



Teachers' Contract Provisions Must be Implemented Without Barriers

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FEBRUARY
2006

"This new contract is filled with golden opportunities for students, parents, teachers, and school leaders. We cannot let logistical challenges ruin our ability to realize these opportunities."

This February, important changes are taking place in New York City public schools as provisions established in the new teachers' contract are going into effect. The new contract includes provisions that alter counterproductive "work rules" and empower principals in the hiring and retention of teachers. The contract also provides 300,000 struggling children from across the city with 150 extra minutes a week of intensive academic help, while an additional 50,000 students are being offered voluntary additional instruction. In addition, teachers are being given real opportunities for professional growth.

Taken together, these changes could dramatically improve the city's public schools. But this will only happen if everyone works together to make sure that the reforms are implemented fully and effectively. So far, we have seen resistance to these provisions, but in most cases the resistance has been overcome and people are on board with the changes.

For example, one of the most critical changes is the elimination of many "work rules" that previously restrained the role teachers could play in out-of-classroom environments. During contract negotiations many resisted changing work rules but ultimately this was accomplished. As a result, principals can now assign teachers to cafeteria, hallway and yard supervision when they are not teaching. Teachers will be able to staff a club or extra-curricular activity, assist special education students on and off buses, and take part in myriad other activities that allow them to really get to know their students and create the kinds of personal bonds that are critical to the educational process.

We also saw initial resistance to the ending of the "seniority transfer" plan, which gave the most senior—not necessarily the most qualified—teachers highest priority in the hiring process. The contract revision is now seen as benefiting both teachers and principals by creating a more "open market" for the application and hiring processes. Also, new teachers are now protected from the old process of "bumping" in which teachers who were "excessed" from their school for budgetary reasons or a school closing could take positions from teachers who had been in a position less than a year and a day.

The contract revision that met the least resistance was the creation of a "lead teacher" position for high need schools. Lead teachers will be paid an additional \$10,000, and they will be recruited based

on merit. Lead teachers will provide guidance and support to their colleagues. Such positions provide excellent opportunities for the best teachers to remain in the classroom rather than move into administrative tracks.

Now, as the provisions are being implemented, we are witnessing significant resistance from schools and parents to the additional instructional time. The contract adds 50 minutes to the work week and brings New York City teachers closer to the average seven-hour workday of their suburban colleagues. The 50 minutes will be combined with the 100 minutes added in the last contract, and this time will be used for individualized instruction to groups of 10 or less students who need the help. Combine this time with the two extra days now required at the start of the school year, and struggling students receive 14 extra days of instruction each year. These days could make the difference between students being promoted or being held back for another entire year of instruction.

While no one doubts that additional instructional time will be valuable to these students, many are resisting the change because of the logistical challenges it presents. We cannot let logistical challenges inhibit implementation of this valuable educational program. In addition, we have heard concerns from principals that the seniority transfer plan does not have a cap on the number of teachers who can transfer out of a school. There should be a 10% cap on such transfers in order to ensure that a school does not lose a large number of good teachers in one year.

CEI-PEA plans to convene a committee of principals from around the city to identify such obstacles and develop strategies to overcome them. We recommend that School Leadership Teams also meet to address these issues. And we recommend these actions take place immediately in order to bring down implementation obstacles before they become absolute barriers.

This new contract is filled with golden opportunities for students, parents, teachers, and school leaders. We cannot let logistical challenges ruin our ability to realize these opportunities. The city should embrace these reforms as significant steps in creating better schools for our children and make every effort to ensure that these reforms become reality in our schools and classrooms.



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