

**Testimony of Stephen Rudnicki**  
**Spanish Teacher**  
**Horizon Science Academy in Dayton, 2007-2013**  
**Before the State Board of Education**  
**July 15, 2014**

President Terhar and Members of the State Board of Education:

My name is Stephen Rudnicki and I was employed by the Horizon Science Academy in Dayton from 2007 to 2013. I will try and confine my remarks to matters not covered by other witnesses.

During my six years with Horizon, the school had four directors. One year, the school had four English teachers in less than six months. Another year, it had six different math teachers. My first year, I taught Spanish and PE – but the school had no gymnasium. And although billed as a “science academy,” Horizon did not have a functional science lab until 2012.

Horizon’s disorganization and emphasis on image over academics did a great disservice to the students.

In 2009, Horizon opened a new high school but hired a first-time director to run a first-year school. He was clearly in over his head. Some teachers suggested he move back the first day of school to ensure that everything was in order but he disagreed and opened it anyway, only to learn that there were no lunch tables, no chairs for the lunch tables – and no food. The director had not yet set up food service and didn’t realize that it took a couple of weeks to get things up and running. Staff was quickly dispatched to Sam’s Club for tables and chairs, and the school brought in Papa John’s Pizza, McDonald’s or Subway each day for two weeks until food service was provided.

Wasting money was a common practice. The school purchased six, large flat screen TVs but four of them disappeared. Administrators blamed their disappearance on contractors, but refused to file a police report.

The IT program was even worse than food service. Teachers learned on the first day of school that there were no computers – just digital projectors. By mid-October, the computers finally arrived but they did not work properly for very long. The school's assistant director also served as IT coordinator, but he did not install any virus protection or firewalls. He said they were unnecessary. Within two weeks, the whole computer system was shut down because of viruses. Proper working computers were not available until nearly January of 2010.

As I told you previously, I taught Spanish but quickly learned that many kids in my Spanish II class learned virtually nothing in Spanish I. They could not even tell me very simple words, and some told me that the Spanish I teacher spoke no Spanish at all. Instead, students said their instruction came from computers. I decided to approach this as Spanish 1.5 and spent part of the school year trying to teach them what they should have learned the previous year, and part of the year helping them tackle Spanish II.

By my fourth year at the school, I was asked by the director, Mr. Zen, to lower my standards. He wanted me to make things easier. He wanted me to reward student laziness. I told him I thought our mission was to challenge students, and I continued to hold my students to high standards.

I never personally witnessed any test tampering but a lot of the teachers suspected it was happening. There were kids who passed standardized tests who had no right to pass, just as there were kids who advanced to the next grade level even though they barely showed up for school. Sometimes, teachers would ask the administration about these kids and we would be told that it's none of our business. Administrators simply would not answer our questions.

I am happy to answer any questions.