

Guest Column/Wisconsin State Journal

"A Discipline Policy Causing Chaos"

by Mitch Henck

May 24, 2015

It finally happened...A career Madison teacher is quitting her eighth grade teaching job at Jefferson Middle School after this year. 50-year old math teacher Stephanie Bush says, "I don't feel safe and I don't think the kids are safe anymore," Bush told The Capital Times last week.

Bush says students are swearing at teachers and kicking trash cans. She says some students walk in and out of class and wander in the hallways. 5th Grade special Ed teacher Margaret Stumpf told The School Board, "We've been hit, spat on and had doors slammed on our fingers and toes."

The game has changed after The School Board changed The discipline code throughout the district. The Board was concerned that the previous code expelled a disproportionate number of students of color.

Under the new policy that began this school year, teachers are supposed to call for outside help when a student misbehaves. A support staffer is supposed to intervene and walk the student out of class and get a sense of what the problem is. But Bush says calls for help often go unanswered by an overwhelmed support staff. "We call and no one comes. Teachers have stopped calling."

School administrators say they want to hold more meetings to discuss the issue. "It's bad parenting 101," says Bush. In the meantime, Wisconsin Republicans want to expand the state's voucher program, including a controversial one for special needs students.

Lawmakers want to reform turning failing Milwaukee schools into charter or voucher schools and change the state's testing system. The voucher proposal would cap eligibility at 1 percent of a school district's enrollment. That angers more Conservative Republicans who want to see much wider eligibility. "Some of our leaders are content with the status quo. They don't want real reform", said one frustrated Republican Senate staffer.

Most Democrats think the voucher program is too big already. So what happened to Act 10? The law allows school boards to change work rules and discipline codes without union permission. So what good does that do if students are allowed to swear at teachers and wander in the halls during class?

It is clear that political correctness in Madison is more important than imposing discipline on unruly students. That drives career teachers like Stephanie Bush out of the profession and throws her fellow teachers under the bus. The teachers are on the front lines every day fighting to make a difference while The School Board and administrators impose a policy that causes chaos.

Thomas Jefferson said, " The only sure reliance for the preservation of democracy is the education of the whole mass of the people." If you care about public education in Wisconsin, it is time to pressure principals and school boards to take control of the schools or more parents will join voucher advocates in looking for a place to escape.