



**TESTIMONY OF
THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
PRESIDENT MICHAEL MULGREW**

**BEFORE THE
NEW YORK STATE SENATE
COMMITTEES ON CIVIL SERVICE AND PENSIONS AND
HIGHER EDUCATION**

REGARDING THE EXPLORATION OF A CIVIL SERVICE PIPELINE

FEBRUARY 21, 2020

My name is Michael Mulgrew, and I am the President of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). On behalf of the more than 190,000 UFT members, I would like to thank Chair Andrew Gounardes and Chair and former UFT member, Toby Ann Stavisky and members of both committees for holding today's hearing on the exploration of a civil service pipeline.

We at the UFT think the idea of such a pipeline is innovative and aligned to our own goals as a union. I would like to share with you today a few proposals that should be considered when thinking about public school teacher recruitment and training.

Teacher residency as preparation

I would first like to speak to the matter of teacher preparation and how to improve our current system. New York City, like many urban school districts, has a tough time retaining new teachers. When I speak with new teachers, especially those who are struggling, the constant refrain is — “They didn't teach us this in (education) school.” We need a new paradigm. One that mirrors the medical profession and gives prospective teachers a student residency of working, teaching and learning inside a New York City public school.

In 2011, the New York City Department of Education started a small alternative certification program called the NYC Teaching Collaborative. The first cohort was 25 teachers. The goal was to provide career-changers more time working in classrooms with experienced educators.

This year's Teaching Collaborative class is over 500 teachers. The cohort will train in over 100 carefully selected Teaching Academies – New York City public schools with a principal who is committed to the growth and development of new teacher and with five or more selected and trained Teacher Development Facilitators who will host participants in their classroom.

Anywhere else, a program this size would be considered a stunning victory. But here in New York City we hire upwards of 4,000 new teachers each year. We must expand residency programs to absorb as many of these new hires as possible.

The UFT and the New York City Department of Education have been in talks with the City University of New York about how additional residency programs could be structured. These efforts need to be nurtured.

New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer last year proposed a residency program that builds on another existing alternative preparation program, the New York Teaching Fellows. This is another interesting proposal that needs to be explored further.

Reducing financial barriers

Civil servants, like teachers, school social workers and school psychologists, dedicate their lives to public service and often forgo opportunities in the private sector with higher pay. Interestingly, many do so knowing that their degree in education will not be any less expensive than a degree in business or computer science, regardless of whether they attended a private or public university.

The result is educators carrying extensive student debt.

At the UFT we created the Student Debt Relief Program to match members with an independent loan specialist to help them access various programs to help them better manage their student loan debt.

The program, which launched in November 2018, was necessary for many reasons. In 2007 the federal government created a public service loan forgiveness program as an incentive for people to work in public sector jobs. The idea was to offer loan forgiveness, after 10 years of payments, to teachers, nurses, social workers and others employed by governmental or nonprofit public service agencies who had taken out federal loans. But for a variety of reasons, very few people have had their loans forgiven by the program.

Making matters worse, for-profit student loan servicing companies often do not inform borrowers employed in public service jobs about this program. It should come as no surprise that Betsy DeVos, President Trump's education secretary, has defended these predatory companies.

The American Federation of Teachers, the UFT's national union, filed a class-action lawsuit in 2018 against Navient, one of the country's largest administrators of federal student loans, accusing the company of steering borrowers in public service professions away from public service debt relief so it could continue to collect millions of dollars in fees.

Our program was created to help UFT members navigate the federal loan forgiveness program. And while still new, this effort has also been able to help some UFT members to reduce their monthly loan payments, thereby lessening the stress of both the educator and his or her family.

But however laudable these efforts may be, they do not get the root the problem, which is the rising costs of a college degree. Any new pipeline we consider should look at how we can help future public servants, such as teachers, reduce the cost of obtaining the necessary degrees that grant them entrance to their desired profession.

Diversity in the classroom

Classroom teachers are not only academic instructors, they also serve as role models to students. Research shows that students who have educators who reflect themselves are more likely to succeed.

Data from the State Education Department shows that the New York City teaching workforce is by far the most diverse in the state; however, there is still much room for improvement. The New York City student population is about 80% Hispanic, black or Asian, yet teachers of color represent 42% of the teaching workforce. Similarly, while the student population breaks down to about half and half in terms of gender, the New York City teaching workforce continues to be dominated by women, with men consistently comprising about 25% of the workforce year after year. And when looking a data for male teachers of color, it was estimated that they only made up about 8% of the workforce during the 2015-2016 school year.

As we consider the idea of building new pipelines for civil servants, including one for the teaching workforce, it is imperative that we look at what new research is telling us: diverse student populations, like that of New York City, can experience greater academic success with a teaching workforce that mirrors the diversity.

We should also explore tapping into our diverse pool of paraprofessionals in schools. These individuals have strong ties to their communities already, therefore we may more readily retain them with additional support, enabling more of them to become teachers.

Closing Thoughts

We at the UFT want to thank you once again for holding this important hearing. Creating a new pipeline for teachers in the form of a teacher residency program is one that we have been proposing for years. We want our future educators to not only have the academic background that makes them exceptional pedagogues, but also the practical classroom experience that equips them with the skills they need to help our students succeed and thrive. It is our hope that this hearing can serve as a next step in having this idea become a reality.