The True Story of Pascale Mauclair

written by newpolitics | March 1, 2012

Here is an extraordinary piece about Digger Murdoch's New York Post *harassing a teacher who was rated poorly on the city's bogus teacher evaluation. When the* Los Angeles Times *printed the same slanderous tripe a year ago, based on the same crap methodology, the Los Angeles United School District teacher involved committed suicide. It was a big story then. This one is no different, except that no one's taken their own life, yet. Wish I'd written it.*

The True Story of Pascale Mauclair

Leo Casey

Within hours of the publication of the Teacher Data Reports (TDRs) last Friday, the UFT began to hear stories of teachers and their families being hounded by news reporters from the *New York Post*.

On Friday evening, *New York Post* reporters appeared at the door of the father of Pascale Mauclair, a sixth grade teacher at P.S. 11, the Kathryn Phelan School, which is located in the Woodside section of Queens. They told Mauclair's father that his daughter was one of the worst teachers in New York City, based solely on the TDR reports, and that they were looking to interview her. They then made their way to Mauclair's home, where she told them that she did not want to comment on the matter. The *Post* reporters rang Mauclair's bell and knocked on her window all Saturday morning. She finally called the police, who told the reporters that since they were inside her private housing development, they were on private property and had to leave. The reporters rang the bell again, leading to a second visit from the police and a final warning to leave. Later, Mauclair's neighbors told her that that the *Post* reporters had been asking them questions about her.

Other reporters were outside P.S. 11, closed for the mid-winter break, looking for parents of students to interview.

On Saturday, the *New York Post* published an article with the headline "They're doing zero, zilch, zippo for students."[1] It singled out Mauclair by name, claiming that her TDR reports put her "at the bottom of the heap" of New York City public school teachers. The article revealed her annual salary and asserted that "DOE brass were confident she was ranked where she was supposed to be," although no officials were quoted—this was the *Post*'s inference, and nothing more.

On Sunday, the *Post* published another story, now proclaiming Mauclair to be the "city's worst teacher." Next to this description, it printed a photograph of her taken from a yearbook. The *Post* quoted a single parent to whom it had provided this description as saying that he wanted to have his child removed from her class. Another parent whose child was no longer in the school was quoted saying Mauclair should be fired and her salary given to the school.

And then there is the *true* story of Pascale Mauclair and her school.

By every conceivable measure, Mauclair's P.S. 11 is an excellent school. It is in strong demand in the community, and as a consequence, is overcrowded, well above 100% capacity. It has an experienced and accomplished staff, with a minimal turnover rate, and a strong educator and leader as its principal. The school has a strong culture of collaboration: staff and administration work together well, with a focus on the education of their students.

Last year, the school earned an ‘A’ on School Progress Report, placing it in the 94 percentile of all NYC public elementary schools.[2] Over the last three years, the school has earned consistently high grades of ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘A’ on the reports. P.S. 11’s last Quality Review has the school as “proficient,” and its last School Survey has school staff, parents and students all giving the school very high marks.

And in P.S. 11, Pascale Mauclair is known by her colleagues and her supervisors as an excellent teacher. Talk to the respected principal of P.S. 11, Anna Efkarpides, and she is completely unequivocal in her support for Mauclair, whom she sees as a very strong teacher. “I would put my own children in her class,” she says.

What the publication of the TDRs and what the *Post* have done to Mauclair is “absolutely unacceptable,” an emphatic Efkarpides told me. She has taken the full measure of her teacher’s work, from classroom observations to examinations of portfolios of student work, and the misrepresentation of her teaching performance found in the TDRs and the tabloids is “just not who she is.” “The truth is the truth,” Efkarpides insists.

When Mauclair returned to school this morning, her colleagues met her with a standing ovation.

As in many other cases, the story of Pascale Mauclair and P.S. 11 begins with a tale of the flawed methodology and invalid measurements of the Teacher Data Reports.

P.S. 11 is located at the epicenter of a number of different immigrant communities in northern Queens, and over a quarter of its students are English Language Learners. Mauclair is an ESL teacher, and over the last five years she has had small, self-contained classes of recently arrived immigrants who do not speak English. Her students arrive at different times of the school year, depending upon that date of their family’s migration; consequently, it is not unusual for her students to take the 6th grade exams when they have only been in her class for a matter of a few months. Two factors which produce particularly contorted TDR results—teaching the highest academic need students and having a small sample of students that take the standardized state exams—define her teaching situation.

