

1 **Declaration of Michael Alexander Caputo-Pearl**

2 I, Michael Alexander Caputo-Pearl, hereby declare:

3 1. I make this declaration based on my own personal knowledge and if called to
4 testify I could and would do so competently as follows:

5 2. I teach sixth grade world history, language arts, and reading at John Muir Middle
6 School in Los Angeles, where I have taught for four years. During each of my four years at John
7 Muir, I have taught two world history classes, two language arts classes, and one reading class.
8 Before teaching at John Muir, I taught third grade at Marian Anderson Elementary School in the
9 Compton Unified School District from 1990 through 1994. I am fully credentialed to teach in
10 California public schools, including having the CLAD teaching credential.

11 3. Although I teach two classes each of world history and language arts, I only have
12 one class set of 35 books for each subject. Because I only have 35 of each set of books for two
13 different classes of students, I cannot send books home with my students for homework. Without
14 textbooks for the students to use at home, I have to give students homework either from sheets I
15 would reproduce or by asking the students to copy material off the board. What I would have
16 preferred and what I think is reasonable is for the students to have a book in class and a book to
17 take home. It is important for students to have books to take home so they can review the
18 material we went over in class, so they can have a text for homework, and so they can read
19 ahead. I definitely had some students who would have read ahead and done little projects if they
20 had had books at home. In addition, it seems inconsistent to me that there's this whole focus all
21 over the State on getting kids to read, but my kids don't get books to take home for homework.
22 Having students read at home is particularly important in language arts, of course, but it's also
23 important in other subjects. I have had many students who have told me they wanted to read but
24 that they did not have books at home or that they had read all the books they had at home. Not
25 having textbooks at home for them to read thus affected their ability to do free reading, which a
26 lot of literature says helps the most developmentally. Not having their textbooks at home also
27 affected the depth that students could go into in their homework; if they had had textbooks at
28 home that they could refer back to, the students could have gotten more out of their homework

1 because I could have assigned them more detailed work to do at home. Finally, a big problem
2 with giving students photocopied sheets instead of books for homework is that it is difficult for
3 students to keep track of everything they're working on if they do not have a book as an anchor.
4 One piece of paper that a student puts away for homework is more likely to get lost than is a
5 whole book.

6 4. During the fall of 2000, a group of parents and I made a big deal of not having
7 enough books for the students. We complained to the administration and one of the assistant
8 principals guided us into the book room to show us that the school simply does not have enough
9 books for all the students. The tour of the book room demonstrated why my students don't have
10 books, but of course it didn't solve the problem.

11 5. I spent my own money buying a class set of some of the core literature books
12 (novels) I use for the reading class I teach and for the language arts classes. The book room did
13 have some core literature books, but they were pretty old and often there were not enough of the
14 books to make up a class set of the same book. So I purchased class sets of novels by Gary Soto,
15 including Off And Running, and a novel called The Shimmershine Queens. I felt that these
16 books were more appropriate and more interesting for my students, and it was important to me to
17 be able to assign all students in a class the same book to read at the same time. I was partially,
18 but not fully, reimbursed for the cost of these books through the English department.

19 6. When I first walked into my classroom four years ago at Muir, there were virtually
20 no books in the classroom library. The books the school did have for my classroom library were
21 30 to 40 years old, some of which I still use because they are so racist that they're good history
22 lessons for the kids in some way. During the four years that I've been teaching, I've built the
23 classroom library up to 300 to 400 books, and I've purchased at least 150 of those books myself.
24 The school has partially reimbursed me for those purchases through the Academic English
25 Mastery program, but I have not been fully reimbursed for the books.

26 7. Muir does not have enough desks and chairs for all the students in the school, so
27 every year I've been there there have been several classes across campus in which students have
28 to sit on small bookshelves, cabinets, and window sills for the entire school year because they do

1 not have desks and chairs. During my first year at Muir and the beginning part of my second
2 year, I didn't have enough chairs in my classes, so two students sat on low bookshelves for the
3 entire school year. Finally, during my second year at Muir, I was able to get more furniture for
4 my classes, so my students all now have regular seats to sit in. But I know other teachers this
5 year have not had enough furniture for their students, so these teachers have had to have students
6 sitting on bookshelves and other makeshift spaces. We teachers have been told that furniture
7 could only be bought out of a particular fund and that that fund doesn't have enough money for
8 the school to have enough furniture for all the students.

9 8. We have had ongoing construction at Muir for years. I have asked why the
10 construction cannot take place when the students are off campus during the summer or during
11 other vacations. From what I understand, the time lines for local bond BB and other construction
12 funds require that not everything be completed during the summer or other vacations. During the
13 2000-2001 school year that just ended, about 20 to 30 Muir teachers and their classes had to
14 move out of their classrooms and spend two weeks out of their classrooms while their rooms
15 were painted, even though we teachers had been pressing for a couple of years to have the
16 classroom painting happen during the summer, winter vacation, or spring vacation when students
17 are not on campus. My classes and I had to spend two weeks in the cafeteria in April while our
18 room was being painted. The cafeteria was pretty noisy because other classes were also in there
19 at the same time because their rooms also were being painted. It was difficult for my students to
20 make the transition to a new space for those weeks. In addition, we didn't have everything we
21 needed, like an overhead projector, in the cafeteria. And the noise from other classes trying to
22 learn in the same space at the same time was a serious problem for us.

23 9. I have had mice in my classroom. I've been lucky never to see an actual mouse,
24 but I have regularly seen mice droppings in one corner of the room during my four years at Muir.
25 The plant manager put down a mouse trap, and the droppings seemed to go away for a time, but
26 the droppings returned again later.

