

From: "Mary Ernat" <mmernat@comcast.net>
To: <strachann@wwcsd.net>
Date: 9/28/2008 8:30 PM
Subject: testimonial

Dear WWEA President Strachan, Nancy:

It is with great respect that I submit this letter to you. I can only imagine the pressure my fellow teachers on the bargaining team and you must be enduring. And please do not think that I, in any way, support the district and the position I feel they have put us in. This comes to you as a personal perspective, one shared by many of our colleagues. So, after much internal conflict and reflection, discussion with colleagues, friends, family members, and parents of students in WWCS, I have decided it is time to write this.

My name is Mary Ernat. I have about 14 years in this district in which I have dedicated myself to improving curriculum and the learning of our students. I have worked very hard to make a name for myself as an exceptional teacher and one whose parents want their children in my classroom. I have sat on committees without additional pay because I need to be involved in the workings of the district. In everything I do, my first concern is, "What is best for kids". I have always felt support and encouragement from my colleagues and from administration....up until recently.

This summer, I attended the communication committee meetings at the WWEA office. From this, I became involved as a lead speaker in coffee klatches, talking with roughly 50 parents. It was never my intent to speak ill of our district, but to simply relay information as what I believed to be fact from the information I received from the union. I felt it was important to notify the community of parents of the status of the negotiations as I knew them.

After the General Membership meeting August 25, I was speechless with the information that was presented. I felt betrayed and hurt by a district that I feel I give my all to. I really felt the lack of respect and took this personally. On this day, I prepared myself for a possible work stoppage. But, it was with great relief that the 30 day contract extension news came, and most particularly starting school on time.

But, as the extension closing draws nearer, the stress and frustration from the lack of progress in bargaining has become unbearable. Not only do I feel lack of respect from the district, but also from members of the union, and that is really the most important reason for this testimonial.

There is a lot of talk about a "work stoppage". From the administration, teachers received the letter in August, which included disciplinary action threats up to dismissal. I do realize this is an act of intimidation, but also a legal necessity on the districts part due to the talk of firing teachers if there is a "strike". This changes the thinking of many teachers. In the past, a "work stoppage" was used as bargaining leverage. But today, for this district, it is meant as losing your job permanently. I for one, at this time in my life, and with the dire economic outlook of our country, can not afford to lose my job or take the risk of doing so. A job is better than no job at all. I would like to continue to work another 12-15 years in this profession, and if I am fired, I would never be able to get a job teaching at this stage in my career with the salary I now make. I have spoken with teachers who echo my thoughts and include the lose of other benefits in the event of getting fired. We are afraid.

It is sad that the district has put us teachers in the position of making such a choice. Many teachers are very adamant about supporting the union, even in the event of a "work stoppage". Many of these members, I have found are near the end of their career or have another means of family income. These members are not open to other members perspective on "firing" and unwillingness to test the legality of the system. Some members have been outright intimidating to those they feel do not give 100% support. It is not that teachers do not want to support the union 100%, but that they are in turmoil over the possible outcomes. It is terrible to see a teacher confronting another for their supposed lack of support. This is not unity. Union members disrespecting other members because of differing thoughts, which are personal, is a wrong message.

But, when all is said and done however, each and every one of us has to think about what is best for their family and themselves. I have two children. I need to put my children first. I need to have a job. Therefore, I beg the union to do EVERYTHING possible to avert a "work stoppage". It is a legal battle that should not be battled at the hands of students and the livelihood of teachers. It is a systemic challenge that the union needs to battle in a court outside of negotiations and not on the backs of teachers. A "work stoppage" is a lose/lose battle and would be detrimental to the relationship teachers have made with children, parents and administration.

Thank you for your time. I would be open to further conversation about any aspect of this letter.

Sincerely,

Mary Ernat

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