

Devalued and Overworked

How Worsening Working Conditions Have Affected My Students and Me

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In my three years as an elementary music teacher in Tacoma, I have been responsible for teaching and grading 66 different classrooms, worked with 44 different classroom teachers, and (with no common planning time) co-taught with six different music specialists - two of whom were not even certificated teachers, let alone having a music education degree. I also reported to 7 principals and assistant principals at 4 different schools - my home school of Fern Hill, plus a new second school every year (Lister, Arlington, and Larchmont).

For the 2020-21 school year, I am once again scheduled to be at a new second school (Franklin). If I had been at the same school full time, or even the same two schools, all three years, I would have only needed to get to know and learn the names of the students of about 4 new classrooms - the incoming kindergarteners - rather than the student names of 14 new classrooms every year. Being able to call a student by name is a crucial first step in beginning to develop trust and build a relationship; the difference between learning 100 names every fall and learning 350 names is huge!

Every year that I've been in Tacoma, the teaching load for my full-time position has increased: my first year in Tacoma, I taught 36 30-minute classes every week. My second year, I taught 38 30-minute classes every week and this past year, I taught 42 30-minute classes. This past year, I also had one day a week where I taught 9 classes and had to travel between schools! This leaves no time in my schedule to contribute to the climate and culture of my schools by interacting with students outside of the music room, having additional musical offerings such as a choir, or planning collaborative projects with the other specialists, interventionists, and/or classroom teachers.

My second year in Tacoma is a particularly clear example of how worsening working conditions have adversely affected TPS students. During the 2018-19 school year, I taught and graded 25 different classrooms: 14 at Fern Hill and 11 at Arlington, 6 of which were shared at each school. At Fern Hill, I had to write lesson plans every week for my co-teacher, especially for the first half of the year when my co-teacher was a long-term sub with no teaching certificate or music experience. At Arlington, the 1.0 Music position was split between three music specialists. However, one of those positions remained unfilled until December, meaning 5 of my shared classes only got music once a week for the entire first trimester.

I love teaching, and I love each and every one of my students whether I've known them for just one year or three, but I should not have to sacrifice my health for my job. **Because of the stress**

of my schedule and worry about being unable to give every student my best, I was frequently sick during the 18-19 school year and had to use every day of leave I had - personal and family leave in addition to sick leave. How can Tacoma say they support the Whole Educator when they deploy us in ways which affect our health, the quality of our instruction, and the equity of educational opportunities across the district? When so much of our job as elementary specialists is building trust and relationships from year to year with students and their families, how can Tacoma Public Schools say they are for Every Student, Every Day when we are moved every year, seemingly at random, and forced into schedules which leave us exhausted and burned out?