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Salt Lake City School District favors east side, says board member

February 28, 2013



SALT LAKE CITY — Is Salt Lake City's east side better than the west side? When it comes to elementary school teachers, one school board member thinks so.

Michael Clara filed a federal complaint accusing the Salt Lake City School District of not allocating enough resources to west side schools.

Clara said there are too many inexperienced and ineffective teachers at west side elementary schools, due to attrition. Why they're leaving, Clara said, is attributable to a number of factors — some of which were outlined in the complaint.

"In the Salt Lake City School District, the highest concentration of the least experienced teachers are employed in the schools with the highest number of students of color, which is on the city's westside," read Clara's complaint to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights.

In the complaint, Clara accused his colleagues on the council and the district of enabling an unfair system to perpetuate.

"Over the years, the superintendent and my predecessors have produced and sustained a caste system of public education that allocates educational opportunity based on wealth and privilege, rather than on student and community needs," the complaint read.

Clara said the district had been told of the west side exodus a year ago, and he was thwarted in his attempt to reintroduce the matter at the last board meeting as well as the next one.

"The idea was that I was supposed to sit at the table with six other board members and we make policy based on the interest of our children," Clara said. "And you can't do that right now under the current culture."

Salt Lake City School District Superintendent McKell Withers said he didn't know why Clara went outside the district and complained to the federal government.

Withers maintained the district was not avoiding Clara's concerns and the whole flap was more of an issue of procedure and a matter of more urgent talking points with the Utah Legislature in session.

"There was nothing to obstruct or nefarious to hide," he said. "How you recruit and retain and then support great

teachers is a pretty complex task."

Withers said the issue would come up at a later date.

Poor schools, because of their federal classification, have more teachers per student which naturally leads to greater turnover, Withers suggested.

He also said inexperienced does not always equal ineffective.

Though Clara said he pressed the issue because of feedback from parents in his district, not every west-sider shares the same criticism of the system.

"I can't find anything negative about this side compared to any other side," said Michael Elizares, whose granddaughter attends North Star Elementary.

Former teacher Heather Lyman said the blame for any lack of success in west side schools lies with parents.

"If there were more parents invested in their students' education, then the west side schools would have a better result," she said.

Clara said the Office for Civil Rights would review his complaint and determine whether to investigate further.

He said he was hopeful the district and the school board would at some point revisit the teacher migration issue.



MEDIA STATEMENT REGARDING MICHAEL CLARA'S OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLAINT

February 26, 2013

The Salt Lake City School District and the Board of Education have not been copied on Mr. Clara's complaint filed with the Office of Civil Rights.

Since becoming a board member, Mr. Clara has asked several questions and received numerous responses and large amounts of data on a great number of topics. We are disappointed that he feels the need to seek solutions by contacting federal officials in Denver instead of working collaboratively with the board of education and the district.

The process for setting board agendas is clearly defined in board policy. The priorities of the board are outlined in their Student Achievement Plan. We believe Mr. Clara's complaints can and should be addressed through established board protocol.

We are committed to advocating for all students. We will continue to provide information to Mr. Clara about the ever-growing statewide effort to create accurate and useful student and teacher evaluation systems and how to use that information to benefit all students and their families.

p 801.578.8599
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MEMO:
Information Relating to Teacher Recognition

March 1, 2013

To: Superintendent Withers
The Board of Education

From: Jo Ellen Shaeffer
Director Assessment and Evaluation Department
Salt Lake City School District

How do we measure an effective teacher? The state of Utah and Salt Lake District in particular has been wrestling with this very question for several years.

The picture is much more complicated than looking at 4 or 5 teachers at one school on the west side and comparing them to 4 or 5 on the east side in one subject area (Science) as Michael Clara recently pointed to. We believe that he is confusing inexperience with ineffectiveness. We have both new and experienced teachers all across this district serving students in positive ways. Altogether 80% of our teachers had effective or highly effective growth results for students last year in both language arts and math.

The state of Utah is currently in the process of implementing a new teacher evaluation system that includes student growth, stakeholder input and observational tools. This system will be in place in 2014-15. In Salt Lake, we used outcome data in three areas; Language Arts, Math and Science to model one out of those three components of teacher effectiveness for our own teacher recognition program that we began last year. We wanted teachers to begin to understand, and collaborate with each other around student growth models used to calculate growth.

