

I feel the need to tell my story.

I have been a teacher since the year 2000. At such point, I began my career as a sophomore in my college career, looking for extra money to supplement high bills for my tuition in UCONN's Biomedical Engineering program. I believed in what I was doing, and so I quit my medical training and shifted majors to pursue my teaching career. In 2006, I began it legally at Torrington High School.

I had an incredible Principal and Assistant Principal who gave me firm but supportive assistance as I began my teaching career; typical earmarks of my growth were my work on closure, initiation, and of course, extracting sarcasm out of my classroom. I was on the fast track to becoming a good teacher, as one administrator had put it, and I really felt that I was making a difference with my students.

Through a series of scandals which are probably more known to my state government officials than I realize, this leader of mine is no longer working in the district; it seems that the Superintendent had a great deal more power than her Board of Education thought, and she forced him out of his position, suggesting that this BOE is indeed powerless as an elected faction. In his place, an interim principal began her career as a principal.

As a principal, she took the opportunity to single teachers out; among that precious few non-tenured to be bullied, I sat center circle. I was observed, without exaggeration, an estimated fifteen times in one month; this pattern of observation yielded reports that were untrue, some that were undocumented, and some that were even denied on record. When I attempted to stand up to the injustice of what would be considered harassment in any other position or industry, I was told to keep quiet, given that I was non-tenured.

I volunteered to chaperone events and was rejected; I applied for a renewal of paid duties in the building (i.e. cafeteria duty) and was turned down for a position; I volunteered for committees, extra curricular activities, etc. and was told that I was not recommended for the job. I attended work daily, only to be persecuted for reasons that were never known to me.

At the time of a budget cut, I was reassured by my Human Resources director that my job would be safe when the restructuring of my department came at the end of the year, because there were two other English teachers who were behind me in terms of hire date, and even experience. Despite this, I was cut for reasons that were never explained to me by an administrator who made it very clear to me that I was unliked in that building. By some miracle, my being cut from the building was spared in a transfer, and so four months pregnant, I began my one year teaching assignment, unlicensed as a 6th grade Writing teacher at Torrington Middle School. Wanting to provide for my family, I accepted the position and accepted my tenure that fall.

Repeatedly, I attempted to approach my administrators for objectives, a list of improvements, meetings, and of course, copies of these observation reports which indicated the exact details of my failures as a teacher; they never surfaced. I have all of this material documented as I prepare my suit for discrimination here with my current district.

Why do I write this? I write to you today, to tell my story, because it has come to light that my job will again be the subject of scrutiny as tenure is abolished. If our current government in Connecticut seeks to repair education, I can assure all parties that this is not the right step to march. Obviously, as I've described, administrators have a tendency to pick their favorites, and clearly I have not been one of them.

Why? I cannot say. If anyone at the state level wishes to look at the test scores of my students, he will see that they are demonstrative of growth of my students, both on standardized tests, and regular grades. I would even invite them to look at my own academic record, Praxis scores, or any other public record in my history. Anyone will see that I have been a stellar student throughout my career, and further, a good educator. Am I exceptional? I do not feel I can make that assertion myself; I would invite these people to ask my students, or pull my personnel file to see that there are a great number of them who have thanked me for my assistance with their education, and even their lives.

It seems as though the best accolades of my career mean very little to my government. My job is to educate children. That becomes the role I assume which has many hats. I am a mother, a sister, a guidance counselor, a teacher, and a mentor to a great many students that I have taught. Despite the bullying I have endured as an educator, I have put forth my best efforts to educate because that is my job. I cannot say the same for my administrators; I cannot say that I have been fairly evaluated. Presently I have virtually no feedback from my administrators on my current assignment because they say they are too busy; previously the administrators were too busy sitting in my classroom drafting my metaphorical target to do little else. In light of all of this, I am begged to ask, why is the teacher the target?

This experience of mine has taught me that even when I do my job, tenure provides me with protection from what really is a glorified popularity contest; it is the only thing to have protected me. I was unpopular with my administrators, and so my job was on the line. Now, because I am unpopular with my administrators (due to the fact that they are busy with other people), I get no feedback on how I am doing. If this abolition of tenure means that my administrators have more control of my ability to keep my job, there is something gravely wrong with the new proposal for education. It is not in the best interest of students, it is in the best interest of Superintendents, and of course, the budget board. I do not see where the current government is even considering the students in such a change.

Are there bad teachers? Surely there are, but tenure has little to do with that. I can assure you that the jobs saved by my being transferred and essentially cut from my high school position were not held by even what could be considered sub-rate educators. Should one seek an example of what I mean, I'm happy to be specific. An English teacher six months my junior had a tendency to arm wrestle and physically grapple with students in the hallway; the same teacher gave teenage girls rides home from school unsupervised; this same teacher went an entire marking period without giving any sort of measurable assignment to students, and when the time came for their entrance essays to be written for college, they turned to me for assistance, and not their classroom teacher. This fact is the hard truth, and one that I am embarrassed to say happened while I worked in that district, two doors down from it, and completely powerless to stop it. My repeated complaints led to the culminating event of my

transfer to a different school in the district; when I complained further, I was told to keep quiet because I had a job.

My better question about this bizarre set of circumstances is to the end of why the other man has a job? Surely, due to his protection in the district for reasons I will not understand in my lifetime, he is now tenured and protected. It is NOT the tenure which protects him, it is the administrators who find him to be a good teacher; it is these same administrators who condone his poor observations and ill behavior. It is due to teachers such as him that the government seeks to abolish tenure.

I would urge this governmental body to reconsider such a detrimental bill. While it would certainly aim to “weed out” bad teachers in this garden, it will not make this goal. I do not consider myself to be a bad teacher; I am a teacher who follows the rules religiously and instills this value in her students. What concerns me is that if I have followed the rules and “done my job” (so to speak), and have experienced this tumult in my workplace for what is now three years, I cannot be alone. There will always be favorites, and the only thing to protect those who are not favorites (and I’ve known these unpopular people as exceptional educators who simply don’t agree with what is not best for their students) is the due process of tenure.

I am not one to normally get involved in the politics of this job; I vote, and am clearly world-minded when I do so. I focus on my children, because that is my job. I would greatly appreciate a government who is so bent on reforming education to do the same as I do: please put our children first.

Thank you for your attention,

Samantha Verbickas