

Duval teachers complain about class sizes, planning time and more

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By **Christopher J. Brooks**

Some Duval County Public Schools teachers complain about being asked to teach classes at a time when they should be developing lesson plans. Other teachers believe they are over-testing kindergarten students.

Those are among 16 grievances filed by Duval Teachers United President Terrie Brady, according to [a copy obtained by the Times-Union](#).

Overall, the grievances claim that the district has violated certain rules originally agreed upon in the teacher-district collective bargaining agreement. The grievances point to violations in employee workdays, teaching loads, class interruptions, planning periods and teaching supplies.

Superintendent Nikolai Vitti said he has been aware of these issues since the start of school. School Board Chairman Fel Lee said he and the board expect Vitti to resolve the issues as soon as possible.

"We've got to get it figured out and we've got to get it figured out quickly because students, teachers and principals are being impacted," Lee said.

Brady declined to discuss the specifics of the grievances on Wednesday, saying that she wanted to respect district officials and work with them to resolve the issues.

"I think Ms. Brady cares about teachers and cares about students and I believe she's using her role to highlight concerns in the field," Vitti said.

Brady and DTU's 16-point grievance list include claims that:

- teachers particularly in art, music and physical education are seeing abnormally large class sizes in middle school
- teachers are being forced to stay after school ends and stand at the buses for afternoon duty beyond their normal work hours
- teachers at the overage academies do not have duty-free lunches nor do they have daily planning periods
- teachers are missing instruction time because they have to perform monitoring duties in cafeterias
- teachers don't have the printer cartridges and copy machine access they need to create materials
- some teachers are being asked to teach a class during their planning period and offered pay at their hourly rates

The grievance list asserts that "DTU has tried to address contract violations school by school.

"Violations of contract language, however, are so pervasive district-wide that filing a general grievance was required to stop the systemic abuse of the Collective Bargaining Agreement."

Vitti said not all of the grievances illustrate a district-wide problem and, in some cases, he has already begun solving issues.

Another DTU grievance notes that teachers feel the learning process has been interrupted because of an inordinate amount of testing. Vitti said the complaint centers on kindergarten through second-grade teachers who are not accustomed to administering one-on-one tests. To solve this issue, Vitti said, beginning immediately, teachers won't be required to give K-2 students the curriculum-guide assessments for science, music and art. Teachers will have to continue using the assessments for reading and math.

"The concern has been that there's a lot of assessments, especially for the kindergartners and a lot of that has fallen on the teacher," Vitti said. "So that's where I feel like we need to remove some of those assessments."

Regarding teachers and bus duty, Vitti said elementary teachers have complained that the district wants them to teach until the last minute of class. But by doing so, teachers feel they must stay after class and escort children to the bus. Vitti said district officials have continually told elementary school principals to allow teachers to end instruction a few minutes early so students can have time to prepare for dismissal. The district's chief academic officer reminded principals of that on Tuesday, Vitti added.

But Vitti recognized that some issues don't have a resolution.

One grievance notes that some classes are being selected to host an overflow of students while others stay at class-size requirements. Vitti said the

district has purposely moved students to different classes to help equalize the number of students in each room. Some classes will have a few students over the limit, but it isn't financially responsible for the district to deploy an extra teacher because of two or three extra students, Vitti said.

Kelley Ranch, a Latin teacher at Ribault High School, said she gets along well with her school's administration and does not share the same issues raised in Brady's grievances.

However, as a 30-year teacher, she said she can see how these issues impede a teacher's ability to instruct.

"It just seems like these set up unnecessary brick walls and, because this is an issue that the administration has to deal with, it instigates this sort of us-versus-them thing," she said.

Lee called the grievances legitimate and added that they contain issues that he has heard about before Wednesday. The board chairman said he didn't have a timetable for when Vitti and the union should solve the issues, but would instead leave it up to the district administration and union leaders.

"What's important to me is that we've acknowledged them and that we have a plan of attack to address them [the grievances]," Lee said. "But we have a bunch of people hustling in the [district] administration and a bunch of people hustling at the union to get these things resolved."

Brady's grievances come weeks after the union president raised issues about some teachers missing instructional materials at the third week of school. The missing materials included middle school novels, elementary school math textbooks, workbooks for ACT/SAT prep classes and middle-school algebra enrichment materials. Vitti said Wednesday that most of those materials have been delivered.

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