

All in a Day's Work: What's Standing in the Way of Teacher Effectiveness?

A Summary Report

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Prepared by
Dina Hasiotis
Director of Education Policy



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Introduction

In the spring of 2006, Common Good conducted a small-scale study of the ways in which law impacts the day-to-day practices of New York City public school teachers. The purpose was to document how bureaucracy and its by-products, such as rules and regulations, affect teachers and their work. Prior research shows that a typical City school must comply with 60 separate sources of laws and regulations, amounting to thousands of pages of rules and procedures.¹ Governments on all levels - federal, state and local - have contributed to this regulatory burden over the years by instituting reform policies designed to improve schools and ensure equity. Though well-intentioned, upon implementation these reforms often result in layers of rules and regulations that principals and teachers must work with (or around) when putting policies into practice. In addition, confronted with the daunting reality of having to comply with hundreds of pages of laws and regulations, teachers, principals, and administrators are often confused over what they are responsible for or allowed to do.²

In recent years, great strides have been made by the New York City Department of Education to de-regulate the City's public school system and provide greater autonomy and authority to school leaders. Efforts have included the creation of the Empowerment Zone schools and support for additional charter schools. While these initiatives are encouraging, as our study indicates, more changes are needed to reduce the adverse effects of bureaucracy on the City's public school teachers.

New York City is not an anomaly in this respect. Teachers across the country work every day in conditions shaped and controlled by a system they cannot control.³ Bureaucracy is rarely revered by teachers or the general public, yet there is little hard evidence elucidating the harm the "system" imposes on teaching, nor is there a clear-cut

¹ Common Good, *Over Ruled Schools*, 2004, <http://cgood.org/schools-newscommentary-inthenews-183.html>.

² Harris Interactive, *Evaluating Attitudes Toward the Threat of Legal Challenges in Public Schools*, March, 2004; Public Agenda, *Teaching Interrupted: Do Discipline Policies in Today's Public Schools Foster the Common Good?* May, 2004.

³ Ingersoll, R. *Who Controls Teachers' Work? Power and Accountability in America's Schools*. 2003. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Ingersoll, R. "Teachers' Decision-Making Power and School Conflict" *Sociology of Education*, Vol. 69, No.2. (Apr., 1996), pp. 159-176; Bryk, A. et. al. "High School Organization and Its Effects on Teachers and Students: An Interpretive Summary of the Research." 1990. In *Choice and Control in American Education*, Ed. W.H. Clune and J.F. Witte, vol1, pp 135-226. New York: Falmer Press.

solution to drive a reform agenda. It is important that those committed to improving public education understand how teachers and their *work* are affected by law, complicated regulations, and bureaucratic procedures.

This report describes a small step Common Good has taken to foster a better understanding of how school bureaucracy may be getting in the way of teachers doing their best for New York City public school students. We hope that increased awareness of the impact of law and bureaucracy on teacher effectiveness can help identify more substantial steps that Common Good and others can take to change these conditions.

Project Overview

Common Good identified a group of eight teachers - four veterans and four rookies- who were willing to keep detailed diary entries for two consecutive weeks (ten school days) on what life is like for them, on the front lines of policy implementation and school bureaucracy. More specifically, the teachers were asked to keep a log of and comment on how they spent their time at school and beyond (when working on teaching-related tasks) and when and where they encountered specific regulations, rules, and bureaucratic procedures. They also responded to a questionnaire and were asked to allow a Common Good staff member to observe their class. The teachers taught in different grade levels at different schools in three of the five City boroughs (Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens) and in six of the ten school regions (Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8). For the purposes of this report, each of the teachers' identities remains anonymous so that they or their schools do not face any particular scrutiny or retribution for participating in the study.

A review of the teachers' diary entries by Common Good identified five recurring problem spots that call into question how well the system is working on the ground. Overall, their entries told interesting stories of typical and extraordinary days filled with responsibilities, procedures with which to comply, challenges to overcome, and classes to teach. The excerpts from the diaries are presented in their original form with no changes to content or grammar made. Some teachers lamented one process more than another and each had distinctly different responsibilities and working conditions. Yet, for all the

existing differences between the eight teachers, the following issues surfaced consistently across their entries, which are neither surprising nor groundbreaking but still compelling and troublesome:

- *Student Discipline:* Teachers spent a significant amount of time attending to disruptive students. Current practices seem to be burdensome, ineffective or non-existent, and in need of improvement.
- *Assessments and Testing:* Due to the time of year that entries were completed, preparing, administering, and grading tests was a common occurrence for several teachers. The teachers described testing as necessary but that it took too much time away from instruction.
- *Mandated Teaching Procedures:* The teachers documented several required teaching procedures related to the classroom environment and curriculum. Some reported these as onerous and/or counter-productive to teaching and some questioned whether these were mainly a means to check up on teachers.
- *School Management:* Teachers recorded school-wide practices that call into question how effectively their schools are being managed, such as numerous classroom interruptions, changes in schedules, and absent or unresponsive administrators.
- *Paperwork:* Teachers completed all different kinds of paperwork throughout their days. Several characterized the paperwork as time-consuming and burdensome while others questioned its overall legitimacy.

