

Dear Reinstate Dr. Siebens Listserv Subscriber,

I said in my update yesterday that the situation at Wilson was even sadder. It started last month and continues.

Sarah Tilman

When Dr. Siebens was transferred from Wilson last fall in violation of the collective bargaining agreement on involuntary transfers, the administration had to scramble to allocate his three sections of AP Biology to other teachers. Two of the sections were assigned to Sarah Tilman, a 27-year old teacher whom Dr. Siebens had been mentoring.

Tragically, just last month, Ms. Tilman died after a sudden illness.

Her two AP Biology classes were left without a teacher, and as you can imagine, it is extremely difficult to fill an AP class mid-year since experienced AP teachers all already teaching classes.

Parents of Ms. Tilman's students asked Principal Cahall and Chancellor Rhee to bring Dr. Siebens back to seamlessly continue these classes, to do what's best for them in this extraordinarily difficult time. Dr. Siebens, who was on disability leave at the time, provided DCPS with medical documentation that he was available to teach Mr. Tilman's classes. In this emergency, they assumed that the best thing for Ms. Tilman's distraught students would be to bring back the most qualified AP Biology teacher in DCPS.

Instead, the administration selected Tim Kennedy, a popular teacher of five general biology courses, who has never taught an advanced course before. To fill Mr. Kennedy's five classes, the administration brought in a general substitute for the rest of the year.

So now there were seven biology classes at Wilson missing their teacher in the middle of the year.

When Dr. Siebens applied to teach Mr. Kennedy's five sections, he was told that the administration chose to hire a long-term substitute.

A dozen former students of Dr. Siebens' AP Biology classes stepped in and created the AP Bio Center in an effort to tutor Mr. Kennedy's students during lunch.

So what does this all mean?

It means that the administration chose to undermine in the middle of the school year five sections of successful general biology courses taught by Mr. Kennedy rather than put the most qualified and available teacher into the AP Biology sections. The Wilson BEACON newspaper reported yesterday that some of Mr. Kennedy's former students have been writing "We miss Mr. Kennedy" on the papers they turned into their long-term substitute teacher.

The Chancellor, who says she values quality teaching and is working hard to convince people how much she appreciates DC teachers and doing what's best for the students, has said:

- "My focus is on making sure students get the services they need, not that the adults are feeling comfortable."

(<http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3749881>);

- By the Chancellor's account, the problems with the DC schools were caused by "a complete and utter lack of accountability" in a system that is "driven by politics and adult interest.... Teacher quality is everything."

(<http://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/0806/schools.html>);

- Or as the Chancellor told Marc Fisher of the Washington Post: "Frankly, the adult agenda has been dictating decisions for too long, and I'm not going to let it happen anymore."

Really?

But that's not what happened at Wilson.

How can that be?

All the Chancellor's talk about the importance to effective teachers and putting the students' interests first simply does not square with the administration's decision to upset seven classes at Wilson: five by taking their popular teacher away in the middle of the year, and the other two by assigning them a teacher who has never taught an advanced course, when the most effective AP Biology teacher is available.

So, class, let's review what we learned in today's lesson:

1. We have two sections of AP Biology being taught by a teacher who has never taught AP biology before;

2. We have that teacher's five sections of grade-level biology interrupted by his reassignment in the middle of the year;

3. We have those five sections being taught by a long-term general substitute;

4. We have former AP Biology students trying to prepare their colleagues for the AP Biology test; and

5. We have the most effective AP Biology teacher in DCPS interested in filling either position and being turned away from both.

And Principal Cahall believes that this is what's best for Wilson.

Really?

How can that be?

The prominent *Education Week Online* blogger Edwonkette concluded last year in her two-part series on Dr. Siebens:

"What I need is for you to have trust, in me and in the school district....I know that trust doesn't come overnight, and I have to earn that trust," Michelle Rhee recently said. What Rhee must realize, of course, is that debacles like the dismissal of Art Siebens eat away at that trust, as does her refusal to even consider that the principal made the wrong call here. Art Siebens has 18 years of data, a PhD, a gaggle of national awards, and a legion of parents and students standing behind him. If this can happen to him, it can happen to almost any teacher in the DC system. Checks and balances, my friends, are the hallmark of the American system of governance, and I see no reason why we should abandon them in public education.

Hey Education Mayor, what's going on here? The adult agenda or what's best for the students?

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.reinstatedrart.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>