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2016 Huntsville High School graduate Drew Pendergrass was editor of the student newspaper Red and Blue. He will attend Harvard in the fall of 2016. - drewpendergrass.com I recently published this article AL.com on the high turnover rates among Huntsville teachers. The reaction has been incredible, with various news organizations looking at issues more deeply than ever before. However, this article was cut from my initial investigation by length. The original is printed here: Over the winter break, seven teachers at Huntsville High School resigned or retired, in the top nineteen who left over the summer. Since 2009, the number of teacher resignations in the Huntsville school system has increased by 225%, as suggested by a graph presented by Superintendent Dr. Casey Vardinsky in a presentation entitled Talent Management Update in August 2015. According to a report published by the Alabama School Connection, 20% of teachers at Huntsville City Schools have a year or less of experience, putting it in the top five worst districts in the state. Pat Miller, Huntsville City Chapter President of the Alabama Education Association, a professional organization that represents teachers, calls this increase unprecedented, drawing attention to the number of teachers leaving mid-year. I came to my 225% figure by counting pixels on yellow bars, and comparing values. I asked the Huntsville School to confirm this number, but they neither confirmed nor disproved this statistic. However, it reflects personnel records submitted by the Alabama Education Association. Huntsville City School Chief of Staff Johnny Giles said: 'The reasons for those quitting are very personal. In any case, the resignations of full-time teachers remain between one and four percent of the population per year in data available since 2009. Historical data on teacher resignations and retirements from Huntsville High School are not available, so it is impossible to say how unusual these latest figures are; however, students notice changes. Senior Edward Rosler said: It seems that more teachers are leaving despite recent churnings in the science department. Rosler's geology teacher, Scott Holcomb, left mid-year, citing the realization that teaching wasn't his passion, while AP physics teacher Atanasia Lianos and AP biology teacher Elizabeth Simmons retired midway through the year. When asked if teachers are leaving more often than when he was a freshman, Huntsville Senior Class President Ryan McGill said, yes, definitely especially teachers who have been here longer. Scott Sharp, a former head football and softball coach and AP Calculus teacher, resigned in June after eighteen years of training. Sharpe's resignation, in particular, led to criticism Policy. The long-standing rule of Huntsville City Schools allowed teachers' children to attend the school where they taught, regardless of the school for which the child was a zone. This has recently changed in an attempt to give all children of the school system equal access to the same schools throughout the district; as a result, teachers' children must now attend their regular neighbour's school. When asked why he left, Sharp cited this new rule; his kids zone for Buckhorn High School in the Madison County School System, about thirty minutes from Huntsville High. Sharp said: With my wife's health problems, I had the opportunity to teach where my children attend school and also to be closer to home. Pat Miller said of Sharpe: If we had the opportunity to leave a teacher of our caliber in the district, we would have to. I hope we haven't lost it because of politics. Miller criticized the district's rudeness in cases similar to Sharp, citing unreturned phone calls and emails; however, in this particular case it was not active. We understand that the district has to make the policy, and not all teacher requests can be granted, said Miller, later qualifying: If you can't work out a deal, at least make the teacher feel valued. Adam Keller, a former teacher at Grissom and Johnson High School who now works full-time for the AEA as director of Uniserv for District Two, where he represents Huntsville City Schools and Alabama's APM, said: For the district, teachers are just numbers on the spreadsheet. And frankly, so are the students. The AEA believes that Huntsville City Schools have become less transparent and accessible, more bureaucratic and authoritarian, the culmination of a system that is unwilling to meet teachers' requests. Miller and Keller also cited the case of an award-winning elementary school teacher who left the district for similar reasons as Sharp, but for privacy reasons did not disclose her name. Communication problems Another issue that has been cited by teachers is the feeling of negative school culture. Nicole Schwartz, a longtime newspaper sponsor who moved to Bob Jones High School at Madison City School before this year began, cited a very positive environment for students and teachers at Bob Jones as the reason for her move. It also led to lower stress levels; in Madison City, she teaches 85 children at a time, instead of 175, receives a higher salary, and no longer has to handle the increased workload at Huntsville City Schools (her class workload was increased to six a day from five). Many teachers also feel that they are not being listened to. A workplace review site Glassdoor.com where Huntsville City Schools has a dismal 2.1/5 rating, one teacher said: Administrators are out of touch and not supported. Communication is strong Teachers feel devalued and here are so passionate about their students. We try to defend what is best for them, but no one listens. By comparison, Newark City Schools and Chicago City Schools, both of which have come under fire recently, have 3.0/5 and 2.8/5 ratings respectively on Glassdoor. Adam Keller agrees that Huntsville City Schools has a cultural problem, calling climate since 2011 (when Vardinsky took office) authoritarian and unsupportive. Pat Miller added that teachers do