

NEWS

[News Home](#) [Columnists](#) [Local](#) [National](#) [International](#) [Weird But True](#) [NYPD Blotter](#) [Traffic & Transit](#) [Lottery](#)

WHY IS THE CITY PAYING 757 PEOPLE TO DO NOTHING?

By ANGELA MONTEFINISE and MELISSA KLEIN

September 30, 2007 -- Just before 9 a.m., they file into large, sometimes windowless rooms.

In some cases, they punch time cards; in others, they scribble their names on a sign-in sheet.

They take their places in plastic chairs either grouped around tables or scattered haphazardly.

Some immediately pull out crossword puzzles or books. Some knit. Others hold golf-putting contests. One takes out his guitar and strums.

One day last week, another, wearing a leotard and tights, spread out on the floor and stretched before practicing ballet against a wall in a corner.

Nearby, gazing out a window, a man slowly fell asleep, his head in his hands.

It's all in a day's work on the city payroll.

For seven hours a day, five days a week, hundreds of Department of Education employees - who've been accused of wrongdoing ranging from buying a plant for a school against the principal's wishes to inappropriately touching a student - do absolutely no work.

In an investigation inside the nine reassignment centers called "rubber rooms" where these employees are sent, The Post has learned that the number of salaried teachers sitting idly waiting for their cases to be heard has exploded to 757 this year - more than twice the number just two years ago - at a cost of about \$40 million a year, based on the median teacher salary.

The city pays millions more for substitute teachers and employees to replace them and to lease rubber-room space.

Meanwhile, the 757 - paid from \$42,500 to \$93,400 a year - bring in lounge chairs to recline, talk on their cellphones and watch movies on portable DVD players, according to interviews with more than 50 employees.

David Pakter, 62, has been in a rubber room for a year for buying a plant for his school and giving students watches he'd made, he said.

The DOE would not discuss ongoing investigations.

Pakter, a former "teacher of the year" honored at City Hall during Rudy Giuliani's mayoral tenure, just bought a new Jaguar with his \$90,000 salary for "doing absolutely nothing."

"It's a present from [Schools Chancellor] Joel Klein," Pakter said. "I want to teach, they won't let me teach, but they'll pay me enough to buy a car. Can someone explain this to me?"

Another rubber-room attendant said she was unaware of the reason

The idle ones	
Number of teachers in rubber rooms	
March 2005	315
March 2006	500
March 2007	651
Last week	757

PRINT
 EMAIL TO A FRIEND
 DIGG IT
 REDDIT
 PERMALINK

MOST EMAILED

- LOST JOB 'OVER MY PERFUME'
- EX IS HIT WITH 100G 'SIN TAX'
- AFTER-SCHOOL SEX SPECIALS
- MORE

ALL CLASSIFIEDS

DATING | JOBS | AUTOS | REAL ESTATE

New Cars

Used Cars

she'd been assigned there for more than a month. Yet another, an Army reservist who spent almost 3½ years in a rubber room before he retired, begged to be able to go to Iraq instead of staying in DOE Siberia.

Sam Lazarus, a social-studies teacher and union rep at Bryant HS in Long Island City, said he and his spotless 23-year teaching record were shipped off to a Queens rubber room last spring that was so "filled to the rafters" that he was forced to sit in a plastic chair outside the room.

"I think I'm the only one who actually had a grievance to get into a rubber room," said Lazarus, who was in this "detention" for six weeks before accusations of verbally abusing a student were dropped.

Some say the teachers themselves are to blame - their union contract requires a hearing before any tenured employee can be fired.

"The reason the rubber room exists is because of worn-out and, quite frankly, irrelevant union contracts that do more to protect people's jobs than they do to protect kids," said Jeanne Allen, president of the Center for Education Reform, based in Washington, D.C.

Adding to that issue is the fact that the 20 arbitrators who review cases meet, on average, five times a month, or twice a month in the summer, making for a painfully slow and inefficient system.

Meanwhile, some teachers feel they're being attacked in a "guilty until proven innocent" atmosphere in which more powerful principals can easily remove teachers who question the system and students can easily get teachers they don't like removed by making up accusations.