This study is not representative of all teachers in New York City nor was it designed to prove or disprove the validity or effectiveness of a particular policy, regulation, or law. By sharing the experiences and opinions of several New York City teachers, our purpose is purely exploratory, meant only to stimulate discussion and encourage a constructive response to address these issues. Relying on anecdotal summaries, this report offers only a bite-size perspective on teaching in the City's schools and some of the problems teachers encounter that may be interfering with their effectiveness.

Project Findings

***Student Discipline:* Teachers spent a significant amount of time managing student discipline. Current practices seem to be burdensome, ineffective or non-existent, and in need of improvement.**

Each of the teachers made at least one reference to having to tend to a disruptive student, either in class or outside of class, handling discipline-related paperwork, or discussing the problem with a colleague. The teachers mentioned classes interrupted by disruptive behavior and time spent calling parents, filling out disciplinary forms, following up with administrators and aiding colleagues with disciplinary problems. For example, teachers wrote in their diaries:

➤ *Friday, 9:15 am*

The students went to their different centers while I taught guided reading. The female student I had had problems with earlier in the week got into a fight with a student in her group. When the fight escalated, I asked the student to go back to her homeroom. She refused, so I had to separate the two. Eventually, the student did go back to her homeroom to cool off, and I was able to begin teaching.

➤ *Wednesday, 12:55 pm*

Two students start arguing and one student holds up scissors, threatening to stab the other student; I intercept the scissors and instruct students to start getting to work.

➤ *Monday, 5:30 pm – 6:00 pm*

Called parents regarding student misbehavior.

➤ *Wednesday, 7:45 am – 7:47 am*

Read a copy of a referral from a teacher that reported a student had called her a “fat, ugly, a--” throughout her class period yesterday and had threatened to slash her tires.

These incidents did not occur every day for every teacher, but were mentioned enough by the teachers to warrant consideration.

The teachers’ entries also pointed out breakdowns in school discipline procedures, residing beyond the teachers’ classrooms. For example, below is an excerpt from an elementary teacher’s diary recounting an episode with one student:

➤ *Monday 9:15 am*

My student began breaking crayons in half and throwing them at the other children. I attempted to redirect many times. At this time I called down to the 'guidance suite' and guidance counselor asked that student come down to meet with her. Student refused. Eventually the counselor called back and said she was sending someone to pick him up. Upon hearing this the student left to go to her. 10 minutes later another guidance counselor showed up to pick him up. I advised her that he had gone down. I then moved my students into centers and began teaching guided reading.

10:00 am

At this time my homeroom students returned and I began the morning message. I did not have many students (5) because all of my fourth graders were in science class. I moved students to the rug and began reading a chapter of our chapter book read aloud. During this time the student who had been sent to guidance came back but was picked up soon after to be tested for the Wilson reading program for summer school. I continued to read and ask comprehension questions. 15 minutes later the student who had gone to the test returned. He had with him a plastic cup full of pretzels. Though I asked him to put them away he refused. He began smashing the pretzels on the table. I told him to quit and he refused. I then called the 'guidance suite' again and the AP[Assistant Principal] asked that the student be sent down. He then decided to throw the cup of pretzels across the room and began kicking the furniture. Eventually he made his way downstairs.

Several other examples reflect the similar problem:

➤ *Wednesday, 8:34 am*

[Student X], who was not even supposed to be in my room, yelled at me. I had to write it up, though I can't really do anything about her behavior. I've called her mother numerous times, and nothing ever changes. [Student X] seems to be a favorite of the AP, and the principal never does anything to punish her harassment of me.

➤ *Wednesday, 7:45 am – 7:55 am*

On my way up to the science lab, I noticed a letter from a teacher in my mail. The letter was addressed to one of the A.P.s, as well as one of the deans, and spoke of a confrontation that had occurred between two students in the teacher's classroom. The teacher had called security, who had then escorted the student to the dean's office. Somehow, the student had gotten away from the dean and ended up back at the teacher's classroom. He proceeded to punch the classroom door window, shattering it, and then cursed at the teacher.

