

Superintendent Larry Nyland should allow Garfield High School to keep its teacher

Seattle Public Schools can well afford to keep one more teacher at Garfield High and save the school the midyear disruption.

By Liv Finne
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ON Oct. 17, nine weeks into the school year, Seattle School Superintendent Larry Nyland and district officials delivered a shock to families at six Seattle schools. Nyland told these schools they would each have to cut a teacher because their student-enrollment numbers were lower than allowed by the district's student-teacher formula. Parents were told they could raise \$92,000 in private funding to keep each teacher.

Some of the schools scrambled to comply. Parents at Gatewood Elementary raised \$60,000, and the school was allowed to keep its popular first-grade teacher. Stevens Elementary, Hazel Wolf K-8, B.F. Day Elementary, Denny International Middle School and Madison Middle School all lost a teacher. The only school that protested raising private money was Garfield High School, so it was allowed to keep its teacher only through the fall semester.

Garfield's troubles are not over. Nyland is now requiring Garfield to cut its teacher in January, halfway through the school year.

This is not a question of money. No teacher will be dismissed for lack of public money raised through taxes. Instead, district officials want to transfer teachers from one school to another so they can meet fixed student-teacher ratios.

The district does not have to be so bureaucratic and inflexible. Public money could be redirected to help out local schools. This 2014-2015 school year, to educate about 50,000 students, Seattle Public Schools is receiving



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new revenue, for a total budget of \$690 million, more than the district has ever received before. Total revenue the district receives from all sources is now about \$13,800 per student, the highest amount ever.

The central district office budget takes \$307 million of this, while neighborhood schools receive only \$383 million. The district employs more than 1,600 people in the central office. The district has recently added 153 more administrative staff members, enough to add a new full-time teacher in every Seattle school.

Garfield High enrolls 1,532 students, and its excellent academic program produces a high number of National Merit semifinalists, consistently ranking first or second among Puget Sound public high schools. Garfield also serves a large group of at-risk students, including 100 who are homeless. Garfield's ReadRight program provides intensive tutoring to the one-quarter of ninth-graders who arrive at Garfield reading at a fourth-grade level.

Yet, Garfield receives only \$5,950 per student from the district, the lowest amount of any high school in Seattle.

Garfield deserves better. The loss of a popular Garfield teacher midyear will directly impact 150 students and indirectly affect the entire school. These 150 students will have to be assigned to other classes, and for some seniors it may be harder to fulfill the credits they need to graduate. The Garfield teacher who is transferred may not be able to teach his or her subject at the new school.

Successful schools like Garfield work for years to attract and retain a teaching staff that supports the culture and program of the school. Cutting a teacher midyear will harm this culture, disrupt and waste the talent of Garfield's teachers and administrators, and hurt individual students.

Nyland and his administrators are not only siphoning money intended for school classrooms, but they are disrupting academic programs and directly hurting students. Public-school families in Seattle do not have school choice. Powerful bureaucracies, secure in their monopoly, have little incentive to deliver resources to the neighborhood schools.

Neighborhood schools should receive the share of public funding they need to provide children with the high-quality education they have been promised. Under the current system, parents, students, teachers and administrators at Garfield have no power over the money and can only beg for leniency from school officials enforcing soulless staffing ratios.