

All,

Here is a wonderful letter from Andrea Rosen in support of Art.

----- Forwarded Message

**From:** Andrea Rosen <[aerie@rcn.com](mailto:aerie@rcn.com)>

**Date:** Sat, 12 Jul 2008 14:14:10 -0400

**To:** <[michelle.rhee@dc.gov](mailto:michelle.rhee@dc.gov)>, <[vgray@dccouncil.us](mailto:vgray@dccouncil.us)>, <[mcheh@dccouncil.us](mailto:mcheh@dccouncil.us)>, <[mbrowser@dccouncil.us](mailto:mbrowser@dccouncil.us)>, <[carol.schwartz@dc.gov](mailto:carol.schwartz@dc.gov)>

**Cc:** <[Paul@unither.com](mailto:Paul@unither.com)>

**Subject:** The Wilson H.S. Community

Please find attached an e-mail I sent to Woodrow Wilson High School's new principal about the ill-advised firing of Dr. Arthur Siebens. Thank you.

Andrea Rosen  
Ward 4

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Andrea Rosen [<mailto:aerie@rcn.com>]

**Sent:** Saturday, July 12, 2008 1:55 PM

**To:** '[PeteCahall@hotmail.com](mailto:PeteCahall@hotmail.com)'

**Subject:** The Wilson H.S. Community

Dear Mr. Cahall,

First of all I want to say that I am thrilled that you have arrived to take the helm of Woodrow Wilson H.S. I became acquainted with, and a great admirer of, Gina Arlotto in the course of campaigning for funds for modernization of DCPS schools, an effort that culminated with passage of funding legislation a couple of years ago. I understand that Gina's husband, a former assistant principal of Wilson and now a high school principal in Montgomery County, encouraged you to come to Wilson, for which I am very grateful.

My son, Samuel Jewler, was graduated from Wilson in 2006; he will enter his junior year at Oberlin College this fall. I visited Wilson, with another alumni parent, the day before you arrived in hopes of speaking with you about Dr. Art Siebens. As I walked the dim, dilapidated halls of Wilson, I realized to my amazement that I had actually missed the place, although as I laughingly acknowledged to my companion, my son's high school years were the most trying years of my life!

Only the most personally ambitious, highly motivated, internally directed students seem immune to the culture of slacking or outright failure that has come to prevail at all but a couple of the secondary schools in the D.C. Public School system. Sam was not one of the kids who swam upstream, but he was

persuaded to take AP Biology. Dr. Siebens was frank, even blunt, with Sam about his frustration that Sam was not working to his potential. He was frank on this score with me and Sam's father as well--and we agreed with Dr. Siebens. In spite of his not being one of Dr. Siebens's triumphs, Sam was as a student full of praise for Dr. Siebens's methods and for the man himself. As an alumnus, Sam was astounded and upset to learn this summer that Dr. Siebens had been let go from his position at Wilson.

You may have heard that Dr. Siebens held classes on school holidays, and periodically after hours and on Saturdays for students who needed to make up work or needed help reviewing material. My understanding is that some of these extra classes were held also because the laboratory facilities at Wilson are so substandard, that it is impossible to have the students perform lab exercises necessary to learning the body of knowledge that AP Bio requires without putting in extra hours. I believe Dr. Siebens took the class at least once to a lab or labs off premises to perform certain exercises. In short, he has taught subjects that demand specialized facilities in a woefully inadequate physical environment for many years and still gained extraordinary results.

Sciences are universally held to be the weakest subject area at Deal and Wilson, and it is likely that most of the students who enter Dr. Siebens's classes are minimally prepared. Thus Dr. Siebens's classes are seen as a kind of beacon of hope for learning any kind of science while passing through secondary school.

But not just because he has little competition as a teacher of science is Dr. Siebens known as one of the stars of Wilson's faculty. His commitment, his talent and skill as a teacher, and his high standards have earned him the respect and the affection of generations of Wilson students and parents. He is one of the reasons that parents -- both in-boundary and out-of-boundary parents -- believe they are doing right by their children when they send them to Wilson. His dismissal from the school is a blow to both the educational experience at Wilson and to the school's reputation.

For the past couple of decades, the best schools in the D.C. public school system have been those that have found a way to thrive despite the central bureaucracy. This was an alien concept to me, a product of Montgomery County schools (Montgomery Blair, Class of 1970). Eventually I learned that parents were crucial to D.C. public schools in a way that is probably incomprehensible to people in other districts. When the schools' parent-teacher associations raise money, those funds go to partially compensate the schools for very real deficits.

