

Q Does MEA oppose all educational reforms?

A No, our positions are based upon current educational research and the relevant experience of our members.

We are advocates for public education, and if there are better ways to teach children and compensate educators we will support them. Unfortunately, our members have lived through countless reforms by an endless stream of experts and we have grown cautious and skeptical whenever the “latest, greatest idea” is announced.

Our disputes with performance-based pay and charter schools are primarily in their funding, implementation and lack of demonstrated results.

Q Where does MEA stand on Race To The Top?

A MEA supports the noble purpose of improving America’s schools and providing more money for programs. Our difficulty lies in the implementation. We don’t like labeling kids, educators, or schools as losers and we think solutions should be found collaboratively.

Over the last 20 years Maine’s schools have done well despite the reforms, not because of them. We are leery of yet another plan that asks us to sacrifice proven programs for a chance in a federal lottery.

Q What’s wrong with pay for performance?

A Pay for performance or merit pay has been tried in several Maine communities and in numerous states where it failed due to fuzzy criteria, bias by evaluators, and inadequate finances.

For example, Texas spent \$300 million on a three-year merit pay program that did not result in improvements in student achievement according to researchers for Texas A & M University, Vanderbilt University, and the University of Missouri.

Maine currently ranks 43rd in the country for teacher pay and MEA believes adequate resources should be committed to fair compensation for everyone before any experimental pay programs are undertaken – otherwise it becomes a zero sum game in which money is taken from many to pay more to a few.

Q What is Maine’s experience with performance pay?

Is MEA out of touch?

Some gubernatorial candidates and political commentators are painting MEA as a villain, a whiny, self-serving union that blocks, obstructs and opposes all meaningful school reform.



How does MEA answer those charges?

A Performance pay has been tried in numerous places over the last 40 years without success. A variation of it called Career Ladder was employed in Cape Elizabeth over a decade ago and the Association supported it, believing it would reward good teaching.

And, like the other experiments with merit pay in Maine it failed, because Cape Elizabeth lacked the money, administrative support, and adequate evaluation system to make it work.

Some of those Cape teachers who were positive that they were deserving of merit/performance pay were surprised to find that, due to the vagaries of the evaluation process, they were not rewarded and others were for reasons they could not understand.

MEA helped develop and supports an alternative pay scale in Portland called the Professional Learning Based Salary System. It avoids the common mistakes associated with performance pay. Check it out at <http://www.portlandea.org>.

Q What about charter schools?

A The results for charter schools are mixed because they often lack accountability to taxpayers and safeguards for students. Applying free market principles to education can result in some students and schools being losers in the competition. For every example of success there is an example of fraud and failure. Charter schools were first created in the South to avoid integration, and that taint and similar ulterior motives still exist.

During this recessionary time of scarce resources, the creation of a charter school would draw students and resources away from public schools, making our budget crunch even more difficult. Experimenting

with charter schools in this environment makes little sense.

MEA supported the creation of “Innovative Schools” outlined in LD 1801 in this session of the legislature that allows the creation of “charter schools” with accountability to local school boards and safeguards for students.

Q Why does MEA mistrust charter schools?

A They haven’t been shown to be an improvement.

Diane Ravitch, a New York University professor and former Assistant Secretary of Education, analyzed 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress mathematics data, compiled by the U.S. Department of Education to measure academic performance at public schools. She concluded that public school students are not only outperforming charter school students in math, but that the gap between them is actually growing.

These findings are especially troubling, Ravitch points out, because many charter schools have been accused of “creaming” the most motivated students from low-performing school districts and serving far lower percentages of special education students and English language learners than their home districts.

Ravitch’s analysis comes on the heels of a study released by Stanford University in June 2009 that amassed data on roughly 70 percent of students enrolled in charter schools nationwide and came to very similar conclusions. That research found that charter school students lagged behind their public school counterparts in reading and were more than twice as likely to post lower math scores.