If a journalist with integrity had examined the TDR data, a number of red flags which suggested something was seriously amiss with the scores for Mauclair and P.S. 11 would have presented themselves.

First, there was an extraordinary anomaly on the Teacher Data Reports (TDR) for P.S. 11. Of the seven 6th grade P.S. 11 teachers with TDR reports, three ended up with scores at the zero percentile. It is simply beyond all credulity that a school which is doing so well academically could have three of the poorest performing teachers in all of New York City’s 1400 schools teaching such a substantial portion of its graduating class.

P.S. 11 is one of a number of exceptional elementary schools with a 6th grade. The great preponderance of elementary schools conclude at grade 5, with students matriculating to a middle school for grade 6. In the elementary school configuration, a single classroom teacher teaches the core academic subjects, especially English Language Arts and Mathematics. In the middle school configuration, instruction is divided into subject classes, taught by specialists licensed to teach the different subjects. Most ELA and Math 6th grade teachers are thus responsible for only their subject, which they teach to five different classes each day. An elementary school teacher with a TDR report would max out with a sample of 32 students taking an exam, while a middle school teacher with a TDR report would max out with a sample of 160 students. A 6th grade teacher teaching in an elementary school setting would thus find themselves in a stilted comparison with 6th grade middle

school teachers that had a far larger sampling of students and were responsible for only one subject. This was the situation for the three 6th grade teachers from P.S. 11 who were placed at the zero percentile.

Second, there was the glaring anomaly that while Mauclair teaches both English Language Arts and Mathematics to her class, there is only one TDR—Math—for her last school year. The numbers of students from her class who took the ELA test were so few that they fell below the minimum number—20—the DoE has set for 6th grade ELA TDRs. A much smaller threshold for 6th grade Math—10 students—left her just above the DoE's cut-off point with 11 students, a very small sample which is easily distorted. Moreover, if you examine the total universe of students for Mauclair in Math over five years, it is 63—an average of 12 students a year.

In explaining its school progress reports, the NYC DoE says:

> *The minimum number of values used for all reported calculations at the school level is 15. Elements for which there are fewer than 15 valid observations at a school are not included because of confidentiality considerations and the unreliability of measurements based on small numbers.*

If the minimum number of values (in plain English, every value is a student score on a standardized exam) for an entire school is 15, how can one possibly justify a minimum number for a teacher at 10?

Who is responsible for this cruel damage done to the reputation of an excellent educator who has taken on the challenging work of teaching the highest need students?

Certainly, the *Post* gets its share of the blame. It engaged in the calculated effort to destroy the good name of a teacher whose sole crime was her vocation to make a difference in the lives of children. It set out to brutally strip her of her personal dignity, and paraded in public an egregiously false 'naked' portrait of her life's work.

But the *Post* and the rest of the New York newspaper corps which participated in this sordid episode of publishing the TDRs had willing partners in the highest offices of this city, and they need to be called out by name.

There is Joel Klein, who as Chancellor gave his personal word and the institutional word of the NYC DoE to Pascale Mauclair and every other NYC public school teacher that the TDRs would not be used for evaluative purposes and would not be published, but would only be available to their supervisors and themselves, as a tool to inform instruction. It was the same Chancellor Klein who, once he saw political advantage to be gained from publishing the TDRs, broke his word and actively solicited the news media to file FOIL requests. And he did so with the full knowledge of just how profoundly inaccurate and invalid the TDR data was, with average margins of error in the 35% range for Math and 53% range for ELA.

And there is Michael Bloomberg, who as Mayor betrayed the explicit pledge to NYC public school teachers that the NYC DoE and the City would oppose any FOIL request to obtain and publish the TDRs, but ordered DoE and City lawyers to not oppose the FOIL requests in court.

New York City public school teachers bear witness to what you have done to Pascale Mauclair and to us.

Notes

1. We will not link to the *Post* articles. If not self-evident, our reasons will become clearer in the remainder of this post.

2. According to the NYC DoE, ‘A’ grades begin at the 75th percentile, so an ‘A’ at the 94th percentile is a very high ‘A.’

First published on the Edwize blog.