

From: mrinzeo@yahoo.com
To: [infocso](#)
Subject: Reflection on my time at DAPSS
Date: Friday, March 09, 2018 12:15:54 AM

Dear Sir or Madam:

My name is James Inzeo and I was a math teacher at the Delaware Academy for Public Safety and Security. I was hired after the start of the 2016-2107 academic year and I concluded my time at DAPSS at the conclusion of the semester. After twelve full years as an educator I have never failed to finish an academic year. Since I was a child, there was nothing I wanted more than to be a high school teacher. Today I work an office job, confident that I will not return to the classroom and that is in part due to my experience as a teacher at the Delaware Academy for Public Safety and Security. What I have written below is based on my recent reflection and a journal I kept during my time at DAPSS.

I was attracted to DAPSS because of its mission. As the brother of a police officer, I was interested in serving young men and women who were deserving a career in protecting others. As an experienced math teacher in Catholic schools, I was drawn to a school that a mission. As Catholic schools serve the Church, I prayed that what I could be doing at DAPSS could serve the public.

At the start, I was troubled by what I found at my new school. There were some elements with which I simply disagreed as a matter of philosophy and others that were simply morally questionable. I did not care for how the students were treated. I had never seen so much yelling. I had a classroom with more students than chairs. When I addressed the matter, a few students were given to a science teacher with no background teaching geometry. For her troubles she felt poorly used by her superiors and disrespected for her shortcomings in field that was not her own nor honored for the work she accomplished in the field that was. That teacher is no longer at DAPSS.

I thought the matter of giving pushups and jumping jacks to students to be problematic. Instead of inspiring discipline, it seemed to compromise order. If a student was strong, the physical demands were a joke. If the student was weak, then punishment was a corporal punishment. The first makes a mockery of discipline and the latter borders on the unethical if not unlawful. Since DAPSS staff members were not uniformly trained in the physical education, I believe we were generally unfit to carry out these sentences.

As a math teacher, I oversaw "Math Enrichment" courses, in which struggling students were to be self-directed in completing math problems on a computer. This was something of a farce as the students were keen on masking their visits to less academic sites while refusing to do work. Students who needed one on one assistance felt they were being shoved aside in a room for show. They rejected the activity because they felt it did not serve them. They were not wrong.

The military drill students performed during my time was overseen, once again, by teachers like myself who had no expertise in the matter and led by students who were more often than not uninterested. This desire to build discipline is laudable but when done in half measures I believe became part of the break down of structure. After all, if something we say is important turns out not to be so, how can be taken seriously when we present anything of

actual value? This position was held by a number of staff members, including at least one administrator.

When asked about whether the public safety program prepared them for career in this field as advertised, most students told me that it did "on paper." Others were less charitable.

My personal experience as a teacher looking for leadership under administration was the worst of my life. Within the second month of my time at DAPSS (10/20/2016), I was called out of my third period class specifically to see Dr. Erica Thomas. I went and found to my surprise that Head of School Herb Sheldon was also present. I was told that it was not clear that I was a good fit. I was told that I might be separated from my position. I was not certain what response Mr. Sheldon expected from me but I replied that I was not sure if DAPSS was a good fit for me either but was ready to do the work to find out because I felt that the students having a third math teacher in the course of the year would cause an even less stable situation for them. Dr. Thomas chimed in that she wouldn't mind letting go of more teachers, which I took as a transparent attempt to invoke my sense of fear. (This was a method several teachers described in their own experiences.) Dr. Thomas told me that I seemed to be against what the school stood for, citing my refusal to demand pushup from my student as her sole evidence and expressed resentment that I called these punishments "physical punishments." (Of course, a punishment which requires a physical act could not be reasonably described otherwise.) I asked how much time would I be given to right things before a decision would be made. I was refused information. In response, I informed Mr. Sheldon that I would do my best work but would give notice in the event I found other work, a response the Head of School seemed surprised to receive. (I believe he simply hoped that I would be cowed into some kind of submission.) Not believing my position was safe, I dropped out of the certification process which I would have spent numerous hours and thousands of dollars as it was no longer a safe investment. December 14, 2017, I was called into Mr. Sheldon's office. He asked me what courses would I be taking for my certification. I told him that I was not, which he said he knew, and I explained my reason. In view of our October meeting, it was not a safe investment. He seemed surprised as he believed that previous meeting went well. I explained to him that we likely saw that meeting differently. He said that he would have to let me go at the end of the semester and I accepted his decision. It was the happiest day for me at DAPSS.

In many ways, I suppose I quit and Mr. Sheldon only just found out but it was fair to say that was fired. Either way I was never so happy to leave a school. Never in my career had I encountered such a disorganized place, such inept leadership, or so many unhappy people. The students don't behave as if they are in a school that respects them. They behave as if they are trapped and I understand why they feel as such. I have never been lead by a head of school who was never a teacher and it showed in every instance. I had never experienced intimidation as means of bending employees to administrator's will. I have never seen an exodus of teachers from a school, whether they quit or were fired, in such a short order. Not one of the math teachers with whom I served is currently at DAPSS. Not even the fellow who replaced me in the second semester and for good reason.

I do not believe the children at DAPSS are bad. I don't not believe the teachers are bad, at least the one still there with whom I serve, or even that the administrators are wicked people. I need to believe that fundamentally they are all good people. The Director of Public Safety, David Wainwright, in particular is a fine man who should be made head of school. Herb Sheldon may have excellent business skills and a good heart but much is desired as a leader.

Dr. Erica Thomas, with the right guidance, will one day be a fine administrator. But everything that could have gone wrong is going wrong at DAPSS. All I ever wanted was to be a teacher, ever since I was a child. I still want that sometimes. But right now, my heart requires time to recover from my experience. I don't know if DAPSS should remain open. But I can say that it cannot remain as it has been. I say this as a father, a citizen, and as a former educator. DAPSS must change or end.

Respectfully,
JHI

