

From: "Brendan Norwood" <brn2105@columbia.edu>

Date: Tue, 22 Jul 2008 00:27:18 -0400

To: <adrian.fenty@dc.gov>

CC: <mayor@dc.gov>; <amfenty@hotmail.com>

Subject: The Dismissal of Dr. Arthur Siebens

Good evening Your Honor:

My name is Brendan Norwood. I am a fourth-year medical student at Columbia University's College of Physicians & Surgeons, a native son of Washington, and an alumnus of the DC Public School System.

I write to you today to inform you of a gross injustice against a dedicated public servant and against the youth of Washington, and to implore your help in rectifying this inequity.

Dr. Arthur Siebens is a talented, dedicated, and remarkably effective teacher at Woodrow Wilson Senior High. He has taught biology for eighteen years, inspiring and informing his students with outstanding didactic lessons, humorous educational songs about biology, and high standards for his students and for himself. He has been featured in the Washington Post for his innovative teaching approaches. His skill and effectiveness as a teacher are evident in his students' scores on the Biology AP exam: since 1994, over 70% of his students earned scores of 3 or higher.

As a reward for his years of dedicated teaching, Dr. Siebens was dismissed this summer and asked not to return to teach in the Fall. He was given no other explanation for his dismissal other than "you don't fit in". The decision is nominally related to the school's restructuring under the No Child Left Behind law. Certainly, the educational disparities present in schools like Wilson should be addressed, but the removal of a dedicated and gifted teacher (two-thirds of whose students are not in AP classes) helps no one.

I was personally affected greatly by Dr. Siebens' dismissal. Ten years ago, I graduated from Wilson with my eyes on a career in medicine, a path I would not have chosen if I had not taken Dr. Siebens' AP Biology class. I had been a mediocre student up until senior year, when I found myself inspired by Dr. Siebens, who pushed me to work harder and set my goals higher. As I enter my fourth year of study as president of my class at a prestigious medical school, preparing to embark on a career in pediatric emergency medicine, I look back and realize how much I owe to that man. Of all the teachers under whom I studied during my 14 years in the DC Public Schools, none inspired me or taught me as much as Art Siebens.

I humbly ask you to do everything in your power to reverse the Wilson administration's decision, and to investigate and remedy the kind of bureaucratic perversity that could lead to such a failure of educational leadership.

Thank you,
Brendan Norwood