

Union Czarina Sniffs at \$125,000 Teacher Plan

Randi Weingarten's Highest Objective Is Monopoly-Bargaining Power

Entrepreneur and former middle school teacher Zeke Vanderhoek believes that investing in teachers, not technology or non-teaching school employees, is the key to improving student performance.

And he intends to demonstrate he's right in a New York City charter school, scheduled to open in 2009, that he is establishing and where he will serve as first principal.

According to a March 7 account in the *New York Times*, his "Equity Project" School for students in grades five through eight "is promising to pay teachers \$125,000, plus a potential bonus based on schoolwide performance."

'Equity Project' Will Pay Teachers Nearly Twice as Much As Unionized Schools Do

"That," explained *Times* reporter Elissa Gootman, "is nearly twice as much as the average [unionized] New York City public school teacher earns"

The Equity Project will be able to pay teachers far more than unionized public schools and other charters because it will have very few non-teaching employees, class sizes will be somewhat larger than average, and all students will take Latin and music, rather than choose from a menu of electives.

Reasonable people may differ about whether or not Mr. Vanderhoek is moving in the right direction.

But one might suppose that teacher union officials, of all people, would be applauding the example he is setting for others who are in a position to decide how school funds are allocated, since teachers, at least, will benefit from his approach.

Instead, as well-known education journalist Mike Antonucci recently pointed out in his blog -- available at www.eiaonline.com -- New York City union bigwig Randi Weingarten has been "poking holes" in the Vanderhoek plan.

'Let's See Which One Prospective . . . Charter School Teachers Prefer'

Ms. Weingarten currently heads the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the largest affiliate of the 1.4 million-member American Federation of Teachers (AFT) union, and is a likely candidate to head the



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Union boss Randi Weingarten: Teachers would rather be under a union monopoly than highly paid.

entire AFT after national union President Ed McElroy makes his announced retirement this summer.

In his March 10 report on the Equity Project, Mr. Antonucci dryly observed:

"UFT hasn't gotten teachers a \$125,000 salary after 47 years of trying. A nonunion charter school opens with that, with no negotiations required."

Teacher salaries are also far lower than \$125,000 in the two Big Apple charter schools that the UFT union hierarchy itself established.

Nevertheless, Ms. Weingarten frostily suggested, according to the *New York Times*, that the performance of teachers at Mr. Vanderhoek's nonunion charter may be "hampered" by their "lack of power in dealing with the principal."


Mr. Antonucci commented: "We have two UFT charter schools, with regular contract salaries And we have the Equity Project charter school, with \$125,000 salaries Let's see which one prospective New York City charter school teachers prefer."

Common Criticism of Teacher Union Bosses 'Gives Them Too Much Credit'

"Teacher union bosses like Randi Weingarten are frequently criticized for favoring the interests of teachers over those of schoolchildren, parents and taxpayers," said Doug Stafford, vice president of the National Right to Work Committee.

"But generally speaking, that criticism gives Ms. Weingarten and company too much credit.

"As Ms. Weingarten's surly response to the Equity Project demonstrates, teacher union bosses' highest objective is Big Labor monopoly power to negotiate teacher contracts.

"And their second highest objective is the power to get teachers fired for refusal to join or pay dues to an unwanted union." 

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