

Franklin Twp. rejects request for firm to review school budget

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Saying an operational audit is the job of the nine-member school board elected by the citizenry, the Franklin Township Board of Education rejected a request by an activist tax group to seek an outside firm to review whether various expenditures are needed.

"An operational audit is what this board does," said Brian Bonanno, vice president of the school board. "We go through it line by line, item by item and question every expenditure to determine whether it's needed."

Phil Kramer, of Taxpayers United in Franklin, asked the school board to get an independent third party to review the school board budget to determine if there are any areas that can be improved to garner tax savings.

"You can't tell me that there isn't some area in this \$116 million budget that can't be improved," Kramer said at a recent school board meeting.

Eva Nagy, school board president, said there was no need to get outside services to do what the board does in the natural course of business. She said there are a number of checks and balances in place to weed out any excess and she does not feel the board would get the best value for such an expense.

Kramer stressed the school board does a good job at managing the budget but thought an independent third party may help in shoring up the budget. He said 60 percent of the past school budgets have been rejected by the voters, and he believes an operational audit may improve voter confidence in the budget.

"To bring someone in from the outside basically says the board isn't doing its job," Bonanno said. "We have elections every year so the public can throw us out if they lose faith in us."

Board member Eddie Webb Jr. said he joined the school board thinking he was going to find wasteful spending, but after his first three years searching for discrepancies he realized there were none. He encouraged more people to get involved with the school board and ask the tough questions.

"There is no integrity issue here," Kramer said. "It's just to see if anything is slipping."

"This budget is not put together lightly," said Bonanno. "Maybe we don't do a good enough job communicating what we are doing, but the budget is sound."

Board member Bernard Siegel said Kramer's concern is justified but added the school board cannot "spend money willy-nilly" without the public questioning it. He said the biggest issue facing the board is communicating with the public so the electorate is at ease regarding expenditures come budget time.