



Monday, March 3, 2008

## Our View - COPE opens up good discussion with district

We want to commend the members of Citizens for Outstanding Public Education, or COPE, for raising important questions about the process by which the Iowa City School District decides how many teachers to assign to each school. District leaders are scheduled to start discussing teacher allocation next month, so it's a good time for COPE to hold its first public meeting Thursday night to discuss teacher assignments at City High and West High ("Parent group to discuss teacher allocations," Feb. 26).

We also want to commend district officials -- specifically Superintendent Lane Plugge, Assistant Superintendent Jim Behle, School Board member Tim Krumm and West High Principal Jerry Arganbright -- for attending the outside group's first meeting, listening to the proposals and actively participating in the discussion. Earlier this year, a group of parents were critical of district officials' lack of movement on assigning more teachers to City High, which had about 150 more students than was projected. Participants in COPE want the district to re-evaluate teacher assignments far more frequently, perhaps on a trimester basis, because enrollment changes so rapidly in the Iowa City area.

Some other concerns raised in these discussions include:

- Ensuring the district has reliable, up-to-date online data about school populations and teacher allocation that groups like COPE or media outlets can have easy access to.
- Ensuring that discussions about the future of the district do not get sidetracked into Westside-Eastside rivalries. The group members include parents and other residents in the West High and City High areas.
- Ensuring that teachers and other school employees feel that they can share their concerns and critiques of district policy.

Ed Stone, a parent of two students at City High and one of the organizers for the group, has proposed addressing the third concern by having the board and administration draft a policy that clearly encourages students, teachers and other employees to participate in public discussion about the issues facing the district. His suggested wording is:

"The Board of Directors and the Central Administration of the Iowa City Community School District feel that open dialogue among all of the stakeholders in our public education system is very desirable. We therefore want to formally encourage all students, teachers, administrators and other employees of the District to attend and actively participate in public discussions relating to our schools, including: parent-teacher-student organizations, school board meetings, alumni organizations, citizen advocacy groups, and the editorial pages of our local newspapers. We want to explicitly encourage the members of our broad education community to share their constructive, fact-based opinions in public -- whether in agreement or disagreement with current District policies -- without fear of any harmful effect on their employment. Indeed, we recognize that freedom of speech is the cornerstone of our free society, and we feel that this freedom is essential to the long-term success of our District."

We agree with the sentiment expressed in this draft -- especially the part about speaking openly with the newspaper. The district administration already has a policy that specifically prohibits the superintendent from

**The issue**• A group called COPE is calling for public discussion about the way the Iowa City School District handles teacher allocation.  
**We suggest**• **It's a good time for COPE to hold its first public meeting, and district officials are to be commended for attending the group's meeting.**  
**What do you think?**• **Should the district re-evaluate teacher assignments more often?**  
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"(discriminating) against any staff member for expressing an ethical dissent," but a reaffirmation of the district's commitment to open dialogue could help improve this discussion by adding insight from the people with the most direct experience with the issues facing the district.

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