

DONALD C. FRY



Baltimore City Public School System CEO Andres Alonso should be left alone to do his job. He may be the city's last true hope, says Donald C. Fry, president and CEO of the Greater Baltimore Committee.
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Let Alonso do his job

Here we go again.

Just a few months ago, the media and education, business and civic leaders praised the successful recruitment of Andres Alonso to run the underachieving Baltimore City Public School System, a system that has shown limited progress for decades and has produced embarrassing graduation rates and test scores.

Remarkably, the school commissioners managed to attract such a highly motivated, extraordinarily well-qualified, energetic CEO who works around the clock and has the best interests of children at heart. An innovative educator, Alonso has received national acclaim for turning around poor academic performance. Yet within three short months of his arrival, he is under siege from the local teachers union, which is calling for his ouster.

For what misdeed has the union chosen to attack Alonso? Amazingly, it is a simple request that the teachers use one (not all) of their weekly planning periods to work together in the hope that collaboration might improve the education product.

It's hardly a novel idea or burdensome request. What a disgrace for the union to take such a position.

Let's label this controversy between the teachers union and Alonso for exactly what it is — an attempt by union leaders to thwart innovation without regard for whether it might actually improve teacher preparedness and student performance.

This is an effort to test the new CEO's authority and to wrest control of the system away from an educator-administrator who is nationally renowned and has proven ideas of how to nurture improvement of academic performance.

Baltimore was lucky to get Alonso, and now the union leadership is treating him so rudely that it serves as an embarrassment to the entire city.

Perhaps the union would have a better argument if Baltimore City schools had been performing up to par. But they are not — and have not done so for years.

Improving Baltimore City schools was the most debated issue in the recent mayoral primary election. If we don't empower Alonso to attempt innovative measures and support his efforts to make tough decisions regarding school reforms, we will likely be debating poor Baltimore City school performance for years to come.

It is time for our community leaders and business leaders to express outrage. Year in and year out, we ask for a functional school system that will graduate young people who have a chance at a decent

future and the ability to succeed in the jobs that will be available for them. But year in and year out, efforts such as this attack by union leaders undercut and damage the chance for success that a dedicated and talented leader like Alonso, and the many dedicated principals and teachers within the system, are working so hard to provide to our young citizens.

These demonstrations don't appear to represent the majority of teachers in Baltimore City. According to media accounts, picketing by the teachers and union "work to rule" efforts have been sporadic. We can hope that this means the vast majority of teachers, who are dedicated and hardworking, would welcome increased collaboration with their peers and want no part of this ill-conceived nonsense.

As a city, it is time to stop this disruptive behavior. It is time for all community, foundation, philanthropic and business leaders to unite and demonstrate our support for our new school CEO.

We must urge our elected officials to keep out of this debate. This is not the time for politics or pandering to special interests. There is only one special interest that is important in this debate — the children in Baltimore City's Public School System.

By uniting behind Alonso, there is a chance that we can see innovative methods and reforms put to work that can transform a school system fraught with dysfunctional factions that have stymied a succession of administrations and yielded dismal achievement results. We must break the culture of complacency that has existed within our city's school system for years.

Let Alonso do the job he was brought here to do. He could be our last true hope.

Donald C. Fry is president and CEO of the Greater Baltimore Committee.