Interview with Daniel Summers
By Catherine Gooding
June 29, 2018

CG: My name is Catherine Gooding, and I am here with Mr. Daniel Summers, an English teacher at University High School. Is that correct? Did I get that right?

DS: That is absolutely correct, yes.

CG: Awesome. It is June 29, 2018, and we are meeting at the Panera in downtown Morgantown, so there might be a little background noise, but hopefully it's not too distracting. We are here today to talk about Mr. Summers' experience of the 2018 teacher strike. So I have three goals for this interview: I wanna talk about what it was like leading up to the strike, how you kinda felt that tension building; what were the key moments for you during the strike; and then what is your perspective now, kind of four months out. Do you have anything to add to that? Any of your own goals or anything else you want to add to my opening?

DS: No, that sounds perfect.

CG: Awesome. So we'll just jump right in. So I know that there were some demonstrations and some chatter for the couple of months leading up to the strike, and I want to kinda get a feel for what – how you experienced that, and how involved were you in those demonstrations and what it was like just kind of leading up to that.

DS: For me it was a little bit unique because I had a baby on the way when this kind of started, and I was scheduled to take a paternity leave around the end of January, which was when things really started to kinda roll. So I wasn't in the school when a lot of the discussions were taking place amongst my coworkers, so my entire perspective of what was going on and the tensions that were developing and sort of a push back against legislation that was being drafted in Charleston and this need to fix PEIA was – my experience of that was mostly through social media – Facebook. I think my first realization that we were really becoming serious about this was when I got like four secret group requests on Facebook to join like Mon County Teachers closed group, West Virginia United – Teachers United closed group. All of those things were springing up, and there were really just sort of hodge-podge, but they weren't venting, they were organizing, which was – you know, a lot of times with the little groups that I'm a part of on social media, people – we just sort of vent or share pictures or something, but this was, "what are we gonna do? Where are we meeting? What do we need to talk about?" So I knew that this was getting serious, so I started – I knew that there were votes that were gonna be rolling out at the school, and I was getting text messages and group messages and so I started going to the school even though I had like a four-day-old or something at home at that point – going to the school and voting on these things. And it was so tense because we knew that technically, that was illegal, what we were doing. You know, we had to set up places that we could go and actually vote so we weren't doing it on school grounds, and we had to…

So it felt really intense, but it also was hitting home pretty sharply with me, having not just a newborn at home, but also another child. My wife and I, you know, before children, we weren't doctor people. We didn't go often, medical bills weren't a big thing, but that's probably 30% of our expenditures at this point, and insurance is very important to us. We started kind of listening to what PEIA was designed for, what it was doing. We were looking at our medical

bills, we're looking at all these things stacking up, and I started to realize that it was maybe time for me to get out of new teacher mode and realize that I'm a professional, and this thing that I do every day is important to society. Not me – I don't want to be egotistical, so not me as an individual, but this thing that we do as teachers benefits society. Then I think what made me go from the realm of voting and discussing and not knowing exactly how far I would go with this, whether I would vote to actually strike or walk out – I started to listen to what was being said about our movement and our desire to be heard and our requests, and it didn't sound like we were being listened to. Instead we were being dismissed, I mean by legislators, primarily. The public support was kinda there from the beginning.

CG: So what made you feel that way, that you weren't being listened to?

DS: Listening to some of the speeches that were being given on the floor about various legislation that was being pushed through, trying to suppress the unions, trying to tie any kind of funding for PEIA to a short-term solution, those kinds of things. I started to become very upset about that, so I remember going to a union meeting before the walkout was official, at the old mall – this one was, we had permission to be there. This wasn't the sort of infamous one that we met – but we were there, we were just sort of talking, and union leaders – I'm AFT, but WVEA and AFT were both present – and talking about what we were facing and how far would we go with this, and at that point there were some pretty serious talks – actually at that point it may have been official that some of the southern counties were going to do the two day walkout. I apologize, I don't remember which counties. So it was either official, or it was likely to happen. That's where we organized the trip, at least from this county, down to Charleston to go before we had officially decided. That's where the first two-day walkout for the state was scheduled by the unions, was at that Charleston rally.

