

## OUR VIEWS

# New teacher pay scheme is déjà vu

The Janesville School District shunned last week the idea of merit pay for teachers, embracing instead the pre-Act 10 pay structure known as “step and lane.”

Under the new system, the steps and lanes look different but essentially function the same—teachers get automatic raises for tenure and for training. An important difference, as Superintendent Steve Pophal noted, is that teachers are now required to obtain professional development credits related to their classroom work. The old system allowed teachers to claim salary hikes regardless of the credits’ relevance to the education field.

This new structure marks the end of the district’s brief, halfhearted experimentation with merit pay. The district subscribed to a pay-for-performance model for a few years under former Superintendent Karen Schulte. But when Pophal arrived last year, the school board formally—and all too happily—declared merit pay dead.

Under Pophal, the district dusted off and gussied up circa 2010 step-and-lane policies, and so we’re back to square one, far from linking teacher pay to classroom performance.

Though Act 10’s adoption in 2011 limited the ability of public-sector unions to bargain collectively and freed districts to innovate and pay teachers in novel new ways, the Janesville School District has failed to escape the gravitational pull of education’s pessimistic past. It claims merit pay is impractical, even counterproductive.

In interviews with *The Gazette*, Pophal and school board President Kevin Murray asserted the difficulty in objectively measuring performance, given the wide variety and complexity of tasks and challenges

For whatever reason, merit pay has become as elusive as the holy grail. They’ll likely rattle off a list.

And we have to believe school principals—the managers of their buildings—could list their best and worst teachers, too.

For whatever reason, merit pay has become as elusive as the holy grail. Even under Schulte’s merit pay system, the administration and school board couldn’t bring themselves to single out the best teachers. The complicated, paperwork-intensive scheme gave nearly 99 percent of teachers a pay boost, while the school board publicly fantasized that all the teachers deserved the raises.

One of the few redeeming aspects of the new pay structure adopted last week is it ties a tiny amount of teacher pay—\$100—to the achievement of “building goals,” such as a school improving math scores by 5 percent, and an additional \$100 for the district achieving its goals.

We’ll have to see whether these carrots, too, turn into participation ribbons given to every teacher in every building, but certainly any nod to merit in this mostly meritless system is worth keeping.

That this new system offers a kernel of incentive is a hopeful sign, suggesting the school board, deep within its political subconscious, wants to reward good performance.

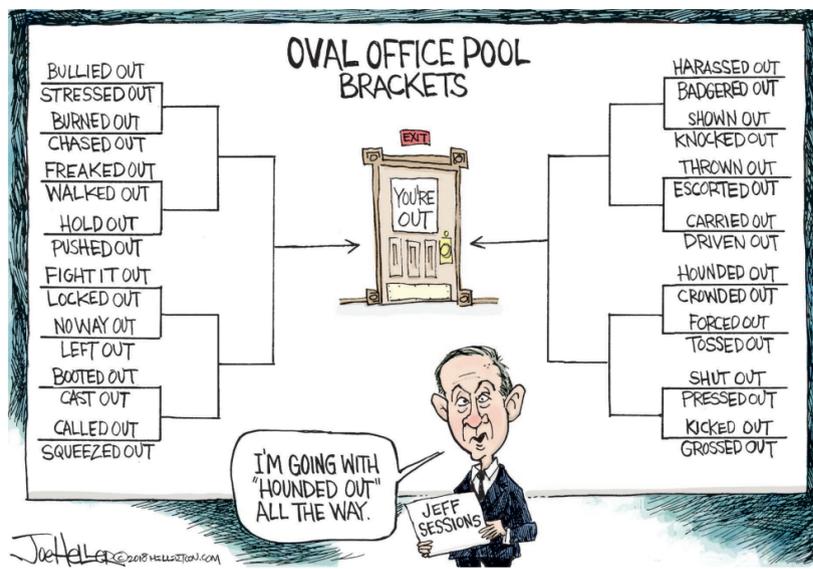
Though our call may fall on deaf ears, we encourage the school board not to give up on merit pay. It should continue to experiment—if only \$100 at a time—and remain open to the idea that both the best and worst teachers deserve to be paid what they’re worth.