When parents volunteer for the school, they perform functions that elsewhere would be performed by paid staff. Of course the money and efforts of parents fall far short of the need, but through their involvement many parents and students come to feel as though they play a very real role in holding the school together.

They develop a profound connection to the "great invalid" that is their school.

And to the good, very good, and excellent teachers who don't decamp to well-funded and well-run public schools outside the District, or to private schools they

are deeply beholden. Dr. Siebens is one of Wilson's excellent teachers. It grieves me and my family that he would be treated shabbily; it grieves me to think he will not be at Wilson to teach.

It is understandable that the extreme brevity of your acquaintance with Wilson would make it difficult for you to make a well-informed decision about retaining Dr. Siebens. I hope that the outpouring of support for his retention will flesh out the picture for you. I urge you not to throw out the baby with the bath water.

With great respect, and a sense of future indebtedness, I ask you to enable Dr. Siebens to return this fall to resume his great service to our community..

Sincerely,  
Andrea Rosen  
3266 Worthington St., NW  
Washington, D.C. 20015

On 7/12/08 11:31 AM, "Paul Mahon" <[paul@unither.com](mailto:paul@unither.com)> wrote:

All,

Now that we've distributed yesterday's testimony to the Wilson community, it's time to look forward to next steps.

I want to welcome Kevin Twillman, father of Meredith, to our group, his email included above. Kevin, if you read all the emails in the chain below, you'll have a good sense of where things stand.

I have copied this morning's email to Mary Cheh below.

The student group I'm told now has 400 supporters of Art and are completing their petition. When the kids have it close to final, we can run it through the PTSA listserve to get more signors and visibility.

I also understand they are planning an ad in the NORTHWEST CURRENT with their petition calling for Art's reinstatement.

So, for all of us, may I propose the following:

1. If you haven't done so already, please email Michelle Rhee, Mary Cheh and Mr. Cahall with your support for returning Dr. Siebens to the faculty and questioning the basis for his removal.

"Rhee, Michelle (OOC)" <[Michelle.Rhee@dc.gov](mailto:Michelle.Rhee@dc.gov)>

"Cahall, Pete (SHS)" <[Pete.Cahall@dc.gov](mailto:Pete.Cahall@dc.gov)>

"Cheh, Mary (COUNCIL)" <[MCheh@DCCOUNCIL.US](mailto:MCheh@DCCOUNCIL.US)>

"Gray, Vincent (COUNCIL)" <[VGray@DCCOUNCIL.US](mailto:VGray@DCCOUNCIL.US)>

2. Please contact other Wilson parents that you know and ask them to do #1 and contact other parents with the same request. Let's keep the drum beat pounding.

Anyone else have any ideas to keep the pressure on? Bring 'em on!

Best,

Paul

----- Forwarded Message

From: Paul Mahon <[paul@unither.com](mailto:paul@unither.com)>

Date: Sat, 12 Jul 2008 08:27:45 -0400

To: "Cheh, Mary (COUNCIL)" <[MCheh@DCCOUNCIL.US](mailto:MCheh@DCCOUNCIL.US)>

Conversation: Wilson -- Dr. Siebens

Subject: Wilson -- Dr. Siebens

Dear Mary,

I understand that you were not able to stay for the 4:00ish testimony at yesterday's DCPS Public Roundtable in Support of Dr. Siebens by two current and two former Wilson students. Although your aides no doubt have their testimony for you, attached is a copy for your convenience.

Chairman Gray's questions and their answers were quite revealing as well.

Dr. Siebens is passionate about teaching and is one of those teachers who makes a difference in students' lives -- after all, it's not about the adults or the system -- schools are about teaching students. Do you remember the teachers who profoundly changed your view of the world?

There are so few of these, let's not lose one. As a teacher yourself, you know how the gift of great teaching changes everything.

Everyone talks about using data to drive decisions, and the tricky question here is where is the data that drives the decision to remove Art? What's the process and criteria by which he was judged and what's the connection to NCLB? And how is removing a celebrated and gifted teacher like Art going to (a) promote achievement, (b) encourage families to send their children to DCPS, and (c) encourage highly effective teachers to join DCPS?

We are hopeful that your timely involvement will ensure that Dr. Siebens is at Wilson this fall to continue his legacy of great teaching and inspiration.

I think it's very important that the impending conflict be prevented for Wilson's sake, while it still can be.

