

No More 'Factory Worker' Model for Teacher Pay in Suttons Bay – Tom Ganert

Suttons Bay Public Schools has achieved a rarity – a teachers union contract that pays teachers for performance and not seniority. While most every other Michigan district has a salary schedule that gives automatic raises to teachers for every year they work, Suttons Bay approved a four-year contract that groups teachers based upon performance, starting in the 2012-2013 school year.

Suttons Bay Superintendent Mike Murray said he wanted to pattern the pay schedule after a law firm and get away from the old automatic raise model, which he said treated teachers like “factory workers”.

Murray said a teacher starting out would be like an associate at a law firm. As teachers showed value to the district, they would become more like partners, and then the cream of the crop would become like senior partners.

Current teachers are grandfathered in at their 2011-2012 salary. Under the previous contract, a teacher's pay would advance on a step system, with an automatic increase in salary every year.

By contrast, the new, three-tier salary schedule begins with a “developing teachers” classification (\$35,000 to \$50,000), and then moves on to “professional teachers” (\$50,000 to \$60,000) and “master teachers” (\$60,000 to \$65,000).

All three categories of teachers can earn annual bonuses that range from \$0 to \$1,800 based on four categories: ineffective, minimally effective, effective and highly effective. A teacher's effectiveness would be determined by standardized test scores, internal standards and assessments, and student growth, Murray said.

“There is an awful lot of data tracking that is involved in this,” Murray said.

Teachers with three years of effective performance could petition to move up in the system. They would go before a board of three master teachers and three administrators and would need four votes to be approved.

The system does away with the automatic salary increases for teachers who get master's degrees.

“Teachers were getting master's degrees they will never use and just doing it to get more money,” Murray said.

Murray said one teacher asked what was the incentive for a teacher to get a master's degree. Murray said another teacher answered that question, saying if the master's degree truly made that teacher better, the system would reward that.

Michael Van Beek, education policy director at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, is in favor of systems rewarding performance over seniority.

“This is a vast improvement over the factory model compensation system used in nearly every school district throughout the country,” Van Beek wrote in an email. “Teachers are going to be rewarded for their classroom performance and leadership, not simply for years on the job or number of college credits completed. Effective teachers will be able to secure higher pay more quickly, but highly paid teachers will also have to constantly demonstrate their value to the district. This creates a much more professional environment, and one that's zeroed in on a singular goal — increased student learning.”

Suttons Bay, which is located in Leelanau County, has about 60 teachers and 1,000 students.