

It will be business as usual

Insight School of Wisconsin doesn't see last week's court decision as a detriment.

Grantsburg, Wis. - December 13, 2007 -

In a ruling that could affect the state's burgeoning virtual school movement, the District 2 Court of Appeals determined last week that an online school based in Ozaukee County violates several state laws and should be denied millions of dollars in state funds.

The decision resonates here because Grantsburg is home to Insight School of Wisconsin, and while Insight officials are keeping an eye on the matter they are not overly alarmed by the decision.

"The Wisconsin Virtual Academy (WIVA) was sued over the way they do business," Jeff Bush, executive director of the Insight School of Wisconsin, clarified.

Since many people believe virtual schooling is the same, the Grantsburg based online school is impacted by the decision.

"Our teacher model is extremely different than the WIVA model," Bush pointed out. "WIVA uses the parents of its students a lot in student assessment and Insight doesn't do that," he continued.

"Insight School was not named in the suit and I don't think the ruling affects us," Bush said. "Right now it will be business as usual because I believe that decision will be kicked up to the Supreme Court."

He said the concerns of the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC), the group who sued WIVA, center around teacher licensure, the open enrollment law and the validity of the charter school's location.

The appeals court upheld that belief.

The unanimous ruling by the three-judge panel found that, because Wisconsin Virtual Academy essentially operates out of students' homes throughout the state and uses parents as its primary educators, it violates statutes regarding teacher certification, charter schools and open enrollment.

"WIVA may be, as its proponents claim, a godsend for children who would not succeed in more traditional public schools, as well as a welcome new option for parents who want their children to receive a home-based education for any number of reasons," Chief Appeals Judge Richard Brown wrote in the decision. "But it is also a public school operated with state funds, and its operation violates the statutes as they now stand."

The ruling is a victory for WEAC, the state's largest teachers union, which sued the Northern Ozaukee School District and state Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster over the virtual school's operation.

WEAC attorney Lucy Brown said the union was concerned the school was not being held to standards in state law that ensure students receive quality public education.

"Also, we were very concerned about the funding fairness and that the Legislature established the kind of funding that WIVA was using to pay for services that a brick and mortar school provides, many of which are not provided by WIVA," she said.

For now, the ruling freezes the open enrollment state-aid funding, an amount of about \$5,800 per student, which follows students from their home district to the online school.

Bush said virtual school involvement is growing exponentially across the country and doesn't know of any other court action against virtual education in the nation.

The issue in Ozaukee County, however, does concern Bush.
"It could happen to us, but we will have to wait and see," he said.

"Until we hear otherwise, we will continue to move forward and help kids," he concluded.