

# UFT Contract Strongly Affirmed; Other Union Leaders Seek Talks

By DAN ROSENBLUM | Posted: Monday, June 9, 2014 5:00 pm

Members of the United Federation of Teachers strongly approved a new Teachers' contract, with 77 percent of the 90,459 votes cast in favor of the nine-year pact, which features 18-percent raises and major back-pay awards of up to \$55,000.

While every category of worker within the union widely approved the contract, the victory margin varied across the positions. Out of 64,232 Teachers who voted, 75 percent approved, while 84 percent of both Paraprofessionals and School

Secretaries approved. Eleven out of 14 Sign Language Interpreters who voted approved of the deal.

## Mulgrew Elated

In a statement, UFT President Michael Mulgrew said he was "thrilled" with the results of the vote on the first contract he's negotiated during his nearly five years in office.

"The UFT and all other city workers were badly served by the previous Mayor. We are entering a new chapter in our school system's history where educators will have a greater say in school-level decisions," he said.

The union's 106,000 members had been without a contract since the previous one expired on Nov. 1, 2009. The new agreement will offer 18-percent raises dating back to that point but with the bulk of the payments not being made until next year and continuing through October 2020, two years after the actual expiration date. It will ultimately raise starting salaries to \$56,709 and top Teacher pay to \$119,471. When compounded, the raises will be 19.4 percent, according to union figures.

Working members will get money from two 4-percent retroactive raises in 2009 and 2010 through 2020, a \$1,000 non-pensionable bonus and two 1-percent wage hikes due May 1, 2013 and May 1, 2014. Over the following four years, members will also see raises of 1 percent, 1.5, 2.5 and 3 percent, respectively.

The bargaining agreement with the Department of Education will also kickstart work-rule changes such as parent-Teacher conferences, leadership positions that will pay an additional \$7,500 to \$20,000, a lump-sum \$5,000 payment for Teachers working at "hard-to-staff" schools and allowing up to 200 schools to experiment with exemptions to city and union regulations, making them similar to charter schools.

### **Mayor: 'A New Day'**

The contract, announced May 1, was approved May 5 by the UFT executive board and two days later by about 2,000 delegates. Ballots had to be returned to the American Arbitration Association by May 30.

In a release issued minutes after the UFT announced the results, Mayor de Blasio referred to the ratification as a “new day for education.”

Municipal Labor Committee Chairman Harry Nespoli applauded the adoption, coming years after then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg cut off negotiations with the UFT. He said he was “getting good vibes from union presidents that want to sit down.”

“Now there’s going to be a mass rush for other unions to get in there and to resolve their contracts,” he said. “What the UFT did with their ratification was open the door for other unions to sit down at the bargaining table and decide right now to negotiate their own contract.”

He credited the union and the de Blasio administration for their work.

### **'Not Great, But Fair'**

“Is it everything we wanted? No it’s not, it’s not everything we wanted,” he said. “But it’s a fair contract. At least we can move forward from this thing.”

“This is a moment where progress can be made,” said PSC President Barbara Bowen in a statement reacting to the vote. “The PSC bargaining team is ready to work around the clock and through the summer. But we want a contract that moves all of our members forward—economically and professionally.”

The PSC, which represents City University of New York employees, is beginning bargaining sessions. It negotiates with the university, but needs to factor in city and state settlements.

Not all of the city’s labor unions reacted kindly to the ratification. The leaders of some police and fire unions which received the two 4-percent raises years ago were unhappy with the remaining terms that would ultimately provide 10-percent raises over seven years. A Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association spokesman declined to comment on the deal, but the union is seeking to go to arbitration for a new contract.

### **Dissidents Unhappy, Too**

In a statement, the Movement of Rank and File Educators, which had coalesced much of the UFT’s internal dissatisfaction of the contract’s terms, said its members met with many educators who “expressed their disappointment” in the ratification. Members of MORE highlighted terms

that would keep raises below the cost of living, extend retroactive pay two years beyond the agreement's lifespan and would give lesser rights to educators placed in the Absent Teacher Reserve.

With the ratification, the union will work to find \$1.3 billion in health-care savings over the next four years without asking its members to pay more for premiums or reducing the quality of coverage. The Mayor's Office estimates the city will save \$3.4 billion when applied to all city employees.

Communications Workers of America Local 1180 President Arthur Cheliotis said he supported the deal and was confident the savings would be found by looking at other models.

### **'An Historic Pattern'**

"I think clearly there's work to be done," said Mr. Cheliotis, adding that while the city doesn't pay a very high amount of health-care compared to what large corporations pay, there are still ways to save.

"I think that there's been a historic pattern established by the first unit out, and that's clear," he said.