LOWER CLASS SIZE IS THE LAW
THE CITY, STATE AND UFT IGNORE

By James Eterno, Delegate, Middle College High School;
Ten Years of Experience on UFT Executive Board

To settle the Campaign for Fiscal Equity Lawsuit where parents successfully claimed in the 1990s that NYC schools were chronically underfunded by the state, the Contract for Excellence was agreed to. Class size limits in this 2007 state legislative settlement for NYC were supposed to average 20 for grades K-3, 22 for grades 3-8 and 25 for 9-12 by 2011. This is the law. Before the settlement, lower class sizes were also a goal put in the UFT Contract in Article 8L which says in part: “With regard to the long term recommendations of the 2005 Fact Finders made subject to adequate CFE funding, the parties shall establish a Labor Management Committee to discuss the following issues:...d) a program for the reduction of class size in all grades and divisions.” Absurd parts of Article 8L such as school wide merit pay have managed to come and go since then. Remember lower class sizes for the city were supposed to be achieved by 2011 according to the law. Why haven’t class sizes been lowered anywhere near CFE levels? Why are so many high school class sizes over the already educationally unsound limit of 34? The fiscal crisis is long since past as the city and state budget surpluses show. Certainly, paying those paltry raises of 10% over 7 years for teachers and other city workers isn’t causing the city to go broke. The main reason class size levels are way too high in my opinion is that our not so brave UFT leaders won’t do anything more than give lip service to lowering class size. The Union calls it progress when there are only 5,485 classes over the traditional class size limits that range from 32-34 in grades 1-12. My daughter’s grade one class has 28. This is outrageous. Kids get very little individual attention in these huge classes.

The reality of life in 21st Century America is that laws are for “little people” like teachers and public school students in the city. Teachers must be evaluated using ridiculous cookie cutter Danielson rubrics and invalid/unreliable student test scores. If we object, the law is thrown in our faces by the UFT. Our students must sit in large classes because when it comes to lower class sizes, leaders like Dennis Walcott, Joel Klein and Carmen Farina can just take the law and ignore it. And what does our union do? Ask us for more COPE money so we can give larger bundles of cash to politicians who harm us.

Bring your voice to the UFT Executive board. By voting the MORE/New Action slate, you can help elect 7 MORE/New Action high school candidates, the first time in a decade that non-Unity Caucus (Michael Mulgrew’s political party) endorsed candidates will be on the board.
JIA LEE FOR U.F.T. PRESIDENT

By Arthur Goldstein, Chapter Leader, Francis Lewis High School

MORE/New Action has selected Jia Lee as its candidate for UFT President. I’ve met Jia on numerous occasions and seen her in various venues. Jia is calm and thoughtful, two qualities wholly lacking in Michael Mulgrew.

While Mulgrew wants to punch your face and push it in the dirt if you touch his Common Core, Jia thinks we shouldn’t have adopted it in the first place. While Mulgrew defends high-stakes testing, Jia not only opposes it, but has opted both herself and her child out of it. This is a risky stand for a working teacher, but Jia’s taken it nonetheless. Fearlessness is a good quality in a leader. Risk-averse Mulgrew and others have led us down a path of concession that’s emboldened our enemies to the point of threatening to bankrupt public unions.

Jia traveled to DC to address the Senate on high-stakes testing. Leadership tried to co-opt her, but she was not for sale. Current leadership forces everyone who represents us to do their bidding. It’s one thing to present a common front, but another to support programs that actively hurt students and working teachers. Mulgrew went to Albany to negotiate our miserable rating system, and thanked the Assembly for making it even worse. Jia Lee, like Diane Ravitch, says judging teachers on test scores is invalid and counterproductive.

Jia is a breath of fresh air. I’m thrilled to endorse her without reservation or hesitation.

WHAT WOULD A MORE LEADERSHIP DO?

By Kit Wainer, Chapter Leader, Leon Goldstein HS

Jia Lee and the MORE team will rebuild our union from the bottom-up. We will revive the strategies that built unions in the first place: workplace organizing, joint protest actions involving members of different schools, mobilizations large enough to pressure the employer. The UFT has given away our most powerful tools and relied instead on backroom deals. We will reverse course.

EDITORIAL

Freedom to Teach

Each class we teach has its own distinct make-up. Scripted curriculum, check-box rubrics, and paint by number lesson plans are not in the best interest of our students, no matter what your AP who taught for 2 years tells you. Lesson plans and teaching styles have to adjust to the needs of a particular class. What works in one class, may not work in the other. As a union we have to fight hard to make sure the real experts, class-room teachers, have freedom to design their own lessons, so that we can best meet the needs of our students. Too often administrators with a lack of real experience hover over us armed only with Danielson and Common Core, but lacking the knowledge of the needs of our students. We can not allow our teaching to be dictated by those who do not know better than us.