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Contract talks heat up early at Centinela Valley
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New contract negotiations begin next week, but the fireworks already are starting to fly in the Centinela Valley school district, with teachers accusing trustees of disrespect and district officials insisting things are being done by the book.

At a district board meeting Tuesday, teachers union President Sandra Goins complained that jobs are being filled without being posted, a contract violation. She later alleged that the district is handpicking candidates and pushing them through the hiring process before informing all union members of vacancies.

Any moneymaking opportunity for teachers -- whether it's to take on another class or simply monitor students during lunchtime -- must be posted for 10 days before any interviews begin, according to their contract.

"It's starting to be a little bit wearing," Goins told the trustees, asserting she has brought the same issue to them three times. "I don't know what to think other than you're not hearing us and you don't have a lot of respect for us."

Superintendent Cheryl White on Wednesday denied such claims, saying, "We definitely post positions."

The Centinela Valley Union High School District is no stranger to rancorous relations with its teachers union, which had a contentious history with past Superintendent Julian Lopez. Before leaving his post in 2004, Lopez was blamed for low teacher morale and often criticized for what the union described as skewed spending priorities.

Better rapport exists with current chief White, who for eight years headed the district's educational services department and is a former teacher.

White said Wednesday she was "double-checking to make sure every (opening) is posted, because we want to give all people an opportunity" to apply for vacancies.

"If some weren't posted, it certainly wasn't the personnel department's intent not to post them," she said. "We'll see where the glitch is if they really weren't posted."

Calls to all five board members on Wednesday were unreturned. However, without answering Goins' accusations, two trustees did address the issue during their Tuesday meeting.

Francisco Talavera urged collaboration between the district and the teachers union. "I am concerned and I really want us to work together," he said.

Without giving any specifics, President Jorge Arroyo suggested tightening "the parameters in which

certain procedures take place."

"We're trying to change the way we do business here in Centinela Valley," he said.

The union and the district will begin new contract talks next week. Neither side has asked that the issue of vacancy notification be revisited, according to Goins.

"This should not be an issue. It's been in the contract for years," she said. "You get the best when there is an opportunity for competition, but that's not happening. That should take place."

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