

EDITOR -HARTFORD COURANT

RESPONSE TO EDITORIAL OF MAY 7, 2009 – *STUDY FINDS SHORTCOMINGS*

SUBMITTING -OPINION EDITORIAL

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The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) has released an analysis concerning Hartford's teaching policies. This organization sent me a letter in October 2008 informing me who they were and that they would be "conducting an independent, objective analysis of the current *teachers' contract* that identifies its strengths and weaknesses *from the perspective of what is best for school children.*" The letter additionally states that their analysis can then be used to "*make several key recommendations upon which to focus in the next negotiations*". What a guise for really saying "your contract needs to be changed and we are here to tell you how to do it!"

Contract negotiations are a practice that takes place between a school system and the bargaining unit that represents the employees of that system. In this case that bargaining agent is the Hartford Federation of Teachers (HFT). Why this NCTQ would think that they would have the right to be part of the negotiations process is absurd. To think that this group would take it upon themselves to be the self appointed new negotiators for the teachers' contract due to their beliefs on how to educate school children is quite an arrogant position.

The Hartford Courant put their spin on this report by reprimanding me as President of the HFT for not wanting to participate in this endeavor and accusing me of showing that Unions really are impeding education. What a foul and mean spirited comment to make. The Courant also comments on some of the areas where they obviously agree with NCTQ. Many of these stances show limited knowledge at best, downright ignorance at worst

For example:

- Hartford teachers have twice as much sick time as the national average of 10 days – 20 days plus 5 personal days. Correction: Hartford teachers have 15 sick days per year and 5 personal days per year (there are 5 reasons why personal days can be taken).
- Teachers' workday – 6 hours and 45 minutes. Correction: Teachers workday is 6 hours and 45 minutes PLUS 2 – 3 UNPAID hours beyond the school day.
- Despite low student achievement, 91 percent of nontenured and 97 percent of tenured teachers are ranked as competent or above. Correction: Yes, and

former teachers who are now administrators trained by the State of Connecticut standards are evaluating the teachers.

- Tenure, a \$2 million lifetime commitment to the teacher, is handed out with little consideration for a teacher's classroom effectiveness. Correction: Before a teacher can become tenured in the State of Connecticut they are a probationary employee for 4 years, during which time they must demonstrate their effectiveness. I know of no other profession that has as long a period before becoming a permanent employee. And tenure is not a lifetime commitment. Administrators can remove ineffective teachers through the evaluation process.
- The district spends \$ 18 million a year for incentives for teachers to earn advanced degrees despite conclusive research that the vast majority of these degrees – those outside the teacher's content area – do not improve student learning. Correction: In Connecticut, teachers are mandated to receive 30 credits beyond a bachelor's degree. In Hartford, teachers MUST have a master's degree to earn additional payment. Also, only approved courses which will be in a teacher's content area will be paid for by this district. (2 classes per year)
- The hiring process, pay and support for starting teachers are flawed and inadequate. Correction: Unions do not hire teachers. In Hartford, teachers are not interviewed or hired by an administrator with a background in education. Actually, most new teachers are hired by non-certified staff in Human Resources. School administrators are responsible for assigning teacher mentors to support newly hired teachers, in addition to their work day. The HFT offers its own support to our new teachers through courses taught by veteran teachers, as a means of mentoring. The HFT is also now working with Hartford's Professional Development department to collaborate in offering additional courses.

As the President of the Hartford Federation of teachers, I stand by what I stated, that this "study" is an insult to the negotiations process. It is also an insult to the hard working teachers of the City of Hartford who view their profession very seriously. Teachers spend a lifetime being learners themselves and teaching others to be learners for a lifetime. When the editor of the HARTFORD COURANT states that this study has nothing to do with the negotiations process then that person missed the mark. The first sentence of the NCTQ purpose (mission statement) clearly states, "TO HELP PUT STUDENTS' NEEDS FRONT AND CENTER IN TEACHER CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS."

Perhaps if the Superintendent, who is also a member of the Board of Directors of NCTQ, were to include the educators in discussions of what is the best for THEIR students, it would be a step in the right direction. Superintendent Adamowski should take a look at the group of educators who have an enormous amount of experience, skill, expertise and knowledge to be shared. Superintendent Adamowski should learn to work collaboratively with the teachers of Hartford.