

Letters

Suburban versus city teacher pay

March 1, 2006

I know you can make your own comparisons with your own suburbs, but your readers might be interested in the following, which I also posted to the New York ICE list. Farmingdale is a school district outside New York City.

It is not particularly wealthy, by the way. One of the things that has to be considered is the impact of these differences on where new teachers seek employment. If you take the economic facts and extend them over the career life of a teacher, a teacher who chooses to work in the city — whether New York or Chicago — may be “paying” a penalty that amounts to a quarter to a half million dollars in lifetime wages alone (the difference grows over time and peaks at the \$15,000 per year represented by the top salaries) over the length of the career.

Add to this the difference in pension that will result for teachers who retire at normal pension rates from the city — versus the suburb — and the penalty for having chosen to work in the city is even greater. A teacher who retires at the top salary of \$93,000 from New York City will receive a much lower pension than one who retires from Farmingdale at their maximum of \$108,000. You and your readers can do the other math.

What follows is what I posted:

Farmingdale has settled their contract. As predicted in the ICEBLOG article we recently wrote, at the top they are once again miles ahead of us. By next year their top salary with 22 years experience, when NYC teachers hit \$93,416, will be \$108,887. At maximum we are 17 percent behind the Farmingdale teachers. By year four their maximum will be \$116,077.

Their new contract while not ideal, gives them 11.5 percent when compounded over four years with absolutely no givebacks.

There are other provisions in their contract worth noting, none of which were given back. The teachers in Farmingdale didn't react too positively to professional development that was top down a few years ago and so the district and union made the professional development self directed (sort of like the old C6R we just gave up in our contract).

The Farmingdale staff development plan for 2003-2004 states, “This year's program is structured so that each of you will be able to construct your own contractually mandated 12-hour staff development program...” Activities such as Independent Professional Reading count as do Book Talks on Relevant Literature. Sounds very professional to me; nothing like what many of us are forced to endure in the city during “professional development”. Their plan continues in the new contract.

Now, let's compare class sizes. Farmingdale's maximum is 30 for most classes and 40 for physical education. Our maximum in the city is 34 for high school classes and 50 for physical education and music. Their contract also states, "No teacher of English shall have a pupil load exceeding 120 students." City English teachers can go as high as 170.

Also in the Farmingdale Contract: "Teacher aides shall replace teachers in lunch-period supervision in all buildings." Didn't we just give away a similar clause to get our sub-standard contract?

How about this little gem in the Farmingdale contract: "No teacher shall be reprimanded without just cause." I believe this means they can grieve any reprimand. We gave that up too.

I don't know of anyone teaching in Farmingdale who is begging to come back to the city to teach here. And it is not even a wealthy area for the most part.

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Cynical ploy on referendum

April 1, 2006

This letter will not be published till after the debacle of April 4 voting on options for the way the Chicago Teachers Union will have voted on whether to change the way that elections are handled. The leadership of the UNION has made every effort to insure that the mail in ballot strongly recommended by the AFT will be defeated.

FIRST: The leadership didn't appoint a bipartisan election rules committee.

SECOND: They circulated their own petition to have mail in ballots sent to teachers at their schools.

THIRD: They sent out a notice of the referendum to members with a biased description of each ballot option and a two-week notification of the balloting occurring.

FOURTH: They have established the same methods of balloting which led to members' concerns about having an accurate accounting of the balloting.

FIFTH: The balloting announcement and vote occurs without any approval or discussion by the House of Delegates.

SIXTH: We have newly elected delegates who have not conducted an election at school.

Why are these measures being taken?

The United Progressive Caucus wants to have control of the elections at the 600 schools where members vote.

That it is impossible to monitor every school site on the Election Day.

That the money that the former officers, employees, and attorneys will earn total over \$5million in compensation during the three years they are in office now.

The union seems to have used union funds to repay individuals who helped the officers get elected. The million-dollar lawyer settled a lawsuit for over \$800,000 to pay former CTU employees back pay after they were dismissed in 2002. Former employees and officers are employed by the CTU at salaries and benefits of \$100,000 to \$200,000.

If the referendum for the election ballots to be mailed to members fails, it will very difficult to insure a fair election in May, 2007. Hopefully, the results will allow the membership to have confidence in the integrity of the next election. We will also be voting on a new contract in the not to distant future.

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Stand up for our rights

March 28, 2006

If we don't fight for our rights, we won't have any. This is shown in some of the anti-war work we have been doing at various Chicago schools.

When the Albany Park, North Park, Mayfair Neighbors for Peace and Justice began leafleting last school year at Von Steuben High School against the U.S. war of aggression in Iraq and urging the students to oppose the military recruiters, here's what happened.

The administration came out and said we had no right to distribute on the sidewalk in front of the school. They threatened us with arrest.

With the help of the National Lawyers Guild, we learned that we have every right to distribute on a public sidewalk, in front of a school or anywhere else.

The U.S. Supreme Court affirmed this in a case against a Chicago ordinance in 1972 and in U.S. vs. Grace in 1983. We brought these cases to the attention of the Legal Department of the Board of Education. They agreed we had those rights.

However, the administration at the school consulted with the Legal Department, and said we had the right to distribute on the public sidewalk—as long as we don't harass students, make them late for class, or cause littering! Handy ways to try to block us from exercising our rights.

In fact, just a few weeks ago, the principal flew out of the school during a leafleting against the administration of the military's ASVAB test inside the school. He said he had a complaint that we were stopping students and engaging them in discussion! And we would have to leave if we did that.

We responded by asking who complained, and with what evidence. After all, we do not force our leaflets on anyone. Our method is to tell the students what the leaflets are about, and give leaflets only to students who want them. Ditto with having discussions with students. And we do not intend to stop exercising our rights on this, or other matters.

There are many other examples of how the lawyers and administrators for the Board of Education—or the City government and its police—make up rules and regulations as they go along, in violation of basic rights.

Just to give one other example. We and other counter-military recruiters called on the Pulaski Elementary School to allow us to address an 8th grade assembly after the Phoenix Military Academy addressed an 8th grade assembly. We made this call on the basis of a federal court decision that counter-military recruiters have the right to equal access in the schools to military recruiters.

The principal and Legal Department of the Board of Education insisted that the Phoenix Military Academy presentation was not a case of military recruitment—even tho as many as 40% of students in ROTC programs are recruited into the military, according to testimony in Congress. Instead, as CEO Arne Duncan and others are fond of saying—the military academies are only educational or career opportunities!

It is obvious that if we do not insist and persist in fighting for our rights, we will not have any.

We would appreciate any involvement and support by readers of Substance in the continuation of the kinds of projects outlined above.

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