

From: concerned4DCPS@yahoogroups.com [concerned4DCPS@yahoogroups.com] On Behalf Of Erich Martel [ehmartel@starpower.net]
Sent: Wednesday, September 01, 2010 12:27 AM
To: concerned4DCPS@yahoogroups.com
Subject: Re: [concerned4DCPS] Rhee Chops Wilson Teacher - mtg transcript

1. Virginia and list members,

Here is the transcript of Instructional Superintendent John Davis' meeting with me where he announced his intention to involuntarily transfer me.

I encourage members to read through it. It is a rare glimpse of a bureaucracy caught on record and making and repeating accusations that are bogus, but which in their cumulative effect are chilling. It is chilling, because his accusations are all basic rights that we have as employees and citizen.

Erich Martel

Excerpts from the meeting; all are statements by John Davis:

"It is clear that these **educational differences are extreme**, and as a result we want to involuntarily transfer you."

"You do not agree with that vision"

"There was a **great deal of difference** between the two of you when the School Improvement Plan was discussed."

"You differ vastly with Mr. Cahall on a lot of topics, so much so that you refused to sign the Local School Plan. You objected to the metrics that were suggested, and you also said that you disagreed with the concept of learning styles."

"You said that you would **encourage teachers to challenge their IMPACT scores** based on the learning styles portion of it."

" You just said that you advise teachers to **challenge their scores** based on learning styles. **This is hindering the principal's educational goals and philosophy.**"

"You are saying that teachers should question their IMPACT scores. The principal has a certain outlook educationally, and you should not be hindering that. There are huge disagreements between yourself and Mr. Cahall."

"No, there are just **deep-seated educational differences.**"

End of Davis excerpts

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Notes from the meeting between John Davis and Erich Martel

Principal's Office, Woodrow Wilson HS

6/21/10 2:30 PM – 3:15 PM (approx)

Introductory Note by Erich Martel (6/22/10)

At approximately 2:15 PM, WHS Assistant Principal Ms. Charlette Butler came to my classroom to tell me that I was wanted in the principal's office. When I went in, Instructional Superintendent John Davis was sitting at the conference table. He told me that he was there to "offer me an involuntary transfer." I asked to excuse myself to get a witness. He agreed. I found Aaaaa Bbbbbb in his room who agreed to observe and take notes. We then went together to the principal's office.

I asked if Mr. Cahall would be joining us. Mr. Davis said, "No."

Mr. Davis, this is a draft memorializing our meeting. Please make any corrections.

If you recorded the meeting on your blackberry (or other), I am requesting a copy.

Thank you, Erich Martel

(Notes taken & transcribed by WHS SCAC Member Aaaaa Bbbbb)

Handshakes and introductions

JD: There is a big difference in outlook of what a school can do between yourself and Mr. Cahall. Specifically, you have vast differences in the areas of AP expectations, honesty with students, and disagreements about learning styles. It is clear that these educational differences are extreme, and as a result we want to involuntarily transfer you.

EM: I do what I can to help students and don't see why I should be involuntarily transferred. I try to hold all students to high standards and do not see the basis for the involuntary transfer.

JD: It comes down to the issues I mentioned before. Let's look at Advanced Placement. Part of Mr. Cahall's vision is to push students to take Advanced Placement courses. You do not agree with that vision.

EM: I agree with the College Board's outlook that all students should be pushed to their potential. For some students that means they should take regular classes, for other students, they should take AP classes. Are there complaints about how I run my AP classes? My highest evaluation from Mr. Cahall was my latest one, and I am unclear as to what would lead to an involuntary transfer. Could you be more specific?

JD: Everyone has potential to succeed. Mr. Cahall believes that all students can take Advanced Placement courses, and this is a deep seated philosophical difference between the two of you.

EM: What is the point of saying that all students can take Advanced Placement?

JD: There are different schools of thought regarding AP potential. Mr. Cahall believes that all

students should have as many opportunities as possible to succeed at a high level. I don't want to be too extreme and claim that EVERY student should take AP, but Mr. Cahall believes that most should be given the opportunity.

