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James Berardi

SPJUSD Superintendent
Loyalton, CA

Dear Mr. Berardi & SPJUSD/SCOE Board:

Thank you for the opportunity to teach and learn at Downieville Schools for the past 3 years. Unfortunately, I cannot finish my year here at Downieville Jr./Sr. High as an educator. In my time here, I have done my best to set high standards for myself and the projects that I do. Since being hired in 2019, I have completed a National Geographic educators program; gotten my Masters in Education Leadership; taken AP certification courses through Camden College; and applied my action research toward building a college and career program at Downieville School that I am genuinely very proud to be a part of.

However, in this same time period, I have lost my tenure each year (moving between county and district positions to fill the needs in my school community), even though similar positions in Loyalton (TK for example) are not categorized as county—making me feel not valued as an employee as arbitrary budget solutions seem to take priority over the needs and work inside the schools. Additionally, I have been overwhelmed by the staff culture and climate on site—struggling to create consistent and rigorous education opportunities for our students K-12 across the site and even in my own classroom without passive or overt resistance from my colleagues.

For instance, I am often asked to resubmit and justify my classroom field trips (as one should to make sure that learning is the priority of the activity) while other staff members have little to no oversight or expectation for following our school's mission and vision or our professional standards outlined by the district. It's exhausting to have staff members convince students to not participate in educational opportunities (especially since we have such little

opportunity compared to larger districts with more funding and less restrictive locations)—or to have staff members take students from my core classes for field trips that have no education purposes (such as a recent field trip for high school students—where 9th and 10th graders missed their Geometry class) to just drive around Grass Valley and Nevada City “for fun.”

I became a teacher because I genuinely care about the quality of education our students receive in the United States and, more specifically, Sierra County. And today, after finding students in a locked weight room alone (with keys given them to them by the same staff member) for the 3rd time this year, that I know of, when that is a clear safety violation and was being used to circumvent the educational programming staff were offering that day—only to be called a “nark” by students, because apparently it’s okay for staff members to repeatedly make secret arrangements with students that go against both our safety and educational policies and this happens so often that students feel a “justified rage” when I intervene in these secret deals.

It’s the straw that broke the camel’s back for me. I operate with professional integrity and genuine care and concern for my students. I don’t want to be fighting my own teaching team to set unified expectations for how students behave and learn at school. I don’t want to keep spending countless hours helping my peers who say they need support in developing curriculum and submitting A-G courses only to have students tell me “they don’t do anything in those classes” as they elect to drop out of electives that actually require students to engage in curriculum. I don’t want to plan events and write grants only to have other teachers balk and complain and undermine the initiatives that Site Council, WASC, and PTO groups work on for an entire school year. After 3 years of this, I don’t have the stamina to keep going, as evidenced by my emotional response to today’s events.

I am tired. I hope the principal next year can do more with this site—there is a lot of potential here and I adore the students, parents, and community—but as an institute, it’s apparent that I am not a good fit culturally. These types of grievances affect me emotionally, personally, and professionally. I need to work somewhere where I am being encouraged to grow—with mentorship and goal setting; where staff are held accountable (myself included) and actually want to be public education teachers—not just make ends meet for a pay check in Sierra County. Our students deserve more and I came back to this county because I believed that I deserved more from my experience as an LHS graduate. I wanted to offer more services and increase the opportunity for students and it has been a constant battle.

Please consider me for other educational needs in the county and district—but I no longer want to work as a part of the Downieville School team as a teacher this year. Perhaps when systems have been ironed out and there is equity in

expectation and opportunity for Downieville School as well as the district, I will be a better fit.

My last day as the ELA teacher will be June 11, 2022. I don't believe I ever signed a contract for the year, so let me know what paperwork is needed. I will do my best to set my classes up for success for the next school year—I hope this transition has minimal impact on the students.

Sincerely,

Niecea Freeman