

“CPS Must Cooperate”
Cincinnati Enquirer, Other Voices, Guest Columnist
June 25, 2010

By Julie Sellers
President, Cincinnati Federation of Teachers

For years, the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers and the Cincinnati Public Schools have joined hands to develop a working relationship that has been the foundation for all of the school district’s successful innovative programs. However, this year CPS has inexplicably refused to carry this spirit of cooperation forward in contract talks with the school system’s educators.

Instead, school board members want to walk away from the collaborative structures built into that contract over more than two decades. Why this has happened is not entirely clear. Some members of the school board have said it is because teachers are just not “transformative” enough. However, just what they mean by that remains unclear.

What is clear is that the Cincinnati’s teachers have a long history of working for reforms that have made our city’s schools better. For more than a generation, the Cincinnati Public Schools and the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers have been in the vanguard of progressive innovation to improve the education of our city’s children.

We have made significant progress in recent years, but more work remains to be done to improve student achievement and graduation rates. For Cincinnati’s teachers, the goal is always the success of all students. Whenever reform has been needed, teachers and their union have been part of the solution—not obstacles to change.

Even a partial list of the accomplishments produced by collaboration between teachers and the school district is impressive:

- The Cincinnati Federation of Teachers trail blazed a teacher evaluation system that has become a national model. In this system, shaped through the collective bargaining process, top teachers help others become the excellent educators that every CPS child deserves.
- The Cincinnati Teacher Evaluation System grew out of the collective bargaining agreement in 1997. The nationally recognized system is the subject of a current study by a group of Harvard educators examining effective instructional practices and their impact on student achievement.
- The Cincinnati Federation of Teachers pioneered a peer intervention program that has become a national model. Lead teachers help struggling ones succeed—and most do. But those who can’t or won’t reach the quality each child deserves are counseled into another profession. Because every child is valued, the quality of instruction each receives is a concern to every teacher.

- One of America’s first differentiated pay scales for teachers was adopted in Cincinnati with the collaboration of the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers. The best educators have an opportunity to become lead teachers who are given more tasks, leadership responsibilities—and additional pay. The selection process is rigorous and so is the work because teachers know that rewarding the highest quality instruction helps us value every child.
- The Cincinnati Federation of Teachers leads the country in collaborating with school administrations. For years, teachers have worked through the collective bargaining process to form structures in their contracts that facilitate partnerships with those who manage the schools. Such teamwork yields the highest quality instruction. In the end, that helps every child.

Innovative, progressive policies have been possible because of the collaborative relationship between teachers and administrators forged in the classrooms and hallways of our schools and formalized in our contract. Our students and our schools are moving forward—test scores are rising and our graduation rate is higher than many comparable urban districts. There is still a lot to accomplish, and the way to reach our goals is to work together.

Cincinnati’s public school system already has something that other districts want and are struggling to achieve: a record of cooperation between teachers and administrators to do what is good for our kids. But some school board members now say collaboration slows the process. That doesn’t seem very “transformative.”