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# Unleashing the Potential of Your Teacher Contract

to Make Positive Change for Yourself and Your Students in New York City Public Schools (NYCPS)

Did you know that despite 75% of teachers favoring additional pay for teachers who receive multiple outstanding evaluations, the current [United Federation of Teachers \(UFT\)](#) contract does not do so?

This is just one example of the disconnect between what teachers want and the policies often contained in their contracts—sometimes called collective bargaining agreements, or CBAs. As the policy documents that govern the teaching profession—and, by extension, student learning environments—these contracts can serve as a powerful lever for change for public K-12 teachers and students. But too often, they don't, instead keeping schools stuck in the past while the rest of the world evolves. So what's typically covered in teacher contracts? And how can we leverage them to transform teaching and learning?

## What Teacher Contracts Cover

Teacher contracts represent hardfought improvements to teacher compensation and working conditions, and also touch upon the majority of what happens in classrooms. They are not only employment contracts, but also impact the conditions in which students learn.

Teacher contracts almost always set teacher salaries and benefits, class size caps, teacher placement and layoff policy, and a “grievance” process to follow if the contract is broken. They often, but not always, determine the length of the workday and teacher evaluation processes.

Teacher contracts must follow state law. For example, [New York recently passed a law](#) dictating class size caps. The UFT contract must follow the law, but can set class size rules that comply with the law. States can also prohibit certain policies from being covered in teacher contracts. For example, [Connecticut law](#) prohibits the length of the school day from being covered in teacher contracts.

## The Potential for Transformation in Teacher Contracts

Teacher contracts hold the potential to enable dynamic, student-centered, modern classrooms designed for the learning of tomorrow. They can—and must—be flexible to answer calls for what [teachers and students need now](#), and responsive to [what they need as we learn something new](#). They can transform teaching and learning through rigorous teacher leadership pathways, flexibility for school-level decision making, strategic compensation structures, and evaluation and professional learning systems that grow and reward highly effective teachers. [Where We Agree](#) provides a collection of modern contract ideas that can help do just that, along with case studies of school systems that have successfully implemented them.

## Learning about Your Own Teacher Contract's Policies

Given the potential of teacher contracts to transform teaching and learning, knowing how to find and understanding your contract are crucial to achieving change for yourself and your students.

**Finding Your Contract:** Your contract is on the UFT's website, [here](#), at the “Teachers” link under 2009-2018 contracts. A 2023 “Memorandum of Agreement” (MOA), [here](#), summarizes the changes that were made to the longer, aforementioned “teachers” contract in the most recent negotiations. Reading the two documents

together provides the full terms of employment for UFT members.

**Understanding Your Contract:** While teacher contracts can be lengthy and challenging to read, reading them in full will give you the best understanding of them. Many policy issue areas intersect, so reading any given section may not give you a full understanding of the relevant policy. If reading the entire contract isn't feasible, follow these steps to learn about your contract:

- 1. Look for and read union-created resources that summarize your contract's policies.** Often, unions produce high-level summaries or FAQs about contracts, recent changes made to them, or the policies most frequently asked about. For example, the UFT has a "[Contract at a Glance](#)" page with links to summaries of the policies most frequently asked about.
- 2. Explore your contract's contents on your own.** Tips for doing so include:
  - Use the table of contents or "CTRL + F" or "command + F" to find specific policies
  - Don't skip definitions sections—understanding the definition of relevant terms is essential for understanding policies.
  - If the policy you're reading refers to other sections of the contract, find those sections and read them too. Otherwise, you won't fully understand the policy.
  - Always check your understanding of a policy with your union representative.
- 3. Visit [Where We Agree](#) for resources to help you understand your contract and inspiration for changes to seek.** Check back periodically, as new content will be added over time.

## Making Your Voice Heard in Your Contract Negotiation Process

Teacher-inspired contract change IS possible! For example, in 2022, Minneapolis Public Schools teachers [successfully advocated](#) for modifications to their layoff policy to protect progress made in diversifying the teacher workforce. Follow these steps to make your voice heard in your own contract negotiation process:

- 1. Find out the timeline for contract negotiation.** Teacher contracts are "renegotiated" every few years. You can find the dates between which [your contract](#) is in effect on its first page, which will give you a sense of approximately when renegotiation will occur. The current UFT contract is in effect from September 2022 until November 2027, and renegotiation generally happens during the year preceding the contract renewal.
- 2. Read negotiation updates.** The [UFT](#) provides updates during active negotiations. While they contain helpful information, they may also be written in an adversarial tone that can make it hard to know what to believe. Read closely and critically and form your own opinions.
- 3. Ask your union representative the best way to get involved in the negotiation process.** Many unions conduct surveys of teachers or hold extra meetings around negotiation time to inform priorities. You can also visit the [UFT's staff directory](#) to find contact information and reach out to learn more about getting involved in the process and share your perspective.
- 4. Visit [Where We Agree](#) to learn how other school systems have achieved contract change.**



### Get in Touch with Educators for Excellence-New York

Reach out to Marielys Divanne, Executive Director of E4E-New York, at [mdivanne@e4e.org](mailto:mdivanne@e4e.org) to talk about policy change—in your contract or to state law or local policy—you'd like to see in NYCPS.