

**From:** Blatch, Sydella  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 24, 2008 7:30 PM  
**To:** '[mayor@dc.gov](mailto:mayor@dc.gov)'  
**Subject:** Please Keep DCPS Teacher Dr. Siebens.

July 24, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

As an alumni and former student, I am writing this letter in support of Dr. Arthur Siebens as a biology teacher at Woodrow Wilson Senior High School.

I had Dr. Siebens as a biology teacher for two of my three years at Wilson. He taught me general biology in my sophomore year and then Advanced Placement Biology in my junior year. He is by far one of the most enthusiastic, effective, and fair teachers I have had in my entire lifetime of education (including through my recent completion of a PhD in biology).

Dr. Siebens is an effective teacher because he does not simply allow us to regurgitate facts about biology. He used interactive discussions, experiments, work in teams, and *live music* to help students *understand* general biology. The foundations of biology I learned from him served me very well, as I went on to college majoring in zoology. It was evident to me that what I knew about biology exceeded my average freshman peer. This certainly was not the case for me in a variety of other subjects, because sadly very few Wilson teachers I had even approached the effectiveness of Dr. Siebens.

Dr. Siebens is not only effective, but he was fair. One of the things I admired most about him was this quality. Many of the teachers I had at Wilson clearly treated students differently, seemingly based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or current educational achievements. It was apparent to me that Dr. Siebens did not do this. Although I performed very well in his class, he did not at all hesitate to discipline me at the slightest misbehavior. He also did not treat students differently, based on how "fast" they learned or what they already knew in the subject. He really treated us under the belief that all of his students had the same ability to do well.

Certainly, most teachers are not committed enough to make learning science fun for their students, that they would compose and sing songs about biology for their students. Even though most students rarely wanted to sing, it was evident that Dr. Siebens loved us and he loved his job. For him to write these rhyming biology songs, lug in his guitar, and force us to sing, he must have cared. I feel that deep down, through this, students knew how much he cared. This level of commitment is certainly exceedingly rare in any educational setting.

Frankly, I am shocked that Dr. Siebens must even face losing his job, given he was one of the best out of only a handful of excellent teachers I had at Wilson over ten years ago. I really learned from him and was motivated by his faith in me. He often pulled me aside and told me that I was good at biology. He was the first science teacher that ever told me that, and I really did believe him. Because of this, I had the confidence to pursue and complete a Bachelor's degree in biology as well as a Ph.D. in Biology, just like Dr. Siebens. I continue in biology now a postdoctoral fellow studying molecular genetics. I am not sure how far I would have made it through this field if Dr. Siebens had not given me that initial push.

Sincerely,  
Sydella Blatch, Ph.D.