

thechiefleader.com

Unions Give High-School Students A Crash Course in Choices Available

RACHEL CISTO



GETTING A FULLER SENSE OF THEIR OPTIONS: Students at the college and career fair hosted by the UFT and the AFL-CIO New York City Central Labor Council in many cases were unaware of the function unions play and the benefits they provide for their members, according to one labor leader, before they heard pitches from those representing employees from transit workers to auto mechanics to School Safety Agents.

United Federation of Teachers President Michael Mulgrew walked onto the stage March 9 and turned to the more-than 400 high school students sitting in front of him.

“Good morning!” he said. “Who loves field trips?”

The students cheered. They had come from 25 schools across the city to the union’s lower-Manhattan headquarters for the first-ever “Future in Focus” event—a college and

career fair hosted jointly by the UFT and the AFL-CIO New York City Central Labor Council.

College, Union How-To

The fair was spread over two floors of the building. One was dedicated to colleges—how to apply, where to look and what to look for, while the other was set up to give students information on union careers.

“Usually these fairs are more slanted toward college,” said Mr. Mulgrew, but the UFT wanted to expose students to all their post-graduation choices. “We’ve got both colleges and unions here, and I’ve never seen it done this way before.”

Mr. Mulgrew told the students that while they could have both a college education and a career, they would have to choose where they started.

“I didn’t go into college right after high school,” he said. “I wasn’t ready to take it seriously and I didn’t want to waste money and time.”

Instead, he opted to join the carpenter’s union—what he called “probably the best decision I made up to that point”—and spent a year and a half in construction before starting night and weekend classes at the City University of New York.

“That’s when I started enjoying going to school, because I chose to be there,” the UFT leader told the students. “I got my degree, then I got a graduate degree, and I was slinging a hammer the whole time.”

He said it was important for the students to do what they felt was best for themselves, and reminded them that they could always change their minds.

“When you look in the mirror, don’t play yourself,” he said. “You might get told by everyone from outside what to do, but this is your choice. This is your decision.”

The brains behind the event, Janella Hinds, said it was a way for her to bring together her two roles—UFT Vice President for Academic High Schools and the Central Labor Council Secretary/Treasurer—and show kids who may not want to go to college that they still have good opportunities.

‘Show What’s Out There’

“Why wouldn’t we do this?” she said. “We’re showing these kids what kinds of options are out there for them.”

Twenty-six unions—including Teamsters Local 237, Transport Workers Union Local 100 and the UFT—set up information tables and handed out everything from tote bags and stress balls to rubber bracelets and bottles of hand-sanitizer.

Some unions even had more “interactive experiences”—American Federation of Musicians Local 802 had a “rock-band selfie station” set up at its booth.

One local union president said the fair wasn’t just about introducing teens to his union, but to the labor movement as a whole.

“We asked them how many knew someone who was in a union, and I was really taken aback by how few hands went up,” said Joseph Colangelo, president of Service Employees International Union Local 246, which represents city workers including Auto Mechanics, Machinists and Sheet Metal Workers.

“A lot of kids don’t get exposure to anything but what their parents do, and they don’t understand how much a union provides for workers and their families,” he said. “Our members get health care, vision benefits, dental benefits. They don’t have to worry about a thing.”

Space to grow.

3- & 4-bedroom homes from \$329,990
New Windsor, NY
Ask about our current promotions!

The RESERVE
at Windsor Star Homes

LEARN MORE

School Safety Agent Terence Elmore agreed, and said many unions—including own,

Teamsters Local 237—provide more benefits than most people realize.

“We have so many resources for the members,” he said, including free financial planning and free or discounted legal assistance. “Life throws you curveballs, but your union is there for you.”

‘Proud to Be Union’

He said he recognized some of the kids at the fair because he patrolled many of the athletic events, and had no qualms telling them about Local 237. “I’ve been here since 1998,” he said, “and I’m proud to be a union member.”

Kristyl Black, a member of TWU Local 100, said she knew first-hand that college wasn’t the right choice for every kid—her son had enrolled at the Rochester Institute of Technology, but decided it wasn’t what he wanted and dropped out.

Ms. Black said that her son’s charter school, Achievement First Brooklyn High School, required students to be accepted to college in order to graduate, but that there was something more important than a college degree.

‘Make Them Productive’

“No matter what the graduation rate is, we want to teach these kids to be productive adults,” she said, whether through a college program or through union training and apprenticeship programs.

Ms. Hinds said that was the theme of the entire day—young adults can make a life for themselves after high school, whether their path leads to college or to a trade.

“Some adult New Yorkers don’t get all this information,” she said, “but we want the kids to know that there are good careers out there for them to pursue.”

News Tips

We cover everything that affects civil servants. If you have labor-related news to share, we want to hear from you!


**Ultrafast internet.
Incredible employee
discount.**

New Fios® Triple Play
150/150 Mbps Internet, Custom TV & Phone

\$69.99/mo

yr. 1 and \$84.99/mo yr. 2, w/2-yr. agmt. plus taxes,
RSN, FDV, other fees & \$12/mo STB equip. charges.
Price includes \$10 employee discount

Plus, HBO® included for 1 year (reg. \$15/mo.)
Multi-room DVR service free for 2 years

fios  **Get Fios** >