

New Action/UFT

...a caucus of the United Federation of Teachers
PO Box 180574 North Richmond Hill, NY 11418
<http://newaction.org> new.action.uft@gmail.com

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New Action welcomes you to a new year and to the Citywide Chapter Leader meeting.

New Action/UFT is one of several caucuses (political parties) in the United Federation of Teachers. There are differences between the caucuses. But we believe, despite differences, we stand need to stand together against threats to our members and external enemies of our union.

New Action has a 30-year record of accomplishments as the alternative to Unity caucus.

- *In 1995 New Action led the historic fight against the infamous “Zero, Zero” contract – Result: it was the only contract to be defeated by the members.*
- *In 2002 and 2003 New Action organized informational picketing in over 100 schools – Result: salary parity became the number one union issue.*
- *New Action has a decades-long record on issues of social justice – from spearheading the struggle for divestment from apartheid South Africa in the 80s, to getting the UFT to take positions against Stop & Frisk and for the DREAM Act giving immigrants access to financial aid, just in the last few years.*
- *New Action has argued that many chapter leaders need assistance and chapters need rebuilding – Result: Creation of the bipartisan Organizing Committee which sends retiree activists into schools to help chapter leaders.*

We work with our leadership, yet remain independent and critical of the leadership when warranted. New Action chairs Michael Shulman and Jonathan Halabi, and eight additional New Action supporters, give voice to members’ concerns on the UFT Executive Board.

New Action announces a coalition slate with MORE for the 2016 UFT elections

Through twelve years of Bloomberg/Klein, New Action worked with Unity Caucus in a bipartisan relationship that included putting the Unity presidential candidates (Randi Weingarten and Michael Mulgrew) at the top of our ticket. Today Bloomberg is gone, and we do not find that we have agreement with Unity on teacher evaluation or on how to deal with abusive administrators. We will continue to work with Unity Caucus in the substantial areas where we do agree, but we will not continue our electoral agreement.

New Action and MORE do agree on teacher evaluation, and on the need to fight abusive administrators, as well as many other issues. Our caucuses have concluded an agreement to run a full joint slate in the UFT elections this coming spring.

New Action 2015 – 2016 Priority Issues

Abusive Administrators – Identify them, retrain them, work to remove them

Teacher Evaluation – mitigate the effects, seek to repeal the State law tying ratings to test scores

Probationers and ATRs – protect vulnerable members from arbitrary and vindictive administrators

_____ I would like to join New Action/UFT (\$25 for pedagogues, \$15 for all others)

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The surprising things Seattle teachers won for students by striking

By Valerie Strauss September 25, Washington Post

Seattle teachers went on strike for a week this month with a list of goals for a new contract. By the time the strike officially ended this week, teachers had won some of the usual stuff of contract negotiations – for example, the first cost-of-living raises in six years – but also less standard objectives.

For one thing, teachers demanded, and won, guaranteed daily recess for all elementary school students – 30 minutes each day. In an era when recess for many students has become limited or non-existent despite the known benefits of physical activity, this is a big deal, and something parents had sought.

What’s more, the union and school officials agreed to create committees at 30 schools to look at equity issues, including disciplinary measures that disproportionately affect minorities. Several days after the end of the strike, the Seattle School Board voted for a one-year ban on out-of-school suspensions of elementary students who commit specific nonviolent offenses, and called for a

plan that could eliminate all elementary school suspensions.

Other wins for students in Seattle’s nearly 100 traditional public schools include:

Teachers won an end to the use of student standardized test scores to evaluate them – and now, teachers will be included in decisions on the amount of standardized testing for students. This evaluation practice has been slammed by assessment experts as invalid and unreliable, and has led to the narrowing of curriculum, with emphasis on the two subjects for which there are standardized tests, math and English Language arts. [emph added]

Special education teachers will have fewer students to work with at a time. In addition, there will be caseload limits for other specialists, including psychologists and occupational therapists.

Seattle teachers had said they were not only fighting for pay raises but to make the system better for students. It sounds like they did.

New Action Proposals and Mayor Bill de Blasio’s Vision for NYC Schools

In his first day back to school remarks “Equity and Excellence” Major Bill de Blasio laid out two goals for our schools and school children. First was to increase the graduation rate, which stands at 68.4%. Second was to make sure those graduates have the skills to make it to the next level. His initiative to provide free, full-day pre-kindergarten is already a major accomplishment. His commitment to work with educators and not against them is a great advance over his predecessor, Mayor Bloomberg.

He laid out six measures 1) giving educators the preparation and support they need to teach Common Core standards; 2) for teachers to work collaboratively with one another; 3) for schools to be safe and supported; 4) to make parents welcome and to open lines of communication; 5) to have school leaders with a strong vision and to open to feedback from the school community; and 6) to develop a sense of real trust throughout the school community. New Action applauds many of these goals, with the obvious exception of Common Core.

New Action would add several points to the Mayor’s list. Reduce class size. Remove the threat of being rated ineffective due to standardized test scores (See Sherri Lederman of Long Island). On trust the Mayor and Chancellor must do much more – administrators need to act collaboratively with staff – not just give feedback. Too many administrators still go after outspoken staff members, rate them unfairly, and target veteran teachers. Administrators should be held accountable for training probationers, and arbitrary discontinuances should be questioned. Schools in New York have become the most segregated in the nation – the Mayor needs to address issues of diversity. The City must also correct the sharp decline of teachers of color in NYC. We welcome much of Mayor de Blasio’s vision and sincerely hope he is receptive of several of New Action’s suggestions.

new.action.uft@gmail.com / Michael (Bklyn) (646) 286-3288 / Jon (Bx) (917) 856-6595 / Greg (SI) (718) 757-4552
