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SWEETWATER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 2

## 'No policy, no understanding ... no teamwork'

Teachers alarmed by length of surprise 'walkthroughs' – and no feedback, association co-presidents say

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DONNA LITTLE-KAUMO



SANDRA BOWLING

Sweetwater County School District No. 2 Photo

GREEN RIVER — The concluded fall semester in Sweetwater County School District No. 2 saw a new development: administrators spending 45-plus minutes in teachers' classrooms, showing up without notice or disclosure as to how often they would be doing so.

That has concerned teachers in the district, who were also worried that they weren't getting feedback upon the monitoring sessions. So they went to the leadership of the their employee association. The administration and board of the district confronted the leaders of the organization, the Green River Education Association, after teachers "(were) told to keep notes on patterns of administrator observations because some of them are in excess of 45 minutes," Superintendent Donna Little-Kaumo said in a meeting Nov. 1 at central district offices, where the accosting occurred.

"They are going to be in there and so you just have to tell your members that 'you know what guys, that is not our call; that is the administration's call. So plan your lessons really well and get in there and teach your little hind ends off like you do every day and don't worry about it,'" Little-Kaumo said in the meeting, according to documentation obtained by the Rocket-Miner.

"The one thing is understanding," Green River Education Association co-president Lisa Robison said.

"You can help them with that" was Little-Kaumo's reply.

Assistant Superintendent Jamie Christensen later said "Absolutely, there are times when we all of a sudden say 'we need to go a different direction with this teacher, maybe, as he is not getting better. ... But until that time, the goal is to try and grow him and to help him all to get better."

GREA co-president Sandra Bowling had said "I'm not negative about the walkthroughs; I am negative about how to help them understand about the consistency, as there is no policy, no understanding; there is no teamwork among administrators with the teachers. ... We need to work together as a team and not just as a 'gotcha.'"

"I have to say, Sandy, that I heard you say one thing that got my attention and this is the piece that is a little bit frustrating to me ... you said 'I feel like it is a gotcha,'" Christensen said as the meeting continued.

"That is how they perceive it and that is how they understand that and we need to change that perception," Bowling said.

"Have you asked them to talk to their administrators?" Little-Kaumo asked.

"I think that it goes back to their not understanding the process again, as all of a sudden this is happening and they don't completely understand it," Robison said.

"Is this a new-teacher thing?" Board Member Ann Rudoff asked.

"It is a variety," Robison and Bowling each said. Bowling later said "I have already had six or seven young teachers tell me that they won't be here next year."

"Over the past year, we have had to bring things up that we didn't know about because we thought that they had been taken care of six or seven years ago or even three years ago – and they have continued going on," Bowling later said. She is in her fourth year of being president or co-president.

"Teachers are professionals; they have gone to college and are professionals and they want to be treated as professionals. ... I can guarantee you that a surgeon doesn't have somebody just walk in to a surgeon room," Bowling said. "We are professionals, too. It is our hearts and our lives ... There is a quick walkthrough. Then it is 20 minutes. And then it is 40 minutes. Nobody was ever notified of that."

### **Timeline, length & dispute**

"We were going 15 or 20 minutes and we've stayed longer at others, because 45 minutes, then we started that this year," Christensen said. "When you stay a little bit longer it feels a little bit different; I get that."

Christensen also said "that 45, 35 or 20-minute or whatever it happens to be, it is a relatively new piece, too," Christensen said.

"It is," Robison said.

"I believe that we have been very clear since the beginning of the year, when we had the opening meeting, that we were going to be doing walkthroughs and that you were going to be given feedback," Little-Kaumo had said. "There were comments like 'can there only be, like, one per semester?' or 'could we invite the principals in instead of them popping in?' The answer is 'no' and sometimes you are going to have a 'no' from us because we are saying that the principals are in charge. I have given the principals strict directions that 'you are to be in classrooms more, you have to give teachers quality feedback, both positive and in growth areas.'"

