

Dear Reinstate Dr. Siebens Listserv Subscriber,

I wanted to give you a few updates since it has been some time since my last one. So here is Part 1.

1. AP Biology Test Scores — 2008 Results Are In!

Faithful readers of these updates know that the available teaching performance metrics support Dr. Siebens' extraordinary effectiveness as a teacher. We know that for the 2007 AP Biology exam, 95% of the students with scores of 3-5 throughout the entire District of Columbia Public Schools had taken Dr. Siebens' class, and all seventeen students who received a score of 5 had taken his class.

So you ask me, "But Paul, what happened with last year's AP test results?"

Funny you should ask, dear reader.

According to data from the College Board that I have reviewed, Dr. Siebens' students last year — including my daughter Hanna — actually raised the bar.

For the 2008 AP Biology exam, every single student who received a score of 2 or above in the all of DCPS were students of Dr. Siebens.

Yes, you read that correctly — **every single 2,3,4, or 5 in every high school in DCPS was a student of Dr. Siebens.**

So how does the Education Mayor, the Chancellor who values quality teaching and Principal Cahall treat this teacher who delivers these results for our children?

Well, funny you should ask about that, since the Education Mayor, the Chancellor who values quality teaching and Principal Cahall sent Dr. Siebens to teach environmental studies — a class he never taught before — to 9th graders at another school. So they took the City's top AP Biology teacher, took him away from Wilson students where his students were consistently producing stellar results and placed him at... Woodson Academy at at Ronald H. Brown Middle School in Northeast Washington.

2. Woodson Academy at at Ronald H. Brown Middle School

If the name of this school rings a bell, it's probably because you saw **last Friday's front page story in the Washington Post by Bill Turque**. Yeah, that one. The one with the headline "**DISORDER IN A MERGED D.C. SCHOOL: Teachers Alleging Attacks by Youths Find Themselves Scrutinized**".

Hhhmmmm..... Now why would the Education Mayor, the Chancellor who values quality teaching and Principal Cahall do such a thing, and deprive our

students of an exceptional teacher? And why would they send Dr. Siebens, who taught science so well at Wilson, to a school where there just isn't any support for teachers who want to teach well there?

Unfortunately, Dr. Siebens and his colleagues at Ron Brown have been assaulted and abused by students, and DCPS doesn't have what it takes to provide support for these teachers to help create a positive learning environment.

So everyone loses. Sure is an odd result for the Education Mayor, the Chancellor who values quality teaching and Principal Cahall to advocate.

I've copied Bill Turque's article below.

Part 2 tomorrow. The story gets even sadder.

Best,

Paul

Paul Mahon

Wilson Parent of Maddie ('07) and Hanna ('09)

Maddie had Anatomy & Physiology with Dr. Siebens

Hanna had AP Biology with Dr. Siebens

Please visit our website <http://www.reinstatedart.com> to learn more about our cause and to access resources in support of the students' petition which can be seen at:

<http://gopetition.com/petitions/reinstate-dr-art-siebens.html>

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/12/AR2009031203540_pf.html

Disorder in a Merged D.C. School

Teachers Alleging Attacks by Youths Find Themselves Scrutinized

By Bill Turque

Washington Post Staff Writer

Friday, March 13, 2009; A01

Woodson Academy teacher William Pow had just finished writing on the blackboard one January afternoon, he said, when he turned to face his algebra class and saw the textbook "Mathematics in

Life" hurtling toward his head.

He ducked, he said, but it caught him in the neck and shoulder. His colleagues at Woodson have not been as lucky. English teacher Randy Brown said he was hit just above the left ear by a book thrown by a student last month. He was treated for a concussion and said he has since suffered from headaches and nausea.

"They think it's a game to hit people in the head," said Brown, who, like Pow, has not returned to school.

They say the 260-student ninth-grade academy, housed at Ronald H. Brown Middle School in Northeast Washington while a new Woodson High is under construction, is overcrowded and dangerous. Brown and Pow count five other teachers or administrators who they said have been attacked this academic year, including one who was pelted by textbooks and another pinned to a desktop and choked. Other teachers, Brown and Pow said, are routinely subjected to verbal threats of violence.

Pow's and Brown's claims about safety and discipline issues are the kind that have long been a source of tension between D.C. teachers and school officials. They involve classroom and hallway incidents in which staff witnesses are often rare and available accounts are frequently contradictory. It is hard to confirm all of the teachers' allegations and determine whether conditions at Woodson are better or worse than at other D.C. schools. But the fact that Pow and Brown are willing to go public provides an unusual window into the problems facing teachers and staff at the academy.

By the teachers' account, students at Woodson are high school freshmen stuck in a middle school, angry at their overcrowded classes and who take that anger out in the classroom.

Principal Darrin Slade said he knew of three student assaults on staff members this year. He said the teachers were distorting the situation to deflect attention from their own professional shortcomings.

"These are disgruntled teachers in the process of being terminated," he said. "We have one of the safest ninth-grade programs in the city."

