



Teachers file grievance over schedule change

By Jessica Brown • jlbrown@enquirer.com • October 1, 2010

The Cincinnati Public Schools' teachers union filed a grievance this week against one of its elementary school principals after she made schedule changes to try to improve students' test scores.

Superintendent Mary Ronan said she was "shocked" to see the grievance because the changes seemed so common-sense. The principal at the Academy of World Languages in Evanston, Jacquelyn Rowedder, had begun requiring teachers to use up to 55 minutes of planning time a week to meet with outside specialists to discuss students' education plans. The goal is to figure out how to help the students improve their state test scores.

But the complaint, according to union president Julie Sellers, wasn't about the schedule changes themselves. It was that the changes were made without any discussion or approval by the school's Instructional Leadership Team - a quasi-governing team of teachers representing all departments within a school.

"They (the teachers) aren't saying they don't want to do it, they just want a say in how it's done," Sellers said.

She said the principal had not convened the team of teachers once this year. That's a problem, she said, because those meetings make sure changes are well-communicated, well-thought and that the teachers have buy-in and ownership of them.

The union contract requires schools have Instructional Leadership Teams "so that the

principal, teachers and other members may share leadership and make decisions" in areas surrounding instruction, training and budget. But is unclear whether team approval is mandatory.


The grievance calls for Rowedder to convene a meeting of the team to review and vote on the educational strategies.

Rowedder could not be reached Friday.

The Academy of World Languages is one of three magnet elementary schools that specialize in foreign language instruction. The Ohio Report Card listed the school in Academic Watch - the second worst of six categories - on its 2009-2010 Ohio Report Card.


The school is also in its third year of School Improvement Status, a term under the 2003 No Child Left Behind act. If it continues to fail for a fourth year, it is subject to increasingly strict sanctions such as adding more programs or replacing staff. It's in the fourth year that the schools would be eligible for the district's Elementary Initiative program. The program directs extra resources to 16 of the district's worst-performing schools to pay for teacher training and outside expert help.

Status of negotiations



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The grievance at the Academy of World Languages comes as the long-stalled negotiations between the 2,300-member Cincinnati Federation of Teachers and Cincinnati Public Schools continue to move extremely slowly. The two sides still are meeting one to three times a week. CFT president Julie Sellers said the sides "did make progress this week," but indicated there are still many issues to be worked out. Superintendent Mary Ronan categorized the talks as "very, very slow." The three-year contract expired Dec. 31, although its terms have been extended indefinitely through negotiations. The district says it needs more flexibility in the contract to make transformative changes - like those at AWL - without having to go through so much union red tape. Union leaders have said the union wants reform, too, but it still needs structure in the contract to make sure changes are good for the students and fair for the teachers.



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