

**STATEMENT OF
DAVID CICARELLA, PRESIDENT
NEW HAVEN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE
JULY 27, 2011**

Good morning Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Miller and members of the committee. My name is David Cicarella, and I am the president of the New Haven Federation of Teachers (NHFT), an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The NHFT represents more than 1,600 teachers.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about our collective efforts in New Haven, Conn., to improve student learning and strengthen the teaching profession through, in part, our development of a comprehensive teacher support and evaluation system in the district.

New Haven schools were facing the same challenges many school districts in the country are facing today: Many of our students were not reaching their potential. As in all cases, a variety of factors contributed to that situation, including the need for more meaningful parental involvement, comprehensive wraparound services for the most at-risk students and, yes, a better way of evaluating teachers and providing them with the ongoing supports they need to do the best for their students. The situation was exacerbated because the relationship between the mayor and superintendent and our local union was often acrimonious, and was characterized by distrust and disrespect on both sides.

Teachers certainly were not satisfied with the status quo: a system that failed to provide any meaningful supports or feedback to help them develop their expertise and maximize their capacity to improve student learning. New Haven did not have in place processes for turning around low-performing schools or for supporting and evaluating teachers. We knew there was no way to improve our lowest-performing schools without involving teachers and giving them needed supports.

However, there were few good models that provided guidance. Districts nationwide were looking at how best to improve teaching and learning by incorporating a more robust teacher evaluation system as part of that strategy. In New Haven, the mayor, superintendent and our local union made a decision to work collaboratively—through the existing collective bargaining process. Keeping collaboration and the need for teacher input in mind, the NHFT negotiating team took an aggressive position on evaluation (including the need for teacher involvement and multiple measures of student achievement), turnaround schools and other thorny issues in order to shape the agenda and drive the final product toward solutions that are good for kids and fair for teachers.

We incorporated the resources and expertise of our national union, the AFT, and its affiliate locals. We ultimately were able to negotiate a contract that, in addition to wages and benefits, would lay the groundwork for a breakout model of urban school reform—one that values and welcomes teacher voice in all key decisions. It is incredibly significant that both the national and state representatives from AFT were active partners and completely welcomed by the New Haven school district representatives.

The contract, which our members ratified by a vote of 855-42, was hailed in the local media as "a first-in-the-nation agreement between a city and a teachers union to work together to change the way public schools work."

One of the reform initiatives we adopted was a new system for evaluating our teachers. The plan included multiple measures of professional performance and real supports tied to professional development. What is key here is that we did not just build a teacher evaluation plan that simply acts as a sorting mechanism to tell us who is doing a good job and who is facing difficulty. Instead, we created a system that focuses on the continuous support and development of all teachers—those struggling and those doing a good job.

Under the new system, individual teachers and their evaluators meet each fall to set personal professional goals. This is the centerpiece of the new evaluation and development system—regular, substantive and collegial conferences between each teacher and his or her assigned instructional manager. Each teacher now has a single instructional manager who is accountable for that teacher's evaluation and development.

The goal of the evaluation and development conferences is to focus teacher performance conversations around student learning, provide comprehensive feedback (including all elements of teacher evaluation) to each teacher, and set a defined plan of development opportunities for the teacher. These conferences are the anchor of the rest of

the evaluation and development process, and the foundation of the professional relationship between teacher and instructional manager. All teachers benefit from a goal-setting conference in the beginning of the year and at least two evaluation and development conferences over the course of the year, with additional conferences provided for teachers identified as needing improvement.

The annual goals that are drawn up in these conferences center on three important areas:

- **Student performance outcomes** measured by growth in student learning and attainment of academic goals;
- **Teacher instructional practice** in the domains of planning and preparation, classroom practice, and reflection and use of data; and
- **Teacher professional values** addressing a set of characteristics including professionalism, collegiality and high expectations for student learning.

Every element in the evaluation is mutually agreed upon, and when it comes to indicators of student progress, teachers and evaluators are encouraged to use multiple measures of assessment that include standardized state tests, district assessments (many of which are conducted quarterly as opposed to annually), student portfolio work and teacher-developed assessments. All are valuable and provide a full, more encompassing measure of student academic growth and achievement.

The new system ranks teachers on a 1-5 scale: Those receiving a final summative rating of 5 will be considered for teacher leadership positions, while those receiving a score of 2 or below will be supported with a tailored improvement plan aimed at helping

them receive a minimum score of 3 (or “effective”). Our goal is to have an *effective teacher* in every classroom.

Our members ratified this contract overwhelmingly for the following reasons. First, instead of instituting “top-down” reforms, with no teacher input, we were able to utilize the collective bargaining process to ensure that teachers are heard and respected. Collective bargaining is a process that ensures workplace fairness and gives workers a voice in their jobs. But it is much more. It is a process that teachers and school districts can use to drive real reforms aimed at improving both teaching and learning. For teachers in New Haven, instituting the changes in evaluation and giving teachers a greater say in decision-making at the school level means increasing their confidence in the system and the supports they need to be effective in the classroom.

We are just finishing the first year of implementation of our new plan and so far, so good. We have established a citywide teacher evaluation committee consisting of six teachers selected by the union and six administrators selected by the district. From the onset, we have collaborated on everything, even these choices. We share our selections and allow every committee member to comment on them—all prior to making our choices public. The citywide committee met over the course of the entire year to complete the system. Despite the painstaking detail, it is straightforward with little room for ambiguity.

In addition to the citywide committee, we established a “working group” that allows for every teacher in the district to volunteer to participate and have input into the evaluation system. Participating teachers brought their own questions and concerns to the discussion, as well as those from colleagues back in their schools. Principals were trained in the evaluation system over the summer, and teacher representatives were invited to address the initial training. This sent a clear message that the evaluation system is very much a joint effort that is supported by all parties. I was invited to address district administrators at their initial training. I was warmly received, and it was a positive experience.

The lessons learned from our experience in New Haven is that teachers have no problem being held accountable, or sharing responsibility, as long as all are provided with an agreed-upon, transparent set of standards and a process for evaluation that includes student achievement, classroom practice and teacher professional values.

Our commitment to work together has led to many positive outcomes, not the least of which is increased community support. Yale University has made a commitment of \$4 million a year for the next four years to pay up to \$8,000 annually to cover the cost of a student’s enrollment at one of the state’s public colleges or universities, or \$2,500 at a private college. Full grants will be given only to students who have been in the New Haven Public Schools since kindergarten, and will be prorated for those entering later.

No two school districts in our nation are alike, and I do not pretend to think that our plan will work in all districts. However, I do know that most school districts do not have good evaluation systems in place—ones that focus like a laser on boosting student performance through a process that prioritizes the continuous support and development of their teaching force.

I cannot stress enough how critically important a valid, reliable, transparent, and ongoing teacher development and evaluation system is to the health of our schools and our students' ultimate success. In the absence of such a system, teachers and administrators are left to wonder what works and what doesn't work, or how and how best to inform and improve instruction. We need to work collaboratively at all levels—from local school districts to Congress and everywhere in between—to establish the conditions that our children need to succeed and our teachers need to teach.