Pow acknowledged that Slade has placed him on the "90-day plan," an intervention program requiring teachers to eliminate

deficiencies or face dismissal. Brown said he is not on the plan.

Two other Woodson Academy teachers who said they were assaulted also agreed to discuss their experiences with The Washington Post, but they asked for anonymity because they feared losing their jobs if they spoke negatively to the media about D.C. schools.

Teachers who complain or eject too many students say they are tagged as weak in "classroom management" by administrators determined to keep a lid on behavior issues. Slade wrote in his guide to teachers that any instructor who refers students to his office every day "will risk placement on some type of improvement plan," a probationary status such as the 90-day plan.

Erich Martel, a member of the executive board of the Washington Teachers' Union and a social studies teacher at Woodrow Wilson High School, said at a D.C. Council hearing Wednesday that the situation at Woodson was "an example of blaming teachers for student violence."

"Instead of acknowledging the extent of this problem, DCPS officials ignore and cover it up," he said.

There are no reliable statistics on attacks against teachers. D.C. police and school officials say they don't break down data on school crime victims to differentiate between students and staff. Washington Teachers' Union officials said the anecdotal evidence is persistent and alarming. They said that they encourage teachers to report attacks to the police but that instructors are often pressured by administrators to remain silent. Some quit instead, they said.

D.C. police spokeswoman Traci Hughes said several incidents at Woodson are under investigation but declined to comment further.

Slade, a former Baltimore school administrator who was retained by Chancellor Michelle A. Rhee last year as she was turning over a significant portion of the principal corps, said he and his team are constantly patrolling the hallways and stand ready to assist any instructor who needs help. But he said teachers are also expected to pursue other steps before ejection, including calling parents and employing "various behavior modification strategies." He also offers cash rewards, as much as \$100, to students who provide information about crimes and rules infractions, saying it has made the school safer and helped break through street culture taboos

against "snitching."

"This is done to support teachers," Slade said, adding that the money comes out of his own pocket. He declined to say how much he has spent this school year.

Lack of space for unruly students is one of the reasons administrators discourage frequent ejections. The District is revising the school disciplinary code with an eye toward providing more alternative settings for those students.

Teachers said crowding at the school has also fueled behavior problems. February attendance records show that enrollment in math and English classes at the academy averages 35 students, exceeding the contract-established limit of 25. (That cap can be broken for space or staff shortage reasons.) Slade said the records are not correct.

"They're smart. They're not dumb kids. But they're angry because they are 40 to a class, which is totally disrespectful to them," said Brown, a fiftyish, soft-spoken former sculptor whose master's thesis at Howard University was on Virginia Woolf's novel "The Waves." This is his first year in D.C. schools, and he acknowledges that establishing control in his classroom has been a struggle.

Colleagues of Brown and Pow's, while not excusing the attacks, said disorder in the classroom comes from the failures to build a foundation of trust, consistent daily routine and lesson plans that keep students busy and engaged.

"You don't have books flying around in my room," said Brandi Drummonds, a ninth-grade history teacher who remembers counseling Brown on lesson plans to keep students focused. "You have to create a plan and stick with it."

Pow, 53, came to teaching several years ago in Fairfax County after a long career in IT. "I want [Woodson] to be a safe place to work so that I can do my job there," he said. "When Mayor Fenty took over the school system and hired Michelle Rhee, and I read what those two were saying, I decided I wanted to be a part of that."

Another teacher, a 35-year veteran of the D.C. school system, said a student was suspended for just one day after shoving her into a desk. "I ended up going to the doctor the next day with black-and-

blue bruises on my thigh. There's no real discipline at the school and no consequences for bad behavior," she said.

Brown thought he'd been making progress throughout the fall term, which he began with portions of "The Odyssey." He said he forged a series of small connections, visiting at homes with the parents of disruptive students, something that Slade urged all his teachers to do.

"They have to know that you're not weak and that you're not there to belittle them," he said. "One-on-one is crucial."

But when students came back after Christmas break, Brown said, they were "crazy and never settled down."

On Feb. 11, he said, he was trying to move students back into class after a fight started in the room across the hall. In the confusion, he felt a book -- a dictionary -- land on his leg, thrown by a girl he'd argued with earlier for singing a raunchy song in the middle of class.

Brown said he kicked the book out of the way toward another girl he thought was "reasonable." An instant later, he said, he was struck in the head.

Brown named the girl who he was certain threw the book. But Slade's investigation turned up a boy. Brown said he had the wrong person. No disciplinary action was taken.

Another English teacher, with 16 years in District schools, said she was assaulted Feb. 9. When a dictionary thrown by a student knocked papers off her desk, she bent down to pick them up. As she stood up, another book hit her "right in the face," followed by three other books in the shoulder, neck and back.

She went to the nurse's office for ice and then left. Slade said a student was expelled as a result of the incident.

"It was one of the worst things I ever experienced," the teacher said.

She has not returned to Woodson Academy.