

Fire Forum

In a great tragedy our campus proved that we could work together to support each other through a tough time. The caring and immediate response of the NCSSM student body, SLIs, and faculty was impressive. Unfortunately, our administration was lacking such compassion in handling a devastating situation.

In forcing students to go to classes the following day the administration showed very poor judgment. Just a few hours before, many students had hopelessly watched as everything they owned went up in flames. Nearly everyone had missed needed sleep. While

students realized that life would need to go on, we feel that at least one day was necessary to rest, console each other, clean up, and survey the damage. Furthermore, the academic day was a waste as most students were unprepared and far too upset and tired to concentrate. Many female students who spent the night on the gym floor had been unable to sleep at all. Male students had stayed up late into the night to help out the girls. Giving all students one day off would have a much more appropriate and caring response.

The administration was also cold and even cruel in the way they handled the all school assembly on Friday, April 26th. Director John Friedrich made some very inappropriate comments placing unjust blame on students, indirectly accusing members of First Beall for endangering other students lives, and blatantly not caring what the emotional impact of his words was. The purpose of Director Friedrich's speech was to introduce a new rule mandating the type of extension cords students could use. But his uncaring tone and harsh diction alienated students to the point where they missed the purpose of the assembly. Perhaps Dr. Friedrich did the best he could in a tough situation; but perhaps someone more understanding could have portrayed his message better. Comments about pulling bodies out

of the building a few hours later, forcing crying students to remain and listen, insulting the intelligence of Science & Math students as regards to the physics of electrical wiring, unwillingness to listen to student concerns, and minimizing how much of victims the students were, were all highly unprofessional as well as unjust.

Students were very much victims in the disaster and actually ought to have been commended for handling the situation in such a way that no lives were imperiled. It was very unprofessional for the administration to try to clear itself by blaming students for the fire.

In addition to what he did say, Dr. Friedrich failed to mention in his speech that the official SBI report in fact did not pinpoint an extension cord as the cause of the fire and in no way hinted that students were at fault. Also, the room where the fire

originated had previously been rid of a frayed extension cord and a new, approved one had been connected to the lamp. Dr. Friedrich also incorrectly stated that he had clearly told students in December that only surge protector type extension cords were permitted. Students agreed that at the last fire assembly Dr. Friedrich had simply warned students to check for old, frayed cords and had recommended the surge protector type as an alternative. It was highly out of line for the administration blame students for not obeying when no clear rules were established previously. Students were very much victims in the disaster and actually ought to have been commended for handling the situation in such a way that no lives were imperiled. It was very unprofessional for the administration to try to clear itself by blaming students for the fire.

Honestly, we students believe that the administration had better intentions for the April 26th assembly but Dr. Friedrich was clearly not the right person to conduct it. For a tragedy which touched everyone living on campus, it would have been much more effective for a person more in touch with the student body to address such a sensitive issue. Then the students would not feel under attack and would be much more responsive to the true, important message: replacing extension cords.

As I sat at our first fire assembly after the First Beall fire and listened to Dr. Friedrich thank Wal-Mart and Pizza Hut, I could not help but think that there were some extremely important people whose thanks were left unsaid. Then, at the second assembly, Dr. Friedrich thanked these people. I would still like to reiterate our thanks, however.

First, thank you to the guys. Most of you were wonderful to the girls, bringing your food, clothes, and beds to the PEC and leaving little for yourselves. I know that many of you stayed up later than we did, either worrying or since you did not have anywhere to sleep. And your unselfish contributions have continued into the week following the fire. We love you for it.

Also, thanks to Jeff Bray. Your guitar playing took our minds off the tragedy that we had just been a part of. You gave us the chance to sing and dance, to let our minds wander with the music instead of back over to Beall. We love you for it.

Many, many thanks to Corey Wilson, the Security Guard who

was sent to the hospital with smoke inhalation. You heroically sacrificed your own health for the safety of the first Beall girls. We love you for it.

I would like to thank the faculty and staff of NCSSM for your incredible contributions to the girls of first Beall. Sandy has washed the girls' laundry, Jennifer Madriaga has brought clothes and food, and Gail Hudson has been on hand to talk when they have needed her. Ken Jones has helped at their hall meetings and kept things organized. We love you for it.

Thank you to all of the girls who have volunteered their clothes, their rooms, and their lives toward making the first Beall girls more comfortable. We love you for it.

Finally, everyone on First Beall deserves more thanks than I can give them for being such fantastic examples to us all. I have heard that if they had not followed all safety procedures and closed their doors as they left the hall, all of the Beall complex would have gone up in flames. They have truly been heroines in their grace, their strength, and their positive attitudes. We love you for it.

I guess it's kind of difficult to put in words the jumbled mess which describes my recent life, and maybe that's the point that should be made. It's really hard for some girls on hall, me included, to label my reactions to the fire, PEC slumber party, adjusting to a new living space, and academic stuff.

I think that a lot of us are just trying to look for some sort of stability, but it doesn't come easily, especially when physically, emotionally, and mentally exhausted.

I find myself trying to figure out how to get through the next hour, while others seem to be getting excited about next week's plans. And that's what is unsettling—it's uncomfortable to realize how mixed-up things can get. Many times during the day I'm struck with a realization of how much we've lost, and I don't know how to respond.

I have no idea what message I'm sending. It's definitely a thanks to all of the people in this school who have done so much.