

# United Federation of Teachers ratifies sellout contract for 120,000 New York City educators

Jesse Thomas  
11 July 2023

On Monday, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), announced that its tentative agreement covering roughly 115,000 full-time and 5,000 part-time education employees in the New York City public school system (DOE) had been ratified.

The contract spans five years, retroactively covering the period beginning last fall and terminating in November 2027. It is widely recognized by educators as regressive, with 3 percent annual raises in the first three years, falling far short of the skyrocketing inflation rates of the recent past. A large question mark still hangs over the status of healthcare benefits for tens of thousands of retired city workers, for whom an effort to privatize their coverage has recently been temporarily blocked by a state supreme court judge.

Additionally, the salaries for paraprofessionals and other educational support staff remain pitifully meager, ranging from as low as \$27,920 in the first year of the contract to a high of \$51,868 in the last year.

James, a paraprofessional who works with elementary students in Brooklyn, told the WSWS, “I’m very disappointed in our union and their lack of transparency throughout contract negotiations. I’m even more displeased with the abysmal deal that continues to leave paras behind. Paras are making poverty wages with the amount of work that is expected of us. [UFT President Michael] Mulgrew is pushing this as a victory but in reality it shows how much our union cares for and what it thinks of its paraprofessionals.”

Danielle, a pre-kindergarten teacher in Brooklyn, commented:

I work in a district Pre-K Site where there are paraeducators in each of the classrooms. The highest paid para makes about \$46,000 a year and the new para hired just last year makes under \$30,000. Even with raises these paras can’t afford to live in the city they work in. The max that this raise would allow

paras to make is roughly \$55,000 by 2025.

The bells and whistles of retention pay and bonus is what our chapter leaders wanted us to see and strongly suggested voting yes. My personal opinion, and one of which I shared with my colleagues, was that if you feel your para is only worth that amount then vote yes otherwise it should be a hard no. Everyone deserves a livable wage and in NYC that livable wage is much higher than the starting salaries of paras and teachers.

The UFT did everything in its power to rush through the voting process and prevent democratic discussion among rank-and-file educators. The vote was only announced on June 13, giving the membership just two weeks to familiarize themselves with all of the details before submitting their choice.

The particulars of the agreement have been kept under strict secrecy before, during, and after the negotiations, with only a 38-page Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) and a “Contract FAQ” released. The bargaining committee, a group of 500 selected UFT members, were required to sign nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) to prevent them from sharing any details of the proceedings. This effectively kept the vast majority of members in the dark about anything related to the agreement precisely until the time of the vote.

Out of 96,000 ballots cast, about 72,000 members voted in favor of the contract, with about 24,000 members voting against. Roughly 24,000 eligible DOE employees did not vote at all. In other words, the contract was ratified with the support of just 60 percent of union members, with 40 percent either voting “No” or abstaining.

Additional details include the expansion of a centralized, DOE-wide remote learning program, a \$3,000 ratification bonus, a small annual retention bonus that remains in effect in perpetuity, as well as negligible operational adjustments to the weekly schedule of time allocated for teachers’ non-instructional duties. Even a perfunctory examination of the

MOA, however, refutes the attempts by the UFT leadership to convey these aspects of the agreement as gains for educators.

Nowhere mentioned in the entire MOA—let alone its section on remote learning—is the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has killed dozens of New York City educators and students over the past three years and left thousands suffering the often debilitating effects of Long COVID.

Rather than being used to prevent the spread of illness, remote learning infrastructure will continue to be used to prevent instruction from stopping during weather-related and other emergency circumstances. Remote instruction will be expanded exclusively on a “voluntary” basis for schools, teachers and families who wish to participate in the program.

While certain routine school functions will now be permitted to be held remotely, the contract also expands administrators’ ability to monitor teacher activity during such times. Additionally, it gives administrations sweeping powers to rescind employees’ ability to work remotely with impunity.

Mayor Eric Adams and UFT President Mulgrew have both touted the paltry retention bonuses, but in actuality they will amount to very little. These annual payments will begin at \$400 in 2024, rise to \$700 the next year, and plateau at around \$1,000 in the last two years of the contract. Such bonuses are a pittance for workers living in one of the most expensive cities in the world, home to more billionaires and centi-millionaires than any other city.

Educators have pointed out on social media that the Adams administration’s Rent Guidelines Board recently voted to allow annual rent for rent-stabilized apartments in New York City to be raised by 3 percent, eating up the bulk of the pay increase provided by the contract for thousands of employees. The ending of the federal moratorium on student loans and interest accrual will further undermine the effects of these inadequate pay increases for a large section of the UFT membership covered by the contract.

It is safe to say that the majority of those who voted in favor of the contract only did so because they saw no alternative, and knew the UFT would not fight for anything better, under conditions in which Democratic Mayor Adams has been enforcing austerity on all city employees.

The union bureaucracy, acting in partnership with the city government controlled by the Democratic Party, carried out a coordinated attack on New York City educators. The contract vote came in the wake of municipal budget cuts from FY 2023, an assault on healthcare benefits and an utter capitulation by the UFT bureaucracy to criminal, back-to-work policies implemented in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. Throughout the voting and negotiation process,

the message was implicit that the agreement was the best possible outcome.

Alongside their class brothers and sisters in every major school district in the US and internationally, New York City educators face a prolonged assault on their livelihoods and living standards. The Adams administration has announced that austerity cuts will be forthcoming, possibly as soon as the upcoming school year. This will inevitably mean the excessing of teachers and cutting of special programs, as was carried out in advance of the 2022-2023 school year. Should the proposal to switch New York City retirees to privatized healthcare proceed, it will inevitably mean that out-of-pocket costs for thousands of retirees will increase.

This same austerity agenda is being ruthlessly imposed across the US, as all social programs are being gutted to funnel unlimited sums to the military-intelligence apparatus and to fight the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine.

To mount a genuine struggle for better wages, living and working conditions, educators must take matters into their own hands and build rank-and-file committees independent of both the Democratic Party and its agents in the UFT bureaucracy, in unity with educators throughout the world. The WSWS urges New York City educators to join and help build the Northeast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, which advocated a “No” vote on the contract and has fought for the interests of educators since its founding in Fall 2020. Fill out the form below to get involved.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**