I drove to New Haven Wednesday morning with expectations of hearing the anticipated crowd of thousands gathering on the New Haven Green to advocate for all students in Connecticut. I braved a cold Wednesday morning along with the crowd that consisted primarily of very young school age children hoping to hear the coalition of primarily charter school advocates demand that every child have access to a quality education. I expected to hear vehement calls to our legislative leaders and charter school operators in Connecticut to remove restrictive policies that prohibit students throughout Connecticut entry to charter schools throughout the school year, calling for the elimination of policies whereby charter schools can legally close their doors October 1 and deny students in Connecticut access to their schools. I expected to hear demands to discontinue the policy whereby students that “do not fit in” at a charter school are sent packing back to the traditional public school.

...continued on page 8
The New Haven Federation of Teachers has secured a $300,000 grant from the AFT-National Innovation Fund. I applied to the fund on our behalf to implement a Restorative Practices program here in New Haven. It is a two year plan. Year one involves assessing the level of knowledge and implementation already existing in the New Haven Public School system with training of teachers and administrators to follow.

The timeline calls for piloting the program in a handful of selected schools this spring with a larger role out in September for school year 2015-16. As of this writing, initial planning meetings have taken place and a project director has been hired. William “Billy” Johnson, former principal at Domus Academy, has been contracted to coordinate the effort of the NHFT to guide us through this work. Billy has the perfect skill set and resume to lead this project. Because it is an NHFT funded project, Billy and I are working together very closely. There has been a tremendous amount of positive energy, anticipation, and acceptance. Several meetings among the key constituents have taken place with working groups being established. Key players include our teachers union, central office, the mayor’s office, various community agencies, and Yale Law school graduate students. We are up and running!

But why such a large investment in restorative practices? Urban school districts like New Haven all grapple with the same issue: providing a safe and orderly environment that is conducive to learning. Learning cannot take place without effective routines and procedures in place. Prior to becoming the NHFT president, I spent 22 years as a classroom teacher and six more years as instructional coach in the math department.

The necessity for effective classroom management has not changed in my 35 years. New teachers today struggle with the same behavioral issues that I did back in 1979 when I started.

There are many impediments to establishing effective classroom management. Lack of support from administration and/or parents, student apathy, and a lack of high-quality instruction materials needed to construct lessons that are as engaging as our students deserve and teachers strive to prepare. Classroom disruptions that impact student learning occur on a regular basis with the never ending debate: what to do with chronic offenders that are ultimately denying other students a right to their education while the unending cycle of suspension versus returning students to class with little or no effective consequences continues unabated. Restorative practices have proven to be an effective program in many urban school systems throughout the country (Boston, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Oakland, Chicago, Baltimore, Minneapolis, New York City, etc.). It is not new nor a gimmick. It is not a silver bullet to fix all classroom management issues teachers face. What it can and will do is provide teachers and administrators with an additional set of strategies and practices that will address the behavior issues impacting teaching and learning.


delimiter

There are 9 types of restorative practices. They are:

1. Restorative Justice
2. Community Conference
3. Community Service
4. Peer Juries
5. Circle Process
6. Peer Mediation
7. Preventative and Post-Conflict Resolution Programs
8. Informal Restorative Practices
9. Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

delimiter

Very often educators, including me, that are not familiar with Restorative Practices, incorrectly assume this is a “soft” program whereby student consequences are eliminated with suspensions and other disciplinary measures thrown out and disbanded. Student must be held accountable for their actions. It is a disservice to the students and our school community to do otherwise. Yet students punished by zero-tolerance measures often fall behind their peers due to lost learning time. As a result, they often become frustrated or embarrassed and proceed to disrupt class. Restorative Practices has proven to be an effective program dealing with the issues that have frustrated us for the past 35 years and beyond.
Transfers: Voluntary and Involuntary

I receive inquiries as to the procedure for both voluntary and involuntary transfers on an ongoing basis. A “policy” for transfers has been established with Central Office in our collaborative efforts to bring some uniformity to these situations.

Voluntary Transfers:
1. Teachers seeking a transfer are free to apply for any vacancy posted on Applictrac.
2. When the position is removed after the 10 day posting period, principals (or supervisors) receive a list of all teachers that have applied for their position.
3. Principals will review the applicants and contact respective teachers for interviews.
4. The principal will offer the position to a teacher and upon acceptance will send a “rec for hire” (recommendation) to Human Resources.
5. Human Resources will process and send the recommendation to both the superintendent and deputy superintendent for approval.

