

I am a 16 year veteran teacher, this is my first year teaching in Prince William County.

For the past two summers, I have loaded my car with school supplies and driven 2400 miles to Puerto Palomas, Mexico to teach and serve the community.

I lived in a cinder block house with no hot water, no drinkable water and no air conditioning in 100-degree heat. Each morning I rose at 5:00 am, ran 40 blocks with a posse of stray dogs.

Each day, I taught four classes of English and Art, in the afternoons I volunteered at an animal rescue center. In the evenings, I taught an adult English class. On any giving night, families would visit asking for English lessons, school supplies, or my students would invite me to a game of volleyball. I worked twelve-hour days and never thought of quitting or became discouraged. Because of my wonderful experience teaching in Mexican public schools, I left my private school position to teach in Prince William County.

I share this with you tonight, because none of the challenges of teaching in Mexico were as stressful or as disheartening as the first month I experienced in Prince William County Schools. My grade-level colleagues and I were provided virtually no time to plan or prepare for the arrival of our students or to establish relationships with them.

The one hour and forty minutes I'm giving to plan each week was and continues to be filled with data and accountability meetings. During my first week of school, my fifth-grade team was told we could grab our lunch and eat during recess while we watched our classes. I declined that offer.

I'm told that CLT meetings and professional develop meetings are designed and developed for our own good. "They will improve instruction." If that's true, why do I, and many of my colleagues, feel so dispirited, discouraged and belittled after these meetings?

Every other week, I'm asked to look at testing data and come up with a written plan to improve test scores. I spend hours supplying this information in a variety of

formats. I reflect and make recommendations based upon my 16 years of experience. Inevitably, I am informed my opinions are wrong and my solutions not acceptable. It's akin to taking a multiple-choice test with only the questions. Very few of us continue to write what we think, we write what we think others want to hear.

Then there are the observations and administrative meetings:

- An observer from the state asked why I was teaching fifth graders to write poetry when the standards only require that understand poetry. Mind you, I was teaching a unit called Poetry.
- I asked a math resource person to help my two non-English speaking students with math, only to be told, "I'm not here to work with students, I'm here to make sure teachers are all doing the same thing."
- An administrator told me that if a student fails a test it's my fault; when I disagreed and said context and schema matter. I endured a humiliating lecture for over an hour.
- When I didn't agree that cramming for test in elementary school was an effective way of learning, I was asked why I didn't care if my students passed or failed.

I arrive at work an hour early every day, I stay two to three hours late. I work all day on Sundays. I've conducted home visits and I've translated work into three languages. None of the us signed on for a 9-5 job, we expected long hours, but time is precious. If I'm going to work 10-hour days, six days a week, I'd rather spend that time in service to my students and developing tier-one instruction.

Unfortunately, much of my time is spent collecting data from one form and repackaging it in another format simply to prove that I'm not incompetent.

Teachers, like students, want to be appreciated, wanted and needed. We have ideas, we care, we deserve more than be tolerated, we should be appreciated. Are the educators in this room no less worth of receiving the level of humanity, and empathy we give thousands of students every day?

I do not believe that my administrators are deliberately uncaring people or intentionally trying to humiliate us. Despite many troubling encounters with my administrators, I have never questioned *their* commitment to educating children.

They are stressed out by the current test-driven, data gazing, pass-fail myopia that drives education. We need a new paradigm built upon respect and the realization that solutions and transformative ideas don't always flow from the top down. Teachers want to be part of the conversation.

Thank You.