



Board member slams budget talks

By SAM NISSEN snissen@keynoter.com
Griffiths says minutia wastes valuable time

A long-time Monroe County School Board member says some of his colleagues are wasting time at budget meetings by trying to micromanage the School District's daily operations.

"When a board member asks who and how, those questions are easily answered and don't change strategy direction. When they ask what and why, those are not easy to answer, dealing with value and philosophy, and can lead to a change in policy," board member Andy Griffiths told The Reporter. Other members ask "how much are we going to save using this kind of grass, that kind of grass, and it's answered and it doesn't change [a thing]. And we spend hours on this" issue.

Griffiths was referring to Tuesday's board workshop at Coral Shores High School. At the session, the board considered ways to trim expenses.

"We've got no money," board member John Dick said after the meeting. "We still need to do more cutbacks at the district."

Superintendent Randy Acevedo says rumors about drastic cuts at the school level are overblown. The administration he oversees is making sacrifices to spare teachers' jobs, he said.

The issue of administrators retiring early, then returning to their posts and earning pensions and income, was part of closed-door discussions, Dick said.

"I don't want people to think we're ignoring this," he said. "But I can't say anything about what happens" in executive session.

The board also considered the future of Glynn Archer Elementary School and Horace O'Bryant Middle School in Key West. Discussions centered on plans to either renovate the old elementary school or place a new building on the larger middle-school site.

Griffiths said the School Board indicated favor toward renovation, a plan he thinks will waste district money. Combining the schools onto a single campus could save in administrative costs, he said.

"I just can't see how you have an argument against it," he said. "Why are we rebuilding an old school that's non-[American with Disabilities Act]-compliant and has no green space?"

Dick said he was with the majority against the combination, not wanting to mix the students on a cramped property.

The board considered other contentious issues, including other cost-cutting measures.

"This is a very important time to talk specifics," said Duncan Mathewson, the board member representing Big Pine Key and nearby areas. "The public has entrusted us to look after the people's money and we need to get the biggest bang for our bucks."

Mathewson said the board was able to create a travel restriction policy that satisfied the board and administration. School Board officials will now approve planned trips.

Also at the meeting, Mathewson said the School Board will retain the law firm Vernis & Bowling for now but might seek other counsel when the firm's contract is up in the fall.