

BE OUR GUEST By RAYMOND DOMANICO

Rip up teachers' contract & start over

Teachers are critical to the success or failure of every school and to the city's school system as a whole. There are tens of thousands of schoolteachers in city public schools whose efforts are nothing less than heroic. Those teachers deserve our respect and every cent of a raise that the city of New York can afford.

But their contract, the basic rules of their work life, must change so that many more students can have a shot at a decent education.

From his earliest days in the chancellor's post, Joel Klein grasped the central obstacle to true reform in the city's schools: the United Federation of Teachers contract allows the system's managers virtually no ability to match teachers' strengths with students' needs.

Klein has identified four aspects of the teachers contract that conspire to keep the school system in a cycle of failure.

First, because the contract gives senior teachers the unfettered right to transfer to more "desirable" schools, they opt for the most successful and safest places. And the newest and most vulnerable teachers are sent to sink or swim in the city's toughest, most difficult schools. Many sink. It should not be a surprise that 40% of the city's new teachers leave the system in just three years. Most of them have been set up to fail, and when they figure that out, they leave.

A more rational contract would allow the school system to place new teachers in schools where they can learn from senior teachers as well as place senior teachers in schools where they are most needed. Both students and teachers would benefit.

Second, the current contract allows no deviation from

lockstep pay. The system cannot raise salaries in hard-to-staff subject areas. A systemwide shortage of math teachers? Tough. Don't even think about paying more to attract qualified math teachers unless you are going to raise all teacher salaries across the board. Of course, this policy condemns hundred of thousands of students to failure in a subject that is more and more essential to survival in a high-tech world.

Third, the contract declares certain aspects of the school day off-limits to teacher assignments — like the lunchrooms or playgrounds. Educators may wax poetic about schools being communities, but the UFT fought for and won the right of teachers to isolate themselves from students rather than relating to them.

Fourth, the contract prevents principals from choosing their own staffs. The system is now equipped to hold principals accountable for the performance of their schools, but it gives them no authority to choose who will actually be doing the work of educating students.

The school system is on the verge of a huge influx of funds as a result of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. Students and teachers can both benefit, but not if the UFT contract is not fundamentally

reformed, or if the UFT is allowed to succeed in its destructive campaign to undermine the chancellor's capable leadership. The system will remain bankrupt if President Randi Weingarten and the UFT keep telling Klein and the mayor the union can't do more to help the schools. The children, and the city, deserve much better. *Domanico is senior education adviser for the Metro Industrial Areas Foundation.*

**Joel Klein must
win four key
reforms to let
school managers
manage and the
kids learn**
