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Cleveland schools may have to hire more special-ed teachers

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The Cleveland schools may have to hire dozens, even hundreds, of additional special-education teachers — if an arbitrator's decision is followed to the letter.

By union contract, "inclusion" classrooms, which mix children with disabilities and other students, must have both a regular teacher and special-education teacher present full time, arbitrator Donald Pearson ruled last month. The district does some of that but more often removes

children with disabilities from different classrooms and sends them to a central location for extra help.

The ruling, if strictly applied, would force the financially beleaguered district to hire up to six teachers per school, according to a teachers union estimate. The decision grew out of a complaint filed by a third-grade, general-education teacher.

Talks on how to comply with the ruling began last week. Teachers union President David Quolke would not disclose details but indicated that a compromise is possible.

"We want to work collaborativ-

ely," he said. "We want a workable solution."

Special education places heavy demands on the Cleveland schools.

More than 20 percent of the nearly 50,000 students are considered to be disabled, and a fourth of the 3,884 teachers are in special education. Still, many inclusion classes have more than the maximum number of special-education students — three in elementary schools, four in high schools — set by the union contract.

Federal law requires schools to place children with disabilities in

general-education classrooms, if possible. Advocates say inclusion spares such students from being isolated and stigmatized, and it ensures that they receive the same quality of instruction as other children.

Cleveland Legal Aid lawyer Jennifer Martinez Atzberger helps needy families argue for special-education services. She sympathizes with the district's financial plight but says pulling children out of class and sending them to work with another teacher can violate the spirit of inclusion.

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Commentary

PHILLIP MORRIS



Foreclosure crisis hits across board

The people ensnared in Greater Cleveland's foreclosure crisis are so diverse that Judge Eileen T. Gallagher can't see a "typical profile."

During a break in a murder trial Monday, she took a moment to talk about the crisis, which has become one of her consuming passions. She is developing a reputation for her effort to keep people in their homes.

The judge, a former foreclosure magistrate for the Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court, keeps as close an eye on the county's continuing riches-to-rags housing saga as anyone.

As chairwoman of the Foreclosure Mediation Program, administered by the Common Pleas Court, Gallagher is a critical cog in a network of public and private agencies that is working to end the local foreclosure crisis, which shows few signs of abating.

When Gallagher says that there is no "typical profile" of those being swept up in the foreclosure tidal wave, she's talking gospel. The crisis does not respect class, race or age. Social status does not matter.

Cuyahoga County has seen more than 9,100 foreclosure filings since January. (There were 9,821 over the first 9 months of 2008). The nature of the filings is noticeably changing.

Several years ago, when Cleveland was known as America's foreclosure capital, most of the filings were in the core city and a few hard-hit in-

Research team hears of hurdles faced in tapping \$6 billion in housing aid