

CRC Herald editorial

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Unfair to `soccer moms'

OUR OPINION: THEY DESERVE A PLACE ON BROWARD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Attention, Broward County School Board: ''Soccer moms'' are taxpayers, and most have children in public schools. They have as much right to participate in the school-construction bid process as construction professionals.

The board definitely needs to reform its politically driven bid process, but it should stop blaming nonprofessional members of its selection committee -- calling them ''soccer moms'' who don't know about construction bids -- for a troubled building program. The board zeroed in this week on the Consultants' Review Committee and its unique majority of nonprofessional members. It rates construction bids and makes recommendations to the board. But trying to blame soccer moms is ludicrous.

Board members are trying to cater to politically connected builders and their lobbyists. School administrators want to replace the committee with a review board of professionals and school-district staff members that would make one recommendation to the board, which would vote it up or down. As it is, district staffers have little input in the process.

That proposal could work, if it's modified to include nonprofessional members. But it also could become a system where district staff can meddle to control the process. A balance of all interests is needed.

The board could consider member Robin Bartleman's suggestion of a rotating membership on the committee to limit lobbyists' influence. Certainly, however, it should study successful school-construction programs elsewhere. Believe it or not, there are school districts where politically wired builders don't get to use the construction program as a honey pot, lobbyists don't wield undue influence and schools are built soundly, within budget and on time. Whatever changes ultimately are made, the best reform would be to impose a cone of silence on the entire bid-selection process.