I went home after that meeting, and I talked to my wife, and I said, "I don't know. This isn't me, I try to be socially aware, but I've rarely been socially active, and I think we have to ride this out. I think we're fighting for something, not just complaining about something." I was lucky, she was very supportive, but it was scary. I make the most money in our household, and breaking the law as they stand – I might disagree with them, but – and then the, just the idea that if they wanted, I could be unemployed. I mean, this previous year was my fourth year teaching, but you know, when I go in for my evaluations and stuff, it's still intermediate. I still – I feel like a new teacher, I feel… So I was scared, and then I was thinking about all my coworkers like – you know, you kinda start looking around like, if we don't all do this, nothing happens. You know, you want to believe that you all just go, but you don't know, because everybody's facing their own things in their life.

So – I feel like I'm rambling, but it was definitely intense, and I said, "I have to ride this all the way." And that was really hard, because I knew – I took a lot of time off from work, and I had three months with my first-born, cause I had just graduated and I was a substitute teacher, but I took that time with him. Being a teacher, and not having actual paternity leave, I did basically cash in all my sick leave and everything, so I took all this time to be with this baby and with my wife, who needed me there – you know, we all needed to be with each other – so I knew that if we did go on strike, that I would have to be standing outside, which is what wound up happening, thankfully for much shorter than it could have, but still for a significant chunk of time. And that was upsetting, but we believed – we being my household – that it was worth it, and I still believe that it was worth it.

So, I committed, and I didn't know if anything was gonna come of it, and then we went to the Charleston rally, and they said we weren't going back for two days – we were gonna do the demonstration. Also we had done a walk-in at my school before that. That was really, I guess invigorating. It's hard to – we throw this word, this thing around, "solidarity," but it's really that feeling I was expressing before where you don't know if people going to walk with you. When you look around and see all those people doing it, and you know this person lives paycheck-to-paycheck, and you know this person has five kids at home, and this person's a single parent, and this person has cancer, and this person – you know, when you know that, and they're standing there, and it was pouring rain that day, and they're holding their signs. And you see your administrators kinda winking at you – they can't do it with you, not really, but they're not like "get in that school." It felt strong. You get swept up in that wave of doing something you think will matter beyond yourself. That was my experience at the beginning.

CG: Yeah wow. That's powerful, I think, seeing all of those people together. So did that make you feel more confident kinda going into the strike, like maybe we have some strength here?

DS: Umm… no. It was still really early, I don't think we were uttering the "S" word too much at that point, even with the rally and the two-day scheduled walkout where we got support from the superintendents and everything while the union leaders negotiated. Even at that point, I think we thought that we didn't have a whole lot of power, and you've gotta remember what made this – I always find that a very rude phrase, "you have to remember" – it's important to realize with the beginnings of it, we didn't know 55, we didn't know every county's going in on this, we didn't know we had that much say. We thought at that point the unions were going to do everything, because West Virginia doesn't allow for collective bargaining. So we had to rely on them to get us something that took away a lot of these bills that were – that we viewed as being damaging to education – and maybe helped us a little bit with the insurance. We at the beginning weren't talking about pay raises at all. I mean, some people were saying, "we could push for this," or whatever, but I don't think that was – I think we all sort of realized that the budget's difficult with the state and everything, so we just wanted fairness.

I don't know, it was kind of like – I've followed West Virginia politics for a number of years now, but I've never really had people in my social circle – Facebook excluded – but like in person who did, and it was just kind of like all of us were watching these things. We were watching live streams and town hall meetings and stuff – all of it – and getting to know these politicians. You know, Mitch Carmichael was not a new name to me, but he suddenly became like a celebrity among – you know, an infamous one. But, so, no, I don't think we were confident. I think we were still sort of in the mode of, we hope someone will tell us what to do next. But, I did feel like if it went south, I wouldn't be alone, so you feel supported as a community. Like, we'll help each other no matter what, so we didn't feel powerful, but we did feel defended – we felt like we had each other's back, which is a type of strength too.

