

Dear Dr. Thomas and Board Directors,

Please see the enclosed school “scorecard” that CSEA members will be using to trouble-shoot readiness in their buildings. We have asked that they strive for inclusiveness in this process and stay focused on achieving a safe, functional, and fair learning and working environment.

We know that changing over to a new anything requires added effort. Teachers know this. They want to be with their students, and they want above all else to do right by their students. It’s why they became and become teachers. They have accepted a lot of extra work, have done it, and continue to do it and accept more because they are dedicated professionals who expect to do their fair share in making D11 successful. They have flexed with numerous changes in direction. They are working harder and longer than they ever have. I watch my wife work 12 hours a day on the weekends to prepare for providing kids quality learning experiences.

Teachers, especially at the elementary, are at the breaking point. They are quitting and taking leaves. They wonder when the next change is coming. Numerous building reps are reaching out to me asking what CSEA is going to do, because their teachers are coming to them in tears daily.

Teachers are, then, caught between selfless dedication and overwork. Their feelings about being directed to do more things, though, are migrating to a feeling of there not being enough respect for the demands on them, on their time. It’s not unlike the old Dilbert cartoon in which he’s directed to build a time machine, but gets no direction on how to do it—just do it. Teachers solve things, yes, and it takes time and energy to do it. Elementaries need time, just like secondary, to prepare their schools for all full-time students. The idea of an asynchronous day sounds good, but then teachers got direction for that day: build lessons and put them in schoology to cover the day; still meet with students twice during the prep day; write parents a version of a letter passed from EDs to principals telling parents you’ll be doing the day asynchronously; work during what’s left of the day (5 hours?). This *adds work in order to do work* that other levels already have available. Work more to do the necessary work.

The student-numbers for on-line and in-person are being assembled as a first step in figuring out how to allocate teachers. Smart. That’s what we have to do. Some ideas about centers linking schools that cannot cover both options individually have been brought out by teachers and Dr. Thomas. That seems a sensible approach to investigate. More teachers, however, have simply been told they’ll be teaching both. Transferring this (=more) work onto teachers when planning and organization flounder is not only an inelegant solution, it is unacceptable. If providing a camera to track a teacher around a classroom satisfies “on-line” expectations, then OK. What teachers are indicating to me is that they’re going to be expected to plan, attend to, and grade both of these components—two completely different jobs, judging by their HR descriptions. It’s more work—another job—and as one administrator put it regarding “hybrid”:

“Many teachers will still end up with double the work when they start to realize how this really looks.”

Why elementary teachers have 5 days of instruction, when a planning day is recognized as valuable at middle and high, remains a question and continues to undermine morale. A clear explanation for why they receive less time to plan is definitely in order and would benefit the staff at that level.

We have worked with many teachers on leaves and accommodations arising from COVID challenges. This is different. Teachers are talking with financial advisors, looking at other viable jobs, and simply preparing to quit because they are feeling crushed by the workload. There is a very bitter irony in this: They have accepted—as noted above—the extra workload over and over again because of a personal and professional dedication to their students, so that now they are raw and weary. Yet what follows is the kind of sneering dismissiveness we hear back (under the name of Dr. Thomas, whom this does not at all sound like, but rather matches the tone of D11 counsel):

“...requiring teachers to work in the safety of empty school buildings and classrooms is the epitome of flexibility, adaptation and innovation with regard to keeping students and staff safe, while at the same time holding teachers accountable. Unlike administrators, who are expected to work without additional compensation as many hours as necessary to get their jobs done, teachers proposed and approved language in the Master Agreement prohibiting the District from requiring them to work more than a certain number of minutes per day without extra pay. **Just as teachers expect to receive extra pay for time worked in excess of their contracted minutes, the District expects teachers to perform work during those contracted minutes**, and is better able to monitor both the quality and quantity of the work performed by teachers while they are at school.” *(my emphasis)*

I’m not sure if this could have been more insulting, or have given less credit to teachers for all their hard work, but maybe it could. Is this, then, the suggested response to teachers’ crushing workload? If they get not even nominal credit for their extra efforts, but instead have it thrown in their faces, the clear implication is that they are doing more than their jobs.

Teachers want to teach their students. They work hard. They work extra. We are at the point that their well-being as individuals and as a workforce is in the balance, and that is a concern D11 needs to take seriously.

Joe

Joe Schott, Ph.D., President
Colorado Springs Education Association
(719) 471-1190



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