

Public Comments

6/21/2018

Mary Gaddis

Good evening Chair Gentry, Vice Chair Anderson, School Board Members and Dr. Berlin.

My name is Mary Gaddis and I am a kindergarten paraprofessional at John Adams Elementary School, EAA Executive Committee member, EAA Building Rep, and an 18 year employee of ACPS. Tonight, I am addressing you on behalf of ACOS employee, Diazreen Ford, or "Desi" as she is known.

Before I provide the details of my concerns, let me tell you about Ms. Ford. Desi is the first person our parents, students, and staff including substitutes see when you enter the office at John Adams. Upon entering the office, our school community is greeted by Desi's big smile and warm demeanor. She has developed relationships spanning generations of John Adams' families and no matter how hectic the office is, she always makes time for a kind word and helpful attitude for all. Ms. Ford was one of the Education Support Professionals honored by former Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan.

After more than 24 years of service to ACPS, Desi was stunned to receive notification from HR that her position was eliminated through the budget process and her employment would be terminated on June 30th. She received this letter on Monday, June 18th, only 3 days ago. Prior to this letter, the only inkling she had of an impending change was her principal telling her and other John Adams office staff a couple of months ago that some staff may be transferred. While the letter from HR states the action is quote "in no way related to your performance" unquote and encourages her to apply for other positions within ACPS, HR offered her no guarantee of preference over internal or external applicants or any assistance at all with securing another position. In a nutshell, a more than 24 year veteran ACPS employee was given fewer than 9 business days to research, apply, and be selected for a position or be out of a job. The only option offered to her was a 60 day extension of her employment at her current hourly wage but with no benefits. While I understand that hard choices must be made, it is unconscionable to give no notice to employees that their job may be eliminated and to leave them "high and dry" at the last minute. Not only is this a devastating moment for Desi and her family, it is troubling to all ACPS employees to see another employee treated this way.

What should be done in the future? Any employees potentially impacted by a budget proposal should be notified of the possibility as soon as such proposals are under consideration. Upon finalization of the budget, affected employees should be placed in other ACPS positions or allowed to "bump" other less senior employees through a support staff Reduction in Force process. EAA will be proposing a Support Staff Reduction in Force policy for your consideration.

For now, Ms. Ford and any other similarly affected employees should be placed in open positions. All employees deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Please don't send the message that employees are disposable. ACPS has a 5 year strategic plan that places emphasis on an exemplary staff as well as health and wellness. Without protection of employment, it seems neither of the focus areas can be fully met.

To quote the School Board Members' own words, "We LOVE our Staff at ACPS." I deeply respect your words because as we all know, LOVE is the key to everything and LOVE is gratitude. But gratitude is more than just saying, "Thank you." Gratitude is an ACTION word. We are in a situation where we can use the benefits of this gratitude, this ACTION. I along with EAA and the employees of ACPS need you to ACT when the proposed Support Staff Reduction in Force policy comes before the Board.

Thank you.