

Good evening school board members, Dr. Walts, and colleagues. My name is Colleen LaMay, and my address is on file.

My former principal at Potomac Middle School who is now principal at Reagan MS was a “bully,” at best. I heard her called worse but didn’t believe it. Not at first.

I worked a year under her as a part time co-teacher for English language learners, my first job with my new teaching degree. I loved the work and the students, the life they brought to my life.

The second year, the principal invited me to teach 7th-grade English full time. I was excited. Mine was often one of the last cars in the parking lot at the end of the day. Sometimes it was the only car.

But by spring of my first full year of teaching, I lived in terror of the principal I had adored. A student accused me of an

act of physical abuse during class, and even though the child later was found guilty of filing a false police report, and I returned to the classroom, my teaching life, and very nearly the rest of my work life at PWCS was over.

Within the space of a few weeks, the principal:

Burst into my classroom, yelled at me in front of a classroom full of entranced children, and later wrote this up as an official observation in scrawled handwriting so difficult to read that I never figured out some of it. I just knew it was bad.

This same principal called me or sent emails at unexpected times nearly every day, even at home on holidays.

She threatened numerous times to call the main office and send someone to “take me away” because of my unprofessional attitude, because I raised my voice. The truth is I barely spoke in her office. I was terrified.

She sometimes told her secretary not to include certain questions or answers in the dictation the secretary took. The principal asked me if I had a tape recorder hidden in my winter boots one morning at yet another unscheduled meeting alone.

I fell apart under the strain, even though I had worked in high pressure jobs for years, including more than two decades as a print journalist, before turning to teaching. I have been in the workplace every year since I turned 15 years old.

I received a Family Medical Leave from my doctor. I couldn't sleep. I suffered migraine headaches for the first time in 20 years. I had constant diarrhea. I suffered from clinical depression and anxiety. I considered this defeat, but felt I had no choice. My marriage suffered. My children suffered. I was so tired when I came home at night that I nearly ran off the road. I fell asleep in the car in the garage.

I am now back in school to become a paralegal. I want to help people who cannot easily access the legal system. I have always worked at jobs helping others. The door on teaching is closing, but another is opening.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to share my experiences.