

## Group urges tougher school contract rules Problems at new Gibsonburg middle/high school cited

By SARAH WILLIAMS  
Staff writer

Because they believe lax contractor hiring guidelines are to blame for facility problems in buildings funded by a state organization, a Toledo-based alliance of construction and contracting professionals is calling for districts to implement more stringent contractor guidelines.

The Alliance of Construction Professionals, an association of construction and contractor professionals, established B.E.S.T. - the Building Excellent Schools Together alliance.

B.E.S.T. contends that issues like the faulty roof and plumbing installation problems at the new \$24 million Gibsonburg middle/high school are the result of poor construction bidding practices supported by the Ohio Schools Facilities Commission.

The OSFC is a state organization dedicated to improving Ohio's school facilities. If local taxpayers agree to pay a pre-determined amount of matching money, the OSFC funds a portion of the project. Gibsonburg's new building, opened last January, was a product of the OSFC.

Gibsonburg officials don't see the problem quite the same way.

"I don't think it was as much that as the timing and the weather as the different contractors worked," said Dick Freeborn, interim superintendent at Gibsonburg. "When you're building a building of that size, with that many square feet and that complex, there are

going to be a few issues. I just got done working at Elmwood and they did a 190,000 square foot building there. There were things they're facing too - it's the nature of the beast."

Freeborn has been on the job for about a month, replacing former Superintendent Jim Reiter. Reiter, who saw the building project through from its beginning, left the district in late July to take a position as superintendent at Holgate Local Schools in Defiance County. The former superintendent was unavailable for comment Wednesday.

"Some things got done before other things should've gotten done," Freeborn speculated. "Like the outside contractor may have finished before the inside contractor, and when it came time to tie them together, somebody hurried."

Calvin Jefferson of BMA Media Group, which is serving the alliance, said B.E.S.T. is calling for school districts to put a "responsible contractor policy" in place.

"With that, (schools) will be able to get the proper people working on these jobs," Jefferson said. "They're not blaming the districts - mostly they just don't know."

"... Most school people aren't construction people."

According meeting minutes, the Gibsonburg Board of Education passed a resolution on May 19 to authorize an independent inspection of both the new middle/high school complex and

Hilfiker Elementary's plumbing systems because of citizen concerns.

"The resolution comes from a number of concerns that have been voiced and heard in the community and we feel it to be in the best interest of the citizens of Gibsonburg and the school system to have these issues addressed before hazardous conditions arise and warranties expire," the minutes read.

Freeborn confirmed there have also been issues with the roof at the new middle/high school.

B.E.S.T. contends that in addition to Gibsonburg, problems in these Ohio schools were also the result of the lower, unqualified bidder: Fairview Elementary School, McDonald Jr./Sr. High School, Frontier Local Schools, Pandora-Gilboa PreK-12 School, Oak Hill Local elementary and high schools, Bellaire City elementary and middle schools, Adena Schools K-12 facility, Zane Trace Local Schools and Paint Valley K-8 and high schools.

Gibsonburg School Board President John Schuett was unavailable for comment Wednesday, as were Bill Brennan and Jack Wilson, associates of the Alliance of Construction Professionals.