Best,

Paul Mahon

----- Forwarded Message

From: "Cheh, Mary (COUNCIL)" <[MCheh@DCCOUNCIL.US](mailto:MCheh@DCCOUNCIL.US)>

Date: Thu, 10 Jul 2008 09:45:46 -0400

To: <[paul@unither.com](mailto:paul@unither.com)>

Conversation: Wilson SHS -- Dr. Art Siebens

Subject: Re: Wilson SHS -- Dr. Art Siebens

I have been in touch with the Chancellor about this and she indicated that there will be any appeal process. I don't know if that has happened yet. In any event I have asked my office to try to schedule a meeting with the Chancellor and perhaps some students and parents so we can talk this out.

Thanks very much for your e-mail.

Mary

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Mary M. Cheh  
Councilmember for Ward 3  
Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. Suite 108  
Washington, DC 20004

Tel: (202) 724-8062  
[mcheh@dccouncil.us](mailto:mcheh@dccouncil.us)

[www.marycheh.com](http://www.marycheh.com)

-Sent using BlackBerry

----- Original Message -----

From: Paul Mahon <[paul@unither.com](mailto:paul@unither.com)>

To: Cheh, Mary (COUNCIL)

Sent: Thu Jul 10 07:45:45 2008

Subject: Wilson SHS -- Dr. Art Siebens

Dear Mary,

My wife and I are Ward 3 residents and admirers of your work. Annie owns Circle Yoga on Northampton Street, and I run a law firm and also am a co-founder of a public biotechnology company on Connecticut Avenue, just above Dupont Circle.

I understand that you're aware that Wilson parents and students are very upset at the news that 18-year veteran and legendary AP bio teacher Dr. Art Siebens (who taught two of our daughters) has been sacked by DCPS as part of the NCLB restructuring. He's the extraordinary teacher who inspires kids to learn with an incredible approach and incredible results, including his performing original biology songs on his guitar. It's a tragic mistake that a teacher like Dr. Siebens would be forced out in a restructuring, and I understand that the circumstances under which his name showed up on the list are unfortunately quite murky -- with what appears to be all kinds of procedural and substantive irregularities -- and with the parents now planning legal and media initiatives in the event that the decision is not reversed.

Annie and I are not sure what advice you may have, but it really is a sad day for DCPS. We know your passion for fairness and making sure that the right thing happens, so we would be grateful for any advice you have or anything you can do to look into the situation.

Below are emails that Annie and I sent to Michelle Rhee on Tuesday and yesterday and her responses.

Onward!

Best,

Annie and Paul Mahon

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Annie's email to Michelle Rhee yesterday morning:

----- Forwarded Message

From: Annie Mahon <[annie@circleyoga.com](mailto:annie@circleyoga.com)>

Date: Tue, 8 Jul 2008 08:13:26 -0400

To: <[petechall@hotmail.com](mailto:petechall@hotmail.com)>, <[Michelle.Rhee@dc.gov](mailto:Michelle.Rhee@dc.gov)>

Cc: Hanna Mahon <[hannamenice55@yahoo.com](mailto:hannamenice55@yahoo.com)>, maddie Mahon <[angelgirlie119@yahoo.com](mailto:angelgirlie119@yahoo.com)>, Paul Mahon <[paul@unither.com](mailto:paul@unither.com)>

Subject: Dr. Seibens

Dear Ms. Rhee and Mr. Cahall,

Good Morning.

I am writing to express my deep sadness about the removal of Dr. Siebens from Wilson SHS. I am the mother of one Wilson graduate (Madeline Mahon), one Wilson exchange student (last year) and one current Wilson senior (Hanna Mahon). I have two other teenagers as well, who have attended Catholic and Independent schools in DC. So I have quite a range of school experiences and have come into contact with many teachers through the last 17 years in the school system. In addition, both of my parents were teachers, as was my grandmother. I myself am an educator, having taught different subjects at various points in my career, although not in a school setting.

My daughter Madeline had Dr. Siebens for the non-AP Anatomy class. I believe that one of the concerns with Dr. Siebens has been his treatment of non-AP students. Maddie was not usually inspired by her teachers, however, during her 1/2 year Anatomy class, I heard more excitement and engagement from her than I did in any other class during her time at Wilson. Dr. Siebens took an interest in motivating Maddie, and encouraged her to work hard and get excited about the subject. Maddie never went on to take AP Bio, even though Dr. Siebens encouraged her, and that had no impact on his respect and interest in helping Maddie learn.

My daughter Hanna had Dr. Siebens for AP Bio last year. Again, I saw the same pattern of engagement in a subject, which as we all know can be taught in a way that could be boring and dry. Dr. Siebens has a real gift for teaching, engaging and inspiring students. What I have seen is that he cultivates professional relationships with students that he continues throughout their time at Wilson, bringing former students back to his classes to help encourage and inspire current students. His Biology music CDs are truly an act of creativity and care for the students, and my daughter used to learn everything from the endocrine system to the digestive system and more. He is truly a one of a kind teacher.