CG: So I want to move ahead to the strike itself. So, where were you during the strike? Did you go to Charleston, were you staying in Mon County?

DS: I primarily stayed in Mon County. I went to Charleston one other time to sort of march on the capitol. We – my school, University High, and I think Suncrest – we were both sort of set up across from Pierpont Plaza, the Exxon there, Schmitt's Saloon, which just closed. So that's where we set up, and I spent a large part of my picketing there.

So I view the beginning of the strike, the beginning of the walkout being – once the union leaders made the deal, it left a sort of sour taste in our mouth. Dale Lee had worked with Justice, and they came up with this plan, and we realized it wasn't really anything we were asking for. I don't know how it played out in other counties, but it was 7:20 at night, and I don't remember if I got a message on my phone, or someone called me, but it was basically, "hey, we're meeting at the mall to talk about this." Now, we had to be in school the next day. So I was in sweatpants and a shirt that I use to paint that had holes in it and stains, and I just ran, I got in the car, I drove to the mall, and we – there were probably about 50 of us, maybe even closer to 100 people in there, and we called Frank Devono, the county superintendent, and said, "we can't go back." And we saw the map – we had the map up while we were sitting there, and it was just red, red, red, red all over. I remember another teacher, I think he teaches at South, Jacob Staggers and I – we knew each other previously from some observation stuff and student teaching – we were just kind of looked across at each other and we were like, "we're doing this," and there was this shocked look, and then we were like "yeah, we are."

And that's what I view kind of as the actual beginning. So I think in terms of the walkout, it started just in the teacher community, and then when I went to this picket line – and oddly enough it started at the mall, which they weren't happy with us, I don't think we were supposed to be there – and then it goes out to this line, and it's the community, and it's day one, and it's pouring the rain, and I was the first person on the line cause Carrie Beatty, she's an English teacher at University High. Her and I planned to get food and handwarmers and stuff like that, cause it was cold. It's winter, you know, it's February. And it was raining, which was so much worse than if it was snowing, so we wanted to get some handwarmers, and we wanted to make sure the people at the Exxon and Huntington Bank that are there in that little plaza – that they were okay with us there, and if they would let us use bathrooms if we needed to. So that was sort of – we were reconning the spot. So I'm the first one there, and I have my signs and stuff and the people don't really know why I'm just standing on the side of the road, and someone pulls up and they ask me if I needed a sandwich or something, and I said, "no, I'm good," and I thought maybe they thought I was panhandling or trying to get a ride. And they said, "well if y'all need anything, I'll be back and forth through here for work." And they drove off and I was like, "oh," and it kind of hit me, they knew why I was there at that moment. So – Mace Dental. Mace Dental up on the hill, once everybody arrived they came down, they brought us coffee, they talked to us. Then just students and parents and community members – and I realized that I guess the sound of solidarity, the sound of doing something can sound a little bit like a traffic jam, cause you have all these horns going off.

I felt like there were more people who knew that what we were doing was in the right, and I do believe that – like, it's so easy to convince yourself that, "I'm on the right side of history." But I don't know how – cause I've thought a lot about it. We kept kids out of school, we made it hard on parents, we made it hard on the community, and that was a conscious decision that we made. But when we were out there, we talked a lot about it. I think that a lot of people maybe assumed that we were just sort of out there saying, "we want things for us," but we talked a lot about what we were doing, too – you know, what was negative about it. I think we were able to find pretty solid and valid logic that you can't have a society that prospers if you don't treat the building blocks of society with respect and give it what it needs. And I think those conversations led us to realize that when they started making offers, that we weren't going back until public workers got raises: police officers, and – and that's what ultimately we

accomplished. Pittance, but – so it really just started as a community. I think that for me with my coworkers and the county and it grew to like, the whole community.