With the understanding that the teacher is the most significant factor in affecting student achievement and the quality of schools, Salt Lake District began a program of teacher recognition that we believe was equitable, realistic and celebrated teachers across the district both collectively and for academic growth of students.

The student growth model compares individual gains to the average gain for similar students across the district and this information is reported to teachers for informational purposes only. It is meant to provide teachers quality feedback for reflection, goal setting and improvement.

Individual and teams of teachers from all sides of the district have received these awards for the past two years. We have been in partnership with the Grand America to reward these teachers with overnight stays, brunch, teacher teas, etc. In addition, individual teachers at each site can also earn certificates. Teachers and schools receive the following awards; School Academic Progress Awards, Individual Academic Achievement Awards, Academic Team Awards, Individual Reading Awards, Team Reading Awards and Exemplary Teacher awards. We are the only district in the state that is currently working to recognize teachers in this way. We only wish we could do more for great teachers. Forty-one percent of teachers receiving team awards had from 1-7 years of experience. The average years of experience of these winners is 12 years compared to 14 years of experience for the district as a whole. We will continue to work to recognize the good work that teachers across our district engage in every day.

JO ELLEN SHAEFFER Ed. D.
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Wednesday,
March 6
2013,
05:50 PM
MST

Angry Salt Lake Teachers Demand Apology From School Board Member

By Cristina Flores

(KUTV) Teacher Becky Bisegger spoke for dozens of teachers who showed up at the meeting of the Salt Lake City School Board Tuesday night.

"We are appalled at the suggestion that west side teachers are ineffective and too inexperienced," said Bisegger.

The "ineffective" remark was made by new school board member Michael Clara in recent comments to the Salt Lake Tribune.

Clara recently filed a complaint with the U.S. Office of Civil Rights, concerned that the high turnover rate of teachers in west side schools, left student at the hands of "ineffective" teachers.

The teachers vehemently disagreed, saying many west side school teachers have masters degrees and multiple endorsements, including ESL.

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Posting as Michael Cl  ra (Change)

Comment



Sheryl Hussein Ginsberg · Top Commenter · California State University, Northridge

Wow, Michael. You, an advocate for teachers and children getting attacked? Crazy. But I have to note that the School Board is mighty WHITE...do you think that affects some of the decisions being made? Your response was excellent, by the way.

Reply · 2 · Unlike · Follow Post · 21 hours ago



Jan Flapan · Works at Self Employed Fine Artist

What did he say?

Reply · Like · 21 hours ago



Elizabeth Spencer Richardson · Attendance and Records Secretary at Mountain View Elementary Salt Lake City Utah

No. The board being white doesn't have anything to do with it. As an employee of this district and specifically in a west side Title 1 school, I can tell you that teaching a class of 26, half of which barely speak English and some not at all is absolutely difficult. The new teachers get stuck in those jobs because the ones with seniority get to move to less difficult teaching jobs in schools on the east side when they want, leaving the west side jobs open. And I wouldn't call a new energetic teacher ready to make a difference "ineffectual". Those new teachers try really hard, but in a lower economical class of students with parents that can barely make ends meet, usually don't speak much to any English, no funds from the parent end of things, it's hard work and no freaking wonder the students don't do as well on the tests. That guy is.... Ugh.

Reply · Like · 19 hours ago



Gregoire Patches · Kinder Teacher at Schools Around The West

C'mon Elizabeth ... I've done it. I HAVE been successful I believe in settings just like what you describe. I've 17+ years of experience. I believe that there are other issues which impact student growth AND teacher effectiveness. I tried to address issues within a Title 1 school much like yours in the Salt Lake District. To retain high quality teachers WITH experience for these high impact settings. Instead I witnessed an exodus of teachers that by the district's own terms were highly effective who were beyond the probationary period. Beyond the 5 year period when many leave the profession. Why did they leave?