As I said, I have had children in many schools - Lafayette, Deal, Wilson, School without Walls, Holy Child, St. John's College High School, and Edmond Burke. Between our four children (and fifth exchange student), over the years, we have probably had at least 100 different teachers. I have heard stories from my children about other teachers in DCPS (including Wilson), that would make you very angry and sad. Teachers who wrote "stupid" and "smart" on the board, and pointed to "stupid" saying "this is you", teachers who screamed and

ranted for 20 minutes before storming out the classroom, teachers who described how they got their girlfriend addicted to coke, teachers who enjoyed embarrassing kids to teach them "life is hard, and they better get used to it", and teachers who clearly didn't know much about subjects they were teaching. So when I heard that Dr. Siebens, one of the teachers who treats kids with respect, cares about their education, inspires students, uses creative methods to capture our kids imaginations and engage them with a difficult subject, and doesn't talk about his personal life constantly in class, when I heard that he had been let go, I felt really discouraged.

I have been a 100% supporter of restructuring, of making some real changes for the benefit of all DC kids, not just the kids who come from highly educated homes, and making the hard decisions. I truly support that. But I have to say that I think in this case a mistake has been made. A mistake that will have the opposite of our desired outcome. Instead of improving Wilson for all kids, you are taking away a very important piece of what makes Wilson work. I know that you don't mean to harm any school, and I am sure that in your hearts you want the best for all students. So I hope that you will consider my comments and those of so many others, and reinstate Art Siebens.

With so much gratitude for your continued support and concern for the DCPS schools,

Annie Mahon.

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Chancellor Rhee's reply:

----- Forwarded Message

From: "Rhee, Michelle (OOC)" <[Michelle.Rhee@dc.gov](mailto:Michelle.Rhee@dc.gov)>

Date: Tue, 8 Jul 2008 08:56:35 -0400

To: Annie Mahon <[annie@circleyoga.com](mailto:annie@circleyoga.com)>, <[petechall@hotmail.com](mailto:petechall@hotmail.com)>

Cc: Hanna Mahon <[hannamenice55@yahoo.com](mailto:hannamenice55@yahoo.com)>, maddie Mahon <[angelgirlie119@yahoo.com](mailto:angelgirlie119@yahoo.com)>, Paul Mahon <[paul@unither.com](mailto:paul@unither.com)>

Conversation: Dr. Seibens

Subject: RE: Dr. Seibens

Thanks for your thoughtful email. I know that this has been difficult, but I believe strongly that Principal Cahall has to have the authority to make the decisions he believes will result in the highest levels of student learning. I know he'll take this into consideration.

MR

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Chancellor Rhee's reply promoted my email from this morning:

----- Forwarded Message

From: Paul Mahon <[paul@unither.com](mailto:paul@unither.com)>

Date: Tue, 08 Jul 2008 14:57:47 -0400

To: "Rhee, Michelle (OOB)" <[Michelle.Rhee@dc.gov](mailto:Michelle.Rhee@dc.gov)>, Annie Mahon <[annie@circleyoga.com](mailto:annie@circleyoga.com)>, <[petechall@hotmail.com](mailto:petechall@hotmail.com)>

Cc: Hanna Mahon <[hannamenice55@yahoo.com](mailto:hannamenice55@yahoo.com)>, Maddie Mahon <[angelgirlie119@yahoo.com](mailto:angelgirlie119@yahoo.com)>

Conversation: Dr. Seibens

Subject: Re: Dr. Seibens

Dear Chancellor Rhee,

Thank you for your reply to my wife's email.

As I understand the situation, the decision to terminate Dr. Siebens was made well before Principal Cahall ever scheduled an interview, and was communicated to Dr. Siebens on June 13th before Principal Cahall scheduled an interview. So from a legal substantive and procedural standpoint -- which is what is troubling about the whole situation -- Principal Cahall's post facto "appeals" interview could certainly be seen as a fig leaf to try to cleanse earlier irregularities surrounding the initial decision. Indeed, the pressure on a brand new principal to uphold the decisions made upstairs must be considerable. (I also understand that Principal Cahall conducted his appeals interview with Dr. Siebens even before he even became an employee of DCPS when he had no authority at all, since I understand his start date is not until the day after tomorrow.)

Because Dr. Siebens is among the most gifted teachers in DCPS, and his impact as a teacher on students so profound and enduring, I believe that intense scrutiny into how his termination has been handled will undermine much of the good work you are doing and the good work which Principal Cahall surely plans to do. Which really would be a shame for all of us.

As an optimist, I remain hopeful that a good solution can be achieved, but I am terribly concerned with the implications and the future consequences.

