

UFT: Defend ATR Seniority Rights To Jobs!

The ATR/School Closing (ASC) committee of the Independent Community of Educators (ICE*) consists of UFT members seeking justice and fairness in regards to the ATR and school closing issues, which are negatively affecting teachers, children and communities. Teachers, students and communities should not be victimized when it is government that has failed our schools. Our union must not sit on the sidelines in a defensive posture. Or issue tepid responses of support for teachers. Or surrender to a "fait accompli" attitude.

The UFT must take the offensive in an aggressive manner by using all its resources to reverse the decline of protections for teachers and children that have been taking place in the era of Joel Klein and Michael Bloomberg.

What is to be done?

ATRs and RTRs, the class of new teaching fellows threatened with losing their jobs this past December if they didn't find jobs, learned in recent months that relying on UFT officials to carry the ball is not enough. Through the Ad Hoc ATR committee, ATRs organized throughout the school system with a petition campaign that reached into over 100 schools, presenting these signatures as part of a resolution calling for a rally at Tweed. On the eve of the rally, the UFT responded with a side agreement with the DOE that ostensibly provides some protection for ATRs from being penalized for their higher salaries. At the same time, the UFT went to court to stop the firing of RTRs and won an injunction stopping the DOE. It should be pointed out that in 2007, when there was no agitation, the UFT did nothing and Teaching Fellows were fired in December. Thus, an important lesson has been learned: Do not rely on the UFT officials to do the right thing on their own. But they will respond when there's agitation from the members.

We will have to monitor this agreement over the next year to gauge its impact. In the meantime, with more new school closings announced, a new class of ATRs will be thrown on the market to compete for jobs. When you entered teaching did you ever think you would be in the position of having to race around the city begging for a job, especially if you have been teaching for years?

The UFT response has been: we'll teach you how to interview, how to write a resume, how to put on makeup to make yourself more appealing. We reject these "solutions." The UFT is not exactly "on the sidelines." Weingarten sits on the board of New Visions and a UFT rep sits on the so-called core committee that signs off on school reorganizations. The UFT uses the same language of the DOE "reformers," referring to schools as "failing," while applauding yearly rises in test scores as a triumph.

It is clear there will be no permanent resolution unless we reverse some of the disastrous consequences of the 2005 and 2006 contracts, which eviscerated so many seniority rights. The UFT/DOE touted open-market hiring system has been a disaster for many teachers. But it goes further than that. The closing of schools and its consequent movement of teachers, the chaos of what is euphemistically called "parent choice," the creation of a dual school system of semi-private charter schools, often existing within the same building, is destroying the concept of a school community where teachers often spend their careers getting to know generations of students and parents. We think these communities are beneficial and their destruction is a major loss for the children and parents as much as for the teachers.

ICE demands that the UFT:

- **Oppose school closings.** These created the ATR quagmire and scapegoat educators unjustly. It is the City that has failed these "poorly functioning" schools; not the teachers, parents or students. We need contractually mandated **smaller class sizes**.
- **Restore our contractual right to Seniority Transfer.**
- **Protect Tenure, Evaluation and Due Process procedures.** Educators must not be subjected to severance or firings due to students' test score results which are used to close schools and to create the ATR'd educator.
- **Promote a Hiring Freeze until all ATRs/RTRs get job placements.**
- **Return to school budgets** based on average teacher salary applied to each school to **prevent age/vet discrimination.**

There will be no change unless you get involved and help build pressure for change in the UFT. **Help organize. Join us.**

Weds, Feb. 4 - 5 PM @ The Skylight Diner on W 34th St. (9th Ave)

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** The Independent Community of Educators (ICE) came together in the fall of 2003 to address the inadequate response of the UFT leadership to the deteriorating working conditions for teachers and learning conditions for their students. We believe in democratic unionism based on an active and involved rank and file. ICE is committed to help form a movement for progressive change within the UFT and in the NYC school system by forging alliances with other rank and file movements in other unions and with parent and community groups that share our vision.*

Next ICE Meeting: Check <http://www.ice-uft.org> for date and location