

South Side school fails inspection due to rat infestation

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A South Side elementary school did not pass a health inspection Thursday after more than 30 rodent droppings were found in the school, including in a sink where kindergarteners wash their hands.

Irvin C. Mollison Elementary School has been battling a rat infestation for at least a month, according to the Chicago Teachers Union. Teachers have been documenting with photos and videos. On Nov. 10, a teacher sent the union photos of baby rats on a pillow in her classroom.

After the school failed an inspection by the Chicago Department of Public Health, Ald. Pat Dowell (3rd) called on CPS to close the school, but CEO Forrest Claypool refused.

Parents and members of the Local School Council have been demonstrating for a week, calling for a school closure. A standoff ensued at the school entrance Thursday when union members were blocked from a walk-through with the inspector by CPS security.

LSC member Cathy Dale was pushed to the ground as she tried to enter. Dale was taken to the hospital by ambulance with non-serious injuries.

Christine Geovanis, communications director for the teachers union, said Mollison isn't the only infested school.

The union recently surveyed members across the city and found that 43 percent of responding schools, or 171 schools, reported rodent issues. Others reported cockroaches and filthy classrooms.

The union said the cause of the infestation "can be pinpointed directly" to privatization of CPS janitorial staff by Mayor Rahm Emanuel in 2014 that led to contracts with Aramark and Sodexo. Aramark has a contract with Mollison, but said it doesn't include pest control.

Aramark spokesperson Karen Cutler said all custodial staff can do is clean up after the rodents, and that they "have been doing complete, comprehensive cleanups almost around the clock."

According to Cutler, Mollison has a separate contract with Quality and Excellence Pest Control, in Lansing, Illinois. The company declined to comment.

In an email, CPS Press Secretary Michael Passman said, "We understand and share the community's frustration, and we will have 45 facilities staff members at Mollison this evening to help ensure the school is a clean, positive environment for students."