



April 23, 2016

Dear Board Members:

Thank you for your service to the people of Charleston. We appreciate the time and devotion you sacrifice in service. As a representative for over 1000 teachers in CCSD, I wish to bring a problem to your attention that has arisen with involuntary teacher transfers that we hope you will help us resolve.

As a result of the budget deficit, principals and associate superintendents have worked together to identify teaching positions at individual schools that will be cut. Following this, principals have designated which teacher or teachers who hold those posts will receive an involuntary transfer to another school that hopefully has an opening for their same position.

The problem is there is no standard to identify which teachers are forced to move when two people have the same credentials. The result is an arbitrary and capricious process that has resulted in teachers being slated for transfer despite having seniority over counterparts who are permitted to stay.

Here is an example of the unfairness in the process: At one school, it was determined that a PE position would need to be cut. Since there are currently two PE teachers at the school, one of them must be transferred. The principal has designated that Teacher A with only one full year's teaching experience will be allowed to stay, and that Teacher B—in good standing and with the same qualifications as Teacher A, plus over fifteen years of experience at that school—will be transferred. The only justification provided to Teacher B was that she is better able to deal with the rigors of the change than the younger teacher because she is older and more mature. This is manifestly unfair.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. We have received several other reports of teachers being told they will be transferred despite having the same qualifications and more seniority as colleagues who are allowed to stay.

It is clear that the current policy (which simply states that any teacher can be transferred at any time for any reason) is being abused. The CTA has not yet determined if it is a case of principals using the opportunity to get rid of teachers they may dislike (something that has happened in the past), or if it is a larger attempt to nudge older, more expensive teachers out of the district. The only way we will likely know is if lawyers become involved, which, I suspect, they most assuredly will when some of these teachers end up losing their contracts due to having no open position available to them in the district. At that moment, this lax policy will be called into serious question for its abuse and discrimination based on race, age, or some other criteria.

Even if legal challenges are avoided, this unfair process will damage learning in our district by diminishing school communities. District officials tell us that teachers do not have contracts with schools but with the district, and the district can move them wherever the district wants. It is true that we don't have contracts with schools, but we have something far more critical: a community bond. And this is what our students need. To be successful, a school must be a stable, loving community, filled with families and shareholders, not mercenaries. This is why the most successful schools in our district also have the lowest rate of teacher turnover. But when teachers who have been part of a school's community since the day it opened its doors are dismissed in favor of younger, cheaper, or more desirable alternatives, it destroys both community and the idea of fundamental fairness that any strong community engenders.

We should not have a "good old boy" system where decisions that impact schools and teachers are made in secret, closed-door meetings. Decisions of this magnitude should be made through clear, objective policy, carefully-crafted by all stakeholders.

We believe that transfer decisions should be reached by objective criteria, such as seniority, but we are open to any reasonable standard. We want to constructively change the unfairness in this hasty attempt to balance teacher allocations, and we have presented the superintendent with progressive ideas for a transparent process that is befitting of a diverse, high-caliber district like CCSD. We were told it would take too long and be too complicated to put these solutions (or any solution) into place. Even if true, the time and energy would be a small price to pay for doing what is fair and right.

Obviously we are disappointed with the board's decision to cut allocations and increase class size. It has never been clearly explained to us how a problem that was not caused by having too many teachers will be solved by having too few. Additionally, teachers are able to point to several areas in CCSD where budget cuts could still be made that would restore at least some of the teaching positions you plan to cut. For years the CTA has tried to help the district end its profligate spending habits by identifying areas that should be cut, many of which are the same areas the district is cutting now. We were rebuffed each time.

The budget deficit is one teachers did not create. We have not perpetuated it, and we have no interest in sustaining it. Yet we are now bearing the brunt of it. All we are asking is for your help in being treated fairly throughout this process, and we ask for your assistance in working with us to resolve this issue.

I plan to address this issue during comments time at the board meeting Monday night and look forward to seeing you there.

Yours truly,
Jody Stallings
Director, Charleston Teacher Alliance