

Positive winds of change in Newark NJ public schools

A reform caucus in the Newark Teachers Union (NTU) made remarkable gains in the union election that ended on Friday. Out of about 3,000 members eligible to vote, 1,200 NTU members cast their ballots. (Sadly, that proportion is about par for US unions.) The New Visions candidate for President lost by only 9 votes to the long-time chief, Joe Del Grosso, who will now serve his 10th two-year term. New Visions won 18 of 29 slots on the Executive Board, giving this vibrant, multi-racial slate of reformers a majority. Quite an accomplishment for a caucus that really began to pick up steam only after AFT President Randi Weingarten used the national union's organizers to push acceptance of a contract that strips Newark education workers of their most basic rights as professionals and workers. Shamelessly currying favor with Cory Booker and Chris Christie, Weingarten used the national union's resources to push Newark teachers and kids under the bus. In this election of officers, NTU members pushed back. But don't be surprised if Weingarten sees the handwriting on the wall and tries to make nice with New Visions. Still, I'm confident New Visions won't be snookered. This savvy group of activists are building the union at the school site, working with parents and students, democratizing the union to "give Newark students schools they deserve." New Visions understands that the future of their union – and public education – requires a different kind of teacher unionism – and union leadership. And they're poised to provide it.