

Testimony on Behalf of Supporters of Dr. Arthur Siebens

By Sarah Cox-Shrader

Class of 2009, Wilson

AP Biology student of Dr. Siebens 2007-2008

Good afternoon. My name is Sarah Cox-Shrader, and I am a rising senior at Wilson High School. I have come here today with my fellow Wilson tigers to this meeting on the proposed teacher quality regulations, because it is particularly pertinent to recent events at Wilson. As a result of the restructuring process at Wilson, eleven teachers and administrators were not asked to return for 2008-2009 school year. The issue of teacher quality regulations applies specifically to the case of biology teacher Dr. Art Siebens, for it appears that no standards were applied in the evaluation that led to his dismissal. As my classmates will demonstrate, Dr. Siebens is one of the most effective teachers Wilson has ever seen. He is passionate about teaching, dedicated to his students, and he produces incredible results in terms of student achievement and test scores, especially on the nationally standardized AP Biology exam.

The importance and necessity of regulations and standards has never been clearer to me than in the case of Dr. Siebens. No one responsible for his dismissal has been able to point out any standards his teaching was held to, and his numerous achievements as a high school teacher indicate only that his removal from Wilson was an arbitrary one. As no fair or reasonable standards were used in evaluating this truly motivational and effective teacher, it is only right and sensible that he be immediately reinstated to his position at Wilson.

Furthermore, ensuring that the students in the DCPS system receive the best education possible begins with hiring and retaining the greatest and most effective teachers. Reasonable regulations, ones based on outputs (such as effectiveness and improvement in learning), must be in place and followed to ensure that this does not happen to any other teachers in the DCPS system. What message does Dr. Siebens' dismissal send to teachers looking to join DCPS, if all it proves is that even the most effective and inspirational teachers in the system can lose their jobs unfairly and arbitrarily? If the goal of DCPS is to attract and retain the best teachers, then both our policies and our actions must reflect that.

Wilson has been and will be going through a lot with this new restructuring plan being put in place. We need teachers like Dr. Siebens now more than ever. Thank you.

Testimony on Behalf of Supporters of Dr. Arthur Siebens

By Hanna Mahon

Class of 2009, Wilson

AP Biology student of Dr. Siebens 2007-2008

Hello, my name is Hanna Mahon, and I am a rising senior at Wilson High School. In determining the standards to which teachers must be held to judge effectiveness, I urge you to use as examples those teachers within our system who do produce outstanding results in terms of student learning. Dr. Art Siebens is a prime example of this kind of teacher. The sheet of statistics attached to our testimonies demonstrates how the students of his AP Biology class perform outstandingly well in on a nationally standardized exam. Furthermore, Dr. Siebens is exceptionally dedicated and caring when it comes to his students, a quality that some would argue is just as important as good test scores. He is the perfect example of a teacher who is not only qualified, but is extremely effective as well.

The petition we have included with our testimony is evidence of the sheer number of people whose lives Dr. Siebens has touched with his teaching. In less than a week, almost 500 Wilson students and parents (past, present, and future) have signed the petition, and that number grows by the minute. We have attached a few of the many comments that were left with signatures so that you can see the many different ways Dr. Siebens has affected so many people's lives.

We know the license and certification policies are being changed from ones based solely on inputs to ones that include outputs as well. Though Dr. Siebens' resume (which is also included) demonstrates that he is entirely qualified on paper, we agree that teaching standards must be based on something more. To us, the students, the effectiveness of a teacher is more important than his credentials, and Dr. Siebens is an amazing example of a teacher who has both. In determining teaching standards for DCPS, I strongly suggest that Dr. Siebens be used as an exemplary model for outstanding teaching.

It is true that Dr. Siebens' credentials are outstanding and that should definitely be taken into consideration; however, I cannot stress the point enough that to us, the students, Dr. Siebens is fantastic simply because with the way he teaches us, we really learn. Thank you.

Testimony on Behalf of Supporters of Dr. Arthur Siebens

By Alexandra L. Klass

Class of 2006, Wilson and AP Biology student of Dr. Siebens 2004-2005

Class of 2010, Wesleyan University, history major

I took Dr. Siebens' AP biology class my junior year at Wilson. I've never been an outstanding science student; throughout my time at Wilson I often struggled to succeed in my math, chemistry, or physics classes. Looking back on my time at Wilson, Dr. Siebens was one of the two best teachers I ever had.

