

Forced-Unionism Abuses Exposed

The facts Big Labor bosses would rather you didn't hear about.

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Compulsory unionism breeds corruption. In each issue of "Exposed," the National Right to Work Committee will highlight yet another example of union-boss abuse spawned and perpetuated by Big Labor's government-granted privilege to force workers to pay union dues, or be fired.

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Utah Teacher Union Bosses Oppose Higher Pay For Math and Science Teachers

In this world, it seems there's no such thing as an unmixed blessing. Right to Work Utah's private sector is so vibrant that it is attracting new employees from across the country. But public schools are having more and more trouble hiring enough teachers to serve the children of the Beehive State's new employees as well as those of longtime residents.

However, despite Utah school rolls' rapid expansion, schools find most elementary and many secondary education teaching positions can be filled without too much difficulty. At the high school level, the vast majority of school districts have far less trouble recruiting English, history, and physical education teachers, for example, than they do recruiting chemistry, physics and calculus teachers.

Therefore, from the perspective of schoolchildren, parents and taxpayers, and naturally also from the perspective of teachers with expertise in secondary math and science and other hard-to-fill subject areas, the most effective solution for Utah public schools' hiring problems is to offer teachers of some subjects higher pay than teachers of other subjects.

That way, public schools could fill all kinds of teaching positions without unduly burdening taxpayers, and educators with both the talent and the perseverance to become qualified to teach high school math and science, special education, etc., would be more appropriately rewarded for their intelligence and accomplishments.

But sadly, the overwhelming majority of public school districts in Utah and around the country currently adhere to a so-called "single salary schedule," which sets the salary levels for all teachers by looking at just two factors: the teacher's level of education (that is, bachelor's or master's degree or Ph.D., regardless of subject area) and years of experience. The "single salary schedule" precludes any consideration of what subjects are taught or at how advanced a level.

To obtain qualified teachers in hard-to-fill subject areas, school districts across Utah would undoubtedly move now to scrap the “single salary schedule.” However, the many Beehive State school districts that currently grant the bosses of one teacher union “exclusive” bargaining power over all the teachers they employ will face intense union-boss opposition to any proposed reform that links teacher pay to subject area.

A January 22 report in Salt Lake City’s *Deseret Morning News* cited the rationalization offered by top Utah Education Association (UEA/NEA) union lobbyist Vik Arnold for opposing any substantive reform of the “single salary schedule”: “Having some teachers getting . . . [a] boost in pay based on their subject of teaching, while others aren’t, could cause divisiveness among teachers.”

What Arnold and his cohorts are really concerned about, of course, is maintaining Big Labor control, not avoiding “divisiveness.” At universities and colleges today, both unionized and union-free, professors of hard-to-fill subject areas such as engineering routinely get paid far more than English and history professors, yet no union boss ever calls the discrepancy “divisive.”

But officials of the National Education Association union and its affiliates like the UEA are terrified of any reform in how elementary and secondary school teachers are paid that would discredit their phony contention that all teachers would make less were it not for union monopoly bargaining.

NEA union bosses’ stubborn and self-serving defense of the counterproductive “single salary schedule” is harming student performance and gouging taxpayers across the country, but the damage being wrought in Utah, with its rapidly growing student population, is especially severe. In response, Utah State Sen. Howard Stephenson (R-Draper) is sponsoring a well-intentioned, very modest reform that would enable school districts to pay teachers of math, science and technology an extra \$5000 annually. Stephenson’s bill may well be okayed by the Utah Legislature early this year.

But the fact is, local Utah school officials clearly already have the legal power, over the next few years, to improve the way they compensate teachers much more substantially than Stephenson’s compromise would. Utah, unlike most other states, has no statute mandating or even authorizing union monopoly bargaining in public education.

Therefore, Utah school officials who want to change their compensation policies to serve the best interests of schoolchildren, parents and taxpayers need only announce now that, once their current union contract expires, they will no longer recognize any union as teachers’ monopoly-bargaining agent. That move alone would eliminate by far the most significant roadblock to real reform of the “single salary schedule.”

The only question is whether Utah school officials are genuinely interested in fixing teacher compensation – or just interested in talking about it.

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