I'm not answering your question. I was on the line every single day. We ran shifts: it was kind of a morning-mid shift, and then an afternoon, and we took volunteers to do like a morning and mid or mid and afternoon. But myself and a few others, we were there the whole time, sometimes 14 hour days in the cold. It was really kind of nice the last couple of days though. It was very bearable though, because we had an unlimited supply of coffee and hot chocolate, and donuts. I ate so badly, my doctor was so mad at me, my cholesterol went through the roof cause I was eating nothing but Little Caesar's and donuts. Yeah, we were provided for by the community. They brought tons of things. It would've been nice if they brought some apples at some point, but you know. So it was warm even though we were shivering, I guess. So I was there with Carrie and Phil Cassidy and a few others from the moment we set up to the moment we tore down every day, and I don't think we were unique in that. I think every line – we didn't get to see much of the other lines. Sometimes there were supply lines, people would go out and bring us news, but I do know we set up pretty much all over Morgantown at all the pristine spots.

It was tough knowing we weren't allowed back in our schools, you know. That was hard to feel kinda – it made it official. It made it feel like – we've got your back in terms of we like you as a person, but you aren't welcome here till this is over. That's not coming from the administration, it's just the policy. So that was tough, because I think one of the ways teachers survive is by considering their classroom an extension of home. You know, we decorate it, we hang pictures – and I think a lot of people do those things in their office, but we also – you can be sitting under a picture of your family, listening to a student talk about something traumatic that happened to them, and it's hard to not imprint yourself in that space. And then you're not allowed there. I just switched rooms at the end of the year, and I was in tears because I'm leaving my room. It was weird, it was such a weird feeling, because I clearly wanted this other room. But it feels a little bit like home, but we weren't allowed there because of – sorry that fly's really bothering me.

CG: I know, it's all over the place.

DS: So that was a tough feeling, but we persevered through it, I think. Most of us did. We tried to fight the melancholy with music – so much music, so much dancing. Laughing – I got to know so many great people in my building I'd never stopped and talked to the four years I've been there. It was a very jovial and enjoyable experience, but there was just this undertone the entire time of what if? And what happens next? And uncertainty – we had no idea what was coming, whether we were being listened to, and I'm not much for conspiracy, but it became very hard not to feel like we were intentionally being worn down. It was committee after committee meeting, and just so many negative things being said. I don't remember what day it was of the strike – of the walkout, to be more precise – but Jim Justice came to my school, to Mon County to talk, and I spoke to him. I got up to the mic, spoke to him – it just – I don't have anything personally against Governor Justice, but it just was so dismissive, and it hurt a lot, to feel like we were only trying to align ourselves with our own prosperity, and not the future for our students.

You know, one argument that came up again and again was that we can't be the state we want to be if we don't attract good, high-quality teachers. There's really no incentive to work here. I was going to leave, I was gonna go to Washington state. That was my plan, my wife and I's plan.

CG: Are you from here originally?

DS: Yeah, I've lived in West Virginia my whole life, but I didn't think I could do nearly as well as a teacher here as I could elsewhere, which is a reality you start to face. And then my son happened, and our family and our support system's here, so we stayed. I don't regret it, and I'm glad, and I love teaching here, and I don't think I will leave now, because I've fallen in love with the students I work with. But you know? It's hard to pay the bills. It is. I did a few interviews with some newspapers, and that was – I was quoted in both of them, and an op ed I wrote – it's really tough because what we're essentially doing is saying, "we can't afford to do what the country can't afford us not to do." I don't know if I said that right.

CG: I get the point.

DS: So, you know, it's hard. People interview you, and you're like, "well, I qualify for welfare," you know, you're airing dirty laundry. We don't accept it, we're lucky, but I work with a lot of people who have to. That's what we were saying to him. So to stand there and explain that to the governor in a capacity not as an individual or a father or a husband or anybody, but as an educator. Like this is – "I have a master's degree, and this is where we're at – we know you can't fix this, this is up to Congress, will you support us? Will you be a loud voice in our favor?" And that wasn't really answered, actually I think he told me to be quiet for a minute.