I agree with a lot of what you have to say, but I think it all comes down to perspective does it not? District

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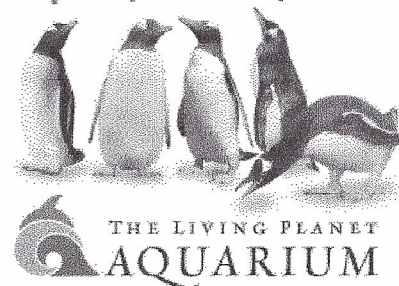
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3.1% Trefoils / Shortbreads
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terminology used to define teacher quali : saddens be that this arisen before) but if that's what their own data says then who is really at fault? this is just a diversionary tactic.

You know as well as I do since you work in a Title 1 setting that getting students to BELIEVE in their capabilities is 3/4 of the battle especially when adults are making excuses for you. You're poor... you don't speak English at home ... you might not have ever been in a building as large as your school. BUT, a balanced blend of 'new energetic' with experienced teachers and administrators as well as support staff is much better than what is currently in place in some settings wouldn't you agree?

Unfortunately I believe the Salt Lake School District is indeed at fault here. It is not just teachers but administrators that need to be held accountable. Are all the teachers in your building licensed? Is there as great of turnover in your school as Mr. Clara states occurs on the west side? How many probationary teachers are on staff (those who have a one-year contract for the first three years giving them little job security)? How many new support staff (less than three years, same as teacher probationary length)?

Just sayin'.

Reply · Like · 17 hours ago



Julie Alkire Olson · Evanston, Wyoming

Teachers sure take the rap for education when actually the blame is to fall in the hands of those who are responsible for curriculum and parent support. Educators are a support system in raising and teaching child and do not get the credit they deserve, they are not responsible for the lack of parenting and lack of up to date curriculum. This school board member was completely out of line and these teachers need an apology. How will they get the respect from the students when the school board finds them incompetent, has this school board member ever been in the classroom to make such an assumption?

Reply · 5 · Like · Follow Post · Wednesday at 5:59am



Gregoire Patches · Kinder Teacher at Schools Around The West

Mr. Clara was using district defined terms used within the data representation. Get angry with the District Office for utilizing those terms in the first place. I was a west side teacher. I am offended by how the district manipulated the Board Meeting. I tried to get my name on so that I could share some insight from my experiences in support of Mr. Clara. The superintendent himself denied me this opportunity. Why? There is a report by an outside consultant that addresses some of the issues at a particular school. This report I believe finds that teacher turnover at this school is due to one individual who is a bully. A bully that the district is aware of and allows to continue his actions. WOW.

Reply · 1 · Unlike · Follow Post · Wednesday at 9:58am



Lisa Vipperman · Sunset, Utah

Care to share the name of the school?

Reply · 1 · Like · Wednesday at 6:14pm



Gregoire Patches · Kinder Teacher at Schools Around The West

Shouldn't be too hard to find :) West side school with an inordinate number of teachers on probationary status.

Reply · Like · Thursday at 2:45pm



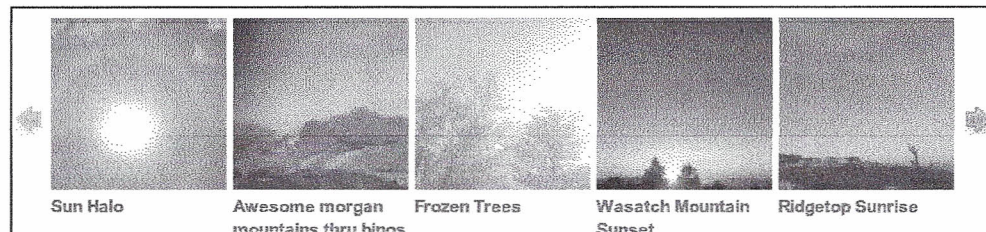
Dennis Owen · Top Commenter · Utah State University

I've got a very sneaky suspicion that this has more to do with race than anything else.

Reply · Like · Follow Post · Wednesday at 8:46am

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The Salt Lake Tribune

Salt Lake City board member blasted for calling teachers ineffective

Education • Response to Michael Clara's complaint has centered on its wording, rather than the district's data on west-side teachers.

BY RAY PARKER

THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

PUBLISHED: MARCH 14, 2013 08:47AM

UPDATED: MARCH 14, 2013 08:47AM

Salt Lake City School Board member Michael Clara's federal complaint about ineffective and inexperienced teachers in west-side schools has sparked outrage — not about the issues he raises, but about his word choice.