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## OTHER VIEWS

## Public-sector unions deserve to be destroyed. Employees deserve freedom

How does a public-sector union work? Easy.

First, the state creates a monopoly. The monopoly forces taxpayers to fund those workers, whether they do a good job or not. The union then coerces workers to pay dues regardless of whether or not they want to. Then the union uses those dues to help fund political advocacy that perpetuates their monopoly and the union’s influence. So, in other words: racketeering.

Among many significant problems with this arrangement, the most obvious is that it’s an assault on freedom of association. If there is another organization in American life that has a license to compel workers to participate in their nongovernmental organization simply to secure a job, I haven’t heard of it.

The Supreme Court recently heard oral arguments in *Janus v. AFSCME*, a case in which a man named Mark Janus, a non-union child-support specialist in Illinois, argued that his First Amendment rights were violated because he is forced to pay “agency fees” to a public-sector union.

It was dismaying, though not unexpected, that during oral arguments, justices like Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor concerned themselves with the impact the decision would have on union membership rather than concerning themselves with impact this kind of policy has on the Constitution.

The vast majority of media coverage on the topic similarly relied on euphemism-heavy stories that did everything possible to avoid words like “compelling,” “forcing” or “coercing.” Most outlets framed the entire case as a concerted partisan attack on unions and, by extension, the Democratic Party.

As a matter of legality, the intentions of those involved shouldn’t matter much. But the reason disparate groups attack public-sector unions is that the institution’s survival often rests on coercing Americans and undermining the First Amendment. If stripping a political advocacy group of the power to force workers to join their efforts is a crippling event, then it’s an event worth celebrating.

As it is, workers in union-heavy industries are typically under incredible pressure to join—in my experience, there are few bullies bigger than the union boss in everyday American life. Yet general union membership continues to crater. Those who resist these efforts are often accused of being “free riders,” because they purportedly benefit from collective bargaining but refuse to pay in.

This is an exceptionally peculiar argument coming from organizations for which the central mission, as far as I can tell, is to ensure that the least effective workers are protected at the expense of the most effective workers.

More than that, though, the entire case against Janus not only rests on coercion, but on a debatable, if not dubious, notion. *John Doe must join a union, because he*

There’s a simple way to find out how much public-sector employees are worth individually, and that’s breaking the union’s monopoly.

*already benefits from collective bargaining negotiations*, union advocates argue. Does he?

Even if we concede that collective bargaining negotiations might raise the average salary of teachers, it may very well depress his salary. It is just as easy to argue that collective bargaining hurts the good teacher. Public-sector unions are not only arguing that workers must join a collective and subvert their individual rights, but that they must accept an ideological contention.

In many states, public-sector unions don’t have collective bargaining rights. Yet, as I write this, every school in all 55 counties of one of those states—West Virginia, where the average teachers’ salary is a bit higher than the average worker’s—are now closed due to an illegal teacher’s strike. Most of those average workers in West Virginia have no choice when it comes to their children’s educations.

Yet nearly every story about this situation focuses on the plight of poor teachers rather than powerless parents. On one hand, we hear that teachers unions are vital to the economy because teachers would make far less in the private sector. In the next breath, we hear them argue that teachers are substantially underpaid compared to what others earn in the private sector. So there’s a simple way to find out how much public-sector employees are worth individually, and that’s breaking the union’s monopoly.

If Americans want to join organizations that undercut initiative and achievement to slide employees into safe, pre-determined slots regardless of ability or work ethic, that’s their business. If they want to break the law and blackmail entire communities who have no choice but to walk away, they should be fired. If they want to force co-workers to pay for their political activities, they should be stopped.

