

## Frontier seeks state aid

By Kate York

NEW MATAMORAS — Frontier Local School officials say they are optimistic for the first time that construction issues at their schools may soon be resolved, following a visit Thursday from the head of the Ohio School Facilities Commission.

OSFC Director Richard Hickman made his first visit to the district, touring New Matamoras and Newport elementary schools and Frontier High School. Three years after the elementary schools were built and the high school renovated, with the OSFC funding 88 percent of the \$24.7 million project, the schools still have major structural problems, including the buildings' roofs, HVAC systems and outside masonry walls.

"I feel we had a successful meeting," said Frontier Board of Education President Dean Booth. "I'm encouraged. I think (Hickman) was sincere in saying he was going to help us resolve these problems."

The discussions with Hickman were closed to the public and the media, although Ohio Sen. Joy Padgett, R-Coshocton, and Ohio Rep. Jennifer Garrison, D-Marietta, also took the tours.

"We're trying to push the OSFC to do the right thing to get these schools fixed," Garrison said. "They need to do right by the community."

Booth said that while it was the contractors, hired by the school facilities commission, who did shoddy work on the buildings, the OSFC had not done its part in helping the district correct the problems.

"I've been disappointed, until today, with their lack of eagerness to get things fixed," Booth said. "I think them actually seeing the problems made the difference."

A preliminary report obtained by The Marietta Times and conducted by the firm Engineering Diagnostics shows photographs and written

explanations of more than a dozen significant construction problems.

They include several insulation problems that could affect air and water movement, improper wall ties and use of the wrong construction materials.

The Ohio Construction Coalition, a labor-management group whose primary function is to monitor school construction performed by the OSFC, has investigated nearly 40 school districts statewide with similar problems. The group has spoken out against the OSFC for hiring irresponsible construction companies to manage the school projects.

The construction manager for Frontier's project, Quandel, has been cited in many of the cases.

Calvin Jefferson, of BMA Media Group, which serves the coalition, has said he believes the problems in the Frontier district are likely to cost a quarter to a third of the total cost of building the schools.

Booth said the local school officials have always been committed to fixing the construction problems but that there was only so much they could do.

"We don't have very much leverage with the contractors because we're only going to rebuild our schools once and it's already done," he said. "The OSFC has the leverage in the partnership and now we think they're going to apply it."

A lawsuit against the contractors could happen, Booth said.

"It's possible. I can't say it won't happen," he said. "The OSFC is eager to do that if necessary."

The contractors will have to pay to correct the mistakes, once reports are completed showing the exact problems and necessary fixes, Booth said.

"We're dedicated to getting the money from the people that screwed this up," he said. "That's the contractors."

### The issue

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Those in the community who voted for a tax levy to fund the district's 12 percent share in the project said they are disappointed with the results.

"It's a concern for everyone who voted for it, which I did," said Helen Brady, 68, of 304 Second St., New Matamoras. "It looks to me like the construction company should have to fix it. They should stand behind what they did."

Booth said he doesn't regret partnering with the OSFC because the district's buildings needed replaced, but he thinks the state needs to make some changes to its school construction program.

"The process has been more or less centrally run out of Columbus," he said. "There needs to be more local control and more accountability."

Issues in the Frontier schools are expected to be addressed one at a time, with no timetable yet set, Booth said.

"We're hopeful we'll start to see things happen soon and that we'll be delivered what we were promised," he said. "We're insistent we get these things fixed and that's what we communicated today."