

STUDY FINDS SHORTCOMINGS

*TEACHER POLICIES; * GATES-FUNDED ANALYSIS COULD IMPROVE CITY SCHOOLS*

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It's about stars in the classroom. If Hartford is to close the achievement gap between its students and those in the suburbs and adequately prepare the workforce of tomorrow, it needs top-notch teachers.

The city does have many fine educators as well as an innovative superintendent, and has made progress in the past decade. But there's still a way to go, as is made clear in a 65-page analysis of the city's teaching policies released this week by the National Council on Teacher Quality, a Washington-based nonprofit research and advocacy group.

Unfortunately but perhaps predictably, the Hartford teachers union leaders declined to participate in the study, then dismissed it when it was released. They were wrong on both counts, and just provide ammunition to those who think that teachers unions are impeding education. But perhaps the union finds some of the conclusions embarrassing. For example:

- * Hartford teachers have twice as much sick leave - 20 days - as the national average of 10 days. The teachers also get five personal days.
- * The teacher contractual workday - 6 hours and 45 minutes - is among the shortest in the nation (though many teachers work longer hours).
- * Despite low student achievement, 91 percent of nontenured teachers and 97 percent of tenured teachers are ranked as competent or above.
- * Tenure, essentially a \$2 million lifetime commitment to the teacher, is handed out with little consideration for a teacher's classroom effectiveness.
- * The district spends nearly \$18 million a year in incentives for teachers to earn advanced degrees despite conclusive research that the vast majority of these degrees - those outside a teacher's content area - do not improve student learning.
- * The hiring process, pay and support for starting teachers is flawed or inadequate.

The study, one of 10 being done across the country with backing from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, recommends sensible changes to these and other policies, and finds some good things to say about the system. An official of the Hartford Federation of Teachers rejected the study as an insult to the negotiation process. This misses the point entirely.

The study has nothing to do with the negotiation process. It has no legal authority - it stands or falls on the strength of its research and analysis. It is there to get the community thinking about ways to improve teaching and learning.

Parents, teachers, administrators, union officials and school board members should read it - it can be found at <http://www.conncan.org> or <http://www.nctq.org> - and see if some or all of the recommendations make sense. If so, they should adopt them.