

**Open Letter to New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and  
United Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten**

September 19, 2008

Dear Chancellor Klein and President Weingarten,

As you know, in April The New Teacher Project published a study of New York City's school staffing policy reforms. "Mutual Benefits: New York City's Shift to Mutual Consent in Teacher Hiring," found these reforms, which ended the forced placement of teachers on schools, to be highly successful. By opening the hiring process to all applicants and honoring the will of both teachers and principals in all hiring decisions, New York City has supported schools in building effective instructional teams while improving the ability of teachers to find satisfying, lasting positions.

However, Mutual Benefits also highlighted the problem of teachers who are unable or unwilling to find new full-time positions after being excessed from their original jobs, even after months or years in the city's Absent Teacher Reserve (ATR) and despite thousands of job openings and extensive job search support. We found that, as a group, excessed teachers who do not secure new positions are six times more likely than other city teachers to have a documented history of poor performance and are less likely to engage in an aggressive job search. Under the existing policy, excessed teachers in this situation are entitled to continue earning their full salary and benefits while serving in the ATR, and may do so indefinitely – even without searching for a position. We estimated that, as of June 2008, New York City had paid a total of \$81 million to support the 665 teachers who had remained in the ATR since their excess dates in 2006 and 2007.

Mutual Benefits made clear that the problem lies with the policy, not with the teachers.

We recommended a new policy that would put reasonable limits on how long excessed teachers may earn a salary without occupying a full-time job. This policy would have created financial incentives that made it less expensive for principals to hire excessed teachers than new teacher candidates. Non-probationary teachers would have been allowed a full year to seek new positions while receiving a variety of job search supports. After a year, unhired teachers would be placed on unpaid leave, with the ability to return to teaching at their prior salary level if they were able to secure a position within a certain number of years. Many observers, including the editorial boards of several major city newspapers, expressed support for this type of solution.

Unfortunately, in the intervening months there has been no progress and the problem has only grown.

On Monday, The New Teacher Project will re-issue "Mutual Benefits" with a new afterword that provides updated data. We project that nearly 1,000 excessed teachers will go without full-time positions for the entire 2008-09 school year, and that the cost of these teachers' salaries and benefits will be approximately \$74 million for this time period alone. By next June, some teachers will have been without jobs for three full years.

As an organization founded by teachers and dedicated to building the teacher workforce, we believe strongly that excessed teachers deserve ample time and opportunity to find new positions. However, we also believe that the cost of supporting teachers without full-time jobs for years will increasingly hamper New York City's ability to support teachers in classrooms and provide a quality education to all children.

Excessed teachers are not to blame. The vast majority are dedicated educators who want to work, and those who fail to secure positions or fail to apply for them have broken no rules. To blame is a flawed



policy that leaves teachers without incentives or a clear timeline to find new positions and puts a growing financial burden on all New York City schools.

New York City cannot afford another year of inaction. The Department of Education and the United Federation of Teachers have rightly earned national reputations for visionary leadership on issues of educational reform. Together, you have dramatically increased teachers' salaries and introduced school-wide bonuses that reward educators who help students achieve. You negotiated the "mutual consent" staffing policies that have modernized the teacher hiring process and made it more transparent for teachers and principals. We look to you now to demonstrate leadership by addressing this problem. It cannot be ignored; the alternative to devising a solution now is devising one later, after even more teachers have joined the ATR and after tens of millions of dollars more have been spent.

Sincerely,

Timothy Daly  
President