not feel support or trust. Keller also said that teachers would not speak out against the alleged injustice because, in his words, teachers live in fear of retribution. When this article, originally written for the newspaper Huntsville High School, Red and Blue, came to print, was pulled out for fear of possible retribution against those associated with the publication of the newspaper. The concern first arose after several teachers at Huntsville High School's English Department corrected the article and expressed concern about its admission among administrators. Whether or not any action has been taken, these fears lead to the deletion of the article. It is important to note that this article was written independently and that any faculty of Huntsville High School are not responsible for its content. In an incident in April 2012, Pam Hill, then a teacher at Hampton Cove Elementary School, reached out to the board of directors in the civic section of the assembly about the

dramatic departure of her principal: In response, Dr Casey Wardynski said: Director McGhee was released for a variety of reasons, which is where supported in court. It was related to bad leadership, ethical issues. And so we're going to get these executives out, we're going to get these teachers out, and so I'm going to warn you when talking to employers to talk to them like your employers. The board is your employer. This was interpreted as a threat by some, including a local blogger and ardent opponent of the superintendent, Russell Wynne, who cited the incident as an example of intimidated teachers in silence. Dr. Vardinsky did not respond to requests for comment for this article. Several new district policies, like mandatory placement I can statements that phrase lesson goals like statements, starting with the words I can, and the focus wall where one wall of the classroom painted in a different color to draw the students' attention to the front of the class, have been met with responses from students and teachers ranging from warm to sneering. When asked about the focus of the wall, sophomore William Booth said: It doesn't really change the room that much to me, and he only looks at I can statements, the sentiment we found in most of the students that we surveyed. English teacher Julie Williams has supported I can statements, This can help the teacher more than help the children. Other teachers have complained about how they will be negatively assessed if their I can't post statements. Miller said: They try to make teacher evaluation as easy as checking off a box. Williams said of the wall focus: I'm sure there are some studies that suggest children will work better. When asked if she thought the district would have received less criticism if they had provided this study along with a new painting plan, Williams replied: I don't think they care about criticism, adding: I don't think they should justify why they draw. Keller criticized the approach and said, They should sell this policy to teachers. Huntsville Head of the AEA says the lack of communication between central office and teachers leads to a lack of understanding on both sides, whether it's on something as little as a focus wall or as big as wages. Aaron King, director of Huntsville High, said: Communication in any relationship, whether personal or in the school system, is the key to success. Disciplinary policy on April 21, 2015, Judge Madeleine Haikala issued a consent order in a long-running case on the desegregation of schools in Huntsville, outlining a series of steps the school system would have to take to achieve unitary status, a state that means the school system has removed segregation as much as possible and can therefore operate with less federal control. Title VII of the Consent Order, which deals with student discipline, led to changes to the Huntsville School Code of Conduct that created confusion and behavioral problems for teachers. The consent order requires that the district review grade two and three offenses and reclassify crimes as lower-level offenses where possible, and/or eliminate the use of out-of-school suspension for these crimes, and, by November 15 of each school year, report to the court the number and percentage of students receiving disciplinary referrals, disaggregated by race, school suspension, out-of-school suspension, expulsion, school referrals to law enforcement and law enforcement. However, some believe that Huntsville City schools were overly zealous in meeting this requirement, leading to chaos in classrooms. Between the 2014 to 2015 and 2015-16 academic year, there were major changes in the level of penalties for several common student offences. Being late used to be a first-class crime: Students must now report late to class in weekly incidents within two months of reporting to be in violation of the code, according to the Code of Conduct students found on the district's website. Similarly, classroom failures must now occur during the for two months to be a crime. Violations, deception, and brief fights have also been reduced to first-class crimes. AEA Head President Pat Miller also noted that non-tenured teachers will be hurt in their grades for writing students up; however, the district maintains that this is not the case. Gregory Hicks, director of behavioral education at Huntsville Schools, would not comment on the discipline policy, though at teacher meetings he said the policy was in the process of being in line with teachers who attended. The discipline of the consent order section was the result of differences in the punishment of students by race, which, according to the teachers interviewed, was a major issue. There really was a disparity in discipline for black students, said Keller of the AEA, and none of the teachers wanted to contribute to the school's prison pipeline. However, he doesn't think Huntsville City Schools adequately address the issue. The district, instead of really solving problems, simply accepted the most common offenses and made them unpunished. It led to chaos