



To Blame or Not to Blame the Teachers Union

Posted by Beardy
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On Tuesday, March 16th, the LinkEd team was able to participate in the Intelligence Squared Debate: Don't Blame Teachers Unions for Our Failing Schools. We were not sure what to expect from the evening, but were pleasantly surprised by a true debate: two teams of three pitted against each other fighting to win the crowd's vote for or against the motion 'don't blame teachers unions for our failing schools'.

Robert Rosenkranz set the stage with a light introduction of the Intelligence Squared Debates, a series of debates aimed at raising the level of public discourse on a range of topics. John Donvan then laid out the rules and explained the objective: we decide whether or not to blame the teachers unions for our failing schools based on the most convincing argument. Before the debaters were let loose, the audience voted on the motion based on their current opinions only: 24% for the motion, 43% against the motion and 33% undecided. The scores were displayed and the debaters took the mics.

Speaking for the motion, Randi Weingarten, Kate McLaughlin and Gary Smuts all stood by the view that if teachers unions are to blame, less unionized states would have higher academic achievement. Their data shows this is not the case and in fact their own schools have had great success with unions. Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, also emphasized that it is all about the kids; 'we are trying to search for what works for kids' and find solutions for the problems which includes providing teachers with professional development and security in their classrooms.

On the opposite side of the fence stood Terry Moe, Rod Paige and Larry Sand, advocating that if you vote for the motion 'Don't blame teachers unions for our failing schools' you are essentially saying that the teachers unions should not receive *any* of the blame. Terry Moe led the introductions for the team against the motion, stating that teachers unions are and have long been roadblocks in education reform. In response to the claim by Kate McLaughlin and Gary Smuts that teachers unions are pro school choice, Moe said "This is all in code: unions are in favor of choice as long as schools are unionized.

The cap on charter schools in NYC was a hot topic throughout the debate as was the 'choice' teachers have when joining a union. Randi Weingarten explained that all teachers have a choice to join the union, but Terry Moe explained that while you have a choice to join, you have to pay union fees (upwards of \$700) regardless of your choice. The crowd was in hysterics when Larry Sand closed the argument with the comment "It's like getting a divorce from your wife that you never wanted to marry in the first place and not getting alimony".

In the end, the team against the motion won the hearts of the audience with a tally of 68% voting against the motion, 25% for the motion and 7% still undecided.

Now you decide. Are you for or against the motion to blame the teachers union for our failing schools? Go vote on IntelligenceSquaredUs.org.