

OCTOBER 2015



*FROM COGEN TO MULGREW  
UNITING THE LABOR FORCE*

*PROTECTING  
PUBLIC EDUCATION*

## **ParaPROFESSIONALS**

**M**ost UFT members are not aware of how and when paraprofessionals became an important part of our Union. It was over fifty years ago that this all important group of educators joined the ranks of the UFT.

In the beginning, paraprofessionals were hired to work and assist in schools located primarily in low-income neighborhoods. These neighborhoods mainly were comprised of students of color, and the paraprofessionals hired were from these same areas of NYC. These workers had paltry salaries and few, if any, protections or rights.

Albert Shanker, the **UNITY/UFT** President at the time, recognized the vital role paraprofessionals played in the NYC school system. He wanted them to become members of the UFT. They needed representation in order to negotiate for better working conditions, job protections, and higher salaries.

Shanker was steadfast in his resolve. There were however, some challenges along the way. In order for the paraprofessionals to become UFT members, the teachers, who were UFT members, had to vote to allow them into the Union. Shanker had a simple plan to address the naysayers – he vowed to resign as president if the measure to allow the paraprofessionals to join the UFT did not pass. It did.



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In 1970 the first paraprofessional contract was ratified, increasing pay by almost 140%, improving the working conditions and providing many of the benefits paraprofessionals still have today. Shanker also had a vision for these educators to advance in the school system. Thus, the concept of a “Career Training Program” was born. The idea was simple – these paraprofessionals could work in their current assignments while returning to school to receive the degrees and credits necessary to advance in title, whether as a teacher, guidance counselor or other pedagogical position.

Many years later, **UFT/UNITY** President Albert Shanker stated that of all his accomplishments as President of the UFT, he was proudest of organizing and bringing the paraprofessionals into the UFT.



UFT President Michael Mulgrew and the **UNITY** Team continue the commitment to paraprofessionals that began with Albert Shanker, fighting for improved working conditions and greater compensation.

**UFT/UNITY** represents and advocates for dignity, recognition and respect for all members.

## Michael Mulgrew and the Unity Team

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