EM: Do you mean that a student who wants to take an AP class should be able to? I don't disagree with that. I followed the College Board's recommendations and in the past we admitted all students who wanted to enroll. Now we are just enrolling students without regards to their interest, which is necessary for AP success. I have never had a problem with letting a student with interest sign up for Advanced Placement.

Earlier this year, I had a conference with a student named XXXXXX about advanced placement. The end result of that is that things went really well for the student, which Mr. Cahall noted on my last evaluation. However, interest is critical for success.

In many cases students have been put into classes which they do not have interest in taking.

JD: There was a great deal of difference between the two of you when the School Improvement Plan was discussed.

EM: I have always made my feelings known. I think that we need to take ability and motivation into account. I don't like to use the term ability, as it implies that it is a static amount, rather than something that can change based on motivation and interest. If a student can do well or even has a small chance of doing well then I think that it is fine if they take the AP class. However, some students are unwilling to do the writing and reading that is necessary to succeed in an AP class. I don't see how saying this is a problem. We could just enroll everyone in AP classes like they did at Coolidge, but that is not serving kids.

JD: There are situations where it has worked, data where it has worked, such as at Bell Multicultural.

EM: It hasn't worked there either. The key word is achievement. It is not just being in an AP class like they do at Bell, but succeeding in that AP class. I don't think it does the students any good to just be a statistic.

JD: You could make a case that a student who has done poorly in an AP class has still achieved more than a student who did well in a regular class.

EM: Studies are mixed, a Texas study showed that students who actually sat for the AP exam did slightly better than others. We have not seen statistics for the results at CHEC. Chancellor Rhee praised the improvement that occurred there, but where is the evidence of that improvement? Aside from that, why is it so bad for a teacher to have a difference of opinion from the principal?

JD: You differ vastly with Mr. Cahall on a lot of topics, so much so that you refused to sign the Local School Plan. You objected to the metrics that were suggested, and you also said that you disagreed with the concept of learning styles.

EM: Why does that justify an involuntary transfer? There is documentation to show and support what I have said. I have no ability or desire to discourage people from teaching to learning styles. I have been reviewing IMPACT to figure out how to improve my teaching. In fact, Mr. Cahall

pointed out that I had been teaching to more learning styles during our last post-conference. Why wouldn't a principal want a dialogue over how students learn? It's not as if I tell teachers not to teach to learning styles. However, I have advised teachers to challenge their IMPACT scores in the learning style area.

If there are such things as learning styles, where is the evidence to support them? Let's assume learning styles are valid: just like with IEPs, shouldn't we be provided with students' learning styles – just like getting reading levels or math levels?

JD: You said that you would encourage teachers to challenge their IMPACT scores based on the learning styles portion of it.

EM: Yes, I could say that, but I also encourage teachers to read the IMPACT document to find out how to teach to the learning styles as in the document.

JD: You just said that you advise teachers to challenge their scores based on learning styles. This is hindering the principal's educational goals and philosophy.

EM: Neuroscientists say that there are not learning styles. People claiming that there are learning styles need to provide evidence to support that view. Why does this justify an involuntary transfer? If I reasonably support my belief that there are not learning styles, then we need to discuss why this is important. It is possibly a semantic issue, but in any case, dialogue is good. We are professional educators at Wilson and should be discussing how students can succeed.

JD: You are saying that teachers should question their IMPACT scores. The principal has a certain outlook educationally, and you should not be hindering that. There are huge disagreements between yourself and Mr. Cahall.

EM: Let's see the research and how it supports the notion of learning styles. My job as building representative is to provide evidence to teachers who wish to disagree with their evaluation. I have taught all sorts of classes and welcome any students who make an effort to succeed. I have had all sorts of students, and if they are doing all they can do then they are successful.

One issue that arose in the first evaluation that Mr. Cahall did came from the fact that I had taken over a class with serious behavior issues (sleeping in class, refusal to remove electronics, etc...). **One student was given a bathroom pass, at the end of class, when I entered attendance, I discovered that he had had his schedule changed just to avoid being forced to follow class rules, and that student is still not succeeding.**

There were other issues with that evaluation. Mr. Cahall said in the evaluation that I watched black students too closely; there were 2 references to that in the evaluation.

