

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

March 27, 2014

Perelman Day School faculty refuses to be intimidated into signing away its union rights

WYNNEWOOD, PA – Faculty members at Perelman Jewish Day School vowed Thursday to fight to retain union representation, after the school's board of directors informed them Monday that it won't recognize the union after Aug. 31, when the current collective bargaining agreement expires.

Perelman Jewish Day School Faculty Association (PJDSFA), Local 3578, American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, has represented the teachers since 1976. The private Jewish school, with campuses in Wynnewood and Elkins Park, serves kindergarten through fifth grades.

The board notified 55 stunned PJDSFA members late Monday night by email that it had voted behind closed doors to rescind its recognition of the school's faculty union after nearly four decades. The board vote came after nearly a year of planning that was kept secret from teachers and parents.

"We are disappointed and deeply saddened by the board's actions," said teacher and union president Lisa Richman. "We remain committed to an open dialogue with the board and administration, not as weak individuals, but as strong union educators."

At a union membership meeting at the Stern Campus of the Perelman School in Wynnewood Thursday evening, members in attendance passed unanimously a resolution urging the board to rescind its withdrawal of recognition of the union.

The resolution stated: "As members of the Union, we categorically reject the terms and conditions in the materials that were handed to us, and we authorize all of our local, state and national officers to pursue all legal means to have this action reversed and to return to the bargaining table, where we can negotiate in good faith a contract that is good for the students and the teachers."

AFT Pennsylvania President Ted Kirsch assured members that they have the support of AFT Pennsylvania, the American Federation of Teachers, the AFL-CIO and parents and colleagues across the state and the country.

"The actions of this Board of Directors are immoral," he said. "They plotted behind the backs of their faculty. They notified them at 10 p.m. Monday night. They instructed them to attend a meeting with less than 24-hours' notice to pick up, read and sign within a week a letter forfeiting their rights to be treated fairly, and with respect and dignity. We believe the board's actions violate the National Labor Relations Act, and years of Jewish law and tradition on the way to treat employees. We will pursue every legal avenue on behalf of these dedicated teachers and committed union members."

As word spread through Philadelphia's Jewish, education and labor communities, messages of support poured in for the small, private-sector teachers' union.

"This decision by the board, whatever their motives, is a violation of Jewish precepts regarding the right of collective bargaining and the inspiring legacy of the Jewish labor movement, of which I am a fifth generation participant, and my daughter is already the sixth. What's more, by cloaking their actions and responding to criticisms with attacks and stonewalling, the board makes it impossible for me to believe that they are truly motivated to create a more positive school community," said Jesse Bacon, the parent of a Perelman student.

Originally, teachers were given one week to sign a letter giving up all of their rights in exchange for a job for one year. Some of the members had been teaching at the school for two decades or more. Under the new terms, faculty members could be fired at any time, without cause, a hearing or any recourse. They would work longer days and be assigned additional duties but give up due process rights, seniority, tenure and other rights guaranteed by their current collective bargaining agreement.

"The letters teachers were asked to sign are scab agreements," Kirsch said, "and the board's entire rollout this week was designed to pressure, manipulate and intimidate faculty into signing agreements that aren't in their best interests or in the best interest of the school or students."

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