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Teachers' unions challenging smoking ban

ORLANDO — (UPI) — Unions representing teachers and support staff of the Orange County public schools have filed a complaint with the state because the school board adopted a smoking ban without consulting the unions.

Union officials announced their action Wednesday, saying they are not disputing the school district's health concerns with smoking but they are opposed to the way the smoking ban became policy.

The unfair labor practices complaint was filed Aug. 15 in Tallahassee with the Public Employees Relations Commission, the state agency that decides labor issues for government workers.

The no-smoking policy took effect during summer school for students, who previously could smoke in des-

ignated areas.

The ban applies to all schools and administrative offices and will include adults next year.

George Segna, executive director for the Orange County Classroom Teachers Association and the Orange Education Support Personnel Association, said the school board should have allowed teachers to use the smoking ban as a negotiating point when deciding this year's contract.

The ban was approved before negotiations began in the spring, said assistant superintendent Dennis Reussow.

He said district negotiators would not discuss the ban during contract discussions for fear it could bog down the whole contract.

Reussow questioned why the

unions did not object to the smoking policy during public hearings before the school board adopted it.

And, he said, smoking is a health and safety issue and as such is not required to be negotiated under state law.

Segna said smoking is an aspect of working conditions and should be subject to negotiation.

The state labor agency has appointed a hearing officer to investigate the complaint.

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