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## **School board discusses billboards**

By Dionna Harris

GLADSTONE — During the Gladstone School Board meeting Monday, it was noted billboards had been placed within the community by the Education Action Group, based out of Muskegon.

According to the organization, which claims to be a group of concerned citizens, parents, school board members, and public school advocates, the purpose of placing the signs along the U.S. 41, M-35 corridor in Gladstone, was to "educate taxpayers in Gladstone who are experiencing pressure tactic campaigns by the school employees union. The billboards, along with other mediums will be used to publish useful information and thought provoking facts which will help citizens determine who is acting fiscally responsibly and is putting the education of kids first."

One speaker during Monday's meeting was Bill Milligan, an instructor from Bay de Noc Community College, who in addressing the school board, said he had written to Kyle Olson, who serves as vice president of strategy for the organization concerning the action being taken.

In response to the letter written, it was alleged, by Milligan that Olson had written to the president of Bay College questioning what action would be taken concerning an "uppity member of the college faculty," as he had questioned the motivation behind the EAG becoming involved in the contract dispute between the Gladstone School Board and the teachers union.

Milligan also stressed, he has a child attending school in the Gladstone School District, and he (Milligan) believes that the district is the best one around.

"It is time to get a contract, it is time to respect the teachers, it is time to respect the students," said Milligan.

Gladstone School Board president Linda Howlett reported she had been contacted by the Education Action Group, and responded to the best of her ability not only to the organization, but also to anyone who either questioned her or submitted their questions through e-mails.

"I addressed Mr. Olson and his questions, in the same manner as if I were addressing a concerned parent or a member of our community, and yes it was videotaped, and it is on You-Tube," said Howlett.

Howlett further stated her comments dealt with the issues of declining enrollment, and the financial problems associated with reductions in state funding due to declining enrollment. She further noted the district had no input on where the EAG signs were placed nor did the school board have any input concerning the content of the billboards currently be seen in Gladstone. There was no mention during the meeting, of what information was contained on the billboards placed by members of the Education Action Group.

"Someone said the video was being seen on You-Tube, I am appalled. You-Tube cannot be viewed by students using school computers because it is blocked, however they are viewing it on their cell phones," said Cindy Blahnik.

Blahnik went on to say the video shown on the MEA Exposed Web site, made the school district look ridiculous, and asked what the process had become concerning the current contact negotiations.

"As a taxpayer in this district, I am appalled," said Blahnik.

Howlett, in addressing Blahnik's comment replied the district had no control over how the information was released, and that in her comments, she addressed the financial difficulties the school district was experiencing due to declining enrollment, and that the district had to look at cost controlling measures.