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## Cincinnati Public Schools to put top teachers at weak schools

### Move violates contract, says one reassigned instructor

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The Cincinnati Public School district is revamping a volunteer career training program for its teachers to ensure the best teachers are working in the lowest-performing schools.

The move is not unprecedented for the administration to weigh in on teacher assignments in this district of nearly 35,000 students. However, this is the first time the district has taken this broad or direct a stance on where its top teachers should teach.

The goal is to save the district money and improve academically struggling schools.

The move will only involve eight teachers next year, but could ultimately impact up to 426 of the district's 2,500 teachers as they move through the training program.

"It's a change in philosophy," said Superintendent Mary Ronan. "How else am I going to get the highest performing teachers in the lowest performing schools?"

Teachers currently have a say in where they teach.

The changes in the program come in the context of tough budget talks. The district is trying to cut \$17 million from a proposed 2010-2011 budget in order to keep spending flat. The administration has discussed cuts in transportation, crossing guards and summer school.

Revamping the career training program is expected to save the district \$1 million next year.

"I think it violates our contract that we're currently under," said Becky Armbruster, a union member and one of the teachers who will be reassigned. "That doesn't show too much faith in the administration upholding a bargaining agreement that they negotiated, so I disagree with it."

Negotiations between the district and the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers stalled last month after the groups failed to reach agreement on teacher employment and school scheduling rules. Employees remain under the same contract. Negotiations resume this month and both sides hope to have an agreement by June 30, the end of the district's financial year.

Armbruster, who taught first grade at Roberts Paideia Academy before her teacher training, thinks that it's unfair to limit the school choices of the district's top teachers.

"I'm not saying I wouldn't want to work at a (lower-performing) school, but I feel I would want to have a choice to work there," she said. "If you just place them, they could be unsatisfied and it could affect their performance."

The teacher training program works like this: Any teacher who enters the program receives extra professional development training. The training qualifies those people as "lead teachers." Lead

teachers can then leave their classroom for a three-year rotation as an "evaluator" during which they travel throughout the district assisting with the job evaluations of the other teachers.

Lead teachers who complete the rotation or take on other extra responsibilities earn a \$6,000 to \$6,500 stipend on top of their regular salary. Currently, 237 teachers receive a stipend.

Previously program graduates would return to a classroom at their old schools after their rotation. Generally lead teachers come from schools that perform better academically. The teachers impacted next year came from Covedale, Roberts, Hartwell, Shroder and Western Hills Engineering. Some of the teachers will end up back at their home school, but others are being reassigned.

Under the revamped program, the lead teachers must go wherever the district tells them to go after their rotation. Next year, that means placing them in some of the lowest performing schools including Quebec and Mount Airy.

The revamped program will also cap on the number of lead teachers at each school that can receive a stipend. That means many lead teachers will see pay cuts next year if they stay at their current school.

The point of the cap is to save money and make sure the district's highest-trained teachers are equally dispersed among all the schools in the district.

Ronan understands the concerns that the teachers may have, but is holding fast to her position, because she thinks the move is in the best interest of the district's students and finances.

"I'm going to push it and it may get us a grievance," she said.

The Academy of World Languages, a K-8 school which focuses on students who are learning English for the first time, will likely get one of the lead teachers next year.

"I'm excited about the person potentially coming to our school," said Principal Jackie Rowedder. "It's a great opportunity for my kids." That school is currently in "academic watch" status on the Ohio report card.

Some of the school board members applauded the changes.

"It's a very wise thing to do, both educationally and financially," said school board member Eve Bolton. She noted that the federal government is pushing for school reforms, including getting the best teachers at the schools with the highest need.

School board member Catherine Ingram also supports the revamp.

"If they (the teachers) are that good at what they do there should be some allowance to say when you come back we put you where we need you," she said. "Whatever's best for the education of the children."

The revamp does not need approval of the seven-member school board.

The teacher training program has expanded over its more than decade-long existence and costs about \$2.2 million today - money that comes from the district's general fund. So far the district has been unable to find alternate ways to pay for the program and the district simply can no longer afford that cost, said Ronan.