27 10. Many of the classrooms at Muir do not yet have air conditioning or have
28 chronically broken-down air conditioning. Thanks to local bond BB money, I had air

1 conditioning put into my classroom during the 1999-2000 school year. But for the first two years
2 I taught at Muir, before the air conditioning was installed in my classroom, the temperature was
3 pretty unbearable during September, May, and June. The teachers who still do not have air
4 conditioning in their classrooms or have broken-down air conditioners tell me that during the
5 months of September, May, and June it is very difficult for their students to concentrate and that
6 students fall asleep in their classes because the temperature is so warm.

7 11. During the 1997-1998 school year, which was my first year teaching at Muir, I did
8 a survey of teachers and at least one third of the teachers at the school said they had either leaks
9 in the ceiling where water was coming in during the rainy season or something hazardous in the
10 ceiling, like tiles falling off. I had a big leak in the corner of my ceiling where water and sand
11 would regularly come in and make a 12 foot diameter space of the classroom unusable. We put
12 buckets and newspaper down until finally the leak was fixed. We looked at the survey of
13 teachers in my union chapter and then we gave the survey to the principal and to the school
14 board. Most of the ceiling leaks ended up being fixed through local bond BB funds, but it took a
15 long time for the leaks to be repaired. There were teachers who had leaks for a full school year
16 before they were finally repaired.

17 12. We absolutely do not have enough bathrooms at Muir for all the students on the
18 campus. We have only three girls' bathrooms and three boys' bathrooms for about 2000
19 students, and on any given day one, two, or even all three of the bathrooms for boys and for girls
20 could be locked. The bathrooms are all supposed to be unlocked during passing periods,
21 nutrition, and lunchtime, but I've had students tell me that the bathrooms are locked during those
22 times, too. I don't have a key to the bathrooms, so when students tell me the bathrooms are
23 locked, all I can do is try to help the students find a custodian or the plant manager or an
24 administrator to let the students into the locked bathrooms. Even when students can get inside,
25 though, the bathrooms are dirty and rundown.

26 13. Approximately half the teachers at Muir do not yet have full teaching credentials,
27 and the large number of inexperienced teachers at Muir is a huge issue for the school. When I
28 first started teaching in Compton in 1990, I taught as part of the Teach For America program, and

1 I did not yet have my California teaching credential. I know, now that I have my teaching
2 credential, that the teaching credential makes a difference in terms of how prepared teachers are.
3 My credential classes were extremely helpful in imparting teaching methodology and in
4 identifying how to develop a curriculum. In addition, the credential classes taught me classroom
5 management skills, including cooperative learning concepts and ideas for how to set up learning
6 centers in a classroom. The CLAD coursework was helpful as well because it did a pretty good
7 job of breaking down why culturally sensitive and language sensitive programs are important. I
8 know from talking to other teachers that the CLAD credential is eye opening for many teachers,
9 and so I think it is important for the State of California to have the credential.

10 14. In addition to having a large number of inexperienced teachers, Muir has a large
11 number of day-to-day substitute teachers teaching classes and also a large number of teachers
12 using their conference periods to cover other teachers' classes because no substitute teacher came
13 to the school to fill these other teachers' classes for the day. This lack of consistency of teachers
14 is a problem for students at Muir. During my first two years at Muir, in the 1997-1998 and 1998-
15 1999 school years, I would have to spend an average of three days per week covering other
16 classes during my conference period. Using that many days to cover other classes makes the
17 whole idea of a preparation and conference period a joke. More recently, things have improved
18 some, and during the 2000-2001 school year I covered another class during my conference period
19 only about one time per week or even one time every two weeks. But even now that things have
20 improved enough so that I do not have to cover other teachers' classes as often during my
21 conference periods, it's still a problem that the school regularly cannot find a substitute teacher
22 when a teacher is absent. When a teacher is absent and no substitute comes to the school, the
23 school has to find any teacher to cover the absent teacher's class, and so the class doesn't
24 necessarily get a teacher who even teaches the same subject area. In fact, it doesn't seem like the
25 school makes an effort to find a teacher from the same subject area. I have covered classes from
26 any subject area, including special education, even though I am a world history, language arts,
27 and reading teacher.

28 15. Muir has extremely high teacher turnover. Each year I've been there for the past

1 four school years, anywhere from a fifth to a third of the teachers has left the school. Teacher
2 turnover that is that high negatively affects teaching and learning at the school. For example, the
3 team teacher who teaches math and science to the group of students to whom I teach world
4 history and language arts and reading has changed every year for the four years I've been at the
5 school, so the math/science team teacher and I have no chance to develop curriculum together on
6 a long-term basis. In addition, having so many new teachers who are not prepared and who have
7 not completed teacher credentialing classes ends up stretching veteran teachers' capacity while
8 the veteran teachers are helping the new teachers. The teachers I've talked to who have left Muir
9 tell me that the top reason they leave is the conditions under which we have to teach at the
10 school. The teachers don't tell me that if we were just paid, say, \$5000 more per year, then they
11 would be willing to put up with the conditions. So it's clear to me that even though more money
12 would help teachers a lot and would make it easier to keep teaching, what is more important in
13 terms of retaining teachers at schools is an effort to improve the teaching conditions at the
14 schools. I have seen the conditions at Muir drive good teachers away, and I know that we need to
15 improve the conditions here both for the kids themselves and for the teachers so the teachers can
16 help the kids.

17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28

I declare under penalty of perjury of the laws of the State of California and the United States that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed this 31st day of July, 2001 in Los Angeles, California.


Michael Alexander Caputo-Pearl