And if they claim that most teachers want to willingly participate in union efforts, the only way to find out is by giving those public employees a choice.

*David Harsanyi is a senior editor at The Federalist and the author of the forthcoming “First Freedom: A Ride through America’s Enduring History with the Gun, From the Revolution to Today.”*



DAVID HARSANYI

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## SOUND OFF

### On polling place staying at City Hall:

This is in response to not allowing voting to take place in the police station. So those who don’t believe in God won’t vote if it’s held at a church, or those who hated school won’t go if it’s held in a school. Those who are hesitant to vote in a police station probably are felons and can’t vote anyway. This is getting ridiculous.

■ I would think the minority people would be rather upset that it’s even in the city building. After all, all the police have to do is look out the window, and they can see who is coming and going there.

■ The reason people don’t feel safe and comfortable in our society is because individuals separate us from what we basically are, the human race. People like to separate us, Black Lives Matter or white privilege, because they want to justify their job and their mission to divide us as humans. Those who don’t like the word ‘human’ need to go back to biology class.

**On Monday story, “Two wheels forward,” Page 1A:** Must we continue to put our tax dollars into seldom-used bike lanes and trails while allowing many of our other streets to fall into complete disrepair?

■ I actually think bike lanes are dangerous. They give a bicyclist a false sense of security, and it shouldn’t do that. With so little use, I think the city should spend the money somewhere else. Maybe just make sure that those that ride on the street know the rules of the road. I think the off-road trails are great, but let’s take the bike lanes off our streets. It does nobody any good.

**On the Second Amendment:** I see nothing wrong with America bearing arms. Just wear sleeveless T-shirts and get rid of the guns.

**On arming teachers:** It’s sad that we have to arm our teachers. In today’s society, we have to arm the teachers that are qualified and want to be armed to protect our children. We need to protect our children. Our children are our most important commodity that parents have.

**On Florida shooting:** Our fearless president said he would run into the school to stop the shooter. His personal physician has released a statement saying he could not actually do this due to his severe case of bone spurs.

**On the Monterey Dam:** Those who are complaining about the dam never bothered to look back in history about Janesville. This is what they should be teaching in the schools. Trading posts were along the river and the towns of Rockport, Monterey and Spring Brook, and all those other towns along the river were here back of the dam. All those little towns were annexed and swallowed up by Janesville after the dam was built.

**On Milton School District proposed purchase of the Hawk Zone:** Really?

They want to buy another building when they can’t even keep up with the buildings that they have.

**On Gov. Scott Walker visits to Rock County:** Scott Walker visited Janesville last month and Beloit on Tuesday. They have all been hand-picked crowds. I hope he makes an announced campaign stop to Rock County that is open to the public so we can all welcome him in our own way.

**On Wednesday story, “School Board OKs teacher pay plan” (Page 1A):** One of the biggest criticisms of public educators is the use of jargon. Why does the superintendent have promises and all other staff members have goals? Seventy-five percent of us do not have children in school, and inconsistent wording and jargon make it very difficult for us to support the district.

■ I commend the Janesville School District. They have many things to be proud of. The teacher’s union and board compromised. Their district and staff do such a good job maintaining schools, including the ones dating back to the 1930s. The promises made to students strive for the success of each and every student.

**On pharmaceutical ads:** Are you as tired of the enormous amount of pharmaceutical ads on TV as I am? Wouldn’t it be nice if pharmaceutical companies would spend as much money on research as they do on TV ads of products that can’t even be purchased without a prescription, and it’s way too costly.



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1 South Parker Drive • P.O. Box 5001  
Janesville, Wis. • 53547-5001 • 608-754-3311

## Sid Schwartz, Editor

sschwartz@gazetteextra.com

## Ann Fiore, Chief Copy Editor

aifiore@gazetteextra.com

## Andrew Broman, Opinion Page Editor

abroman@gazetteextra.com

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