JD: Do you remember what they were?

EM: I'd have to look up the evaluation.

Mr. Cahall then **asked me to sign the evaluation, which was improper and not a requirement. Of course, I refused to sign it.**

If a student is not working hard, then I recommend that they transfer to a regular class because they may be better able to achieve in a grade level class than in AP. As a teacher I am supposed to evaluate where a student is, we don't just teach mindlessly. If a student has no interest in being in an AP class then there is a problem with that. Lots of teachers agree with this. We are supposed to improve student learning and if a student is in a regular class, but should be in AP, we say so and are praised for it, but some students aren't ready for the challenge of AP, what is wrong with saying so?

JD: That makes some sense, but the bigger question is how much do we push students?

EM: We push them as much as we can, but not everyone is ready for AP. Is there another reason for the transfer?

JD: No, there are just deep-seated educational differences.

EM: Why don't we welcome debate about educational philosophy? We have to cover a great deal of material in an AP class. If I teach it at a lower level because 1/2 the class are reading at an 8th or 9th grade level, what am I supposed to do if they cannot or will not keep up? Do I slow down the instruction even if that means that we do not cover all of the required material? Some AP classes have students with reading levels between 6th grade and junior year of college. It is hard to teach to such a wide range of students and students at the lower level of that range will not succeed because they don't have the tools to succeed. How do we resolve this problem?

JD: It does get to the main point of conflict. Obviously I don't want to take it to an extreme case, but even the students who struggle with material or refuse to do the work might choose to do it the next day. You have actively opposed measurements on Advanced Placement courses, and this is a fundamental difference between you and Mr. Cahall. It is apparent that you disagree on this.

EM: What constitutes success in Advanced Placement? Enrolling in the class? Taking the exam?

JD: That's part of it. Advanced Placement must be as commonplace as possible. We need to ask the question of how we can catch them up so that they can succeed. Other measures of success such as pass rate, etc... are also important.

EM: Where is the interest of the student considered? When do you do that, and who decides? Are the previous year's teachers recommendations considered? What are the criteria? Lots of kids aren't ready for AP, or don't have time, and we are not helping them by enrolling them in class.

If enrolling an unprepared student into class doesn't work, it is the teacher's fault. What is wrong with students being in regular classes that are challenging to them? Isn't that a part of the picture? This helps to suggest kids who want to take AP; all that I hear is that the teacher is responsible. What about student responsibility?

JD: Of course there has to be student responsibility.

10 second silence

EM: That's what I am in favor of and this has been an issue all along that students are in AP

classes without any idea of what they are getting into or any preparation. No one is telling them and supporting them. Students are being put into APs without basic skills and teachers are being blamed for this. It is unbelievable to me that someone wants me to be involuntarily transferred for this.

JD: You simplify too much here. If there are kids that are missing some skills, we should be trying to fix that. We should be putting kids in situations where they will rise to the challenge that we set forth for them. You are very familiar with cases where this occurs.

EM: Yes, when the student is interested and puts in the effort. Not everyone is interested in a topic and is ready to be put into that situation. It is absolutely critical to gauge interest and ability. Shouldn't previous teachers be involved in this process?

JD: That does make sense.

EM: If recommendations disagree, then we need to talk to the parents, get counselors involved, etc...

I do not see any grounds for involuntary transferring a successful teacher. I would think that Mr. Cahall would want teachers with experience and expertise in this area. AP participation is slowly increasing and I think this is a good thing. However, this growth in AP participation must be in combination with interests of the students.

JD: I just wanted to come out to see what your response to this would be.

EM: Who is involved with this decision?

JD: Some of the people at the Chancellor's office may be involved, but I'm not sure exactly who. However, you can direct any questions through me.

EM: Is the Chancellor aware of this situation?

JD: I do not know if the Chancellor is aware of this situation.

EM: Does the Deputy Chancellor know?

JD: It's being discussed in the Chancellor's office.

EM: I am not in agreement with this involuntary transfer.

[Mr. Davis got up to leave.]

EM: I am not accepting an involuntary transfer.