

Wednesday, July 9, 2003

# Superintendent national search, but when?

It's essential for elected officials to explain issues honestly to the people they represent.

Last month, five of the nine School Board members approved an 8 percent pay increase (about \$16,000) for our attorney, Johnny Brown. There was no evaluation of his performance. Frank Cobo, Perla Hantman, Frank Bolaños and I voted no. Among other problems, Brown's judgment lapse cost the district \$600,000 in back taxes and interest penalties last year. There also was concern about inconsistencies in his legal opinions.

At today's School Board meeting, member Gus Barrera, who voted for the increase, is proposing a national search for a new superintendent one year before Merrett Stierheim's contract is up. This is troubling because an elected official who is a member of Barrera's family has said publicly that he would like the superintendent's job.

One of the most important reforms this district needs is the eradication of nepotism and cronyism. Last week, Gov. Jeb Bush expressed concern regarding the national search, questioning the motivation behind it. The State Advisory Oversight Board also expressed reservations about releas-

ing more than \$40 million if reforms aren't continued. This would be terrible for the district.

Board members favor a national search at the appropriate time. However, we should ask: Why is there a need for something so disruptive so far in advance? Shouldn't our focus be on students' achievements and teachers' low morale? Why should we approve a national search using local politicians as advisors?

I haven't supported many of Stierheim's decisions, and I feel many things could have been done differently to yield needed reforms. Still, there have been some positive and important changes under Stierheim.

Responsibility and accountability are essential in a democracy.

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