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CPS teacher Craig Cleve holds a sign in a rally outside of CPS Pilsen-Little Village Network Seven on Monday. Craig and other teachers and parents showed their support for the teachers who chose not to administer the ISAT last week.



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Parents and community activists, who rallied at CPS Pilsen-Little Village Network Seven, said they are supporting teachers and students who have been retaliated against for opting out of the ISAT.

Angry parents, teachers accuse CPS of retaliating over opting out of ISAT

by **EMILY WEINSTEIN**
 Mar 12, 2014

Joanna Maravilla Cano said she and her husband never imagined they would be intimidated by their school's principal for exercising their right to opt their daughter out of the Illinois Standard Achievement Test.

"They put our children in an overall confusing and stressful situation, should they listen to the authority figure from their schools or should they listen to their parent who has the best intentions for them?" Maravilla Cano asked, adding that studies have shown the ISAT does not contribute to a child's overall academic growth.

Maravilla Cano was among parents and community activists who gathered Monday outside of the CPS Pilsen-Little Village Network Seven to show support for teachers who refused to administer the ISAT last week. Network Seven oversees Saucedo Scholastic Academy, which is one of two schools where teachers chose not to give the ISAT to students.

According to rally demonstrators, Chicago Public Schools officials retaliated against parents, students and teachers who opted out of the ISAT.

"What is the Board of Education doing right now under Rahm Emanuel?" asked Saucedo teacher Sarah Chambers at the press conference. "They're doing what Rahm Emanuel does best, they're bullying us!"

Opponents of the ISAT say that students are over-tested and the ISAT is a "low-stakes test," meaning that its results will not be used for student promotion, teacher and school evaluations, or selective enrollment applications. CPS teacher Craig Cleve said there are no negative academic repercussions for students opting out of the ISAT.

"As a teacher, it doesn't have any value for me," Cleve said, "because I won't see any of the results of it until next July...and it really doesn't have any data that I can use with my students right now."

The areas ISAT used to effect, such as student promotion, are now based on the Northwest Education Association Measurement of Academic Progress test. The ISAT will be completely phased out by next school year.

CPS CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett reiterated in a letter sent to parents Jan. 29 that parents have the right to opt their students out of state standardized tests, but Byrd-Bennett also strongly discouraged parents from doing so.

"I hope you will strongly consider the value of these assessments in providing your child with a high-quality education that will prepare her/him for college, career and life," Byrd-Bennett wrote in the letter. "

Yet, according to those at the rally, when students and teachers chose to opt out of the ISAT last week, CPS officials bullied them as a result, sparking controversy.

According to Chambers, officials have threatened revoking teachers' licenses, have made harassing phone calls to parents, and have mistreated the students who chose to opt out.

"On day one of testing," Chambers said, "the opt-out students did not receive breakfast at a school where 90 percent of students are below poverty level and do not eat breakfast at home."

Parents and teachers said they were also upset because their children are losing valuable learning time.

"Please understand that there will be no alternate instruction given during the assessment," Byrd-Bennett wrote. "Children who are not being assessed will be required to engage in a silent, self-guided activity while their peers are being tested."

Anne Carlson, teacher from Drummond Montessori School, is among the about 45 teachers who chose not to administer the ISAT last week. She chose to teach instead.

"The students and I have to hide in the trenches, in the library behind the tall bookshelves," Carlson said at the press conference, "and one of my students stands guard watching to make sure no administrator catches us teaching and learning."

CPS issued a statement saying that the District is required by Illinois law to administer the ISAT, and that the test is tied to classroom funding and making sure students are college-ready.

According to CPS spokeswoman Lauren Huffman, CPS is working with the Illinois State Board of Education to decide on the "appropriate disciplinary action against teachers who chose not to administer the test."

ISBE spokesman Matt Vanover said no disciplinary action has been decided on at this time.

"We have to wait for CPS to complete their review, and see what local action will be taken, and then at that time we will decide if state-level action needs to be taken," Vanover said.

ISAT testing will continue in CPS schools through the end of the week.



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Teachers, parents and community activists rallied Monday to express their anger caused by CPS retaliation against parents, teachers and students who opted out of state tests.

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