During one classroom observation, a teacher had a disruptive student who was removed several times, only to return minutes later. The teacher spent her preparation period in the front office speaking with administrators about the problem and calling the student's

parents. At the end of the day the student was finally escorted off of campus by her mother. When asked what the school policy on discipline was she could not give a specific answer. She referenced having to document misbehavior on detailed “Anecdotal Forms”, which she, in turn, had amended because they are too lengthy and burdensome to complete during class when students act up. Another teacher wrote: “The lack of adequate discipline policies and procedures makes it difficult for me to teach my best.” And a third suggested: “Strengthening the Chancellor’s Code of Discipline would do wonders for the improvement of NYC schools.”

Assessments and Testing: Due to the time of year when entries were completed, preparing, administering, and grading tests was a common occurrence for several teachers. The teachers described testing as necessary yet taking too much time away from instruction.

When the teachers' kept their diaries, five of the eight were actively involved in testing their students on City or New York State assessments. The testing process seemed confusing in some schools and organized in others; burdensome on the teachers, especially for those in elementary grades who were responsible for bubbling in students' answers or grading; and time-consuming across the board. For example:

- *Monday, 9:15 am – 11:55 am*
Score NYSESLAT (New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test). Each test takes about 5 minutes to score if it's clear-cut. If we are in doubt about any of the students' answers, we pass the test to a colleague for a second opinion. It's hard to follow the rubrics and anchor (sample) papers sometimes. They can be contradictory, and stories often fall between 2 rubrics.
- *Tuesday, 1:45 pm – 2:25 pm*
I unexpectedly spent my entire prep time bubbling in answers for all fifteen of my students who took the NYSESLAT. I was informed of this responsibility right after the test.
- *Wednesday, 12:45*
Prep. Check mailbox. Note from testing coordinator asking me to give NYSESLAT make-up test tomorrow. Write note explaining I cannot, as I am Administering EPAL.
- *Wednesday, 2:10PM-2:20PM*
Returned completed tests for the day to Testing A.P. on first floor. She instructed me to set up another classroom with a complete set of equipment (10 groups/3 stations each) for make-up tests. I told her that was impossible. It takes me two days to set up a classroom with 10 groups of equipment. I told her it was doubly impossible since I was booked all day in the science lab tomorrow proctoring three sessions of testing.

These tedious activities and spontaneous changes and/or responsibilities did not seem beyond ordinary.

The amount of time spent and the instructional time lost was especially troublesome for the teachers. Some teachers were pulled from their regular teaching

assignments for up to five weeks, they related, as they administered and graded tests. And other entries indicated teachers had to weave assessments into their daily lesson plans because they needed more time to administer the tests than allotted for by the City or State. For example:

➤ *Monday, 2:50 pm*

I traveled back to my colleague's room to meet up with our after school tutoring group. During this time I E-CLASed my students until 3:37 ½. I spent most of the day administering E-CLAS 2 and DRA assessments. Very little time was spent teaching. I wish there was an out of classroom person available to assess my students so that I could teach.

➤ *Wednesday, 1:45 pm*

I maintained reading assessment folders for all my students. During the year, we are required to individually assess our students in reading five times. Each assessment takes 25-40 minutes per child to administer, and that time block does not even include all the time it takes to maintain the records for each of the five assessments. I feel as if I spend more time assessing than teaching.

➤ *Monday, 9:30 am*

Maintain ECLAS records: This is a comprehensive literacy assessment which is administered twice a year by classroom teachers. It is a worthwhile endeavor since it gives you an accurate and thorough picture of each student's level in phonemic awareness, sight words, decoding, reading, writing, spelling and vocabulary. However, each teacher is given only 1 day to accomplish this comprehensive assessment with the entire class, while a substitute covers their class. It is of course impossible to accomplish this in 1 day. It usually takes me the 1 day allotted to us PLUS an additional 2-3 weeks of prep time to just administer the assessments to each child in my class.

And even more frustrating for some of the teachers was spending time on assessments that do little to guide their instruction and take time away from other valuable exercises. As these teachers explained:

➤ *Friday, 10:00 am*

Administered E-pal 2 day 2 to my students. This literacy assessment is a practice for the ELA and is supposed to give teachers data on the students needs. Because many of my students are far below grade level this exercise is extremely frustrating and does not give me good data. I think that a differentiated assessment would be much more valuable.

