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Posted: 8:23 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 23, 2012

APS teachers accused in cheating scandal given ultimatum

By Tom Regan

ATLANTA — Teachers accused in the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests test-cheating scandal were summoned to Atlanta Public School headquarters on Thursday to meet individually with legal representatives of the school system.

They were given two choices, according to a teacher who didn't wish to be identified.

"It was very brief. They basically gave us an option of either resigning, or be prepared for termination," the teacher said.

The educator told Channel 2's Tom Regan she was accused of altering CRCT test answers at Parks Middle School.

She said she planned to fight the charges before an administrative hearing.

"We are all individuals and I believe every person has a right to present their case," the teacher said.

The school system, and Superintendent Erroll Davis, are taking steps to close the books on the test-cheating scandal which has cost \$6.2 million in salary and compensation to 120 educators on paid administrative leave.

There's also a looming May 15 deadline, when tenured educators are entitled to one-year contract extensions. On Wednesday, Davis told Regan said he will not renew teachers who are under suspicion of test cheating.

"I'm not intending on issuing contracts to anyone who had not been exonerated and not had a proceeding. So, I'm anticipating we will get our work done prior to May 15," Davis said.

Lawyers for some of the accused teachers said APS is making a rush to judgment, because they still have not seen

evidence that is in the hands of the Fulton County District Attorney's Office, which is conducting a separate criminal investigation.

Instead, they said the school system is relying solely on the findings of the state investigation into test scores in 2009.

"When you have a number of clients who say, 'What is said is not accurate,' it makes you wonder about the accuracy of the report," said attorney Melvin Goldstein. Goldstein said his law firm represents 30 of the accused educators.

"I have a problem from the onset, when the superintendent issues marching orders that everyone purportedly involved is going to be fired," Goldstein said.

Another attorney, who is representing six accused educators, told Regan there is not factual evidence to prove his clients are guilty of test cheating. He also said he may file suit against APS for damaging the reputation of his clients.

"We believe their reputation has been sullied in a way that cannot be repaired short of litigation," Griggs said.

Sixty educators are being given notice Thursday and Friday. Those who chose not to resign will be given a charge letter, which details allegations of misconduct. They are entitled to present evidence at an administrative tribunal hearing to block punitive action.

Teachers who were notified Thursday have until Friday or Monday to decide whether to resign or challenge the test-cheating accusations.

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