



CPS teachers file unfair labor charge

By Jessica Brown • jlbrown@enquirer.com • August 16, 2010

Cincinnati Public Schools' 2,300-member teachers union has signed an unfair labor practice charge against the school board, accusing it of failing to bargain in good faith on a new labor contract.

The Cincinnati Federation of Teachers and the district have been working since January to hammer out a new three-year contract. Their old one expired Dec. 31 and the teachers continue to work under its terms.

Both sides told The Enquirer over the weekend that although things were moving slowly, everyone was still at the table talking. Neither side was prepared yet to call impasse - or end negotiations.

But the filing, signed by the union Friday and obtained by The Enquirer on Monday, is a clear indicator of the problems that remain between the parties.

The 20-page filing accuses the district of dramatically switching gears on contract talks in June. It says the district, after months of productive negotiations, decided that the work wasn't "transformative" enough, according to the filing. The district then allegedly offered "a raft of radical 'take back' proposals" that had never been discussed, according to the union.

Among the pages of alleged "take backs" proposed by the district: making teachers work additional days without more pay; gutting teacher training and evaluation programs; deleting language that sets teacher/pupil ratios; and eliminating tenure.

It also accuses the district of imposing salary

cuts that violate the union contract.

The district will challenge the allegations, CPS spokeswoman Janet Walsh said.

She said the district is "disappointed" with the filing.

"We were making some progress. It has been slow and there were different interpretations on what transformative meant ... but we've been hopeful all along that ultimately we'll reach a contract that lives up the high expectations ... on both sides and that's along the lines of the recommendations of the New Teacher Project," she said.

The New Teacher Project is an education think tank that in December proposed reforming the way the district recruits, hires, assigns, compensates, evaluates, promotes and fires educators.

It is unclear how much of a wrench the labor filing will throw into the contract negotiations. The charge does not necessarily mean that negotiations will cease, according to Walsh, who said the district plans to stay at the table.

The next negotiation session is scheduled for Saturday.

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The superintendent and board members were all at a board retreat Monday and unable to be reached for comment. Union President Julie Sellers did not return calls on Monday.

The last unfair labor charge filed against the district occurred in September 2009. The CFT union accused Superintendent Mary Ronan of violating multiple parts of the union contract in her signature school "redesign" initiative. The state threw that charge out in February because it was not filed in a timely manner.

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