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October 8, 2008

Following Up on the Art Siebens Discussion



Thanks to everyone who's participated in the spirited discussion below on the [Art Siebens case](#). Commenters have raised a number of important questions, among them:

- 1) Will eliminating tenure increase the quality of teachers in DCPS? Where will this fleet of new exceptional teachers come from? Do principals have incentives to keep the best teachers? Will principals nix "bad" teachers, or will teachers who are outspoken take the fall, too? Might it not be prudent to make investments in improving the teachers that we have, rather than just replacing them in large numbers?
- 2) What are the implications of arbitrary firing for the teaching profession overall? As John Thomson wrote, "It does not take many arbitrary decisions to destroy a career before you poison the entire well of teaching talent. Would you commit to a career and buying a house etc. if you had a 2 or 3 or 5% chance per year to run afoul of someone who could destroy your career?"
- 3) What do we learn from examples like Art Siebens? Is his experience reason enough to abandon the idea of eliminating tenure? How many mistakes are too many? And what kind of appeals system should be in place?
- 4) When the budget gets tight and the private money runs dry, who is going to pay for six figure teacher salaries?

So join the discussion. I'll leave you with some of the moving testimonials about Art Siebens, of which you can find many examples [here](#) and [here](#). And if you'd like to learn more about the effort to reinstate Art Siebens, you can visit this [website](#).

He didn't just teach us the material, he sang it to us. Dr. Siebens, in all of his excited glory, would break out his guitar, forcing us groaning teenagers to sing to the tunes of "I heard it through the Grapevine" (The Nephrons like a Grapevine about the adrenal system) and "Poor

wand'ring one" from the musical the Pirates of Penzance (Poor Wandering Bun- a song about digestion). Junior year, Biology was everywhere- in the class, on the radio, and even in my dreams. Can you name a teacher in your lifetime that had this power? - *Devorah Flax-Davidson, valedictorian, 2005*

When I was a first-time teacher nine years ago, Dr. Siebens took the time to provide me with demonstrations of each Biology lab that I had to use for the entire year. He also provided me with all the teaching materials I needed as D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) did not have a Biology curriculum at the time....Now entering my ninth year as a teacher, I still use his well-crafted and creative Biology songs to engage students with the content of my lessons. To say that Dr. Siebens is a valuable resource to Wilson's staff and students is a gross understatement. - *Damian Kreske, Former Biology teacher at Wilson High School*

This was not a decision about the children and what they learn; that much is certain. This might be a decision about adults and pecking orders, power over the union, an attack on contract rights, but it is without any doubt not about getting the best teacher in the classroom and giving the students the best possible education. Dr. Siebens is the best example of teaching excellence we encountered in 15 years of experience with DCPS. - *Ross Eisenbrey, parent of former student*

If a man like this is not a fit, then who is a fit? He obviously, you know, if we listen to the lyrics, he loves his job; He loves kids. I mean, you don't have to be a rocket scientist or a nuclear physicist in order to understand the commitment that he has to young people. - *DC City Council Chair Vincent Gray*

Letting Dr Siebens go is a very bad thing for the school in many ways. It shows teachers that being great teachers does not matter, it will go unrewarded. It shows the parents that you have no understanding of what they think is important - which is the education of the children. But most importantly, it shows the students that you and other grown ups do not really care about them or understand what they think is important when they think about school - that is, good teachers who care about them as students. - *Susan Churchill, parent of two current students*

Posted by eduwonkette at 9:32 AM