But that was a turning point, I think for a lot of us – not me speaking – but we realized that we were gonna have to buckle in, cause it wasn't gonna end quick. And it drug on for the nine days that it did, which I think for some people may not seem like a long time, but when you think about one, the impact that it has on the community: parents need to find ways to take care of their children during the day; students, I teach high school, so AP students missing out on that crucial time; and then teachers, who already understaffed in this state for educators, who don't know if they're ever gonna be able to work again – it's unlikely, that's the whole point of the strike, but still that – the uncertainty, "will the superintendents continue to support us? How long can this go? What happens when they quit, do some of us buckle? Do I buckle?" You know, those feelings and those uncertainties – nine days may not seem like much from an outsider's perspective, but time goes so slow, and from my perspective with the baby, I was not holding her. I was not missing work, I was still on leave when we did this whole thing. I was supposed to be back the Friday – we settled everything on a Tuesday?

CG: I think so, yeah.

DS: So my first day back was supposed to be the Friday before that Tuesday. So I only had three days off of work, which was also tough because I didn't feel like I was giving up as much as other people. But it was this cloud of joy over top, and then this undercurrent of nail biting an melancholy, and I think anxiety is about the best way to describe it.

CG: So something that stands out to me about your story is that you had this newborn baby at home. So I'm kind of curious, when you had this whole nine days of school called off – and of course, you only had three days that you were supposed to be back in school anyway – but why did you go out and like, stand on the picket line for the whole day, like open to close? Why didn't you just stay home with your baby? Like, what drove you to make that decision?

DS: You know, my wife and I talked about it, because I could have. And honestly, there's this whole stigma of crossing the line, and some people never showed up. Some people I work with,

some people in the county – they just never went to the lines, and you don't know where they stand. You know, maybe they do stand with it, but they don't want to stand there. So why am I going? And I don't know how to answer without sounding cliché or pompous or something, but it's just – I don't know what choice I had. I respect other people's choices, but I don't know that that's the kind of person I want to be, the person who doesn't do it. And I have children, and I want them to be that kind of person too. My sign – it's so silly, but it got the hell beat out of it, and it just said – and I held it every day, at the strike and when we went to Charleston – it just says, "today, I teach perseverance." It didn't have – I wrote – goodness, two dozen, maybe close to fifty letters – emails mostly – I called and called and called and left messages, I sent thank you things to the superintendent, I sent pleas to congressmen and women, I sent support to like Bob Beach, I met and spoke with so many reporters, I wrote op eds, I wrote pieces for books, like I just had all of this, like paperwork that I'm doing when I get home, when I'm not even on the line. And all of that didn't feel as strong as just being a face in the bitter cold, holding a sign that says "perseverance," for the community to see. And then I think when you add enough faces like that together, and then across the whole state, you go from being a strike to a movement, and I think that's what we became. I know that sounds pompous, but I really do think it became a movement, and I think it influenced other states, and I'm proud of myself for putting that much into it. I'm not disappointed in others who didn't, but I'm glad that I was someone who did. I guess, that's the only answer I have.

CG: Yeah, no, that's absolutely fair. So now it's about four months later, so what is your perspective now? What do you think – like how are you thinking about it now?

DS: I don't know, there's a part of it where, when it's immediately over and you go back to the classroom, teaching is just so hectic, and the ability to process what we'd done was sort of put on a backburner for what we did, right? It was kind of, "all right, more things to grade, more things to plan for," dealing with kind of the dramas and the joys that come with being an educator. And so when it started to really wind down for the school year and summer was kicking in, that's when it really started to hit. Now I'm in process mode, like, "that's what we did, what was it that we did?" You know, so you're on – I'm still in kinda the shell shock of the whole thing and I don't know exactly what I feel. But I do know that I believe, and a lot of people who I'm close to and who are influenced by decisions about education, policy about education – we know that that's – what we got, the 5%, the $2,200 pay bump – and a good number of the bills that we were fighting against, that the unions were fighting against were tabled – we know that that's amazing, but not what we were there for. PEIA, the insurance is, I think still the rally cry. We went back to the classroom on a handshake with that. The board they appointed is supposed to be coming up with solutions to fix it, but the town hall meetings that they're holding and stuff – it's sort of – I think we're just completely in the dark about what direction they want to go with it. And then you have people who are so against us, so obstinate towards us, claiming that they were part of the solution for it – I don't want to name-drop, but it feels like those tensions, those sort of dismissiveness and disrespect are still there.