➤ *Tuesday, 3:10 pm*

I asked the AP if I could still have a prep period to work on my after-school activity. The AP said he was not sure if this would be allowed, since we were grading state exams, but he said that he would ask the principal. I did not say anything to him, but, I was really annoyed with his response. I spent a lot of time creating a program for the top students in our school. This situation exemplifies what education in New York City has become - preparing for tests, testing, and grading tests. What has happened to teaching?

Mandated Teaching Procedures: The teachers documented several required teaching procedures related to their classroom environment and curriculum. Some reported these as onerous, a means only to check up on teachers, and/or counter-productive to teaching and learning.

Teachers reported that they are required to follow certain procedures in how they teach the curriculum and organize their classroom. The elementary and middle school teachers noted the mandated activities with the most frequency and responses to a given practice varied depending on the level of teaching experience. The veteran teachers lamented the loss of professional creativity and “teachable moments,” while younger teachers focused on the validity of certain practices. With regards to curriculum, the structured and scripted reading and writing programs for the elementary grades were a source of frustration and anxiety for some of the teachers, especially the veterans. For example:

- *Saturday, 7:30 am – 9:15 am*
Plan mini-lessons for reading and writing workshops. These mini-lessons must follow a very structured flow and form. Administrators expect all of our reading and writing workshops to adhere to an unvarying and strict script, and they give us a suggested vocabulary to use with the students. For example: “Writers, today and everyday, you should remember to revise your writing by adding personal comments about the facts.” Sometimes I feel like I’m a robot regurgitating the scripted dialogue that’s expected of us day in and day out.
- *Tuesday, 1:25 pm – 1:45 pm*
Review my lesson plans. The lesson format for a Reading and Writing Workshop must follow the “architecture of a mini-lesson.” The first ten or twenty minutes must follow the “connection, teaching point, active engagement, and link” structure. We then are required to lead an individual or group work period, followed by a “class share.” While this model may be a good one most of the time, it is stifling to have to follow it all the time.
- *Wednesday, 10:20 am*
Teach mini-lesson. Read aloud book by author we have selected. Student raises hand with question. Tell him to put hand down. Students not allowed to ask questions during mini-lesson. Feel guilty.

Teachers expressed fear of being caught out of sync with a lesson plan or not posting a specific “teaching point” on the board while working with students. As one teacher

wrote, “I am so tired of always having to be aware of ‘how things will look to someone coming in’ rather than being able to focus solely on student needs.”

For others, curriculum requirements were seemingly less stringent. An elementary teacher reported that she is required to have a “Read Aloud” and “Shared Reading” every day but that there are no required materials or scripts for those aspects of her lesson. She also implements the city-wide math curriculum yet “supplements/re-organizes the curriculum a lot to differentiate for [her] students.” One teacher feels free to make changes while others do not. How do those different realities impact their individual teaching styles and effectiveness? Are there real consequences for not following a script? Do less experienced teachers buck the rules more often than not? Which type of teacher has more success with their students?

The teachers’ entries also noted time spent on arranging their rooms to comply with particular requirements. Typical city-wide classroom environment mandates include: bulletin boards being covered, displaying student work that has been labeled with the teaching standard, rubric, task, and authentic comments. Teachers recorded having to post “teaching points” next to every item of the daily agenda. Some found this repetitive (it is already written in their lesson plans) and unhelpful to students since the language used is very technical. Another classroom requirement for some was to maintain detailed conference notes on each child’s progress in a binder that, according to one teacher, should be “kept in a conspicuous spot for ‘visitors’ who enter our room to review them.” The teachers claimed these types of requirements were purely instituted for management purposes and often cause them to shift their focus from teaching to compliance.

Requirements on student seating and desk arrangements were particularly problematic for new teachers. After being observed, one explained: “At the beginning of the year, I had tables seating groups of five to six. This was very challenging for me, with respect to behavior management, so I moved the tables apart so that only two to three students were at a table. However, I was told by my math coach that this was not allowed.” Another teacher reported having a year-long debate with her principal who insisted that she seat her children in groups, threatening her job if she did not comply. She refused and faced constant “harassment,” even though she felt her students were

more focused and better behaved when not seated in groups. A third teacher noted that his principal has chosen not to enforce the seating policy and allows teachers to “arrange the classroom furniture according to the needs of our students.”

School Management: Teachers recorded school-wide practices that call into question how effectively schools are being managed, such as numerous classroom interruptions, changes in schedules, and absent or unresponsive administrators.