Involuntary Transfers:
There is widespread confusion on involuntary transfers. Perhaps the most misunderstood piece is the role of seniority. Fortunately we have been spared the misfortunes of layoffs that so many of our teaching colleagues locally, statewide, and nationally have suffered. Our contract does include a clause which clearly states if a reduction in force is to occur, lay-offs are determined by seniority. However this does not apply to teaching assignments. While not contractual, we have agreement with Central Office that if an involuntary transfer is needed, the principal or supervisor will first ask for volunteers. On previous occasions over the past few years, many teachers, for various reasons, have requested a transfer thereby eliminating the need to move a teacher(s) arbitrarily. In an odd, twist the involuntary transfers can sometimes be a blessing in disguise as it allows for teachers seeking a transfer the first opportunity to interview for those positions.

No one likes an involuntary transfer. And that includes teachers as well as administrators. Principals want to select their staff and teachers want to go to an assignment of their choosing. This is an area of which I am particularly sensitive as I have been transferred three times in my career. I put a great deal of time and effort into assisting teachers that either request a transfer or are scheduled for reassignment. We look for all possible vacancies within the teacher’s certification, ask the teacher for their preference, and send the names off to principals to schedule interviews. Very often (but admittedly not always) teachers land in an assignment where they are very satisfied. But the goal is always for what we refer to as the “perfect marriage”: a teacher being placed in an assignment of their choosing and an administrator selecting a teacher for their faculty.

Notes:

Transfers during a school year
- Our contract states the transfer will become effective the next school year. However, if a quality replacement can be secured a transfer may occur during the school year. This is to ensure a classroom of students is not suddenly left without a teacher due to a transfer.

Interviews
- Depending on the number of applicants not every teacher will be interviewed. Some positions have 3 or 4 applicants and all candidates can be interviewed while some positions have 20-30 applicants. In this situation principals and supervisors will conduct a “paper screening” (essentially a review of the resumes of all applicants) and follow with an inquiry to the person(s) the teacher has listed as a recommendation. Interviews will then be scheduled.

Posting of Vacancies
- The posting of all positions on Applictrac has rendered some of our contract language obsolete. Article VII references to a vacancy list to be sent to each building steward for posting. That is no longer necessary as we have “24/7” access to all vacancies via Applictrac.
- I receive complaints that some jobs are not posted. We (NHFT Vice President Tom Burns and I) have addressed this many times over the past few years. Jobs must be posted. Part of the problem is the fact that a position cannot be posted until the teacher has officially resigned or retired. Very often teachers hear of a colleague leaving the district, and on occasion even attending their retirement party, yet the job is not posted leading to calls to Tom and me. But if the teacher has not submitted a resignation or retirement the job cannot be posted because that teacher still contractually “owns” that position. We have encouraged teachers repeatedly to submit their resignations or retirements as soon as their individual situation permits. “Holding onto” their positions prohibits the schools from finding the best possible replacement and also prevents our colleagues form applying for that position. The reality is some teachers have had a negative experience in New Haven and will deliberately not submit resignations. However this tactic, intended to “punish” the school district actually hurts our colleagues looking for a transfer the most.
NHFT Holiday Party
Omni Hotel Grand Ballroom • December 12, 2014
In my five years organizing with non-union health care workers who wanted to join the union, job security was always one of their top issues.

Firings were arbitrary, they said. Evaluations were based on favoritism. Experienced employees were fired just because they were more expensive.

So it always surprises me to hear regular people repeat the smears against teachers’ job security. They’re parroting the message of those trying to weaken one of the largest remaining sectors of unionized workers in this country.

When it comes to teachers’ right to job security, you have to look at why management wants to get rid of it—if you want to tell fact from fiction. A few common myths:

**MYTH #1:**
**TEACHER TENURE MEANS A JOB FOR LIFE.**

Teacher tenure is not like academic tenure, which is set up through each university. Faculty members jump through many hoops before becoming tenured.

But maybe the differences are beside the point. Both systems lay out clear grounds for dismissal. A teacher or professor can be fired—for cause.

K-12 teachers first won tenure rights over 100 years ago, but it wasn’t through collective bargaining agreements. The push for tenure systems came out of the desire to protect teachers and districts from the politically motivated firings that came with patronage politics.

It became a way to protect women, pregnant teachers, and people of color from discrimination. Also teachers with controversial views—read, “pro-union.”

In fact, today charter school teachers are organizing unions so they too can bargain for, you guessed it, job security.

**MYTH #2:**
**IT’S IMPOSSIBLE TO FIRE A TENURED TEACHER.**

Research shows teachers are fired more often than federal workers—above 2 percent, compared to .02 percent a year. These figures come from Dana Goldstein’s new book, The Teacher Wars: A History of America’s Most Embattled Profession.

