

June 17, 2022  
The Bronx

Union sisters and brothers,

I have served as United Federation of Teachers Chapter Leader at the High School of American Studies at Lehman College since September 2002. It is today twenty years, forty terms, roughly a hundred marking periods later.

The union at HSAS started out as something foreign, strange. Many of us entertained the misconception that the union and the chapter leader were one and the same.

I remember walking into Myra's office one day that September - the school needed to change something - I held my contract in my hand - to comply with some rule. Myra listened, then looked down at her work. I was easy to ignore. In October, though, we were asked to eat lunch with the kids. We - the eight of us - met. This time when I went into Myra's office and reminded her about duty-free lunch she listened, and agreed. Our effectiveness, our power, come from our collective will to use our rights.

This chapter has come to use the union, though, for more than protecting rights. The chapter has become a vehicle for schoolwide initiative and change. Think about our move to two marking periods in 2011 (for which we were issued an award)! Think about our collective response to Michael Bloomberg coming to the HSAS graduation the following year. Think about our proposal to reform admissions in 2015. Just this week the chapter organized discussion around supporting students. And perhaps my favorite, think of how the chapter planned our 2020-21 schedule - awful, but less awful than any others. This UFT chapter has become much more than a guarantor of our contractual rights.

And I am proud of that. There is no reward or compensation for being a chapter leader, aside from the small stipend I transform into a chicken lunch each June. But I do take away satisfaction in having helped build this chapter into a vehicle to amplify faculty voice. I hope you continue to use the UFT structure for that purpose. But that would be without me.

Effective the end of June 30, I am stepping down as United Federation of Teachers chapter leader at the High School of American Studies at Lehman College. I have asked Morgan, our election chairperson, to open nominations for a new chapter leader.

I wish you much success going forward. I look forward to seeing you at the chicken lunch next Wednesday. And I hope you have a relaxing, recuperative Summer break,

*Jonathon Halabi*  
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