

Clamor erupts in Greece schools

• 600 flood meeting in loud call for details on school chief's fate.

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GREECE — More than 600 Greece parents, teachers and community members flooded Greece Apollo Middle School's auditorium Friday night, eager to learn why the school district's Board of Education called a special meeting with just 30 hours notice.

Many of those who turned out stomped and cheered in support of the district superintendent, whose position was rumored to be in jeopardy.

The board's agenda was brief, and members voted 5-3 during the short meeting to hire an educational consultant to assist in evaluating the merits of charges of discrimination pending with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Board President Ken Walsh said the board wants to protect individuals involved and that's why the board majority wanted to gain the point of view from an educator not directly affiliated with the school district or the community.

Because the action is a personnel matter, Walsh said board members could not discuss details.

But without those details, many district residents and employees started drawing their own conclusions.

And at the meeting, angry audience members demanded answers to their questions.

Chris Shanley, 35, of



Margaret Keller-Cogan reiterates commitment to school district.

Greece canceled his plans Friday because he was worried that the board might be up to something that is not in the best interest of the community.

"They seem to be more interested in pinching pennies than on shaping minds," he said.

Greece parent Gale O'Toole skipped her weekly family night to attend the meeting. She said she was worried that board members might be trying to slip something by district taxpayers by holding a meeting on a Friday, with such short notice.

After the vote, O'Toole, 42, said the content of the meeting certainly wasn't what she expected, but thought "the school board continues to breed distrust in the community."

Speculation also reached the district office.

Several hours before the meeting, Superintendent Margaret Keller-Cogan addressed a rumor that "she was not committed to Greece Central School District," and released a statement saying that she has no plans to leave the district.

"I have consistently spoken of my desire to continue to work with our staff

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to provide the best possible educational opportunities for the students of Greece," Keller-Cogan said in the statement. "I am completely committed to giving both students and staff my very best, and it is my intention to remain here to ensure that my commitments are realized."

After the meeting, Keller-Cogan reiterated her commitment to Greece and said she was surprised and overwhelmed by the community's support.

Because many community members didn't know what the



Gale O'Toole was worried about school board meeting that was held on such short notice.

board had planned, many assumed the worst — that the board had planned to replace Keller-Cogan just 45 days into her tenure.

Walsh emphasized that the board does not have a hidden agenda and that it was a procedural meeting. He then apologized to the community, and Keller-Cogan, for his role in abruptly scheduling the meeting

— the second special board meeting this week

Walsh said he thought the reaction stemmed from "a level of distrust and suspicion in our community."

"What will this cost the district?" several audience members shouted.

Board member Joe Moscato countered the question. "How much will this cost us not to proceed?"

In the past two months, five district employees received negative determinations from the director of the EEOC's Buffalo office. As a result, the district could face five lawsuits that could each cost the district hundreds of thousands of dollars, Moscato

said after the meeting.

According to a document from Greece teacher Mary Donlon, the director of the Buffalo EEOC office determined that Donlon had been treated unfairly because of her age, a medical disability and for speaking out when she thought she was being treated unfairly, and that the district had created a false paper trail to support the district's position.

"The board has a duty to inquire about the policies and practices that are at issue, to see if any of the policies or regulations need to be addressed," said James D. Doyle, a Greece-based lawyer who is representing the Board of Education, a VFREILE@DemocratandChronicle.com