

Lafayette Parish Teacher Frustrated with Lack of Discipline in the Classroom



Abby Breaux read this letter at the Lafayette Parish School Board meeting, shortly after announcing she would not be teaching next year. She says among other reasons, teacher evaluations and lack of discipline in the school system are driving good teachers away. Read her letter and leave your thoughts here.

Letter to Lafayette Parish School Board: March 6, 2013

I feel that we as teachers have really had enough, and that someone needs to finally speak up. My name is Abby Breaux and I have been teaching for 25 years in Lafayette Parish, yet no one in this room knows me because no one here has ever come to the schools in which I've taught and just asked me, "What do you as a teacher think?"

I keep hearing statements that only ineffective teachers are leaving the system. This upsets me. Many, and I mean many, teachers like me who have been evaluated as effective and highly effective for many years by their administration are leaving the public schools. These are teachers that have been elected Teacher of the Year, LEF winners, and many have received other awards. Even more than that, we have played a part in hundreds of thousands of students becoming great citizens and grownups! Teachers have also been criticized for leaving during the year, for interrupting the students learning. But, these teachers have had enough, and many are actually getting physically sick and can't make it to the end.

Teachers are not the bad guys here. You tell society that we have three months off in the summer and get off at 3:30 in the afternoon. Well, I can tell you for a fact that we work at least 10 months a year. What about all the teachers that either get to school early or stay

late? We give up a lot of time for our school children– sometimes our students are getting more time than our families. What about all of us who still after 25 or more years, are working all day and then are working more hours at night? What about all the hours we volunteer to coach, chaperone dances, plan field trips, and sponsor clubs? We stay late after school for meetings and programs, and we are constantly grading papers, at night, on weekends, and even on vacations. We attend in-services for either no or minimal pay in the summer or on weekends. Not to mention all of our OWN MONEY we spend on students. I can't tell you how many THOUSANDS of dollars I have spent over the years for science and social studies supplies for my classroom alone. Buying our own paper and ink, team celebrations, class rewards, incentives, classroom decorations, primary sources, books, etc.... And if you think that doesn't happen. Again, ask a real classroom teacher! So don't tell me that teachers don't care!

No one ever really asks us what the real problems are, nor do they ask US how to solve them.

You've hired people from a state that is #50 in the rankings to fill our positions. I could almost understand if you got someone from a state ranked in the top 10! We have plenty of experience and highly qualified professionals right here in Lafayette Parish. If they are not applying for the job, then the question needs to be asked. WHY?

You make us pilot all of these new programs year after year that have been tried already (just under another name), not worked–and tried again. We keep reinventing the wheel! I hear often that teachers don't teach any more. We don't! You have made us information pushers, test givers, and paper passer outers. LET US TEACH!!! You have taken all of this away. You give us a new common core curriculum that is almost impossible to finish in a year, and now you slide in Compass, new evaluations, JPams, and On Course all in a single year, and all which require more time that we just don't have. You are setting teachers up to fail. Teaching was once a noble and creative profession. Learning was once fun! If you want kids to stay in school, make them want to come!!!

Our jobs should not depend on two lessons a year. Principals should be able to walk into a classroom any time and do a true evaluation. To tell children that OUR jobs depend on them–well you are giving the students the "upper hand"! They now have the power and they know it. I have heard some students say that they are not even going to try on the standardize tests. They are even "out" for some teachers and are going to score low on purpose. Many students won't do their homework or study for tests–WHY? They know they won't fail because of your policies. You have made it all about "what the teacher needs to do" instead of "what the student needs to do!" HOLD them responsible! Would a doctor lose his job if his diabetic patient didn't follow their recommendations for losing weight when that patient is hospitalized for his/her choices? Of course not! The educational system is no different. We should not be held responsible for apathy and wrong choices!

If you really want to change one thing in our school system—start with discipline: SIMPLE nothing else, just DISCIPLINE. Follow through from first grade on up to twelfth grade. Be consistent, give consequences. Teachers should not be repeating rules to the same students over and over again. If you would listen to experienced teachers who have good discipline, it works and learning is going on. No fancy programs, no bells and whistles, just the teacher in charge. Stop moving students from school to school. This just dilutes other schools!

