

ABC's *GMA3: What You Need to Know*

08/19/22

1:00:35 p.m. [TEASE]

11 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Controversial Deal]

AMY ROBACH: Plus, the controversial agreement to allow white teachers with more seniority to be laid off before younger minority educators. Our *GMA3* TV exclusive with two top teachers union officials in Minneapolis.

(...)

1:05:36 p.m. [TEASE]

8 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Coming Up on *GMA3*; Controversial Deal]

ROBACH: The new policy generating a lot of debate when it comes to teacher layoffs. We're going to talk to the union officials agreeing to let go of white teachers with more seniority first.

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1:09:44 p.m.

6 minutes and 40 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: *GMA3* Exclusive; Controversy Over Minneapolis Public School Policy to Retain Teachers of Color During Layoffs]

ROBACH: Just ahead of the new school year, a heated debate over a new teacher layoff policy in Minneapolis public schools. The policy stipulates that schools will prioritize the retention of teachers of color over seniority in the event of a layoff. The provision was negotiated with the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers and joining us now for this *GMA3* exclusive is the MFT, Greta Callahan and Vice President Marsha Howard. They both join me from Minneapolis. Welcome. We appreciate your time here and I'm going to start with you, Greta because this change was taking away the departure from the traditional last in, first off layoff policy. That was what was in place. Now, Minnesota Public Schools defending the policy, the new change saying in part to ABC News it's "to remedy the continuing effects of past discrimination." Can you explain further why both the school district and the teacher's union felt that this was an important and necessary change?

GRETA CALLAHAN: Well, our number one priority is what is best for students and what is best for students is having people in front of them who they can count on, who have the experiences and skills that they can also see themselves in, and so, our number one priority was to ensure that our students have safe and stable schools and receive the high quality education

they deserve, so this contract language was something that we are, first of all, extremely proud of for achieving but it also doesn't go far enough. We need to support and retain our educators, especially those who are under-represented and this language does one tiny, minuscule step towards that but doesn't solve the real crisis we're in right now.

ROBACH: And Marsha, this clause was created back in March after a two-week teacher strike and a lot of different —

CALLAHAN: Three week.

MARSHA HOWARD: Three.

ROBACH: — yeah, three-week teacher strike and so much was discovered and also determined because of that. But to that point, this was all written and agreed upon essentially five months ago, why is this clause just now being discovered? Any idea on the timing of why this is all coming out now?

HOWARD: I think the timing is very suspect. This is the language that we were put in and that we went out and marched for. We voted on this, the district and the union agreed upon this and now it's coming out because some Minnesotan website decided to put it out there and the MAGA media picked it up and they were waiting for mainstream media to run with this story. It's a non-story. It was language about the event of a layoff and we are nowhere near having layoffs this year. We're down like 250 teachers. We're down. There are no layoffs. So I ask y'all why? Why is this a story?

ROBACH: Yeah, no, we have been reporting on and talking about a teacher shortage. So, you know, that is obviously not any concern right now in these times coming out of this pandemic. And I want to follow up, Greta, because you mentioned the discrepancy in representation. The numbers are — are undeniable. The school district reports 65 percent of students in the past year are people of color while just 30 percent of the teaching staff are people of color so obviously, the intent is to reconcile those numbers, but critics are saying it's discrimination. It's unconstitutional. Are you concerned — this doesn't go into effect until spring 2023. How are you concerned that litigation may undo what you-all have decided?

CALLAHAN: Our concern is what is best for students. Right now we have kids who are sitting in lunchrooms being supervised because they don't have enough teachers in front of them to teach them. Our concern is what is best for them and that's why we went on strike for recruitment and retention of educators who represent our students and smaller class sizes and more mental health support and higher pay because those are the things will ensure our students have the education they deserve and right now, they are not receiving that, so no, that is not one of my concerns at all whatsoever and we welcome any challenge to it.

ROBACH: All right, that was a very strong statement. Marsha, you're a teacher and educator. What do you say to the critics that say this treats the long-time more senior teachers unfairly?

HOWARD: I've been teaching for about 24 years and I started in a school that was over 60 percent black and for many, many of my students, I am the only educator that they had in 12 years that looked like me. And here it is 24 years later, and that's still the same case in a lot of schools. This is a non-issue. It really, really is. But the part that is the issue is that our students deserve to have intellectual and academia being represented by people who are under-represented. African Americans, indigenous folks, people of color. They need to. And in order for us to get a foothold, we needed to put something in place to recruit and retain them because frankly, in this district, they not [sic] paying us enough. So, if you have all the skills to be a teacher in Minneapolis, you would go somewhere else. They're not funding education in Minneapolis the way that they need to and folks need to come off some money. Billionaires need to start giving what they're supposed to be giving to this state in order to fund education so that we can get some parity and actually attract people to this profession again.

CALLAHAN: If I could jump in, this language that is so controversial actually doesn't achieve that. This language — we've only had 15 — in 15 years, 48 teachers of color have been laid off in the district. In the last two years, over 200 teachers of color have left our district by choice. That is the crisis and this proposal that is so controversial, we had more language in there, it doesn't go far enough, to have mentors for educators of color, to have a support counsel for educators of color. Those are things in addition to more pay and better working conditions that are going to retain and support educators and so we need to continue to take this further.

ROBACH: What you both are saying I know is resonating with so many people watching. We appreciate your passion. We appreciate your purpose and your time for being with us today to clarify all of that, to take on that controversy, thank you for being on the program. President of the MFT, Greta Callahan and Vice President Marsha Howard. Thank you both.

CALLAHAN: Thank you for having us.

HOWARD: Thank you for having us.