in the classrooms, Keller said. Aaron King took note of these concerns by inviting Hicks to speak to teachers at a teacher meeting at Huntsville High School. In any case, Miller said, the result of the new policy leads at best to teachers afraid to write and at worst to dangerous behavior in the classroom. No increase in years according to a report from the Alabama Education Union, since 2007, teachers at Huntsville city schools have not had cost-of-living adjustments. This, combined with increased employee insurance and pension contributions, means that teachers are getting less in real dollars today than they were a decade ago. Meanwhile, administrators received a 4.6% increase each year; this pay increase is a Huntsville City school policy, not a state one. HCS pays its teachers an initial salary at the state minimum: \$36,867 a year, less than Madison City or Madison County schools, despite a \$30 million district surplus and several six-figure administrative salaries. However, Adam Keller denies that stagnant wages are causing teachers to leave. According to Aaron King: No one goes to education for money. Keller said: The increase would be good, but it won't solve our moral issues. Pat Miller cited wages as a sign of lack of appreciation, and said: Pay shows that teachers are not a priority. Common Core, Testing, and District Walking Guide in 2002, no child left behind by the law was signed into law. It was the first attempt by the federal government to bring schools responsible for the quality of teaching, and began as a bipartisan to make our school system internationally competitive. Fast, the agreement fell apart; students were evaluated annually, annually, if the student corps does not show adequate annual progress, schools will face sanctions. By 2014, 100 percent of students had to master English Arts (ELA) and Mathematics, a goal that was seen as increasingly impossible as the year approached. Common Core was a response to what many on both sides of the aisle saw as a federal bust; if no child was left behind characterized by rigid love and strength, the Common Core was characterized by its perceived flexibility and voluntary nature. Unlike No Child Left Behind and its weak successor, the Every Student Succeeds Act (signed in December 2015), Common Core is voluntary and public; Alabama adopted the standards in 2010. Contrary to popular belief, Common Core does not establish any specific curriculum; Instead, it provides a series of criteria that each student should understand, and sought to replace the state-specific No Child Left Behind tests with national tests that measure critical thinking rather than mouth learning. This, combined with the relatively weak nature of every student succeeding law, was designed to ease the pressure no child was left behind and put education back in state control while maintaining high standards. However, the voluntary nature of the common core has been to some extent undermined by race to the top. The Obama administration's program gave states the ability to compete for \$4.35 billion in federal money earmarked for those who enacted national standards, with additional cash given to states that tracked student development from early education to high school graduation. The program, which began at the height of the Great Recession, has been criticized for forcing schools to adopt standards quickly in hopes of easing their cash-strapped budgets. As a result of the Obama administration's support, the influence of billionaire education activists like Bill and Melinda Gates and George Soros, and the rise in profit testing and education of companies like Pearson, Common Core has received a huge response from conservatives and liberals alike. Standards have made flaws in more stringent-measure areas, as critical thinking is clear, exposing the lack of elements in schools that passed in the era of No Child Left Behind (schools like Huntsville High School). Former Education Secretary Arne Duncan has outraged many with his comments that some of the pushback from Common Core comes from white suburban moms who realise their child isn't as brilliant as they thought they were, and their school isn't quite as good as they thought, and it's pretty scary. While common core and national standards for education are likely to remain a subject of discussion for years, its implementation is obvious: teachers now have much less flexibility in their classrooms. In addition to adopting the common core of the nucleus Under the state mandate, Huntsville City Schools has adopted the ACT's quality-core system. According to the ACT website, qualitycore is well aligned with Common Core standards, while providing a greater level of detail than ACT College and Career Readiness Standards for individual courses. However, because the qualitycor program is designed to comply with both ACT guidelines and national standards, this is a particularly rigorous program. The result of adopting qualityCore, in addition to an already difficult common core, is a rigorous walking guide to the area; teachers are given a number of days to achieve goals in different areas of content. This has prompted complaints from many teachers. Adam Keller of the AEA said that quarterly testing of district benchmarks, which measures the skill of the qualitycor and Common Core goals, which would have to be studied if the pace guidance had been followed, had led to a loss of control over the class: Licensed professionals lose their autonomy as a result of testing. Pat Miller added: Bottom line: Teachers have less control over their work today than ever before. With the rapid implementation of these high standards, our school system had to decide whether either more children would fail and repeat grades, or children would be shuffled without actually meeting the standards. Our system, like many across the country, seems to have chosen the latter. Although standards are higher than ever, so are high school graduation rates. Some of this increase in graduation rate came as a result of low teen