



Evans seeks more dismissal power

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Superintendent Dan Evans wants to manage Jackson Public Schools teachers more like a baseball team.

In some professional sports, some players are "unprotected," meaning they can be released with no recourse. Evans said he would like to implement a similar system where up to three Jackson Education Association members of the district's choosing could be released after each school year. The union's ability to contest the firings would be limited.

Evans thinks the proposal would help purge the school system of underperforming teachers, whether they have tenure protection or not.

"Somebody is not going to sit around here and make the place bad for everybody else," he said.

Evans will take his idea to the bargaining table with the Jackson Education Association in May, when the current teachers union contract expires.

"He's done that before," said longtime union President Mary Lou Konkle. "Which three would you pick?"

Konkle said the administration needs to concentrate on getting principals to complete teacher evaluations on time. The union and district have an ongoing dispute about this issue.

"Administrators have a job to do. They need to do that job," Konkle said. "Some do, some don't."

Nontenured teachers must be evaluated twice a year until they are considered for tenure status after four years. Principals must evaluate tenured teachers only every three years.

Evans said there could be an exception for high-performing veteran teachers, but otherwise most of the 450-member union would be left vulnerable.

"There would be some give and take," he said. "It would be negotiated all the way down the line."

Labor experts agree the idea is unusual, but would be revolutionary in the public sector if the teachers union agreed to begin working under conditions of regular at-will employees.

"That would be a bit unusual, but I think it's interesting," said Tom Washburne, director of labor policy at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a Midland-based free market think tank.

Jackson would be hard pressed to get around the state's tenure laws protecting teachers' jobs, Washburne said.

"I don't think you can just bargain that away," he said. "Because tenured teachers have some rights."

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