Each of the teachers' diary entries included instances of interrupted instruction time, planning time consumed with unexpected work or responsibilities, and run-ins with administrators that seemed counter-productive to effective teaching and school management. These issues are categorized under "School Management" because they originate outside the classroom and are beyond the teachers' control. While some of the teachers expressed exasperation toward their administration, others understood that administrators face uniquely different challenges than teachers – but they still wished more thought was given to how their administrators' actions impacted their teaching.

Classroom interruptions of all kinds were the biggest source of frustration and time wasted in this category, according to the teachers. Types of interruptions recorded or observed include: knocks on the door from administrators, service providers, students, or parents; phone calls from the front office regarding student attendance, paperwork, school activities, or discipline; PA announcements throughout the day; discipline problems; and changes in scheduling. For example:

- *Wednesday, 10:35 am*
I begin leading into the lesson and explain several examples to my students only to be interrupted by a phone call. I answer it, and it's the school secretary asking me for a copy of the program from my sister's graduation, for which I missed a day of school last week.
- *Thursday, 8:38-9:45 am*
Proctored a class taking the New York State Intermediate-Level Science Test; 2 PA announcements interrupted the test.
- *Tuesday, 9:10 pm*
During writing workshop we were interrupted by a call from the office informing me that a parent had brought an ice-cream cake to celebrate a student's birthday. I had to quickly serve cake and punch to 25 students. Parent was not allowed up to room to assist– school policy.
- *Tuesday, 2:40 pm*
During my lesson, a student knocked on the door to deliver a ticket to Six Flags that my student had earned for completing a certain amount of reading.

The teacher relating this last anecdote later reported having to fill out a form verifying that the ticket was delivered. During one Common Good classroom observation session, a teacher was interrupted sixteen times throughout the day.⁴ At one point, the teacher received a call from the front office instructing her to immediately turn in her students' reading books. She had to stop giving one-on-one E-PAL assessments and interrupt her co-teacher's lesson so that students could gather their books and turn them in. Her planned lesson did not resume for another 25 minutes, by which time the day was almost over. She was not surprised by this type of request or interruption. Another teacher who was observed was pulled out of the beginning of her second period class to speak with a parent who unexpectedly arrived and wanted to discuss her child's behavior problems. This teacher was outside the classroom for 14 minutes while an instructional aide observed the students.

In addition to specific classroom interruptions, teachers also seemed affected in different ways by how and what types of decisions were made by their administrators. Unpredictable schedule changes were problematic for some. One teacher reported that "my school does not have a consistent schedule, which makes it difficult to plan, and also does not provide much stability for my students. The schedule changes every morning, so I'm never totally sure how to plan my day until about 30 minutes before the day begins." Others documented similar issues:

➤ *Tuesday, 1:45 pm – 2:25 pm*

I unexpectedly spent my entire prep time bubbling in answers for all fifteen of my students who took the NYSESLAT. I was informed of this responsibility right after the test. [cited earlier in the assessment section as well]

➤ *Friday, 12:12 pm-1:38 pm*

Proctored New York State Intermediate-Level Science Performance Test, regular time class. I found out from the teacher assisting with proctoring that the science teachers had not yet been informed that they would be grading the NYS Intermediate-Level Science Written and Performance Tests beginning on Monday 5/15 in lieu of teaching their classes. (I had been informed on Wed. 5/10 that this was to occur and I thought that the administration would type a memo to all science teachers involved).

⁴ Interruptions are classified as any event originating inside or outside the classroom that caused the teacher to stop teaching or distracted students. Typical comments and strategies to keep students on task and not disruptive were not counted as an interruption.

Others related time spent waiting for or trying to get administrators to make decisions they needed answers to:

➤ *Wednesday, 7:45 am – 7:55 am*

I asked if the principal was in today. She was not, which meant she had been out of the building for two consecutive full days. I was not going to be able to find out if she had funding for the science research program before the Boston trip, and the program was supposed to begin in less than a week.

➤ *Wednesday, 10:05 am-10:20 am*

I waited to speak with the A.P about a student who was removed from class.

A third teacher explained an experience she had had the previous year: “At the end of last year I wanted to set up summer tutoring for my lowest kids. My principal wouldn’t allow me to speak with her before the summer began. So, though she did give me permission to do the tutoring, I had to begin mid-summer because she wouldn’t speak with me until the first day of summer school.”

Paperwork: Teachers completed all different kinds of paperwork throughout their days. Several characterized the paperwork as time-consuming and burdensome while others questioned its overall legitimacy.

