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Duette Elementary School, the last one-teacher schoolhouse in Florida, may soon be forced to close its doors.

DUETTE FROM 1A

have a resounding outcry from the neighborhood and community. It is important to keep the school open because it is one of the heartbeats of the Duette community.”

Last year, parents of 13 students at Duette Elementary were outraged when they learned bus service to the school had been eliminated, O'Connor said.

“That ruffled a lot of feathers and caused a lot of people to get upset,” he said. “I don't think that the school board really acknowledges the value of having that school, which is the only active one-teacher schoolhouse in Florida.”

As a result, the community has stepped up to the plate on several occasions and provided private financial support to the school.

“If we had support from the school board to encourage students that live in that particular part of the school district to attend that school there would be more attending,” O'Connor said. “But it is being discouraged and it seems like there was a plan hatched several years ago that they would

just starve the school out of services and existence.”

However, district administrators insisted this week that tough decisions must be made because of funding cutbacks they are facing and each department will have to reduce its operating budget by 11 percent.

But for many in Duette, keeping the schoolhouse open is well worth the money.

For almost 23 years, Jim Leonard said, he has lived in Duette and heard stories from families who have had third and fourth generations attending the school.

“Pretty much everybody who has been out here any length time has some connection to that school,” Leonard said, adding that both his children attended the school. “And I do understand that the school board is under a lot of budget constraints and the cost per student is very high compared to most of the schools in town. But on the other hand, I don't think the board of education has really done anything to support the student population at the school.”

Stacey Eidson, *Herald* reporter, can be reached at 708-7908.

Duette to fight for its school

With \$21M to be cut from district budget, school may be closing

By STACEY EIDSON

seidson@bradenton.com

DUETTE — Florida's last one-teacher schoolhouse could be forced to close its doors following this week's announcement that the Manatee County School District must cut \$21 million from next year's operating budget.

School administrators released a list of \$28.5 million worth of potential cuts on Monday and many Duette residents were disappointed, but not surprised, to see Duette Elementary was on the chopping block.

The schoolhouse, which first opened in 1930, has a long legacy in the community that is worth protecting, said Duette resident Donna Keen.

“My husband went to that school, his mother went to that school, my kids went to that school and now my grandchildren are at that school,” Keen said. “So, it means a lot to us and the community, but every year, the school district tries to close the school. It's crazy because it is a historic school.”

With two of her grandchildren in kindergarten at Duette Elementary, Keen said she has watched them thrive in the intimate setting of a school with about a dozen students.

“The one-on-one attention that they get out there is incredible,” Keen said. “They learn really quickly and it is the perfect situation for them.”

Ever since his daughter attended Duette Elementary almost 20 years ago, John O'Connor said he has fought