

Teacher 'Fired' Over Software Plea

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A battle over whether open-source or proprietary software should be used in Moscow's public schools spilled into the open Wednesday when a schoolteacher said he was forced to quit for complaining about being forced to use Microsoft programs.

Vladimir Sorokin, deputy director at School No. 572 in southeastern Moscow who teaches computer science, said by telephone that education officials had pressured him into resigning after he complained to President Dmitry Medvedev about an online training system for students that requires Microsoft Office to run properly.

The federal government decreed in 2007 that all schools nationwide have to switch to software based on the free operational system Linux by next year. Sorokin said the training system Moscow schools are forced to use defies this order.

"The education directorate is giving preference to Microsoft," Sorokin said.

"There has to be freedom of choice," he added.

Schools do not have to pay for software they use, but Linux-based software has an advantage over Microsoft in that it "does not depend on a certain developer and can be freely copied and modified," Sorokin said.

City Hall on Sept. 23 ordered all Moscow schools to use the online system, which serves to prepare students for the Single State Exam for graduation. The education directorate of Moscow's Southeastern Administrative District issued an identical order four days later.

The training system is developed by the City Hall-connected Moscow Institute of Open Education, Sorokin said.

Sorokin filed his complaint about City Hall's actions with the Kremlin on Oct. 5 and was notified in mid-October that it had been forwarded to City Hall for review.

On Saturday, the director of Sorokin's school, Tatyana Kolyadenkova, told him he was "not wanted" at the school because he had "set up the people who feed the school," Sorokin said, adding that he had to file a voluntary resignation.

He said Kolyadenkova was apparently referring to the Moscow Institute of Open Education, which also provides money and equipment for two experimental education programs that it developed at his former school.

On Wednesday, Sorokin submitted a second letter to the Kremlin, asking why his complaint had been forwarded to the officials he had complained about.

Repeated calls to Kolyadenkova's office and the press office of City Hall's education department went unanswered Wednesday.

Moscow Institute of Open Education head Alexei Semyonov was unavailable at his office Wednesday, and a Kremlin spokesman did not return a phone call for comment.

Microsoft Russia said in a statement that it cooperates with many educational departments nationwide but has a policy of 'technological neutrality,' leaving software choices in the hands of individual users.

Ivan Pavlov, board chairman of the St. Petersburg-based Institute for Information Freedom Development, said the City Hall order was illegal because it violated competition laws in Microsoft's favor.

This is not the first flare-up over software in schools.

City Hall, acting on a recommendation from the Center for Information Technologies and Education Equipment, headed by Semyonov's wife, Yelena Bulin-Sokolova, ordered that Microsoft's Windows XP operational system be installed on all Macintosh computers purchased for schools this summer, computer industry news web site CNews.ru [reported](#) last week.

Also, the Center for Information Technologies and Education Equipment said in September that a survey by IDC, a leading IT market research company, had proved that using Linux in schools was actually more expensive than using Microsoft products, the report said. IDC later

denied the claim.

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