



Teacher Requirements vs Recommendations from UTD President Karen Aronowitz

Updated September 17, 2009

DEAR BARGAINING UNIT MEMBERS OF THE UNITED TEACHERS OF DADE:

Last school year, I had asked your steward to read this letter to you as part of their 10 minutes at a faculty meeting to update you on some very important UTD business. As we begin the 09-10 school year, it is more important than ever that this information be reiterated and expanded.

You, our members, have shared your frustrations with the UTD leadership that teachers at some worksites have been required to perform duties that may be good classroom practices but are not required of them. The UTD leadership feels strongly about two issues:

- academic freedom; and
- the value of teachers as the professional decision makers in their classrooms.

Academic freedom under Article XXII of the UTD/MDCPS contract guarantees freedom of choice and flexibility with respect to teaching styles and methodology. Requirements like federal or state law are mandates. There are times administrative recommendations, best practices, and suggestions sound like mandates or are misinterpreted by administration who calls them mandates. Even schools with special identifications, like D.A., SINI, and CIM **cannot be mandated to violate our contract.** For example, the FLDOE revised the School Improvement Plan (SIP) this year to include a section on Instructional Focus Calendars (IFC). Just because these questions appear in the document and seem to require a response, nothing in our contract requires teachers to use an IFC. They are available on the district's web page as an instructional tool for those teachers who feel that using them would be a benefit.

In a meeting last week with Diana Urbizu (Labor Relations), Millie Fornell and Ava Byrne (Curriculum and Instruction), we reached agreement that teachers who choose to use IFC's can also use them as their lesson plan, as long as they include an assessment and home learning.

We are currently in the process of negotiating with the district exceptions to these rules for the 34 Intervene and Correct II D and F schools that may, in fact, require these 34 schools to use an IFC. The only reason the district would have to negotiate this with UTD is because **using an IFC or a Pacing Guide cannot currently be mandated.**

The same holds true for specific board configurations, posting of objectives anywhere other than in your lesson plans, bi-weekly assessments, word walls, print-rich classrooms, and other such recommendations.

We do not question the use of assessments as a way to monitor student progress. We do take issue with a requirement to add weekly or bi-weekly assessments on top of those we're already giving our students, especially if they are not in sync with what we've taught that week. Article XXVI, Section 32 indicates that teachers will not be required to administer tests that do not appear on the jointly developed and agreed to district testing calendar.

Again, we may agree to different strategies for the 34 schools – not because we necessarily agree that more rigid control will improve student scores, but because these schools are so fragile that we may agree to try some strategies that we have resisted in the past.

We do not question the validity of analyzing the data we get from appropriate assessments we give our students. We will, however, address a requirement to use our individual planning time to discuss this data with our peers or administration in required group meetings. Article XX, Section 7 describes teacher planning and indicates that compulsory meetings cannot be held without mutual agreement of teacher and principal. Collaborative planning during a common planning time is an example of a best practice that we agree can be useful, but appropriate time must be allocated through negotiations for these collegial conversations.

You are charged with your students' education and I know you will stop at nothing to help them succeed. As professionals, we will settle for nothing less than an education expert in front of every class in Miami-Dade County. If using a district generated Pacing Guide or focus calendar benefits you, by all means use it. If learning centers benefit your differentiated instruction, use them. If word walls contain appropriate, relevant words that compliment what you're teaching, put them up. If rubrics assist you in planning your instruction, create them. If a particular board configuration is helpful, you make that decision. But if these tools do not align with your instructional plan, please do not waste your time complying with a checklist that has been sent around the school to intimidate you into compliance. **You are the professional in your classroom.**

Let your administrator know you will take their suggestion(s) into consideration. Make decisions for your students based on what will help them grow and thrive. Make decisions in your classes that are valid and authentic. On the other hand, should you be directed to implement a program or policy, please do so, so as not to be insubordinate. Once you have complied, we ask you to inform your steward immediately.

Lastly, there is only one state-approved teacher evaluation system that can be used by administrators here in Miami-Dade and that's now IPEGS. After three years, the state has approved the system. The reason we were required to develop a new system was changes in the law that now require 1) at least 3 ratings indicating unsatisfactory, satisfactory, and outstanding; and 2) a requirement for evaluations to be tied to student achievement, thus the new goal setting component. However, IPEGS does not require you to do anything that violates the contract as discussed above.

UTD and the District have agreed to create a frequently asked question (FAQ) document, as soon as possible, to address each of the issues raised above.

Should you receive directives that violate any of these parameters, please advise your steward immediately and provide them with appropriately written backup information. Thank you for being such a strong advocate for professional practices and for being such a powerful voice for educators and students in Miami-Dade County.

In Unity,

Karen Aronowitz, President
United Teachers of Dade