

Teachers also laid off in virtual retooling

Written by Mark Jaeger

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Operator of on-line school would rehire staff, outside of union contract

When the Northern Ozaukee School District issued preliminary layoff notices to all of its teachers last week, it wasn't the first time this year such an extreme measure has been taken.

"We have already been through this process with WVL," said School Board President Paul Krause.

The entire staff of Wisconsin Virtual Learning, the district's virtual charter school program, were already given layoff notices in anticipation of the system being taken over by the Pennsylvania company National Network of Digital Schools.

The virtual program has 30 teachers and aides who serve online students throughout the state.

"Once the new non-instrumentality charter is in place, the virtual teachers will be rehired but as employees of NNDS and without collective bargaining rights."

By transferring the program and staff to NNDS, virtual teachers would no longer be members of the Fredonia Education Association, the local teachers' union.

Decisions about the operation of the virtual program would be made by a new governing board. That five-member body would include one Northern Ozaukee School Board member in a non-voting position.

The School Board was to hold a hearing on the new charter at 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 3.

For the past two years the district has worked closely with NNDS in the operation of its digital charter school. The company is one of the primary curriculum providers for the virtual program.

Although officials are still weighing the impact Gov. Scott Walker's budget repair bill is likely to have on staffing at district schools, Krause said it is likely to mean the layoff of four brick-and-mortar teachers and one or two paraprofessionals.

"We've worked out how class sizes would have to be shifted and determined it would be plausible, although not desirable," he said.

The scenario is much brighter for the virtual program, he said.

As it now stands, Krause said the state does not intend to reduce the amount of aid received for virtual students.

"This is a case where the virtual school will really, really help us. Open-enrollment reimbursement will not be affected, and because our enrollment is pretty evenly divided between brick-and-mortar and virtual students, it means half of our aids won't be cut," he said.

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