The teachers' entries supported a commonly heard complaint that too much of City teachers' time and energy is spent on paperwork. Teachers documented time spent handling paperwork or forms for testing, specific curriculum programs, grading, special education, and general school administration. As one teacher wrote, "It seems like we're always playing catch-up with paperwork and multiple forms of record-keeping." The teachers tended to classify paperwork into two categories: paperwork that, while burdensome, is necessary and paperwork that seems meaningless and does little to improve the quality of their teaching.

Obligatory paperwork appeared in all the teachers' entries. Grading papers, recording homework and classroom grades, keeping track of student progress, copying worksheets, documenting discipline, preparing promotional information, managing attendance forms, etc. were the typical tasks described. The time required to complete the work was frustrating for teachers. One new teacher estimated that she spends roughly two hours a day on this type of work. Grading periods and the end of the year seemed to be the busiest times for teachers, as one entry documented:

➤ *Tuesday, 4:30 pm – 6:30 pm*

I start completing articulation cards for each student. These cards take about 20-25 minutes each to complete, and I have 25 students. I could never complete them all during my prep time at school. It's a very time-consuming and involved process.

And while the entries reflected an understanding by teachers that some paperwork is just part of their job, they also relayed a sense of wonderment about why some paperwork could not be completed by others. Some questioned why they were responsible for completing cumulative files (standard personal and past performance student information). For example:

➤ *Monday, 12:00 pm-2:20 pm*

I traveled to my room to work on cumulative folders. I realized I did not have an ATS list for attendance. I traveled downstairs and had the attendance officer print out a report. I traveled upstairs. I spent the next 2 hours checking to Cums. to

make sure that they had all necessary documents...I feel like this is very tedious work that might be better handled by a school aid/secretary. Though it may be important, I do not think that filling out and organizing cum. cards is necessarily a great way for classroom teachers to spend their time

Special education paperwork was also noted in this category. Two of the teachers in the study were special education inclusion teachers and commented on how too much of their time is spent navigating and complying with special education requirements, especially in the absence of a full-time special education administrator in their schools.

More troubling to the teachers was the energy and resources required to complete apparently unhelpful and unnecessary paperwork. Here are some examples:

➤ *Thursday, 7:10 am – 7:30 am*

File writing in folders. Realize that [I] have no recent entries of mandated conference notes in required ESL binder. It comes down to priorities. Do I spend my limited time with needy students instructing them, or writing down observations in a book I frankly do not find useful?

➤ *Tuesday, 8:00 am – 8:57 am*

I went to the custodian's office on the first floor to get a form to fill out to ensure that the school would be open at 6:00 am on Thursday. I fill this triplicate form out every year. I have no idea where the copies go. I think the custodian just keeps it on file, so I don't know why I can't just ask him to make sure the building is open or just write him a short note.

➤ *Wednesday Evening*

I went out to dinner with some colleagues in between school and the student's performance. Not only did I have to time in and out, but I had to fill out a time sheet that reiterated what the time card already stated. So much is redundant and done "just in case." There constantly seems to be a foundation of mistrust within the school and the system. So frustrating....

Conclusion

Although this report recounts the experiences of only a few teachers in a system of thousands, it is not unrealistic to assume that other teachers have had comparable experiences. In isolation, each incident described by the teachers may seem harmless to some; yet, when combined, the cumulative burden of these moments creates substantial roadblocks to the daily work of teachers and schools. And, as products of a seemingly intractable bureaucracy, teachers often lack the time and the authority to break down these hurdles.

Common Good is committed to addressing the issues and questions raised by the teachers' diary entries. The experiences described in this report leave much to be understood. For example, which laws and regulations produce the most paperwork for classroom teachers? What bureaucratic demands lead to chronic interruptions, unexpected changes, and mismanagement? Have some rules and policies been misinterpreted or misrepresented? And to what extent have laws and regulations, or the misperception of laws and regulations, shaped the school environment and teacher practice? We hope to work with others devoted to improving the City's schools to better understand the causes and effects of the incidents described by the teachers so that positive changes can be made. Such work is essential in order to ensure that teachers can focus on teaching and that compliance does not trump sound decision-making in our public schools.

For general email inquiries, email hq@cgood.org.

New York Office
477 Madison Avenue, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10022
(212) 681-8199
(212) 681-8221 (fax)

Washington Office
1730 Rhode Island Avenue, NW, Suite 308
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 293-7450
(202) 293-7451 (fax)