

# Schools, Bedford may settle dispute

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**TEMPERANCE** — The dispute over thousands of dollars some believe the Bedford Township government owes the school district may soon end.

The township board recently voted to pay the township's school district \$80,000 in a lump sum to close the matter of what the district is owed under an old agreement involving the two bodies and Buckeye CableSystem.

The matter now goes to the school board, which must decide whether to accept the offer.

Years ago, the township board agreed to pay \$10,000 a year to the schools toward its journalism program, which would maintain a television studio the township could use. The district would also put \$10,000 in the pot, and the cable company

would give each contribution a \$5,000 match.

When Buckeye took over the township's cable television operations, it asked that the contribution be taken out of the township's annual cable franchise fees, which amounts to about \$175,000, said trustee Larry O'Dell. Buckeye CableSystem is owned by Block Communications Inc., which also owns The Blade.

Bedford students used to operate the camera for the township's meetings. When that stopped a few years ago, the township stopped sending payments to the schools.

Tom Dawson, senior manager of government and community affairs for Buckeye CableSystem, has said the company has continuously remitted the franchise fee payments to Bed-

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## Dispute

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ford Township since Buckeye first began providing cable services there in 2001, and was under the impression the money was to go to the schools.

Members of the township's cable committee believed the former board's action deprived the schools of what was rightfully theirs. Steve Lennex, a former member of the committee, said the contract did not specify that the district had to supply students to televise the meetings. It had to maintain a studio, which it did. He believed the township

owed the district.

After much back and forth, the township board came to much the same conclusion.

"We felt it was fair since they had assumed, and some of us had assumed, there were payments owed since 2001," township clerk Bob Schockman said. "The board members at the time believed the schools were required to do certain things, including boardcasting the township meetings. They stopped and said they had no obligation [to do so]. The board disagreed.

"The schools feel they are owed \$20,000 a year" until the contract runs out in 2011, Mr. Schockman said.

The board's attorneys said the board has no legal obligation to

pay the schools, Mr. O'Dell said. That left a "moral obligation," he said. Hence, the meeting and the proposed payment.

The terms of the payment are fairly simple, he said. "The only requirement for them to receive the money is to sign a waiver that they will not hold future boards responsible for [further] payment," Mr. O'Dell said.

"It's a win-win," he added. "They receive money they need right now. We go our separate ways.

Bedford Superintendent Jon White said he met with township Supervisor Walt Wilburn Monday and would take the proposal to the school board.

"Mr. Wilburn and I had an amicable meeting," he said.

"We both agree that the township and the schools must work together for the good of the community."

Mr. Lennex was less than impressed.

"Eighty thousand is probably what they owed in the past, but they have a continuing obligation," he said. "As a private citizen, I am appalled. I am completely blown away by what they're trying to do."

"It's a strange thing to say, 'We don't owe the money, but we're going to pay it anyway,'" he added. "The moral and ethical part of it is, they should honor the contract. The money is owed, it should be paid, it should continue."