

Greece bias study begins

• Fate of schools chief unclear amid 5 teacher EEOC complaints.

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GREECE — Attorneys representing Greece Central School District's Board

of Education and District Superintendent Margaret Keller-Cogan are discussing whether Keller-Cogan should stay away from dis-

trict property during an investigation into five teachers' charges of discrimination.

The study will kick off today when the district's attorneys — Harter, Secrest and Emery — hire an educational consultant to

evaluate the complaints, which are pending with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Keller-Cogan repeated Monday that she plans to return to her office next Monday.

"Greece is a big place,"

she said. "I need to be back in the office to conduct district business, but I will not in any way interfere with the investigation."

The back-and-forth discussion has many community members concerned about the future of the dis-

trict. Greece is the eighth-largest school district in the state, with about 13,600 students and about 1,100 teachers. Greece residents and employees want to know whether the district

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took part in any discriminatory practices. Some of those charges are associated with teacher accountability, an area that fell under Keller-Cogan's charge when she led the district's efforts in curriculum, instruction and accountability. She took over the district's top job in July.

David Kresock, a partner at Harter, Secrest and Emery, said he's not sure how long it will take to complete the study.

To date, the nine-member board has not voted on whether Keller-Cogan must take a leave of absence or if she must avoid district property during the investigation. It was thought that her presence could influence the outcome of the investigation.

Five determinations from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission are at the heart of the controversy.

Since mid-July, the EEOC's Buffalo office has determined that the district did not act prop-

erly in its treatment of five teachers, three of whom no longer work for the district. As a result, the school system could face five lawsuits, each of which could cost the district hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Because the complaints involve personnel matters, neither the district nor the EEOC would comment on them. It is unclear what circumstances led to four of the complaints.

But one of the five teachers who filed a complaint, Mary Donlon, 54, has taught for the district for more than 15 years.

According to documents provided to the *Democrat and Chronicle*, the EEOC determined that Donlon had been treated unfairly by the district because of her age, a medical disability and for speaking out when she thought she was being treated unfairly.

The document stated, for example, that the district made numerous criticisms of Donlon's performance in the classroom and "failed to set attainable criteria for improvement, denigrated (Donlon's) professional

abilities, attacked her character and credibility and created a paper trail to support its position."

It typically takes about six months from the time an employee files a charge until the EEOC makes a determination, said Elizabeth Cadle, director of the EEOC's Buffalo office.

The extent of the teachers' complaints came up at a hastily called board meeting Friday at Greece Apollo Middle School, attended by more than 600 concerned teachers, parents and community members, most of whom loudly voiced their support of Keller-Cogan. Many had come because they had heard rumors that Keller-Cogan's future with the district was in jeopardy and were surprised when board members voted 5-3 to hire an educational consultant to study the charges.

Chris Savino, Greece PTA Council co-president, said she is hopeful that Keller-Cogan will return next week.

"There's definitely buzz in the wind, and people do think the meeting on Friday was highly misleading," Savino she said.

What's next

Once the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission determines that a complaint has merit, as it has with five teachers from the Greece Central School District, the employer and employee undergo "conciliation," or forced mediation, to address the differences. If that doesn't work, the employee typically receives a notice of a right to sue, and has the authority to file a lawsuit. It is unclear when any conciliation would begin.

On the Web

To see the EEOC's determination on Mary Donlon's complaint, click on this story at [Democrat - andChronicle.com](http://Democrat-andChronicle.com).

Savino said she felt that the board hasn't been honest about their intentions for Keller-Cogan.

"I want to know how the trust in our community will be rebuilt," she said, a VFREILE@DemocratandChronicle.com