

DAILY NEWS

50¢

NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

OPINIONS



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By RAY DOMANICO

Why UFT deal is a winner

The teachers contract announced Monday is a significant victory in the ongoing struggle to create a more effective school system in New York City. It will benefit both students and teachers and will yield great dividends in schools in the city's poorest neighborhoods. All parties to the negotiations, Chancellor Joel Klein, Mayor Bloomberg and UFT President Randi Weingarten, deserve congratulations for a job well done.

This contract undoes some of the most intractable and longstanding impediments to efforts to improve education in the city's most needy neighborhoods. For more than 30 years, schools in poor neighborhoods, with the most challenging students, were given the least experienced teachers. The new contract places reasonable limits on seniority transfers and creates a new senior teacher position. With it, school management finally can exercise some reasonable control over which teachers get to work in which schools.

The new contract also rewards those effective senior teachers who agree to work in schools where they are needed the most.

Also, by rolling back some of the old

contract's most stringent work rules, the new agreement allows principals the managerial prerogative they need to be true leaders.

Few may realize how much has been accomplished in these negotiations. From the onset of the failed decentralized school system in the 1960s, the right of senior teachers to transfer where they wished trumped the needs of students. The hands of management were tied. In the end, both students and teachers suffered for that excess. Year in and year out, the schools in the poorest neighborhoods were staffed by new waves of eager young teachers who would quickly burn out because they lacked the experience needed to be effective, and they found few senior teachers to show them the ropes. They would leave in frustration and be replaced by a new crop of untested teachers.

This problem has not been a secret. Our organization has been speaking out about it for three years now, but it had long been felt that it was too much a part of the Civil Service and union culture to be undone in labor negotiations.

It was undone because Klein, with his deep commitment to fairness and

justice in the school system, made this a core issue in his negotiating strategy and refused to back down.

It was undone because Bloomberg, who has made school improvement the signature issue of his administration, backed his chancellor to the hilt. Before mayoral control of the school system, mayors and chancellors were rarely so well aligned in contract negotiations.

Finally, this historic agreement was reached because Weingarten and her union leadership team have shown a willingness to take a risk by attempting to sell these needed reforms to a teaching force that was angry about the slow pace of negotiations and in little mood to concede givebacks.

In the end, though, teachers themselves will benefit as they and management move forward together to take advantage of these reforms and continue the hard work of school improvement.

The city's teachers should ratify this contract, and all New Yorkers who are concerned about the quality of the city's schools should be pleased at the efforts of those who brought it about.

Domanico is senior education adviser to Industrial Areas Foundation - Metro NY.