Honors LA 10

November 20, 2013 **An Ingraham Story: Part II**

**Directions**: Read the following article carefully, marking it up as you go (underline or highlight important parts, and jot down reactions or questions in the margins as they occur to you). Then, in a journal entry, give thorough and thoughtful responses to each of the questions at the end of the article.

**Firing of Ingraham’s Martin Floe does not add up**

Monday, May 16, 2011*by:***David Horsey**

Martin Floe appears to be the latest victim of the bureaucratic machinations that have driven the central administration of the Seattle Public Schools for far too many years. Fortunately, he is not without defenders and may not go down without a fight.

Floe is the principal at Ingraham High School, a place that is dear to my heart. My father was one of the school’s founding teachers back in 1959. In Ingraham’s journalism class, I discovered my future career and met the girl who would become my wife. My picture hangs in the Ingraham Hall of Fame, alongside the picture of my classmate, Congressman Jay Inslee.

For the first decade-and-a-half of its history, Ingraham was ranked among Seattle’s finest high schools. Then came a long period of decline as the school became a dumping ground for students with nowhere else to go. Ingraham lost its once strong connection to the community.

Happily, in more recent years, Ingraham has been on the rise. A key part of the renewal has been the placement of an International Baccalaureate program at the school that has attracted top students. Another key ingredient has been the work of a good principal, Martin Floe.

But, last week, Floe was fired by interim school superintendent Susan Enfield.The ostensible reason is that test scores have dipped at Ingraham. Parents and faculty do not believe that is the whole story. Neither do I.

Given that school bureaucrats are under a cloud of scandal that cost the most recent superintendent her job and exposed some of the cronyism and incompetence that infest the administrative offices of the Seattle Public Schools, one would think they would be a bit more cautious. But, instead, they have gone after Martin Floe without following an open process or standard procedures, thus enraging parents and faculty and possibly exposing the district to legal liability.

Before asking a few questions that have not been answered by administrators, I’ll first state my bias.

I think the national obsession with testing is undermining American education. Instead of pushing the nation’s young citizens to greater achievement, it is making their education narrow, mechanistic and dull. “Teaching to the test” is turning teachers into drill sergeants who have been stripped of the ability to be creative and adapt their methods to the realities in their classrooms. Students have been turned into numbers, rather than individuals with distinct learning styles, home situations and life aspirations. Arts and humanities programs outside the narrow catechism of the three R’s have been severely restricted or eliminated altogether.

For this, I blame politicians who have imposed numbers-driven mandates on the nation’s schools, as if, by fiat from Washington, D.C., or the state capitals, they can command learning to happen. I also blame the education bureaucracies that, emboldened with ever-mutating theories and infused with petty politics, place additional roadblocks between teachers and students.

Is any of this reflected in what is happening at Ingraham?

Yes, test scores have slumped over the last couple of years, making Ingraham the second-lowest performing high school in the city, according to the school district’s reckoning. On the face of it, that is cause for concern. But a few questions come to mind:

The education numbers game assumes a false consistency. The same students are not being measured year after year. The student mix is always changing and, in the case of Ingraham, a new cohort of students with bigger educational challenges has come into the school. Is it not logical to expect that adding a fresh crop of kids who need extra help might bring the numbers down?

If Floe is being axed because his school’s performance is the second worst in the city, why isn’t the principal at the school with the worst numbers being fired? How about the person in charge at the number three school? Why only Martin Floe?

If there is a perceived problem at a school, the principal is generally offered help to turn things around, not summarily fired. Is Floe being dumped so suddenly because someone else is angling for his job?

Floe is known as a jolly fat man, whose unpretentious style obscures a sharp, analytic mind and forceful character. He is credited with facing down and largely eliminating a serious gang problem at Ingraham. He has encouraged more minority and low-income students to take the tougher classes in the IB program. And he has sat face-to-face with students on the edge of dropping out and convinced them to stay. That might not have helped aggregate test scores, but it certainly may have given hope to some individual students who might otherwise have quit school and been doomed to failed lives.

How many paper pushers in the central office can claim that sort of success? If it is numbers they want, here are some that impress me: The many Ingraham parents who have rallied, protested and petitioned on behalf of Martin Floe and the unanimous vote of support from the Ingraham faculty. Bad principals do not get those kinds of numbers.

Floe appears to be an inspiring leader who has touched the lives of his students in ways that numbers cannot quantify. His firing just doesn’t add up.

Accessed via <http://blog.seattlepi.com/davidhorsey/2011/05/16/firing-of-ingrahams-martin-floe-does-not-add-up/>

Journal Entry: **May 16th 2011**

1. Whose viewpoint is being represented in this article? What kind of bias or slant do they possess?
2. Now having read opinions from two sides of the story, what are the biggest discrepancies you see between these two stories?
3. What questions do you have about this story after reading? What do you want to know more about?