Many of you know that for over a year now, I have been voting against the cyber charter school payment line items of our Acccounts Payable. Several of my board colleagues and I have been doing this to illustrate our feeling that cyber charter schools are an egregious waste of taxpayer dollars.

In 2010, Parkland created its own cyber school when we calculated that we could educate a student for about $4,500 per year in our own cyber program, while the state mandated that we pay cyber charter schools more than twice that amount in tuition expenses for Parkland resident students to attend state-sponsored cyber charters. Fast forward to today where the PA Department of Education data has shown that not a single one of these PA cyber charters, which are authorized by the state, earned passing grades during the past 5 years when that same state issued School Performance Profiles. In fact, last year, the majority of cyber charters landed in the bottom 5% for educational performance across the entire state. All state-sponsored cyber charter schools also had graduation rates below the state average of 86.6%. However, according to the law, districts must pay a per-pupil tuition fee for each student attending a cyber charter school. This year, the per-pupil fee Parkland pays is $11,306 for each regular education student and $24,192 for special education students while Parkland is able to run a cyber program at a cost of about $4,500 per student. My feeling is that this is a gross misuse of funds and a burden that our taxpayers should not have to bear which is why I have voted against making these payments each month. The Parkland cyber program for grades 6 through 12 includes a 97% course passing rate and graduation rates, but we still had to send $1.65 million to these failing cyber charter schools last year.

It is the District’s legal responsibility to pay the cyber charter invoices. After much consideration and noting that there has recently been four Board members who are voting against making these mandated payments, I feel it is in the best interest of our school district to continue to pay these bills in accordance with state law, and prevent the District from incurring any legal costs associated with not making these payments. **For this reason alone**, I am no longer voting against the cyber charter school tuition mandated payments.

I am trying to remain optimistic about two bills that are circulating in the House and Senate that, if adopted, would greatly help public schools. The first idea is to set tuition costs for cyber charters at $5,000 for non-special education students and $7,000 for students with special needs. The second idea is that if a district has its own cyber program, families would need to pay their own tuition to attend one of the 15 state-sponsored cyber charters, similiar to how families pay for parochial & private schools. There is also a 3rd bill addressing accountability in charter school advertising that just passed the House last Wednesday and is now in the Senate – this was initiated by our own Mike Schlossberg.

**There are two words on billboards, mailers and internet ads for charter schools that have come to grate on state Rep. Mike Schlossberg.**

**“Free tuition.”**

While it’s true that charter and cyber charter students do not need to personally hand over cash for admittance, the schools are not free. Charter schools are public, so their funding comes from Pennsylvania taxpayers, just like public school districts. To take a direct quote from Mr. Sniscak in a recent Morning Call article:

**“We’re the ones who have to answer to the taxpayer. They do not. And that’s part of the accountability gap that exists with funding charter schools.”**

I urge all of you to support these ideas with our legislators and hope that something will be done to counter the excessive rates that we are mandated to pay for a service that continues to fail our children. In lieu of my voting No to cyber charter school payments, I have begun setting up meetings with our local legislators to discuss this topic with them in person.