

# Fresno teachers pack district board meeting in protest over waiver

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Nearly 500 Fresno Teachers Association members dressed in black packed into the Fresno Unified School District board meeting in protest Wednesday night and returned hundreds of copies of the CORE waiver that will let the district set accountability measures for itself.

Association President Eva Ruiz told school board trustees that the request for a waiver from federal accountability rules never would have been submitted to federal officials had teachers and the unions been consulted. During the meeting, hundreds of teachers jammed in the back of the board room or spilled out into the lobby, stairwell and street outside, most waving signs calling for a raise in teacher pay. A union official estimated nearly 500 teachers attended the meeting.

The Teachers Association is worried the district left its money to be handled by an outside agency that wrote the waiver and it disapproves of the way teachers will be evaluated through the waiver.

Fresno Unified is one of eight districts that won the waiver last year as part of a consortium called the California Office to Reform Education, or CORE, a nonprofit that helped write the waiver and now oversees its implementation. California applied for statewide relief in 2012, but was rejected.

Though the Teachers Association has tried bargaining with the district over the waiver as part of contract talks, members say the district has not responded.

Board members Carol Mills and Michelle Arax Asadoorian requested information on the board's response to teacher association bargaining proposals. Mills, who supported the waiver, said she thought the board took action seven times and remembered multiple discussions with the teachers association. Asadoorian remembered the board discussing the waiver with the Teachers Association after it was approved, but said she didn't recall discussing it before it was approved.

In other action:

--Students from United Youth Voices asked the board to consider furthering efforts of restorative justice rather than spending millions of dollars to install security cameras in schools. The group argued it needed "counselors, not cameras" to promote a safe school environment.

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