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## Frontier told to sue over construction

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An investigator for a statewide coalition monitoring Ohio School Facilities Commission construction is advising the Frontier Local School District to sue over the still-unresolved construction problems at three of the district's schools.

Nearly four years after New Matamoras and Newport elementary schools were built and Frontier High School was renovated, district officials say there are still significant roofing and masonry problems.

"I think they would be wise to sue," said Al Adams, an on-site investigator for the Ohio Construction Coalition, a labor management group whose primary function is to monitor school construction performed by the OSFC. "The district can barely afford to operate and can't afford to sue the state to get what they should have so I've told them I'll do everything I can to help find funding or a lawyer to take their case."

Adams has investigated about 50 OSFC projects with problems statewide and says the construction problems at Frontier are the worst.

"I've seen a lot of schools and these are definitely the worst looking schools I've ever seen," Adams said. "I think the feeling is that here's this little school district tucked into the river and we're just going to ignore it."

The OSFC, formed in 1997, paid 88 percent of Frontier's construction costs on the \$24.7 million project and the district was one of the first to work with

the OSFC.

Frontier Board of Education President Dean Booth said in April that a lawsuit was possible but that after a visit from OSFC director Richard Hickman he was optimistic for the first time that the commission would put pressure on the contractors it had hired to make corrections.

There is now a contract for roofing work to be done but no agreement has been reached regarding the masonry problems.

Booth and other Frontier officials did not return calls for comment for this story.

"We're still battling," said Frontier Superintendent Troy Thacker at the board's July meeting. "It's not an easy road. We look at all these other Taj Mahals in the state and we're still struggling to get ours fixed."

The most recent report on the construction problems, released in June, lists myriad problems with the schools, including cracks in the veneer at New Matamoras Elementary occurring in 90 percent of the joints.

Previous reports have outlined insulation problems that could affect air and water movement, improper wall ties and the use of the wrong construction materials.

The OSFC has now asked the Frontier board to sign an agreement that would allow the OSFC to negotiate a settlement with the contractors on its own, Adams said.

"If they accept that agreement, they're basically giving up their rights and giving the OSFC the go-ahead to settle this out," Adams said. "I think

they would be poorly served if they did that."

After a settlement, the board of education would be expected to sign off on the buildings, Adams said.

"Right now, they're co-owners of the buildings with the OSFC," he said. "When they sign off, it's Frontier's property and any problems there, they'll be stuck with."

The Frontier board has so far held its discussions about its dealings with the OSFC in closed session.

"If you knew how much garbage we were going through with the state you'd throw your hands up and wonder why we do it," board member Jason Riggs told the public at the board's July meeting.

Adams said he was also concerned that the most recent masonry report was conducted by Karl R. Rohrer Associates Inc., a company that been selected by the OSFC to do many school projects. The report may not reflect the true extent of the problems, he said.

Frontier board members were "outraged" by the report, said Calvin Jefferson, of BMA Media, which serves the Ohio Construction Coalition.

"If there are people that have been paying you to do hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars of work a year could come to you saying 'We've got a little problem down in Washington County, can you come up with an easy fix for us?'" Adams said. "I'd be a little afraid of that."