Goldstein also looked at comparable private sector data. These jobs too were more secure than teaching.

If teachers violate policy or can’t do their jobs, it’s up to administrators to make a case to remove them. That’s what due process means.

**MYTH #3:**
**TEACHER TENURE IS TOO PROTECTIVE—UNLIKE OTHER SECTORS’ UNION PROTECTIONS.**

Sure, the process could be tweaked—for instance, expedited, so it doesn’t punish the unfairly targeted and doesn’t draw out the appeals of those not equipped to do the job. (See Union Fights Teacher Jail to read how Los Angeles teachers get caught in a legal limbo.)

But that’s not what they want, the people pushing to get rid of due process.

Look at Chicago, where the unionized teaching force has shrunk by 20 percent, and black teachers dwindled from 45 to 29 percent. Teachers are facing layoffs year after year, while non-union charters grow.

Hard to make the case that teachers have too much job security, isn’t it?

Emboldened by anti-tenure rhetoric, Philadelphia, Chicago, and L.A. have been bypassing seniority provisions in district policies and in union contracts. When budgets are squeezed, districts push to replace veteran teachers with inexperienced hires at the bottom of the pay scale—or not replace them at all, and make remaining teachers do more.

That’s not about what’s best for students. It’s what bosses do, when they can get away with it, in any industry.

When people say, “Teachers may have needed tenure back then, but now things are different and they have it too good,” remember: you could easily replace the word “tenure” with “union.”

Samantha Winslow is a staff writer and organizer with Labor Notes. samantha@labornotes.org
Chicago Teachers Take On Rahm Democrats

Samantha Winslow Originally published on labornotes.org, February 9, 2015

Chicago’s mayor appoints the school board, so Chicago Teachers Union members collected petitions to see if voters think their school board should be elected. The nonbinding question will be on the ballot in 37 wards.

The Chicago Teachers Union and its allies are making a bid to channel the spirit and unity of the teachers’ 2012 strike into unseating “Mayor 1%” and his city council allies.

It’s been a grueling four years under Rahm Emanuel. CTU beat back some of the worst concessions the mayor’s school board pushed, but the union was hit hard by a record 47 school closings in a single year. Broader attacks hit public sector workers and their pensions.

The new, independent political organization United Working Families—formed by CTU and SEIU Healthcare Illinois along with community groups such as Action Now—isn’t just out to oust the mayor. It’s trying to create a progressive, pro-labor political infrastructure to challenge the mayor’s pro-business agenda.

“We certainly want to break from the politics of austerity,” said CTU organizer Brandon Johnson. “We want a break from the disinvestment.

“Whenever you have incumbents that vote 100 percent of the time with the mayor of Chicago and his corporate interest agenda, there is clearly a need to have a more independent voice,” Johnson said.

But not surprisingly, it’s hard to get many Chicago unions to endorse Emanuel’s rival. Many private sector unions have praised the mayor’s development projects, hoping they'll mean building trades and hotel jobs. Even in the public sector, where Emanuel has pushed deep budget cuts, unions may fear retaliation if they support his opponent and lose. Many think it’s futile to oppose such a powerful candidate.

So without a united front among Chicago union leaders, the United Working Families coalition is seeking out ways to engage directly with the 250,000 rank-and-file union members they represent.

VISION NOT JUST VOTES

That means setting up community meetings in key wards and reaching out to union members and other voters at the most grassroots level. “These are not just simply about getting out the vote, it’s about really laying out a vision: how do you deal with issues of safety, violence, disinvestment in schools,” Johnson said.

It’s been a grueling four years under Rahm Emanuel. CTU beat back some of the worst concessions the mayor’s school board pushed, but the union was hit hard by a record 47 school closings in a single year.

Defeating the mayor would be no small feat. Emanuel is a Democratic Party and Obama administration insider. He’s raised $10 million. And historically it’s been nearly impossible to beat Chicago’s Democratic machine, which operates in lockstep with the mayor.

Hopes were high last fall as CTU President Karen Lewis explored a challenge to the mayor; Lewis polled well, and excited both rank-and-file teachers and the progressive voter base. A Lewis/Emanuel contest would have clearly posed the question: Which way forward for Chicago?

When Lewis bowed out of the race for health reasons, a challenge to Emanuel and his agenda seemed further out of reach.

Cook County Commissioner Jesus “Chuy” Garcia stepped into the space Lewis left open. He’s running on a pro-union platform and has the support of CTU, SEIU Healthcare Illinois, and ATU Local 308, the city’s largest transportation union.