Teacher union officials and educators who packed the board's recent meeting demanded an apology, angered by Clara's use of "ineffective."

"I know we're effective teachers," said Becky Bissegger, a teacher at Meadowlark Elementary, on the west side of Salt Lake City, for 15 years. "A great portion [of teachers] have chosen to be in west-side schools, including me."

But the "ineffective" label — and the data cited by Clara in his complaint to the Office of Civil Rights — was created and is used by the Salt Lake City District in school improvement plans.

A report presented to the board in January 2012, before Clara was elected to represent the west side, noted students in schools in poorer neighborhoods "have a five times higher chance of being with a marginal or ineffective teacher."

The ratings are based on a student growth model, which gauges teachers from "highly effective" to "ineffective" based on student test scores. They are part of teacher and administrator evaluations required by SB64; districts must enact the teacher assessments by the 2014-15 school year.

Clara's complaint to the U.S. Department of Education noted that in science testing at Meadowlark Elementary, "as high as 67 percent of teachers... were classified as 'ineffective.'"

He said he used the word after reading it in Meadowlark's school improvement plan, available on the district website. "I did not make up this data," he said. The label is "not even my issue," he said. "My issue is the revolving door of teachers that are constantly cycled through [west-side] schools."

His complaint claims the board's refusal to discuss teacher distribution puts the district in violation of a section of the Civil Rights Act that prohibits discrimination in federally funded programs. The Office of Civil Rights is expected to reply in two to three weeks.

The subject has not been placed on upcoming board agendas. President Kristi Swett and Vice President Heather Bennett declined to discuss the board's response.

"Under normal circumstances, we would be happy to speak with members of the press about Salt Lake City School District's consistent, collaborative and ongoing efforts to improve teacher effectiveness," they said in an e-mail. "The way this issue has been framed, however, makes it impossible for either of us to comment."

Board member Rosemary Emery, who has taught math for 38 years, said she does not think the district deliberately puts particular teachers in west-side schools.

"I resent the words 'ineffective teacher' to describe the quality of work a teacher does solely based on test scores," Emery wrote in an e-mail.

But she added: "We do seem to have some west-side schools with more provisional teachers than the east-side schools."

Emery said she has tried, without success, to convince the board to discuss her related concerns. "My issue is the high schools where we have a 62 percent to 68 percent drop-out rate," Emery wrote. "With half of our Hispanic students dropping out of high school. I know the board is aware of this issue but [members] have not been willing to have the courageous conversations and really deal with this issue in depth."

Emery said she agrees the board needs to keep good teachers in high poverty schools, suggesting bonuses, changes to teacher contracts and a new definition of effectiveness.

After talking to more than 20 educators, Clara said he wants to discuss four solutions:

- Include the community and teachers in interviews with future principals, who have the biggest impact on staffing. This is done at some schools, but not consistently, Clara said.
- Extend the one-year provisional contracts for new teachers to three years, with a provision to dismiss after two years.
- Hire earlier in the spring, to be in sync rather than behind other districts.
- To help support teachers, provide low-income schools with additional counselors and family-involvement specialists.

"Those points are very valid," said Bissegger, a Salt Lake City Teachers Association board member, adding, "those are points that could have been made without saying there are ineffective teachers on the westside."



Leah Hogsten | The Salt Lake Tribune Michael Clara, (left) a Salt Lake City School Board member who filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education, asserting there are too many ineffective and inexperienced teachers in west-side schools was in the hot seat Tuesday, March 5, 2013, as members of the teacher's association addressed Clara at the Salt Lake City School District meeting.

Agenda

City Council/School Board Leadership Meeting

Friday, March 15, 2012

Salt Lake City School District Board Room

440 East 100 South

12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.

(lunch available)

-
- CDGB, grants, and other collaborative opportunities moving forward
 - *"A Capital City Education"* and common strategic priorities/partnerships for the city, school district, and higher education
 - School Board's response to recent news articles: Communicating accountability and effectiveness measures to the community and media
 - Future transit planning, partnerships, and collaborative decision making
 - Operational efficiencies through shared green space maintenance and snow removal
 - Salt Lake City Bike and Pedestrian Plan/Safe Routes to School
 - Sequestration and new laws impacting our schools and community
 - Scheduling athletic fields
 - Other

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