

**Dear Mr. Bickford, Mrs. Sharrow, and Ms. Reed:** We wanted to write a letter to you to culminate our involvement on the committee for reconsideration of instructional material for the 7th grade Language Arts *Personal Narrative* assignment. We are in full agreement with the contents of the letter the committee wrote. We do want to take the opportunity to put in writing additional thoughts. While we realize these thoughts are more than what is necessary for the report, we wanted everyone to know our personal views sides on this issue.

First of all, we both thoroughly enjoyed participating in the committee's work. The issue was clearly described. Thank you to Mr. Bickford for the supporting materials regarding the parent complaint and all relevant school district policies, and thank you Mrs. Sharrow for the exhaustive set of supporting materials that you provided. It included all pieces of introductory, ancillary materials and the rubric for the assignment. It made the work of the committee go smoothly to have all of the materials in hand for review. The initial discussion gave us insight into the assignment and why each of the materials are used. In both of our meetings each of the seventh grade Language Arts teachers were very forthcoming in the value of the assignment, the value of guiding students to write a personal narrative based on their own experiences. We were so glad to hear all of the factors.

We both tried to put ourselves in the shoes of a parent who might object to the assignment based on the age and circumstances of the student, but also who might object in particular to the sheet of questions from Philip Lopate. We came to understand very well how this type of preliminary activity would greatly help to get students engaged and able to see things in their own experiences that would be good material for their personal narrative, to think beyond what might otherwise just seem hum-drum. We saw that Lopate is both an expert on writing, specifically the "show not tell" angle that the teachers are trying to illustrate, but also an educator himself, at college level now but the project director for a decade of the *Teachers & Writers Collaborative*, in New York public schools (elementary and middle school).

Each of us has a student with special needs and also student(s) that excel. We fully embrace the school's efforts to make an assignment accessible to all, but bring out the best in students at all levels. We both see how this assignment in particular could bring out a struggling student to make them feel much more prepared to do their best work on the narrative. And for advanced students, it brings the assignment to a new level. Each of us is highly engaged in our local schools because we want to give back, we want to help make improvements for all students and support our community. We want to raise the bar and make our schools and students successful.

We were pleased to be involved in the process, learned more than we expected, and came away with a new and deeper appreciation of the culture at IHGMS and the teachers in particular. How lucky we are that Mrs. Sharrow has continuously worked in her teaching career to hone her craft, to bring in ideas and materials from very reputable sources, and make an otherwise ordinary assignment extraordinary. We were very glad to hear feedback from both teachers as to how excited the students were to work on this assignment, the excitement that they wanted to begin their writing before the entire lesson was given, that it made them proud of their writing, that they wrote much more than they expected they could do. This assignment, given in the way it is, with the supporting materials, is a home run. We didn't want the work of the committee to end with just the report of findings as to whether the policy was adhered to and the materials appropriate. We think the materials are wonderful. We think the teaching and the teacher are wonderful and together they raise the bar for all students, but they also give the students the tools they need to be successful in this assignment. We want you all to know that we came away from the work of the committee with a very high regard for the teaching of Mrs. Sharrow and think it reflects so positively on IHGMS. She has taken the time to pursue the very best teaching methods and has crafted a wonderful assignment in the *Personal Narrative*.

very best ... dana & Danielle