I don't want to go through it again. At all. So I hope to my core that solutions are found, compromises are found, but it's so hard to believe that it's actually over until we see an actual shift in the state toward educators. There's still really no incentive to come here and work. We're still not competitive in wages, our insurance is increasingly degenerating, and it was supposed to be the perk, you know – "we can't pay you, but we can give you good healthcare." Which, as a father, is enough. I make enough money to keep the lights on, and put food on the table, and get

them a measure of material happiness, but you know, every medical bill cuts into that a lot, and we're just a few sprained ankles and broken bones away from deciding whether we pay this bill or that bill, and that's not right. It's just not, for anyone. Certainly, for the amount of work and effort that my colleagues and I put into being where we're at today, it's not right. It's not necessary, more importantly. The argument is that it is necessary, but we know it's not. The numbers are there to support this state. They're just not being put toward the state, and that's again a little bit toward the conspiracy theory side of things, but it's really not. It's just not. I don't want to be political or anything, but it's just not. There are solutions, and we know there are, and we're very educated people and we can measure where they're at, and when we're looked at and told that they're not there – and if that happens again in November, I think the most important thing, more important than a strike, walking out, holding a sign, writing op eds, is to just vote. And I hope that does something. If not, I don't know where we'll be. But wherever it is, I guess I'll be there, wherever that is.

CG: I actually want to backtrack a little bit, because you mentioned something that I forgot to ask you about.

DS: Sorry

CG: No, no, it just slipped my mind until just now. So kind of that moment when the unions made the agreement with Jim Justice, and then you all had that meeting at the old mall, and you kind of realized, like "we're still doing this." That was – it seems like that was a major shift, because you said that before that you weren't really thinking of it so much as a strike, you were just waiting for the unions to tell you what to do. So what – how did that feel with that major shift, like – this is no longer coming from the unions. You know, what did that feel like to you?

DS: We were all so afraid. It's so funny, you know even in a room full of grown adults, we all still look for the person in the lab coat to say, "this is what you need." Heather and Sam, the local leaders for WVEA and AFT, they came – Sam was there. Heather, she had just driven back up from Charleston, and she came straight there, she didn't even go home, she's getting texts in the car and stuff from them. She went straight there, and she's clearly tired and harried, and we were like, "what do we do? Tell us," and all they can do is say, "this is what is happening." And we're like, "that can't be it, we can't –" and we're talking about the '90 strike, and how that ended on a handshake but it went okay and we should just trust this, and other people were like, "no, no this isn't enough." So you always have those outspoken people kind of arguing and being loud, but most of us are just standing there like deer in headlights, like, "just… do I go into the building tomorrow, or do I not? That's all I need." And then that, you I know I told you about that conversation I had with my wife just kinda clicked into my mind, and I said, "no, I'm in this all the way." And I realized that I wasn't, because if I go back and I don't believe in going back, that's not being in it all the way. And I don't remember who started that line of reasoning, but it started as a whisper and started getting louder and louder. And one gentleman I remember was saying that the union leaders – they were kinda bashing the union leaders, and I just said, "it's not their job," and he said, "what do you mean, whose job is it?" and I said, "it's ours," and I'm sorry for this, but, "it's ours, and it scares the fuck out of me. But it's our job." I guess that's the only thing I was feeling, like, "it's our job, and it is so scary, but it's our job." You know, you can't train for a job like that. Maybe if you go to school for public relations or marketing or something – I don't know what degree you would need to be good at fighting for an ideal, but it was our job, and you know, I don't even know how well we did it, but we did it. I guess that was