Dr. Siebens' extensive knowledge of the topics he taught was immediately obvious. His AP class required readings from a massive college biology textbook, but the core of the class consisted of his lectures, which clarified complicated concepts from the page into information I could actually understand. The many songs he wrote to explain complex biological concepts helped also. When it came time for tests, he clearly indicated what information was important so none of us would be unfairly surprised by a concept we hadn't anticipated. Looking to Dr. Siebens' long list of accomplishments as both a scholar and a teacher underscores his thorough understanding of biology, as well as his ability and deep commitment to teach teenagers.

The extent of his academic work before he began a successful career teaching high school is in itself impressive. He received his Ph.D. in Physiology at The George Washington University. He taught medical students as a guest lecturer at the Yale Medical School, and at the University of Maryland medical school. His accomplishments include post-doctoral fellowships at the National Institute of Health as a senior staff fellow, and at the American Heart Association.

I could continue discussing his scholarly accomplishments, but more important than these fellowships, research awards, and lecturer positions is that he chose to use his expertise not to pursue a cushy position in the ivory tower, but to serve others by teaching science to 14-18 year olds in an urban public school. Dr. Siebens has taught science at Wilson for 18 years. My year's AP exam pass rate was 71%, a statistic that few teachers can boast of. This past year's pass rate was 76%. 17 out of 54 students tested received a score of 5, the highest possible grade on an advanced placement exam, one that typically allows a student to bypass introductory level college biology at universities nationwide.

Looking at objective indicators of success such as test scores and awards clearly demonstrate Dr. Siebens' remarkable abilities to teach. However, the facts merely reinforce what years of students and alumni have experienced: his commitment and talent for teaching, even compared to some of the tenured professors at US colleges. Dr. Siebens' longstanding dedication to student success did not go unnoticed either. He was recognized by both the Washington Academy of Sciences in 2000, with the Bernice Lamberton Award for teaching of science in high school, and the College Board's Middle States Regional Assembly with the Advanced Placement Recognition award.

From the start of the course, he demanded success, and lots of hard work, from every student. Correspondingly, I matched his high expectations with hard work. When I was having trouble completing some homework assignments, we sat down and worked out a different format for the assignments so that I spent my out of class time studying in a way that was best for me.

My score would have allowed me to accelerate a biology program in college, had I not majored in History. My college requires me to attempt a bit of science in order to graduate, and I have taken two courses aimed at non-science majors. Neither of those professors set high expectations for student success, and in neither of them have I done nearly as well or learned nearly as much as I did in Dr. Siebens' AP biology class. The students at Wilson will lose an exceptionally talented and caring

educator if he is not rehired immediately. Losing such a teacher will irrationally deprive hundreds of students from the knowledge I was lucky to gain while attending Wilson.

Testimony on Behalf of Supporters of Dr. Arthur Siebens

By Michael Jayes

Woodrow Wilson High School '06 and former student of Dr. Siebens AP Biology class

Superintendent, School Board members, my name is Michael Jayes and I am a 2006 Woodrow Wilson High School graduate and former student of Dr. Arthur Siebens. I come before you today on behalf of those in the Wilson community who are shocked and dismayed by the dismissal of Dr. Siebens from the Wilson faculty. Dr. Siebens lost his position as a teacher of AP Biology, Zoology, Botany, and Human Anatomy as a result of the school restructuring process at Wilson. I am here today to demonstrate that this presents a tremendous loss to the Wilson community.

Dr. Siebens was more personally invested in my education than any other teacher at Wilson. Dr. Siebens made your education *his* business. In addition to regular class time, he held extra classes during lunch, after school, and on school holidays for those who needed extra help. He went out of his way to call each of his more than 50 AP students to discuss their personal performance on the AP exam. Our conversation lasted about 20 minutes, and if you multiply that by the more than 50 students who took his class- that's a lot of unremunerated time!

Dr. Siebens was also extremely supportive of those students who struggled in his class. The rigorous nature of the AP Biology curriculum left many students feeling panicked, but Dr. Siebens always went out of his way to bring those students up to speed. He would take the pulse of the class at the start of each lecture to gauge its comfort level with the material. If need be, he would always slow the pace of the class down to help those who were having difficulty grasping the subject matter. In addition, Dr. Siebens created a "buddy system" to help those who were struggling in the class. Each student that needed extra help was paired with a student that felt relatively comfortable with the material. Study buddies were given an extra credit incentive to meet each week. These polices helped create an atmosphere in which we all felt motivated to succeed.

The dedication that Dr. Siebens gives to the education of each individual is invaluable at a large public high school like Wilson. I thrived at Wilson because of the talented and dedicated individuals that made it their job to make a difference in my life. There are far too few such teachers, and Wilson cannot afford to lose this one.

And one last thing- he sang us songs he wrote and recorded about biology. What other teacher does that? The tunes and lyrics still ring in my ears. Thank you.