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No plan yet with looming school eviction

John O'Connor | The Guam Daily Post 8 hrs ago



MEETING: A meeting was held yesterday with officials from Guahan Academy Charter School, the Guam Academic Schools Council and the Guam Department of Education to address an eviction notice for Guahan Academy. *Daily Post*

"Don't pay (property owners) on time and this is what we're going to get."

– Fe Valencia-Ovalles, board chairwoman, Guahan Academy Charter School



BOARD CHAIRWOMAN: Guahan Academy Charter School board Chairwoman Fe Valencia-Ovalles said delays in validating the school's budget are the reason the school received an eviction notice. A meeting was held yesterday with officials from Guahan Academy, the Guam Academy Charter Schools Council and the Guam Department of Education to address the eviction notice. David Castro/The Guam Daily Post

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More than 300 middle and high school students attending Guahan Academy Charter School may be displaced by Feb. 14 with no action plan yet to address the matter.

A meeting with the Guam Academy Charter Schools Council took place yesterday, but no clear pathway has been decided for the 336 secondary school students occupying the campus.

Guahan Academy board members will be meeting with officials from the Guam Department of Education this morning to discuss validating funding requests. The board has also been directed by council Chairwoman Amanda Blas to meet with the council this afternoon with an action plan in tow.

Nonpayment of \$245K

The charter school board received a notice to quit and surrender possession of the middle and high school campus in Tiyan from property owner Nan Chul Shin Trust on Feb. 7.

The letter stated that the campus should be vacated by Feb. 14 due to the nonpayment of \$245,000 in installments for the purchase of the property.

Guahan Academy has been mired in financial controversy this fiscal year, beginning with the over-enrollment of about 300 students after failing to receive an anticipated expansion of their enrollment cap to 1,015 students.

The enrollment expansion was to fund a facilities expansion plan – including the \$6 million purchase of a Tiyan campus to house middle and high school students.

All charter school funding is a portion of annual appropriations to GDOE based on the charter school's student enrollment.

An agreement to use the existing campus for elementary school students is set to expire. The new temporary campus would eventually be converted to house all Guahan Academy students.

GDOE is responsible for validating the school's purchases before the Department of Administration releases funding. This is outlined in annual budget laws and an automatic provision does exist in case GDOE does not validate within 10 days.

Guahan Academy board Chairwoman Fe Valencia-Ovalles stated in yesterday's meeting that delays in her school's budget validation resulted in the current situation.

"Don't pay (property owners) on time and this is what we're going to get," she told the council, which includes GDOE Superintendent Jon Fernandez.

Items that have been validated in the past are now being bounced back and there has been no specific information on what is setting back the funding requests, Valencia-Ovalled said.

Franklin Cooper-Nurse, chief auditor at GDOE, said one concern was the reliance on additional funding for the new Tiyan campus. The additional enrollment never materialized but Guahan Academy proceeded to purchase the property even without the enrollment approval.

Focus on Tiyan property

But the ultimate concern is compliance with procurement law, Cooper-Nurse said.

A Feb. 2 letter to Cooper-Nurse from Guahan Academy Procurement Manager Al Erquiza stated that the purchase of the Tiyan property was not governed by procurement law, as is believed to be the case for the purchase of property in Mangilao for a permanent campus.

Council members disagreed, however. Blas said Guam law, as of 2009, requires charter schools to procure contracts subject to procurement law.

Fernandez said he would be open to determining if the Mangilao property was purchased correctly, but the focus now is the Tiyan property. GDOE is seeking the procurement documentation for the Tiyan property in order to conduct validation.

Guahan Academy parents were not informed by the board about the potential eviction, according to Parent Teacher Organization President Jolene Toves. She learned of the issue through social media.

Vince Leon Guerrero, the governor's education liaison, said one option may be to institute double session at the elementary campus. This was offered by a Guahan Academy teacher, and Leon Guerrero suggested opening up dialogue to stakeholders for solutions, similar to what GDOE had done when it was faced with a budget shortfall.

John O'Connor

Reporting on utilities, education and other topics.