– there's a book online, *The Dictionary of Unnamed Sorrows*, or something, and I'm trying to find a word here to describe this, but I don't think it exists: just the realization that it's your responsibility, not the person in the lab coat's to fix this. It's like being told, "you can get healthy, but you have to do it," by the doctor. You're just like, "can't I just take some Advil or something?" No, you have to work really hard for this, and that's a scary feeling cause you don't know how much you trust yourself in those situations, cause you've never been there. Did that make any sense? I don't know if that made sense.

CG: Yeah, for sure. So I just have a couple more questions. How did this – like going back to school after the strike, how did this impact the way that you related to your students, and the way that you were able to teach them? Like you teach high school, so it might be a little different. Someone I talked to the other day teaches like 6th grade, right? So how does that impact the way that you kinda talk to them and relate to them?

DS: It's so weird, cause a lot of them came out to the line. We were really close to the school, which means close to their houses. You know, a lot of students I see in my classroom were there, some students I'd had in the past were there, some students who'd never had a kind word for me in the world were there like, "I'm proud of you, Mr. Summers." And it's just – so there's that, and when you go back in the classroom your relationship dynamic changes. You know, you see a student in the grocery store and sometimes they avoid you, and sometimes they're really friendly, but when you're in the class, it's like, "you've gotta ask me if you can go to the bathroom." So there's that kind of relationship shift. But I think in a way, I'm very lucky to teach high school. I can't imagine what it was like for elementary and middle school teachers, because most of my students are so close to being a part of this, and they can articulate and plan for things like this in the future. Some of them already know that they want to do this in life. Most don't, but some do. And they're just a few years away from voting, so it was so easy to turn all of it into sort of a civics lesson. I teach English, and I at the time taught business – I'm not teaching it next year.

But it's also tough, because we really shouldn't/you're not allowed to talk about politics, like our personal political beliefs, and so much of this was wound up in politics. We shouldn't try to force our bias, because not every student was in support of what we did, and they don't have to be, and they shouldn't be if they don't want to. Also, like I mentioned with the AP students, it's easy to shift unset curriculums around, like I can… So we had a few snow days, basically is what it boils down to, cause we had a bad winter, you know. But with courses that are set, like I taught Business Computer Applications, which is like every day is planned out, I don't have to design the curriculum for it, it's Microsoft Office – so those students were super behind, AP students super behind, probably I would imagine the Agriculture students super behind, because you have – there's just a this, then this, the this kind of pattern to those courses, which is not how most education works, it's interpretive, but some things do have a set pattern. So you're interacting with those students, and they're under so much stress, and they have so much homework to get caught back up.

But I had the experience of just being obnoxiously supported by my students when we came back. That was a huge relief, cause I didn't know what I'd walk into. They – we can't talk about politics, but we can talk about how politics work. We were able to have some really deep and meaningful conversations about that and about the state of West Virginia. We were able to read so much contemporary literature that came out of this from all sides, and I think in the end it

was a pretty positive thing to bring back to the classroom. They saw how not everything just comes to you, from both sides – from our side, and then we had to make concessions too.

CG: Then my last question is just, what do you see as the impact of the strike, going forward?

DS: Well I think it's pretty evident that teachers across the country have started to stand up for education. We by no means are isolated in our plight. Some states have it even worse – Oklahoma comes to mind with their just – supplies and rooms and stuff, and of course we have counties here in West Virginia that are very similar. I think that when you have a model that is flexible enough to fit your current needs, that model's gonna be around for a while, and I think that model came out of West Virginia. I don't know how, but every corner of West Virginia was in on this, which to my knowledge has never really happened before. So I think other states can look at that and say, "well if we all do it, they have no choice." That, I think, is one consequence of this that we've already seen start to play out.

