

Last November, the Charter Committee of Greater Cincinnati endorsed the Cincinnati Public Schools levy that failed. However, together with this support, we called for greater accountability from the school board and school administration to the parents, children and citizens of Cincinnati. Specifically, Charter recommended that an independent advisory panel be instituted to focus on the finances of the school district and the appropriateness of future tax levies. Such an independent panel would build confidence within our community for the school district's programs, and build trust in the district's management of its finances.

The current Cincinnati Public School Board recently decided that the newly elected incoming Board should determine if another attempted levy should appear on the March 2008 ballot. The Charter Committee encourages the incoming Board, as we did with the current board, to institute such an independent advisory panel. We recommend this course of action even if it would require delaying a vote on the tax levy until after March.

The advisory panel should be independently appointed and include those who have expertise in evaluating complex fiscal structures and as such will bring the necessary skepticism to question school board or administration budgets and tax proposals. Its proceedings should be transparent and well documented. With these structures in place, the advisory panel would ensure that any proposed levy is the proper size to meet the financial needs of the district and its students. It could also provide the voting public with the information necessary to understand the financial situation of the system and the confidence necessary to support the levy.

The superintendent's financial advisory committee was a step in the right direction. The committee members should be thanked for their volunteer service and dedication. Nevertheless, the overall process was insufficient. The method of appointment to the committee was unclear and the subsequent proceedings were not transparent. The committee did not have the time, staff or resources to adequately review the levy request. Even assuming that the committee's conclusions were proper, the overall process was insufficient to provide the aura of confidence that will be necessary to ensure the passage of the next levy.

If the implementation of an independent advisory panel delays the timing of the levy, it should be remembered that funding to the district would not begin until January of 2009, regardless of when passage of the tax levy might occur. The possibility of delaying the levy is a small price to pay, when compared to establishing trust with the voters and ensuring a successful levy.

There has been progress in Cincinnati Public Schools over the last several years. For the good of the students and the good of our city we must see that progress continue. With the rejection of the levy last November, the voters sent a clear message that Cincinnati Public Schools be more accountable, therefore the school board must do everything in its power to prove to the voters that it will be a good steward of our tax dollars.

Michael Goldman, President
The Charter Committee