Inland teachers unions discourage job seekers at fair

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By Adam Hartmann / The Press-Enterprise

SAN BERNARDINO - Representatives from three Inland teachers unions went to a job fair Saturday to discourage prospective teachers from going to work for their districts.

Union officials from Yucaipa-Calimesa, Rialto and Victor Valley Union High distributed fliers that negatively portrayed their districts. They highlighted low pay, weak morale and unresponsive management.

"We need anybody who's thinking of coming to Yucaipa to know what they're getting into," said Cyndi Holman, president of the Yucaipa-Calimesa Educators Association.

Facing off against the districts that employ them, the teachers unions used the job fair at Cal State San Bernardino as a protest to influence contract negotiations they say are going nowhere.

Two of the districts, Victor Valley Union High School and Yucaipa-Calimesa, are at a negotiations impasse, and Rialto Education Association. President Bill Hedrick said his group is likely to follow after almost a year of bargaining.

Defiant union members passed out the fliers to the estimated 1,500 job seekers that made their way in to meet with about 85 employers at the university's Coussoulis Arena.

Wielding piles of fliers from their post about 200 yards away from the arena, Yucaipa-Calimesa and Victor Valley union officials and teachers greeted candidates with comments such as "Avoid Yucaipa!" Rialto protesters stationed themselves closer to the arena, flagging down nearly every passerby.

Sherry Kendrick, Yucaipa-Calimesa's assistant superintendent of human resources, said she was aware of the protest but said it wasn't hindering the district's recruitment efforts, describing business as "brisk."

"It's their right, (but) it's disappointing if it does deter some of the better ones," Kendrick said. "That would be a sad thing."
Elvin Momon, Victor Valley's senior director of certificated personnel, was unavailable for comment immediately.

Many job seekers took one or more fliers, studying them as they walked along the path to the arena.

"They probably have a legitimate gripe on some of this," said James Potts, a substitute teacher in San Bernardino and Colton, as he strode toward the arena.

Still, Potts said he would make the best deal for himself.

"I can understand some of it (but) hey, I'll take whatever's coming out," Potts said.

Jamie Sullivan, a union organizer and teacher in the Victor Valley Union High School District, said her district has hired more than 100 new teachers this year, comprising almost 25 percent of the teaching staff.

"We have like a revolving door for teachers," Sullivan said, noting her district also lags in per-pupil spending and salaries for both beginning and veteran teachers, compared to neighboring districts.

Angelica Lepe, a substitute teacher in Moreno Valley, called the teachers' salary situation "unbelievable ... it's ridiculous," as she scanned a flier. A former substitute in Los Angeles, Lepe said Inland substitutes make about half as much as substitutes in the LAUSD, making them as underpaid as the regular teachers.

"For them to get paid that, come on, that's a joke," Lepe said.

Her sentiments were echoed by Temika Morris, a credential and master's student at UC Riverside and a substitute teacher in the Riverside Unified district.

"I think it's wonderful, actually," Morris said of the protests. "It's so tough being a teacher."

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