

March 4, 2015

My name is James Boutin and I teach at the Academy of Citizenship and Empowerment

Dr. Enfield, members of the board, thank you so much for the wonderful ceremony. As a teacher, it's incredibly nice to be recognized for your work.

Tonight, I asked for time to speak to the board because we recently learned at ACE that three AP classes will be included in our schedule next year.

Now, we've never had AP classes, but I welcome the opportunity to think of new, innovative, and engaging ways to challenge our students. And I appreciate that the district, too, thinks this is important.

I am concerned, however, that there was no discussion about how ACE, as a school, might best go about creating innovative and engaging ways to challenge our students.

It's not entirely clear to me that AP makes sense for our school. As a school devoted to the mission of social justice, AP poses many concerns – particularly around tracking. And despite what many people believe, AP or IB classes are not a requisite to be accepted to a four-year university. This was the misconception that a few of our freshmen had before we collectively called a few schools like Harvard and Stanford and spoke with admissions officers there who told us that students whose transcripts did not include AP or IB classes would in no way be at a disadvantage.

Now – I can't tell you that ACE, as a community, is in agreement when it comes to AP classes. Some like the idea. Others don't. But most of us are concerned that none of us were consulted on this matter by the district. Even those of us who like AP as an idea, are very concerned about the prospect of adding it the master schedule without preparation, like pre-AP courses. A similar misjudgment was made in Seattle schools a few years ago at Rainier Beach High School, and, in response to feeling unprepared for the exams, students staged a walkout.

Another reason we're deeply concerned about the introduction of AP at our school is that it is likely only to increase the amount of stress felt by teachers and students by having virtually everything we do be reduced to how we score on yet another test.

The district should understand on a very intimate level that school-based staff are far too often inhibited from being able to teach what we feel would be meaningful curriculum because of the demands that test after test after test.

Given the time and support, intelligent and passionate educators (that's the only kind of educator we have at ACE) are just as capable of developing college-ready courses as the College Board. But even better than the College Board, we're capable of adapting that curriculum to meet the needs and interests of our diverse student body.

I recognize that trusting school-based staff and the community requires tremendous courage for district-level officials. It requires the courage to occasionally disagree with OSPI or the Feds. It requires us to act with the understanding that tests and AP courses are not authentic measures of students' growth as human beings - and that it is the people who work closest with those students who are most able to make judgments about that real growth.

The test-driven education system that we allow in our district in many ways stops students from achieving their full potential as humans and learners. It tells them that the end goal of education is passing a test. In classrooms, teachers shouldn't be saying, "You need this for the test" which I hear ALL THE TIME, but instead "You'll need to know this to be able to vote," or "You'll need to know this to open a bank account," or "You'll need to know this to get along with someone who disagrees with you."

So I ask you to find the courage to trust for the professionals that you've hired, or at the very least, to find ways for the people who make these decisions (we honestly don't even know who they are because they don't come talk to us in person - they just relay their decisions through our administrators) to come meet us and discuss their thoughts with us. I've heard rumors that the district is developing a new advisory curriculum. But at ACE, we've spent hundreds of hours developing our own advisory curriculum, called Empowerment. It would be devastating for those of us who've spent so much time on it to just have it replaced by someone who doesn't know our students like we do.

Please, come talk to us. We have good ideas.

Lastly, please live-stream of school board meetings. This is a democracy, and we are an institution of public education. It's only right that the public have ease of access to what goes on in this space.

Thank you.