

RCSD accused of targeting union in teacher transfers

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The Rochester Teachers Association is accusing the city school district of using the state receivership process to illegally displace teachers who serve as union building representatives, particularly at Edison Career & Technology High School.

The union also alleges that the district broke the collective bargaining agreement in transferring teachers out involuntarily without providing any cause or notifying the union itself.

About 130 teachers were affected, RTA President Adam Urbanski said, including 27 at Edison Tech, representing about 9% of the faculty there. They included five of the seven building representatives, including social studies and special education teacher Michael Tobin.

According to Tobin and others, principals read off a district-provided script informing teachers they were being transferred out, but did not provide a reason and directed further questions to central office. That contravenes a 2016 agreement between the district and union requiring the principal and teacher to “discuss the basis for the request.”

“It was the most unprofessional, degrading and disgusting experience I’ve ever had,” said Tobin, who has been at Edison for 12 years. “I 100% think they’re union-busting and trying to end-run our contract.”

District spokesman Carlos Garcia said the district had not yet received the complaints and could not comment. The union provided to the *Democrat and Chronicle* a notice of claim to sue as well as two internal grievance forms.

Generally speaking, RCSD cannot move teachers against their will except according to very specific procedures. When schools are in receivership, the district gains that right but must formally inform the teacher and the union and give the reason why it is doing so.

The RTA alleges that in several receivership schools the district failed to do so, but instead disproportionately targeted union representatives and others who had been vocal advocates.

Urbanski, a Polish emigré, said it was a tactic “reminiscent of the old country.”

“Some people with union animus are taking advantage of this chaos in our district and are lashing out against union reps because they probably think it’s easier to get rid of them than to address their concerns,” he said.

He and Tobin noted that teachers in receivership schools often face more demands in their jobs and in some cases work longer hours than they would elsewhere. Having a less experienced teaching corps in those schools, they argued, makes it easier for administrators to ask more of teachers without generating pushback.

The dispute is an interruption in several years of mostly placid relations between RCSD and its largest union. Their contract will expire June 30, and it is not clear whether the two sides will extend the current agreement for one year or negotiate a new multiyear deal.

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Twenty-seven teachers at Edison Career and Technology High School, representing about 9 percent of the faculty, were displaced. TINA MACINTYRE-YEE/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE FILE PHOTO