I hope that – you know, I think what a school can do and what a state can do is more important than what people think about it, but a brand is very important, and I hope that we can draw and keep quality educators in the state because of, if nothing else the pride factor. The factor that, when we did what we did, we said that, "we're only gonna bend, we're not gonna break. We're rooted here." Cause I gotta tell you, it's honestly so much easier to just cross the border and teach in Maryland. It's not so easy to teach in Pennsylvania, but all you have to do is move there.

CG: Right, it's not that far.

DS: Well, where I'm living now, when we decided to move there, you know we're a 10 minute interstate ride from Pennsylvania. We could go to Port Marion, we could go to Bobtown, PA, and property's so much cheaper and I could teach there and make more money and have better insurance, and the cost of living's low cause I'm not living in the city. It was a temptation. I think for every – I'm pretty close with a lot of curriculum and instruction teachers at WVU, and I try to stay active in the English part of that, NCTRs and whatnot. I just got to know so many amazing teachers who go out and find a job, and it's not here, and they're from here. And I'm so happy for them, but it makes me sad for the state. We should be fighting to keep those people, cause I think a lot of people would stay if given the choice. My school lost two really, really awesome math teachers to other fields. And those things come from – I don't know if anyone will ever believe this, but it's less about moving up financially and more about just going somewhere where you're respected. Cause it's such a rush – so much dopamine when you're a teacher, cause you're staring at those 30 faces, and when they have those a-ha moments, you're like, "ha, I did that. That came from my brain." It's super rewarding. It's the other stuff that's the hard work, and if you don't have the support of your community, your administration, and your state, you're gonna leave. You're gonna leave real quick, you're gonna burn out fast. That's what's been happening in this state.

CG: So, if it's so easy to leave, why do you think people stay? Why do you stay?

DS: Well the better question for me would be, why didn't I go to Pennsylvania? Cause like I said, I wasn't planning on staying. Well, for one thing, it's not super bad, it's just not that attractive. There are more attractive offers in other states, but comparatively, teachers' lots in the country are not great. Virginia's awesome. We lose a lot of people to Virginia, I think. But North

Carolina, they have a lot of problems in their schools, they're very understaffed – not with the students, but just with keeping people there. So you're kind of like – there's these pockets of, "woohoo!" but everybody's vying for these pockets, so it's even harder to get a job there. I think that's part of it, and I hate to say that. I wish my answer was like, "ooh, West Virginia pride!" But it's maybe a bit of a hassle for not that much of an upgrade.

But I think another part of it is, once you do get a job in this state, you kind of fall in love. I imagine it's gonna be that way anywhere you go, but it's just – I can only speak as a high school teacher, cause that's all I've done, but you meet a freshman, and you really want to see where they're at their senior year. Like you get to know these people. It's hard not to get to know somebody when you spend that much time with them, and you do. I wish teachers knew how much – or students knew how much we care about them, but – and so you're super invested in it. Given the choice now between leaving and staying, if we're not talking six figures, I'm staying. But, I'm an English teacher. English isn't the problem in this state. Math and science is. And math and science professionals are given the choice between five and six figures typically in their fields. We have some people who teach physics, AP bio, that they are so incredibly intelligent and talented that honestly, the only thing keeping them there is they like what they do. There's no other reason. They could go somewhere else and make a lot more money. We have doctors. Not medical doctors – they have doctorates.

CG: Right, PhDs.

DS: And I'm not talking a doctorate in education, I mean doctorates in their fields – physics. They stay there. I work with lots of people that are financially okay, their spouse makes a lot of money, or they have a lot, or they have a second business. I work with some people with second businesses, and they're fine. They don't need to be there. They stay, and there's a reason for that. But those are the exceptions. Most people won't do that. And we still need people who are that good at physics to teach our students physics. They deserve it – the students do, so let's get them into class.

CG: All right, well that's all the questions I had. Do you have anything else to add?

DS: Nope. Sorry I'm very long-winded

CG: No, no this is all great.