



UNITED TEACHERS LOS ANGELES STATEMENT ON TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

APRIL 27, 2010

UTLA welcomes the opportunity to engage in a serious and thoughtful discussion of teacher effectiveness because, above all, classroom teachers and their union want our students to receive the highest quality education. UTLA has always acted upon the understanding that instructional quality is one of the key factors influencing student learning, along with class size, administrative support, parent involvement, and the socio-economic conditions of students and their families. Over the years, UTLA has pioneered many programs to improve instruction in the District.

Indeed, round one of the Public School Choice process clearly demonstrates that classroom teachers, if given the opportunity to be creative and innovative without bureaucratic constraints, will step up, along with parents and administrators, to create schools that better serve our students. We believe that improving teacher effectiveness is really about making teaching a true profession, with all the rights and responsibilities involved. It must be about *both* empowerment *and* accountability. No one can be held accountable when they have little real control over their working conditions and little support.

Insofar as the recommendations of the Teacher Effectiveness Task Force enhance the teaching profession, by giving teachers the necessary support to improve our craft, we can support them. Insofar as the recommendations may further weaken or undermine our profession, and ultimately teacher effectiveness, we do not support them.

The opportunity to explore all these recommendations through public discussion and the collective bargaining process is important. In particular, as we move forward, UTLA will insist that the opinions of classroom teachers about the future of their own profession be valued at least as much as those with little or no classroom experience.

Task Force Recommendations: TEACHER EVALUATION

“TETF proposes developing an evaluation process within a true performance management framework, including multiple measures of effectiveness (both formative and summative)—student outcome data, parent and student input, and an enhanced assessment of instructional quality.” (Summary, p.4.)

UTLA Response:

UTLA fully supports and encourages the development of a new evaluation system for teachers and principals that enhances their professions. The theory and practice of teacher evaluation in LAUSD is broken and it’s time to develop a new approach so that teachers are given real tools to systematically improve their practice and assist student learning. Any evaluation process developed should focus on helping to create and implement teacher development and evaluation systems that retain the very best teachers while helping to inform their practice.

We are prepared to work collaboratively with District leaders, parent advocates, academic experts, researchers, our teacher union affiliate leaders and all other fair and civic-minded individuals to develop a program based on clear implementation standards. Effective evaluation of teachers and other professionals will require spelling out for those professionals how the evaluation system works, including details such as how teachers are involved, who evaluates them and how often, what criteria will be considered, and how the results of the evaluation will be used. However, we believe, as many studies

confirm, that standardized test scores are not valid measures of student learning. Therefore we oppose their inclusion in teacher evaluations.

There must also be adequately funded programs to support meaningful professional development and growth throughout a teacher’s career and regular, rigorous evaluation of teaching and learning conditions, such as facilities and resources, teacher empowerment, school leadership, professional growth opportunities and school climate and safety. (We note also that evaluation procedures are a mandatory subject of bargaining under California law.)

Task Force Recommendations: DIFFERENTIATED COMPENSATION AND CAREER LADDERS:

“Recommendations for differentiating compensation focus on a closer alignment between district needs and values with compensation and promotion decisions. Further, these recommendations propose the development of a new career ladder, offering high performing teachers the opportunity to apply for instructional leadership positions as coaches, professional developers, mentors, and other similar roles.”
(Summary, p.4)

UTLA Response:

UTLA has long supported differentiated compensation, especially for classroom teachers, based on responsibilities and inputs into the needs of students: National Board certified teachers, coordinators, mentor teachers, lead teachers, differentials for ELL specialist teachers, and so forth. We continue to support these types of programs and are prepared to expand these practices to ensure improvement of school operations and effective student instruction. UTLA and the District have previously formed a facilitator-guided task force on Competitive Compensation which is the logical place to begin considering potential incentive pay programs and career ladders that may be available and desirable.

At the same time, UTLA does not support differentiated compensation based on student standardized test scores, or “pay for performance,” as the Task Force recommends. Not only are such tests invalid, as previously mentioned, as a measure of student learning, but, as Diane Ravitch and others have shown, student growth in test scores cannot possibly be attributed to the contributions of any one teacher. Most important, as long as standardized test scores are the driving force behind narrowing the curriculum and promoting rote memorization and scripted lessons, as opposed to developing the critical thinking and problem solving skills necessary for success in college and a career, they should never be used as a financial incentive. It takes a village to raise a child. Education is collaborative. It is a mistake to create a system that creates disincentives for teachers to collaborate.

(We note also that the issue of compensation is a mandatory subject of bargaining under California law.)

Task Force Recommendations: RESTRUCTURED TENURE PROCESS

“Tenure recommendations seek to restructure the process, allowing a greater focus on employee developmental needs and opportunities, and ensuring that the achievement [sic] is the true marker of a teacher’s transition out of the novice phase of his/her career.” (Summary, p.4)

UTLA Response:

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten in her testimony to the California Senate Education Committee regarding SB 955 recently stated: “Tenure is a word often used and seldom understood. First, it is not, nor should it be, a guarantee of a lifetime job. Second, tenure is not awarded by

teachers or unions but by administrators exercising authority accorded them by statute. Tenure does not guarantee a job, but it does guarantee that a job cannot be taken away without due process”

Unfortunately, rather than focus on the lack of adequate funding for our public school children, and on the development of programs that work, there are some who wish to blame teacher “tenure” for the problems in our schools.

We commit to work with Superintendent Cortines and the Board of Education to create and implement evaluation and teacher support systems that attract, support and retain the best teachers while helping to inform their practice, but we will not join in the narrow-minded and biased efforts to scapegoat teachers and eliminate their rights to due process.

Task Force Recommendations: SUPPORT MECHANISMS:

“In addition to other recommendations, the support mechanisms proposals focus on augmenting early teacher support and intervention, further defining professional growth pathways for teachers throughout their career, and addressing issues of intervention and exit for teachers.” *(Summary, p. 5)*

UTLA Response:

Nearly half of all teachers who enter the field leave after only five years because they fail to receive needed supports and are not treated as professionals. As emphasized at length above, we fully support and will work with anyone that understands that support programs that truly work for teachers and other school staff are essential to improving education for our students in Los Angeles.

First and foremost, the District and its partners, led by teachers and health and human service personnel, must develop and support an authentic reform model aimed at teacher quality. That model must involve supporting and extending proven successes, such as Peer Assistance and Review, mentor teacher programs for new teachers, National Board Certification, Lesson Study, and the AFT’s Education, Research, & Dissemination program. If there is authentic and meaningful support for teachers in their earlier years they will stay with the district longer. Teachers who receive this type of support will help to create the environment needed for their students and for the younger teachers who join them along the way. We know what works: smaller class sizes; professional support for new and struggling teachers; access to updated textbooks and materials; modernized classrooms, and increasing, not decreasing, the ranks of counselors, librarians and school nurses.

In conclusion, UTLA believes that the future of public education lies in empowering and supporting teachers, parents, administrators and other stakeholders to collaborate together for the benefit of *all* our students. That is why we were disappointed that within the Task Force, so few authentic teacher voices were heard. Even more troubling, Board members and district staff began lobbying in Sacramento in support of some of the most controversial Task Force recommendations before they were even brought to this Board.

As Board members know, a massive nationwide disinformation campaign against teacher rights and teacher unions has been unleashed just at the time that government support for public education is being slashed. This is not an accident. The Board should not join with those who would shift the focus away from the real issues of resources for schools. Instead, UTLA calls upon the Board to partner with UTLA to improve teacher effectiveness, as well as to provide our students and teachers with the necessary resources to support effective teaching and learning.