

Dear Reinstate Dr. Siebens Listserv Subscriber,

Columnist Harry Jaffe writes about Chancellor Rhee and Dr. Siebens in his column today in the *Washington Examiner*, copied below.

<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/columns/HarryJaffe/Can-Rhee-reform-schools-and-be-fair-42361622.html>

Can Rhee reform schools and be fair?

By Harry Jaffe
Examiner Columnist

I am totally in the tank for D.C. Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee.

If you believe public education is the most potent equalizing force, Rhee could be the one person who can make Washington, D.C., a great city for all the residents: white, black and brown; rich, middle class and poor.

Our chancellor says she has a military focus on kids and the classroom; she is not afraid of closing schools; she has not flinched from challenging the teachers unions over merit pay and tenure.

And if she can fix our wretched public schools, President Barack Obama could use them to ram through reforms across the country. At which point we can build monuments to Rhee.

But before that moment, while we are in the midst of the messy process of actually reforming schools and moving around teachers and making sure each child has a chance to learn, I feel compelled to re-examine the case of Art Siebens and his removal from Wilson High.

The transfer of Siebens, perhaps the best biology teacher in the city, has troubling elements of selective enforcement of rules and a scent of reverse racism. Art Siebens is a quirky and creative teacher. He wrote songs about capillary action and molecular biology.

He brought his guitar to class, set it among the beakers in Wilson's decrepit bio lab, and made his students memorize and sing. He was also an uncompromising drill sergeant. In his classes, thousands of kids learned and did well on AP exams; many went on to careers in science.

Last summer Rhee lured Pete Cahall from Montgomery County to be Wilson's new principal. He vowed to bring order to Wilson's chaos. He fired Art Siebens. Neither the school nor Rhee have given a solid reason, beyond the undocumented charge that Siebens discouraged minority kids from taking his AP class. Wilson students protested. They wrote letters to Rhee. They testified before the city council. They tried to meet with Rhee. Siebens' former students started a movement to bring him back.

Rhee was unmoved. The biology program at Wilson collapsed.

"It was the worst of the adult agenda hurting the kids," one parent told me. Now switch to Shaw Middle School, where Rhee is scheduled to tour today with congressmen. At Shaw, Rhee had joined two failing schools in rough neighborhoods into one, which stopped at eighth grade. Some eighth-grade students asked to stay at Shaw for ninth grade. Rhee agreed to meet them. She relented.

“Even if it’s not the right decision for the system,” she said, “It’s the right thing for the kids.”

Why is what’s “right for the kids” in Shaw not so right at Wilson? Wilson High is the city’s biggest and best. This week seniors fielded acceptance letters from Princeton and Yale, Stanford and Dartmouth. It also has the most white students.

After seeing how Rhee applied the rules at Wilson and Shaw, it’s fair to ask: As she elevates education at poorly performing schools, will she allow it to be lowered at the best?

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>