

To those I have elected into office to represent me:

First, let me share with you that I am writing this with about 20 minutes notice that emails are to be received by noon today. This is my 30-minute lunch period. Having the meetings during the typical school day hours excludes the very people that you are making potentially quality of professional and personal life decisions about. How is it that those of us who vote for you are then not allowed to have time to respond in a reasonable manner? Oh, I digress and now have approximately 17 minutes left before I must go walk my students back to class. Please excuse any fractured sentences as this is truly a rough draft so that I meet your deadline for submission. I have a class that begins in just a few moments.

I am a “newer” middle-aged teacher, having received my certification through the ARC program in 2005. I paid for my masters (completely out of pocket) this past year so I could earn a bit more, although it will be years before the cost of my advanced degree will be offset by the incremental increases of our local contract. I have offhandedly joked that finally, starting my 7<sup>th</sup> year of teaching, that I can only afford to teach because my husband makes a decent salary.

Each year our district makes cuts, but those line items are often directly taking away from my ability to provide a good education for my students. I am passionate about being the very best I can and so to fill those budgetary gaps, I am spending (and can show with receipts) anywhere from \$500 - \$1600 per year for basic supplies, classroom materials, teaching resources, memberships to professional organizations like NCTM and professional conferences that are not reimbursed by my district. Where else can you have a job that requires you to supply your own staplers, pencil sharpeners, class libraries with book printed in the past 10 years, etc.? Why don't I quit? I love children, I hope I'm making a difference, I am passionate about trying to spark a love of learning in our future stakeholders, I'm idealistic.

Without exception, I arrive at school between 6:30 – 7 AM and leave between 4- 6 PM. I bring home work to grade, create and plan my lessons. We have access to grading and email from home, so often I am answering emails and entering grades remotely from my dining room table. I volunteer for committees and student activities which also take away from my “plan time” during the day. My husband and young adult children have also tirelessly volunteered to help with classroom setup, repairing things in my room, cleaning my room, etc. , building items for school wide activities, etc. because they see my passion for my job. For this I started at \$31,500 a year. This year, my seventh, I will finally begin earning a more livable wage, which sounds wonderful except that most don't know that I already paid out approx \$20,000 to finish my masters degree so I can make that figure. Our union just signed our new 3 yr contract that will give me about \$700 this year and about \$3,000 over the life of the contract. I am a typical teacher. I am better off than many of the single - by choice or not by choice- teachers who must

somehow support themselves and often a few children to barely meet their basic financial commitments.

I did not just “SHOW UP” for 4 years and gloat that I am tenured. I have kept up this pace and commitment since I was hired as a long-term sub in August 2005. What has happened is my continued disbelief that we, as teachers, are held fully accountable for the well-being and education of our students. When were parents given the **option** of sending their child to school prepared to learn? If little Jane and Johnny are not fed breakfast, their parents do not return phone calls, they have no health care and have high absenteeism how am I held accountable for their success? Why am I held accountable for the academic success of my students when the school/town/state doesn't support learning by funding basic educational resources, the state makes drastic cuts to town budgets that trickle down to our schools, buildings are in disrepair, teachers are publicly disrespected by an ill-informed public, fueled by an ill-informed governor. I know money is tight everywhere – including my personal budget, however, I am not publicly disrespecting my husband's employer or his customers because money is tight for them as well. We are all in this together. To put the balancing of the budget on the backs of teachers who average probably \$50,000 a year (no overtime, no bonuses) without hope of social security benefits or paid health care upon retirement is a slap in the face. I worked for many years paying into social security. I am now faced with a decision of whether to continue in a field I am passionate about and have a difficult retirement or move on to another career so that at least the hours I spend will be fairly compensated and I will not be required to purchase paper clips, lined paper and markers out of pocket in order to do my job.

Tenure for teachers is really a hot topic. Tenure seems to be misunderstood by non-teachers. Tenure for us, is simply due process before being terminated. If a teacher is not showing progress in teaching and the students are not learning because of the teachers ineffectiveness, this is shown in a quality administrator's evaluation. With several evaluations, both formal and informal, required every year, along with the BEST program, now TEAM Mentoring, ineffective teachers should be clearly identified by the time they start their third year; sooner if there are glaring issues. Even after achieving tenure, teachers are still held accountable by evaluations. The biggest difference I've noticed between being a teacher and a “regular” job holders, is there is not additional money (merit raise) given for exceptional evaluations. Those in the private sector, such as my husband, relatives, neighbors and my adult children, receive monthly or annual bonuses based on excellent performances. These bonuses are typically anywhere from 5 – 20 percent of their monthly or annual salary. Do all of these people hold or were required to pay for an advanced degree in order to keep their job? No.

This may be a scattered response, and I apologize for this, however, as I stated earlier, I received almost no advance notice of a request for testimonials by noon today. The only opportunity was to think and write during my lunch period today.

Please look at alternatives and PLEASE schedule your meetings when we can be there. I often go to training after hours, it seems that the legislators could hold meetings after hours when the laws they're considering weigh so heavily on a certain population. It almost seems as if the meetings may have been scheduled so as NOT to allow the teachers to attend. Hmm... just thinking.

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