You are hiding the problems—NOT solving them! The same students that we saw get away with the "little infractions" over and over, and over again, are the same students that end up in the paper under "local arrests". We are not here to be popular or please parents, we are here to teach children. Small things like uniforms, gum chewing, and tardies may seem small to you, but to a classroom teacher they are the small things that lead to larger problems like disrespect. If you don't back us up on these issues, the students know it and lose respect for us. Don't give in half way through the year, or keep changing things. Follow through. Back your teachers up! You have taken our "power" away. No Discipline=No Teaching—Period!

You have basically taken "morals" and work ethics out of our schools, yet now our tax money is paying for students to go to private schools where they teach morals and work ethics. I believe we should bring BOTH back to our schools, and this will bring our students back as well.

You want save one child by not removing them from the classroom or campus because you don't want THAT child to miss out on learning, but you are doing a TOTAL injustice to the average and above average students who want to learn and know how to behave. The others are NOT learning because teachers are spending their time repeatedly correcting, constantly documenting, meeting one on one, and conferencing with the one child who chooses not to behave. I have about 10 daily behavior plans with only 2 out of the 10 working. Why is this? There is no follow through at home! Teachers work harder than the parents and the child to help that child succeed. If you do not think this is true, again, just ask a classroom teacher!

All teachers are different and that is what makes public education so special. Students get the affection, nurturing, life lessons, and education from each of them over their twelve years. Some experiences will be good, some not so good, but that is called life!!! Children need to learn to cope! They need this skill for the rest of their lives, so they can become good problem solvers on their own and not have everything catered and changed to their every desire. Having their parents just being able to call the central office and have teachers give in to "solve the problem" to make it easier for the child is not a coping skill. You are doing the students and parents a total injustice.

Computers have been an asset in the classroom as a learning tool for students. The school board and state however seem to have incorporated them as tools for teachers to do more meaningless work! We should have computers and laptops for the students to use as resources, not for teachers to type and retype and retype again. You would not want us asking students to redo a project three times and then never grade it. Why do you keep giving us surveys and paperwork that you will never read? A perfect example is our VAM Evaluations! All of this is taking away from our teaching time!

Is there a reason why we in Lafayette Parish (a parish that has MONEY compared to most) still cannot get enough books for our students in the classroom, yet we have money to waste on silly job positions and in services. This is not just this year or last year; this has been an ongoing occurrence. Teachers should not have to scrape and scramble for books and paper every year! To you this might be minor, but for us, the classroom teachers, this is a major issue and affects morale.

If you think getting rid of experienced classroom teachers is the answer, then shame on you! It takes experienced teachers to help new, inexperienced teachers with the overwhelming burdens of classroom management, helping with background knowledge of the information being taught, and learning how to build relationships with the students and the community that these students come from. There is SO much more to teaching than getting in front of a class and giving a lesson!

Personally, I was hoping to teach for at least 30 years, but because of all these new evaluation policies, fear of retirement issues, and feeling constantly threatened that if I don't do "this or that" I will lose my job, I and many others have had enough and feel the need to leave. I LOVE TEACHING and never thought this day would come. I love working with kids. You have basically pushed me and many excellent, effective teachers out of the education field or into the private sector with all of your useless paperwork and lack of follow through. I know I may get some "recoil" for what I am saying today, but what I am saying is the truth, and it is something that most teachers say and think every day. Many are afraid to speak up and this is something that I too have been holding in for years because of the same reason. Please, sit down with the CLASSROOM teachers and work with them. But above all, GO TO A CLASSROOM! Don't choose a "favored, high scoring" school. Go to a struggling school and observe a classroom. Better yet, since you are supposed to be people of "service", substitute in a classroom. Your eyes will be opened to how difficult it is to do this job on a daily basis.

I am very proud to have worked with the many amazing and hardworking teachers, administrators and staff over the years in Lafayette Parish. We want a positive system and a system that continues to improve as much or even MORE than you. We would really like for you to not only hear us, but make some necessary changes.

*Thank you,
Abby Breaux*

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