pregnancies, as well as groups that identify and benefit failing or chronically absent students. However, critics argue that many students are still unprepared for many jobs that previously could have only come from a high school diploma such as manufacturing. In order to complete, students had to pass the Alabama High School Final Exam; however, since 2014, this is no longer required. As part of the consent order, Huntsville schools have introduced a new assessment policy across the county. Student grades are all weighted, like sixty percent of the tests, thirty percent of the quiz and in-class work, and ten percent of homework, regardless of course. In addition, students no longer receive zeros for work not given up - they get one. All students have the opportunity to compile unsuccessful tests for a class of up to seventy; Late work should be taken as well, with the point taken down every day work late. The policy has received criticism, especially from teachers requiring courses. After the student in her class Algebra II did not understand what it was Root, Krystle Johnson, a math teacher and basketball coach, said, I don't know how some of these kids did it for me. They miss something in high school. Johnson cited the ability of all students to retake failed for a class of up to seventy as a possible reason for an unsized advance on her math level. The teacher, who asked not to be named, added that teachers at Huntsville city schools are afraid to let the students down. A Huntsville City School teacher at an online workplace review site Glassdoor.com said the new district-wide profiling policy allows apathy and increases work for teachers, because teachers have to stay after school and sometimes write new issues to allow students to retake failed tests. Because there is so much material to cover, teachers feel that it is impossible to answer questions that students ask outside the classroom, although these questions are sometimes necessary to understand the present material. One teacher noted that they feel that they have to meet the benchmark, even if the children are behind. Classification policy was cited as a major problem; another teacher reviewer at Glassdoor noted that there was too much pressure on teachers to make student classes match what is expected by supervision, regardless of how students behave in the classroom, or how students are actually trained and performed in some classrooms. The controversial Alabama Legislature for the legislative session starting February 2, Senate Speaker Pro Tem Del Marsh has proposed his controversial RAISE Bill Act, which dramatically changes the system of ownership in Alabama. Under the original project, starting in 2017, new staff teachers would have two options: a disappointing tenured performance-based career track with higher wages but lower security; and the traditional way of owning, where teachers will be paid less. The bill also increases the length of time a teacher must work to get a term of office from three to five years; support staff were no longer eligible to remain in office, nor were teachers who had too low a score under the new teacher evaluation system proposed by the bill. An existing tenure can also be cancelled if the teacher mis appreciates the results. Cost-of-living adjustments for teachers in positions are limited to five per cent per year. For principals and assistant directors, the assessments are largely based on evidence of student performance growth; Starting in 2022, forty-five percent of their grades will be based on these student growth rates. It is reported that the new draft of this bill eliminates the term of tenure of teachers hired after 2017. Cliff Pate, an AP statistician in Huntsville High, criticized the practicality of the bill; he said: Whenever you associate pay for tests, you get people who teach a test that is always bad news when you want kids to learn from the love of learning. Pate believes that many teachers will take the performance track at first if there is a choice because it's been so long since we've had raises... they'll see that as their only one to make more money. However, he says the play won't last because, he says, the Teachers just want some level of respect. We don't want to be rich or famous or anything. In a letter published AL.com, a group of teachers also raised the issue that classes without testing, such as art and music, would be difficult to assess on the performance track proposed by Marsh. A representative of Marsh could not be reached for comment. The bill has not yet passed, but past education bills from Marsh, including the bill on charter schools, have been passed into law. The future of public education in Huntsville Teachers are worried about a future that has contributed to a low morale in systems across the country. New national reforms coupled with controversial pay and charter school measures, as well as a case currently before the Supreme Court over union fees, have put education in an uncertain place. Test results and increased accountability have also dramatically changed the tone of education across the country. Director Aaron King said: No child has been left behind, we have moved from a culture of trust to a culture of testing. This uncertainty and change of standards have disappointed AEA representative Adam Keller to the point where he said, Public education is under threat in this country. While this may be an exaggeration, there is certainly some truth to it: According to King: Education is in a state of revolution right now. However, prominent national issues do not hide the fact that Huntsville city schools are partially blamed for teachers in the district leaving. A sense of disrespect on the part of teachers leads to real moral problems, something noticed by students who see their teachers leave. King said: We have a shortage of teachers with five to ten years of experience and we need this group to be a successful school. huntsville city schools science pacing guide

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