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## Charter school teachers file unfair labor complaint against network

### Vote to unionize academy for at-risk kids met with threat of closure, organizers say

By Noreen S. Ahmed-Ullah, Chicago Tribune reporter

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Teachers and staff at a Chicago charter school for troubled youths have filed an unfair labor complaint that claims the network that runs the school announced plans to close it a day after teachers voted to form a union.

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The complaint, filed with the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board, seeks to stop Youth Connection Charter School from closing the Youth Connection Leadership Academy at 3424 S. State St. or laying off teachers.

The teachers are joined in the complaint by the Chicago Alliance of Charter Teachers and Staff, the American Federation of Teachers and the AFL-CIO.

"This is union busting, plain and simple," said Brian Harris, president of the Chicago Alliance of Charter Teachers and Staff, which the academy faculty had voted to join. "We've never had anything this drastic where they've threatened to fire everyone or close down a school. But, every single school where we've tried to organize, with the exception of one, we've faced some push-back."

Sheila Venson, executive director of Youth Connection Charter School, says the teachers' efforts to organize had nothing to do with the decision to close or restructure the academy. She said the decision stems from a new charter contract being negotiated with Chicago Public Schools that requires networks to come up with solutions for underperforming campuses.

"Our contract with CPS requires us to address performance of any campus with a failing status," Venson said. "So our board is looking at any number of options."

Charter schools tout their ability to hire and fire teachers free from union restrictions. But employees at 13 Chicago charters now have labor representation.

A case filed last year involving efforts by teachers to form a union at Chicago Math and Science Academy, a charter school, is still before the National Labor Relations Board, Harris said.

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