

New Action/UFT

...a caucus of the United Federation of Teachers
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The Teacher Evaluation Train Wreck is Unfolding Before Us

Since January 2010, New Action's record on a new Teacher Evaluation System and Teacher Tenure is clear: New Action/UFT absolutely opposes linking student test scores to teacher evaluation and tenure decisions. At the June 2013 UFT Executive Board, Jonathan Halabi, New Action co-chair, spoke against the newly imposed teacher evaluation system announced by NYS ed commissioner John King.

Today in the schools there is a mess. Principals were not well-trained in the new system, and many are making it up as they go along. Some are rating items they do not observe. In some schools our contractual rights to plan our lessons is being infringed upon. There is routine collection of lesson plans; there are schools where lesson plan format is being dictated. There are observations being conducted not according to the agreement, or observations occurring before planning conferences, or planning conferences not scheduled at all. And when a teacher disagrees with the principal, there is no recourse.

Teachers are now reading the Danielson Framework and are angry about aspects. For the first time there is some focus on Domain 4. Will you be downgraded for not participating in an after school activity that your principal asks you to attend? For not at least once a year reporting a colleague's disparaging remark about a child? (what if you don't hear one?) For disagreeing with the principal's rating of an aspect of your lesson?

Lesson Plan Resolution

New Action Executive Board member, Bill Goldman, Chapter Leader of Tottenville HS, presented the resolution on lesson plan format on September 23, 2013. New Action wrote the initial draft, which was shaped into a bipartisan resolution. There is already a Union Initiated (UI) grievance. Our union must use all means available to ensure that the new teacher does not eviscerate our hard fought for contractual rights. We urge all chapter leaders and delegates to communicate with the members in their chapters reminding them of their rights regarding lesson plans.

Tests make kids sick

Tonight we have a resolution calling on the PEP to end the overemphasis on standardized testing. This resolution could go further, but nonetheless deserves support.

New Action leader Maria Ramos rose to amend this at the September 23 Executive Board:

"the current intensity of the standardized test taking and test prep affects children emotionally and physically leading to anxiety, frustration, low self-esteem, headaches and other physical ailments."

Hear hear! The amendment was unanimously adopted.

Moratorium on Consequences for High Stakes Tests

No one opposes standards. But there is a vast chasm between standards and the mania for standardized testing, especially when such dire consequences are attached to the results. Standardized tests are being used to grade schools, close schools, destroy the morale of the school community and now to evaluate teachers.

New Action sharply disagrees with the UFT leadership regarding the Common Core, the new Teacher Evaluation system (or even the need for one), and the potential abuse by administrators in issuing “ineffectives” to teachers. But we wholeheartedly agree with the call to put a moratorium on consequences for high stakes standardized tests.

What’s coming?

This storm is just starting. Many teachers have as yet to be observed. We are 11 months away from year-end ratings. Very few of us have begun to digest that low scores on the 20% State and 20% Local Measures Components will trump the judgment of a principal who supports you and thinks you are effective.

And we are a full year from teachers with I’s working in fear of their jobs, and teachers with D’s having to report both to their own principal and to an outside administrator.

And, little as we like to think of it, we are almost two years from at least hundreds of tenured teachers being fired.

What Next?

We should continue fighting problems caused by the DoE’s unfaithful implementation of the system King imposed. We should look to renegotiate many of the problematic aspects.

But at its core, this is a system that rests on rating teachers based on standardized test scores, that weakens tenure. We need to go back to Albany and advocate for a repeal of the misguided legislation that led to this evaluation system.

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