

NEW YORK POST

UNION'S 'CUE' TIPS

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Now roll over! Now speak!

The powerful teachers union had City Council members on a short leash this week -- crafting cue cards with questions for legislators to ask at a hearing.

EDITORIAL: COUNCIL FOR SALE

It was an unusually aggressive attempt to direct the interrogation of witnesses regarding charter schools, according to City Council officials.

The TelePrompTer-like scripts were quietly hand-delivered to sympathetic members by a union rep during the hearing and contained tough, leading questions for Department of Education officials and softball inquiries for a United Federation of Teachers official.

The hearing was called in response to a council resolution designed to give the public more notice when the DOE wants a charter school to share a building occupied by a traditional school.

Angry council members accused the DOE of jamming charter schools into buildings with limited space.

They also claimed education officials create advantages for charter schools at the expense of traditional public schools

Armed with the cards from the UFT, they put the officials on the hot seat.

One of the cards even concluded with the politicized question of whether leaving parents out of a decision made "the case for changing mayoral control even stronger?"

The UFT has released a proposal that would strip the mayor of control of the schools by removing his power to appoint a majority of the Panel on Education Policy.

The Bloomberg administration has been one of the nation's strongest backers of charter schools, and the loss of mayoral control would likely deal it a tremendous blow.

Charter-school proponents were incensed by what they felt was a brazen move by the union.

"Frankly, it's just disrespecting the council," said Peter Murphy, policy director for the New York Charter Schools Association, who testified at the hearing.

"This is just classic manipulation. There's nothing wrong with giving information to policy makers -- but this goes way beyond that."

The strain between the UFT and charter operators has heightened in recent weeks, with teachers at two charters attempting to quit the union.

Veteran council members said the flash-card distribution was unprecedented.

"Unions are very often the source of legitimate questions," said Councilman Peter Vallone Jr. (D-Queens). "However, I've never seen typed-up cue cards before."

UFT President Randi Weingarten, who was in Washington during the hearing, said in a statement, "I am proud of the testimony we gave, but I regret the manner in which our other concerns were shared."

Of a half-dozen council members contacted by The Post, none said they knew whether a colleague had asked a question from a card verbatim.

The questions on the cards also included one about whether "the fundamental problem here [is] the Department's abdication of its most important responsibility to provide quality district schools in all parts of the city."

A spokesman for Councilman Simcha Felder (D-Brooklyn), who had seemed taken aback by the distribution of the cards, still said it was a perfectly valid move.

"I think it was more aggressive at this hearing than at other hearings, but they shouldn't have anything to be ashamed of," he said.

"The UFT is one of the most organized and one of the strongest advocates for their issues."

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