

EDU 5301 Educational Governance and Policy

Prof. Carla D'Ambrosio, Ed.D.

Denise T. Smith

Reflection on:

New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) Essential Fiscal Reform Playbook

Interesting name for the game at hand – fiscal reformation of the educational system with regards to employees. My current situation is one that I do not have to negotiate with a union and I do not have mandates that are currently hindering the fiscal responsibility of public school boards and school districts.

The seven key mandate relief initiatives are ones that are not only smart, but also prudent. Our system is crumbling, as the fiscal restraints have become a hindrance. Unions have historically protected the employees to which they belong, however, as the years have gone by, the protection has turned into a burden on society. The Triborough Amendment allows teachers' pay to continue to increase under an expired contract. Why, then, would anyone in the union want to renegotiate when they are still receiving countless benefits including health insurance, extremely generous pensions, retirement benefits and a handsome increase as they move down on the scale even without a renewed contract? A contract that is to be renegotiated opens up not only salary but also all of the above issues thereby risking the reduction of some as "give backs" to the districts. The Governor is 100% correct in proposing, through this amendment, the freezing of all salaries upon the expiration of a contract.

From a young age I was taught a strong work ethic and it is one that I have instilled in my own children, and one that I insist on from my faculty and staff. As a Principal, “last in, first out” is not my philosophy. Hard work, while putting the best interest of the students and parents first, is my philosophy. If a teacher who has been with the school for 15 years imparts his/her knowledge and does a good job then his/her job will be secure. However, if that teacher is adverse to change (i.e. technology, common core) and a third year teacher is attending workshops, reading, listening and learning from his/her mentor, then why would I let the third year teacher go and keep the veteran teacher? What is the best thing for the students? It is my belief that observations, communication with parents and administration, daily responsibilities such as posting class information and homework on the website, supporting the students both in and out of the school day, and an overall solid work ethic is worth more than years on the job. If, on the other hand, the above are all qualities of that teacher who has been on the job for 15 years, then that is the member who stays because they DO have the experience to move the students forward as well as the seniority.

I am in full agreement with streamlining teacher disciplinary procedures. It is a tremendous waste of time and taxpayer money under the current system. If a teacher has been convicted of child abuse or other certain felonies, then we should not reinvent that wheel and retry him/her. That teacher will have assumedly been found guilty by a panel of his/her peers or a judge thereby eliminating the need for us to hold a hearing. In the situation where a tenured teacher is charged with pedagogical incompetence, then I believe s/he is entitled to a hearing but s/he should not be placed in a “rubber room” for months

on end. The process should be timely and a panel should be in place to hold these hearings on a weekly or daily basis as deemed necessary by the number of teachers.

As a nation we are all faced with escalating health care costs. As a non-union employee, my husband and I pay exorbitant premiums, which have only seen major increases in recent years. Unfortunately these premiums are a result of the system we have in place in this country. A cap should be placed on the employer's end. School districts cannot possibly continue to sustain the increases and still provide a quality education to the students, as the monies spent on subsidizing the premiums are monies being taken from the instructional side. I am in full agreement with establishing maximum health care contributions.

Regarding rebuilding special education, it would be unfair of me to impose my opinion, as I do not feel well enough versed in this arena. I am not a supporter of waste, particularly in these challenging times, however, it is our social and moral responsibility to educate everyone, including those cover under IDEA. What constitutes a disability? That question needs to be answered by the professionals. If the costs associated with these disabilities are duplicated, then shame on us. If not, then those receiving are entitled and should be serviced.

Allowing "piggyback" purchasing is a no-brainer. Why would we not allow schools the same purchasing power and the benefits associated with those of other states and local governments? This initiative is a clear example, in my opinion, of the obvious finally coming to light.

Finally, the pensions initiative - we cannot continue to support our current system between healthcare costs, salaries and general overhead that has contributed to drive up

taxes. We live in a time that most companies have passed on defined retirement benefits and left the task of savings up to the employee. Most companies will match the savings as an incentive but our economy across the board can no longer sustain the old system.

As you can see, I support those initiatives that address the fiscal responsibility of our boards. The dilemma that our schools is faced with is a mirror of what our country is faced with and our boards must somehow creatively continue to provide our children with a quality education and assure our teachers that they are respected and appreciated all in a fiscally sound way.