That feedback hasn't been given, Bowling said. Little-Kaumo said it "should be" and that principals would be asked to give it.

Bowling said the feedback should entail "a learning target for teachers on a monthly or weekly basis," but Little-Kaumo said "trying to make it consistent in a way that you are thinking about it, Sandy, would really be tough, because it depends on what the teacher needs."

As the dispute continued, 40 and 45 minutes were repeatedly brought up by GREA leadership as assessment lengths of concern for the teachers.

"I said 'here is what to tell the members: plan well, teach well and embrace people when they come in,'" Little-Kaumo remarked on what she said in a prior meeting. "I personally was a little offended that you were telling people to keep notes on patterns of administrations. Why? We tell the administrators what to do. That is not your role; your role is not to say why they get to come in for 45 minutes. Because we want them in there for 45 minutes and we want them to give you feedback. That is our job."

"I thought that we were going to have a meeting on communication and this is just a bashing, so I am going to leave," Bowling replied early in the meeting.

"It is not about bashing, Sandy," Little-Kaumo said.

"You cannot tell GREA what to do; you can tell us 'no' but we (can't) tell you 'no' back," Bowling said. "That is what is happening. I am not agreeing with everything that you say and what should be moving forward with the district. We can have differences, OK, and (be) going through and sharing the experiences."

"We have come up with strategies on how we are going to improve student achievement," Little-Kaumo had said. "Some principals are in there a lot and other principals may be in there a little bit."

### **Extra! Extra!**

"The school board put a stamp of approval on these evaluations," Board Vice Chairman Steve Core said. "If you want to bitch at somebody, that's us."

"What happens to us is that other people don't have that understanding and so it is a communication thing, not just from us, but from administration, too, because they didn't get that understanding from their administrators," Robison replied. "I can't say that 45 minutes is all right or not; I don't know ... every building has a little bit different evaluation form that they use for classroom walkthroughs."

"You have teachers talking to each other from different buildings, like 'how come this or how come that,'" Robison said. "We get hit with that and I don't want to answer for that administrator by any means."

Scott Blume is a former GREA president who said he was invited, but Robison said it didn't come from the GREA. He said "I kept thinking about that video package that I was watching."

"Those are instructional rounds," Little-Kaumo said.

"As far as instructional rounds ... the walkthrough is just an administrator going through and I understand all of that because that is exactly what the video did," said Christensen, who blocked the Rocket-Miner from covering rounds each for the primary and secondary schools this semester. On both occasions, the rounds were listed on the district's public calendar.

To Christensen's remarks on the rounds, Bowling said "I have asked the question that some people get 10 walkthroughs and other people get two."

"That is correct," Christensen replied.

"That is a problem," Bowling said.

"Why is that a problem?" Core asked.

"They don't have an explanation," Bowling said.

"I don't care if they walk into your room 10 times, it is to help you," Core said. "It is to help you get better and us to get better and our kids to learn what they need to get."

"It is the lack of understanding of the process," Robison said.

"Then that is something that we need to fix," Core said.

"It is the consistency," Bowling said.

"That is what," Robison said.

### **Board questions administration**

"A principal goes in and looks at Scott and evaluates him for 45 minutes and takes some notes, what happens after that?" asked Core, the chairman.

"What is a principal supposed to do? I am asking the administration, what is supposed to happen?"

"Then what we ask them to do is give the teachers feedback," Little-Kaumo said.

"Does that happen on a constituent, next-day basis or is it a week later? Because I agree with Sandy that if I had somebody evaluate me and I didn't hear anything from them for 10 days, I would be wondering 'what the heck?'" Core said. "I get that and I agree that we should have consistency and that all principals will do whatever they need to do and then I think communicating with the person that they evaluated as soon as possible is a fair thing."

"I think that absolutely, but sometimes, it's a drive by on a prep hour and it's like 'here is what I saw and there was some good work here or I'd do this,' Christensen said. "(I) also think that sometimes people do it by email, some teachers write it on a sheet and the administrators leave it."