The union now counsels its members to avoid becoming too involved - including even in breaking up student fights - because it could land them in a rubber room.

"Teachers are scared. The system wants to cover itself, not protect us," said Lenny Brown, a physics teacher who landed in the rubber room over accusations that he touched a student's breast in front of the class - a charge he vehemently denies.

The DOE admits it has become more proactive in trying to fire teachers.

"I've been pushing to try to charge more cases," said DOE general counsel Michael Best. "Sometimes I'd rather be more aggressive in terms of things, in getting folks who we should be trying to terminate terminated."

But Best says the system, governed by state law and contractual obligations, is cumbersome.

"I think everybody would like to resolve these cases more quickly," he said.

Randi Weingarten, president of the United Federation of Teachers, says the union is not interested in protecting bad teachers and adds that she is willing to compromise to fix the system. She hopes the future holds a quicker process and a rubber-room system where teachers will at least be working.

The city used to assign teachers under review administrative duties, but that ended with the 2002 school reorganization when district-run rubber rooms were turned into larger, citywide cells.

The DOE says it's handcuffed by a clause in the teacher contract saying rubber-room residents cannot be given "non-teaching duties," but the UFT says administrative work is just fine.

"Right now, the system is terrible for everyone," said Weingarten. "It's in everyone's interest, I think, to change it."

Additional reporting by Susannah Cahalan and Kathianne Boniello

angela.montefinise@nypost.com

Sponsored Links

New York City Hotels

Read reviews, compare rates and find deals on hotels in New York City. www.TripAdvisor.com

Take A Vacation

Special Timeshare Offers Only For American Express® Cardmembers. amexnetwork.com

I Had High Blood Pressure

Now it's down to 120/75. Find out how I did it without drugs www.resperate.com

[Buy a link here](#)

News
• Local News

Sports
• Yankees

Gossip
• Page Six

Entertainment
• Movies

Post Opinion
• Editorials

Classifieds
• Cars

User Services
• Contact Us

- National News
- International News
- News Columnists
- Weird But True
- NYPD Daily Blotter
- Liberty Medals
- Traffic & Transit
- Lottery
- Classroom Extra
- Mets
- Giants
- Jets
- Knicks
- Nets
- Rangers
- Islanders
- Devils
- Sports Blogs
- Columnists
- Bettor's Guide
- Horse Racing Picks
- Post Line
- Cindy Adams
- Liz Smith
- Braden Keil
- Michael Riedel
- Celebrity Photos
- Celebrity Sightings
- Page Six Magazine
- Delonas Cartoons
- **Business**
- Business Columnists
- Real Estate
- Stock Quotes
- Movies Blog
- Oscars
- Food
- Fashion
- Fashion Blog
- Music
- Theater
- Health
- Travel
- Travel Blog
- Horoscope
- Weddings
- Dating
- Weekend Guide
- Comics & Games
- Post Game Report
- Tempo
- Oped Columnists
- Letters
- Books
- Ramirez Cartoons
- Send a Letter
- **TV**
- Linda Stasi
- Starr Report
- Adam Buckman
- Reviews
- TV Listings
- LIVE: The TV Blog
- Dating
- Jobs
- Real Estate
- Marketplace
- Place an Ad
- **Miscellaneous**
- Sweeps/Contests
- Coupons
- Media Kit
- Parade Magazine
- RSS
- Special Sections
- Privacy Policy
- Terms of Use
- Video
- FAQ
- Daily Newsletter
- Home Delivery
- Avant Go
- E-Edition
- Archives
- Back Issues
- Reprints
- Story Index
- Last 30 Days

[SIGN IN](#)
 [SUBSCRIBE](#)
 [PRIVACY POLICY](#)
 [TERMS OF USE](#)
 [NEWS HEADLINES FROM OUR PARTNERS](#)
 [RSS](#) 

NEW YORK POST is a registered trademark of NYP Holdings, Inc. NYPOST.COM, NYPOSTONLINE.COM, and NEWYORKPOST.COM are trademarks of NYP Holdings, Inc.
 Copyright 2007 NYP Holdings, Inc. All rights reserved.