Garcia is one of four candidates opposing Emanuel in the February 24 election. (If no one gets a majority, there’s a top-two runoff in April.)

Part of United Working Families’ plan to beat the mayor is simultaneously running rank-and-filers and community activists for city council seats, coordinating those campaigns with get-out-the-vote efforts. It has endorsed seven incumbent on the city council, five CTU members, and 11 other grassroots challengers.

It remains to be seen whether this energy will translate into a lasting organization—and whether it’s possible to build a progressive political bloc independent of the city’s Democratic machine.

REAL DEBATE

Meanwhile Emanuel has racked up more union campaign contributions for his reelection than in 2011—including...continued on page 8
Charter School Rally Falls Short of Expectations...continued from page 1

These students are our most needy and require a larger dose of our attention, not an exit slip to another school. New Haven Public School students have individualized plans of instruction tailored to their specific needs. The plans are monitored and adjusted on a regular basis. We are not allowed to send them to a charter school midyear when we face challenges, nor do we want to. The NHPS accepts students wherever they come from, whenever they arrive, at whatever academic level they are at, and immediately begin to serve and educate them despite having limited resources to do so. I was hopeful the rally organizers would push for the same.

I expected to hear calls for the initiation and participation in a collaborative reform framework similar to which the New Haven Public School System and the New Haven Federation of Teachers have employed for several years now with the sole purpose of improving the educational opportunities for all students.

I expected to hear sincere acknowledgment of the hard work of Mayor Harp, Superintendent Harries, and the New Haven Federation of Teachers. Instead only a brief, lukewarm reference to the mayor and superintendent was delivered and no mention of the NHFT and my fellow teachers who work tirelessly each and every day in extremely demanding conditions serving a population of students desperately in need of services that extend far beyond the classroom.

The rally fell far short of my expectations and that of so many others. I left disappointed with my hopeful expectations unfulfilled as speaker after speaker employed the same tired rhetoric referencing inequities yet offering no positive alternatives. The rally organized by charter school CEOs used it as another not so clandestine attempt to direct tax dollars away from the most needy public school students they claim to advocate for and line their pockets with tax dollars, utilizing hundreds of very young elementary school students dressed in neon T-shirts, as props for the media cameras.

Still, I am hopeful that we can find a way to end the divisive dialogue and move forward in a collaborative way that seeks to dramatically improve education for every student in every school. I call on the charter school advocates to recast themselves as a group truly seeking equity for all students. And I call on all of us to come together to tackle the difficult challenges we all face in meeting the needs of students, so that we create endless opportunities for success in college, career and life for students down the road.

Chicago Teachers Take On Rahm Democrats...continued from page 7

from the Teamsters, the Pipefitters, UNITE HERE Local 1, Operating Engineers, Sheet Metal Workers, Carpenters, and SEIU Local 73, which represents city workers and school employees. Four years ago, every SEIU local in the city stayed out of the mayoral contest, as did CTU.

Six weeks before the election, the Chicago Federation of Labor and AFSCME Illinois, among others, were still sitting out the mayor’s race, while AFSCME has endorsed some of the coalition’s city council candidates.

Internal disagreements over union strategy are usually conducted in whispers, but in December SEIU’s local vs. local fight over the mayoral race went public. Tom Balanoff, head of SEIU’s state council and president of its janitors Local 1, told reporters the health care local had violated the state council’s decision to stay neutral in the mayor’s race.

Balanoff said the state council would address the violation through its own internal processes. SEIU Healthcare Illinois had indeed endorsed Garcia and made a hefty contribution. There was no public scolding, however, for SEIU Local 73’s $25,000 contribution to Emanuel’s campaign.

The debate inside SEIU reflects the split in Chicago’s labor movement, said Amisha Patel, director of the Grassroots Illinois Action. Her group works with United Working Families.

“I think there is a growing set of progressive labor unions, but it’s still in a larger environment that still expects to meet the needs of their members [by] sticking to the status quo,” Patel said. By breaking from the pack, the health care union opens up a dialogue.

“What that indicates to me is that people have a taste, an appetite for an independent political structure that puts the needs of people first,” Johnson said.

SPIRIT OF THE STRIKE

CTU and its allies announced United Working Families a year ago. The point was not only to challenge Emanuel’s reelection, but also to engage in citywide issue campaigns, including raising the minimum wage, fighting charter school expansion, and restoring an elected school board. As a result of their efforts, the February ballot also contains advisory questions on the elected school board in 37 out of 50 wards, and for paid sick days citywide.

To continue reading, go to labornotes.org – http://labornotes.org/2015/02/chicago-teachers-take-rahm-democrats