

SIC child study team leader quits

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SEA ISLE CITY - Another resignation brings more change to the struggling Sea Isle school district. After weeks of pressure for answers from some school board members, the head of the Child Study Team has resigned.

Child study team coordinator Barry Keefe, a consultant hired through the Educational Information Resource Center (EIRC) that is running the Sea Isle City School District, resigned his position effective Feb. 15.

Keefe was approved by the school board in June 2006 to head the child study team. His approval split the board, with several board members objecting to Keefe's lack of school experience and absence of school supervisory certification.

Keefe's role was to put in place a staff, on a part-time or on-call basis, to handle the needs of the special needs students in the district of about 90 students.

To date, no hiring recommendations or contracts for special education staff have been publicly brought to the school board. That fact had several board members questioning repeatedly, since Keefe's hiring, his duties and whether the school district was in compliance with state requirements.

According to Chief School Administrator Dr. Warren Benedetto, the district has an agreement with Cape May Special Services District to provide child study team services in Sea Isle schools. That agreement, he said, was in place prior to his coming to the district in late September.

In recent years, the school district has been involved in a number of lawsuits centering on special education students. That area is overseen primarily by the child study team, in this case Keefe.

Without a supervisor certificate, Keefe was also not able to do observations and evaluations of staff, along with other key functions of the position. At the time of his hiring, Keefe was the only candidate for the position brought to the school board

by EIRC.

Keefe is resigning, Benedetto said, for personal reasons. "He just indicated that he can no longer continue in the position for personal reasons," he explained. Benedetto did not elaborate.

Benedetto said at the time Keefe was hired, it was done on a temporary or interim basis.

At the June meeting when the hiring took place, no mention was made in public discussions of Keefe being temporary.

Last week, the school district began advertising for the position of child study team director, requiring a supervisor certificate. They also advertised for a special education teacher and a speech language specialist.

Benedetto said EIRC and the school district are making independent efforts to fill the child study team director's slot.

"They are doing it both ways, hoping to find the best candidate," he said.

The school district has had trouble keeping a child study team in place. Previous outside teams, including Ocean City and Salem County Special Services, have resigned or refused renewal of their hiring agreements in the past two school years.

When contacted, school board President Steve Zellers refused to deny or confirm Keefe's resignation. He referred all questions to Benedetto.

Benedetto, like Keefe, is employed by EIRC, rather than the local school district. Last April, the local board of education hired EIRC to run the school district, including providing the chief school administrator, business administrator and Keefe.

EIRC took over the running of the district on July 1, 2006. Since that time, two chief school administrators and a business administrator have resigned their positions. Keefe's resignation brings the changeover total in key administrative positions to four since July.

