teachers, and to taxpayers, that expires in 2012—so there is plenty of time to work out a merit-based compensation program that is fair to teachers, rewards gains in student achievement, and positions Maine 207 at the forefront of student-focused learning and success-indexed compensation.

## ***Why Eric's proposal is the right proposal...***

Eric Leys believes that paying for performance by tying results in student achievement to teacher pay is the best way to improve academic excellence in Maine Township High Schools and ensure that we continue to recruit and retain the very best teachers to educate the students of our community.

Including a merit-based component in teacher pay is a controversial topic. While communities tend to largely favor this type of forward thinking, unions such as the National Education Association, the Illinois Education Association, and even our local Maine Teachers' Association are resistant to such a large-scale change in the way we do business at Maine East, Maine South, and Maine West. Therefore, it is important that implementation is careful, and timing is key. Eric Leys will work with community stakeholders, district and building administrators, and teachers to lay the groundwork and lead a collaborative effort to include merit pay in the next teachers' contract negotiated between the Board of Education and the Maine Teachers Association.

Eric Leys believes that there are many outstanding teachers in Maine that deserve to be recognized for going above and beyond. Teachers that are focused on results-driven student learning have nothing to fear under Leys' proposal. A successful performance pay system needs to include a blend of factors to determine "merit." Eric Leys' ideas for merit pay are solid, and fair...

- **Include all teachers.** Just as District 207 has expanded performance based pay for administrators—and have instituted a program that is not punitive, and a component of an overall competitive compensation package, rather than a "bonus", in order to make merit pay work we need to establish criteria that is inclusive and works for all teachers. From Physical Education to AP classes, from Home Economics to Business, from Foreign Language to Physics and Special Education.
- **Significant and impactful, yet not demoralizing.** Eric Leys doesn't want to just pay bad teachers less and keep them in our schools teaching students. Leys' plan rewards excellent teaching and encourages under-performing teachers to seek another line of work. Eric Leys believes that good teaching occurs when students learn. This is best evidenced by measured improvement gains. So rather than adopt a bonus system which amounts to extra pay that will bring good teachers outside of the competitive marketplace or a straight 100% merit system that could compromise the best practices of improving student achievement, Leys supports reallocating a portion of existing teacher pay—as part of a market-competitive contract—in the range of 10-15%.
- **Retain only the best.** As new teachers work through their four-year probationary period before attaining tenure, Eric Leys believes the default should be "No." Leys believes that only the best and the brightest should stay on in District 207. Maine is known throughout the state for excellent teaching, and high quality teachers. This has been attained by implementing a more rigorous evaluation process that was developed through collaboration between teachers and administrators. We must apply this same effort to the development of a carefully planned and executed merit pay system for our teachers.

- **Peer evaluators.** Teachers unions are often quick to argue that supervisor bias can sink a merit based compensation program for teachers. This criticism was common when performance based pay plans were first rolled out in the private sector, and can be overcome. Eric Leys supports a ‘peer judging’ component in District 207’s performance to counteract the common arguments against rewarding teachers who have a positive impact on student learning through merit pay.
- **Embrace diversity.** Maine 207 has an extremely diverse student population at our three campuses. While this is a challenge for the school district—it is also a tremendous strength. Our student population is ethnically diverse, diverse in socio-economic status, diverse in mastery of the English language, and diverse in learning and achievement ability. Eric Leys believes board members are responsible to lead our schools in construction of an educational framework that fosters the growth of all students to their full potential. Merit pay shouldn’t just reward the AP/Accelerated teachers that have the most academically-gifted students in their classrooms; it should reward teachers that do the best job of helping an array of students reach their full learning potential. We need to measure how much “value” different teachers add.
- **Reward positive decisions.** A compensation plan at its best can encourage positive activities by our professional educators. Improving student achievement is not limited to what’s measurable on a standardized test. Eric Leys believes in innovation and rewarding positive work. Positive work such as creation of a “Career Development Plan” that defines all professional development intentions aligned with District objectives and current assignment. We can reward teachers for executing professional service commitments that serve our school, students, or community outside the normal school day. We can also tie positive evaluations to movement on the salary schedule. Since merit can also be derived from taking on challenging assignments, we can offer a pay component that takes into account teachers serving in “hard to staff” or “hard to serve” positions. Leys believes that teacher leadership can be incorporated into a merit pay system that provides leadership opportunities for teachers not wishing to move into administration such as mentoring, peer coaching and assistance, curriculum development, content specialists, and research coordination.

**Eric Leys is the ONLY board member candidate with a student-focused agenda ready for implementation in Maine 207.**

Eric has served on the board for eight years, and is a graduate of Maine 207. As board president for two years, Eric had a very positive working relationship with the MTA leadership through two MTA Presidents. Eric feels that the most important aspects in successful negotiations are patience, communication, and compromise. I believe if both the board and MTA focus on fostering a relationship of mutual trust and working closely with each other the end goal of maintaining district financial stability and improving student achievement while honoring our professional staff with the appropriate, market-competitive salary and benefits that they deserve; merit pay will prove a natural next step as Maine 207 explores innovative methods to better prepare students for the constellation of opportunities that exist beyond our school walls.