Teacher Won’t Administer CSAP Tests

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By Percy Ednalino

Jan. 27, 2001 – A middle-school teacher in Greeley said Friday that herefuses to administer the Colorado Student Assessment Program tests to his students because they clash with his beliefs as an educator.

This is the first time a teacher has refused to administer the tests, officials believe. State law requires teachers to give the exams, a fact that hasn't escaped Donald Perl, 58.

"I've anguished over this for a long time, and I cannot administer these tests, knowing the population here and seeing how discriminatory the test is," said Perl, a Greeley resident who teaches eighth-grade Spanish, reading and language arts at John Evans Middle School.

Non-English-speaking students are at a disadvantage because the tests are written in English, he said. More than 40 percent of the Greeley School District's student enrollment is Latino. A Spanish version is offered only for third- and fourth-grade reading.

Perl also said the test cultivates competition instead of cooperation and test-taking skills over "true stimulation of our children's curiosity."

"It was all intuitive at first, you know?" he said. "I started to talk to some people about it and … the more I looked, the more I read, the more I saw that these high-stakes standardized tests violate my egalitarian values of what the public school system is supposed to be about."

Perl sent copies of a news release he issued Friday about his intended boycott to district Superintendent Anthony Pariso and each member of the State Board of Education. Principal "shocked" As of Friday afternoon, only Barbara Sheen, the principal of John Evans, had responded to Perl's declaration.

"The principal was shocked," Perl said. Sheen did not return phone calls to her office. Pariso was out of town and unavailable for comment.

"We obviously need to get legal counsel at this point and find out just exactly where we are with all this," said John Stewart, associate superintendent. "We're not going to have many comments until after we have a chance to visit with our legal counsel."

Deborah Fallin, director of public relations for the Colorado Education Association, said any disciplinary action against Perl would be taken at the district level.

She said Perl would not be subject to criminal prosecution, even though the state mandates administering the tests, which are given from the third through 10th grades in reading, writing, math and science.

A teacher, like any other school employee, can be dismissed for not performing his or her assigned duties, Fallin said.

Fallin said that to her knowledge, this is the first time anyone has refused to administer the test.

But Colorado Commissioner of Education Bill Moloney said teachers have had concerns about the tests since they were introduced five years ago.

Moloney said he's not worried that other teachers could follow suit with Perl's boycott of the CSAPs.

"They know it's the law, and we know it's the law," he said. "People have opinions about testing, and it's perfectly natural. So far, there's been a remarkable level of cooperation. We trust the local folks to look after it, and I suspect that it'll take care of itself.

"In any event, they can just get someone else to give the test. Big deal."

Perl said he is prepared to face the consequences of his refusal.

"You know what? I have to look at myself in the mirror, and I know these tests are wrong," he said. "Frankly, I'm not a teacher when I teach to a test like this, when I administer a test like this. People need to think about this: The role of a teacher is to bring people to examine their own thoughts.

"If I have gotten some people to think about this, then I have done my job as a teacher."

Perl was reluctant to discuss the possibility that he could lose his job, along with the effects it would have on his family, but he said "I figure when one door closes, another one will open."

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