

New York teacher exposes how unions helped impose performance evaluations

Our reporters
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The World Socialist Web Site spoke with a teacher from upstate New York about the role of the unions in implementing the state Department of Education's performance evaluations. In order to conceal their complicity in this attack, unions in Rochester and Syracuse have filed a lawsuit against the evaluations. (See: "Unions file phony lawsuit against teacher evaluations in upstate New York")

Where I worked in the Buffalo area, the local union did nothing to stop the district in 2010 from revising the evaluations to incorporate standardized test scores. They did this so as to receive the Obama administration's Race to the Top (RTTT) funds. I'm not sure the district itself was all that interested in making those changes because it was a huge endeavor; however, the witch-hunt climate against teachers and public education which was being carried out daily in the media led the district to move forward. The result? A one-time RTTT award distribution from the state in the amount of a whopping \$26,000! Not even enough to hire a single teacher for a school year.

There was a schoolwide meeting held by the teachers union. It was a small meeting and teachers were asking why we were just signing on to this instead of taking a closer look at it. Teachers were very upset.

Our schools are in a high-poverty district and teachers knew they would be penalized. They were very much opposed to the new law. Rather than to just sign on to this, we wanted the union to fight it. The union reps response was: "we are in no position to fight against this. Teachers are public enemy number 1!"

I remember being flabbergasted that the union wasn't doing anything meaningful to fight back (neither the locals nor the state). The locals acted powerless and the state union was feeding us lies and vacillating. They claimed to be against the measure and promised to

reduce the percentage or weight of the test scores on teacher evaluations. Then, on the other hand, they turned around claiming the evaluations were fair and there was no reason to worry about it! They sounded just like the politicians!

They left out the fact that teachers have a great distrust of the value of these tests in the first place. They are not produced by the teachers but by for-profit companies. The fact that teachers don't even see their students' results and we can never use the tests as a learning tool is reason enough to distrust them.

After Bush's No Child Left Behind (NCLB), teachers were not allowed to see the tests before they were administered. Only after the tests were taken could they see the test and their students' results. When teachers received the statewide math test results, they found they were erroneous and there were enough problematic math problems to place the validity of the test into question.

Teachers protested and the erroneous questions were taken off of the tests and not counted against the students' scores. The test scores increased dramatically. Soon afterwards the state passed a law prohibiting teachers from seeing their students test scores. So we have no idea how our students really do on the tests. They can tell us anything.

Currently the procedure is that high school students take the test, which is not handled by or held on to by any teacher. Tests are administered and collected each day by a school administrator or test proctor. The tests are sent out to Albany to be scored. After the test is scored, the student and the teacher receive a copy of the original test—a blank test that has not been completed by the student or scored. The teacher can review the test with students. Weeks later, with the students having to depend on their memory for how they may

have answered, it becomes a fruitless and frustrating exercise.

I was aware that something rotten was happening—a political deal of some kind. I just thought it had more to do with the role of the media in demonizing teachers than with the actual corruption of the union itself. Especially since its members were objecting (we were almost 100 percent against the new evaluation formula). As I recall the time, it was very confusing and frustrating, feelings that many teachers continue to have towards the unions today.

I was looking everywhere to see who in the media was willing to criticize RTTT and the Obama administration. Up to that point I still considered the Democrats the party for the working class. I googled “Obama” and “attacks public education.” The WSWS was the only website that had anything at all on this and told the truth about the Democrats and Obama’s attack on public education.



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