

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 listserv 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>

"Cahall, Pete (SHS)" <Pete.Cahall@dc.gov>

"Cheh, Mary (COUNCIL)" <MCheh@DCCOUNCIL.US>

"Gray, Vincent (COUNCIL)" <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>

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

To: "Cheh, Mary (COUNCIL)" <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>

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

To: <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

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

www.marycheh.com

-Sent using BlackBerry

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

From: Paul Mahon <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

Annie's email to Michelle Rhee yesterday morning:

----- Forwarded Message

From: Annie Mahon <annie@circleyoga.com>

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

To: <petechall@hotmail.com>, <Michelle.Rhee@dc.gov>

Cc: Hanna Mahon <hannamenice55@yahoo.com>, maddie Mahon <angelgirlie119@yahoo.com>, Paul Mahon <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.

Chancellor Rhee's reply:

----- Forwarded Message

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

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

To: Annie Mahon <annie@circleyoga.com>, <petechall@hotmail.com>

Cc: Hanna Mahon <hannamenice55@yahoo.com>, maddie Mahon

<angelgirlie119@yahoo.com>, Paul Mahon <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

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

----- Forwarded Message

From: Paul Mahon <paul@unither.com>

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

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

<annie@circleyoga.com>, <petechall@hotmail.com>

Cc: Hanna Mahon <hannamenice55@yahoo.com>, Maddie Mahon

<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

And her response:

----- Forwarded Message

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

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

To: Paul Mahon <paul@unither.com>, Annie Mahon <annie@circleyoga.com>, <petecahall@hotmail.com>, "Cahall, Pete (SHS)" <Pete.Cahall@dc.gov>

Cc: Hanna Mahon <hannamenice55@yahoo.com>, Maddie Mahon <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

And my reply:

----- Forwarded Message

From: Paul Mahon <paul@unither.com>

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

To: "Rhee, Michelle (OOC)" <Michelle.Rhee@dc.gov>, Annie Mahon <annie@circleyoga.com>, <petecahall@hotmail.com>, "Cahall, Pete (SHS)" <Pete.Cahall@dc.gov>

Cc: Hanna Mahon <hannamenice55@yahoo.com>, Maddie Mahon <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

And her response:

----- Forwarded Message

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

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

To: Paul Mahon <paul@unither.com>, Annie Mahon <annie@circleyoga.com>, <petecahall@hotmail.com>, "Cahall, Pete (SHS)" <Pete.Cahall@dc.gov>

Cc: Hanna Mahon <hannamenice55@yahoo.com>, Maddie Mahon <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