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Nurses assigned to CPS students still sidelined, awaiting background results

Chicago Public Schools CEO Janice Jackson has said teachers whose background checks uncover areas of possible concern will be kept out of the classroom pending further review. | File photo

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Chicago Public Schools promised all adults working in schools would have their backgrounds rechecked before the start of school, but by the end of week one, officials couldn't say how many vendors — including some school nurses assigned to care for specific students' medical needs — still aren't allowed to report to work.

Of the 43,332 CPS employees whose backgrounds were reexamined over the summer, 255 staffers — including 47 teachers — still aren't allowed back in schools while officials gather more information about them, spokesman Michael Passman said. Another 188, including five teachers, haven't submitted fingerprints at all and won't be allowed to work for the school system until they do, Passman said.

He said no one yet has been permanently removed because of information uncovered by the renewed background checks aimed at preventing sexual abuse of students.

Nor would he say how many vendors, including private agency nurses CPS depends on to care for specific students with medical needs, remain benched while their backgrounds are being checked, saying only in a statement that "CPS is working closely with its nursing services providers to complete the re-check process in a timely manner.

No lapse in services is acceptable, and we have been adjusting staffing assignments to help ensure students receive necessary services."

The Chicago Teachers Union reported that nurses from RCM Technologies Inc., a private agency, didn't report to at least 14 schools for their assignments because they hadn't yet been cleared to do so; those nurses' assignments include meeting the medical needs of specific students. CTU spokeswoman Christine Geovanis said the union's 104 member nurses were trying to fill in for them and were also covering high-acuity cases for a separate nursing agency at four more schools.

An RCM health worker who showed up to work at West Ridge Elementary Tuesday had to be sent home because her background check hadn't cleared, Geovanis said.

RCM couldn't be reached for comment.

Over the summer, on advice of an outside attorney, CPS tightened a number of its policies to safeguard against sexual abuse, including requirements that all adults working in schools get their backgrounds rechecked by a single agency.

That included vendors who work in schools with kids, not all of whom were checked in time.

Parents reported that staffers from the Neighborhood Boys and Girls Club, who have passed separate background checks to work with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, are not yet allowed to enter the three North Side schools where they have long run after-school care programs.

That means that almost 400 children from Bateman Elementary in Albany Park, Coonley Elementary in North Center and Cleveland Elementary in Irving Park will continue to walk to the organization's clubhouse when classes let out instead of staying at school, said Bonnie Werstein, the club's director of operations. Werstein said CPS' new staffer rules required the club to file more paperwork and pay for additional insurance, which took longer than expected.