Paul Mahon

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And her response:

----- Forwarded Message

From: "Rhee, Michelle (OOC)" <[Michelle.Rhee@dc.gov](mailto:Michelle.Rhee@dc.gov)>

Date: Wed, 9 Jul 2008 09:04:03 -0400

To: Paul Mahon <[paul@unither.com](mailto:paul@unither.com)>, Annie Mahon

<[annie@circleyoga.com](mailto:annie@circleyoga.com)>,

<[petecahall@hotmail.com](mailto:petecahall@hotmail.com)>, "Cahall, Pete (SHS)" <[Pete.Cahall@dc.gov](mailto:Pete.Cahall@dc.gov)>

Cc: Hanna Mahon <[hannamenice55@yahoo.com](mailto:hannamenice55@yahoo.com)>, Maddie Mahon

<[angelgirlie119@yahoo.com](mailto:angelgirlie119@yahoo.com)>

Conversation: Dr. Seibens

Subject: RE: Dr. Seibens

First, thanks for your words of general support, we're working hard to improve the educational experiences for all kids in the city and I appreciate your acknowledgement of that. While the preliminary decision was made before Principal Cahall's arrival, we gave him complete authority to make the decision he felt was right. It was only fitting that he make the final decision as the new leader of the school.

In moving the district forward lots of difficult decisions need to be made. Many of them don't make sense to some group of people. I understand how frustrating that can be. All of our actions, though, are made in what we believe is in the best interests of students and their academic achievement. I think it's important that you know that despite the fact that you don't agree with the decision.

Again, thanks for taking the time to reach out with your thoughtful email. I'm confident that this year will be a great one at Wilson.

MR

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And my reply:

----- Forwarded Message

From: Paul Mahon <[paul@unither.com](mailto:paul@unither.com)>

Date: Wed, 09 Jul 2008 13:28:45 -0400

To: "Rhee, Michelle (OOC)" <[Michelle.Rhee@dc.gov](mailto:Michelle.Rhee@dc.gov)>, Annie Mahon

<[annie@circleyoga.com](mailto:annie@circleyoga.com)>, <[petecahall@hotmail.com](mailto:petecahall@hotmail.com)>, "Cahall, Pete

(SHS)"

<[Pete.Cahall@dc.gov](mailto:Pete.Cahall@dc.gov)>

Cc: Hanna Mahon <[hannamenice55@yahoo.com](mailto:hannamenice55@yahoo.com)>, Maddie Mahon

<[angelgirlie119@yahoo.com](mailto:angelgirlie119@yahoo.com)>

Conversation: Dr. Seibens

Subject: Re: Dr. Seibens

No one would disagree with apple pie ideals like improving the educational experiences for all kids in the city -- what's not to like about that? -- and we all want that to happen.

But that's a very different matter than the specific circumstances surrounding a decision to terminate an outstanding teacher who has inspired DCPS students for 18 years. The ability to inspire students to learn, to really get excited about a subject, is what teaching is all about, and what Dr. Siebens is all about. And when such a teacher is sacrificed in the name of apple pie, that's unnecessary and unfair. I have not seen any topic galvanize past and present Wilson parents and students as much as Dr. Siebens' termination, which is why they are mobilizing to bring the brightest scrutiny if the decision is not reversed.

I remain hopeful that we can all have our apple pie and Dr. Siebens, too. These are not mutually exclusive outcomes, and both are in the best interests of DCPS.

Paul Mahon

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And her response:

----- Forwarded Message

From: "Rhee, Michelle (OOC)" <[Michelle.Rhee@dc.gov](mailto:Michelle.Rhee@dc.gov)>

Date: Wed, 9 Jul 2008 13:40:59 -0400

To: Paul Mahon <[paul@unither.com](mailto:paul@unither.com)>, Annie Mahon

<[annie@circleyoga.com](mailto:annie@circleyoga.com)>,

<[petecahall@hotmail.com](mailto:petecahall@hotmail.com)>, "Cahall, Pete (SHS)" <[Pete.Cahall@dc.gov](mailto:Pete.Cahall@dc.gov)>

Cc: Hanna Mahon <[hannamenice55@yahoo.com](mailto:hannamenice55@yahoo.com)>, Maddie Mahon

<[angelgirlie119@yahoo.com](mailto:angelgirlie119@yahoo.com)>

Conversation: Dr. Seibens

Subject: RE: Dr. Seibens

I respect your thoughts, and will certainly continue to operate with them in mind, as I'm sure Principal Cahall will. We may disagree on this particular issue, but am confident that we both have the same endgame at heart.

MR