
Time for school district to give up legal fight

SouthtownStar editorial

Last Modified: Jan 3, 2012 09:43PM

The Rich Township High School District 227 school board has scheduled a Jan. 17 meeting to discuss a further appeal of its lawsuit seeking to close the charter school that opened in the district in 2010.

Our advice — don't bother.

The Illinois Appellate Court last week upheld a Cook County judge's decision a year ago that Southland College Prep Charter High School can remain open.

District 227 had sued in June 2010 to try to prevent the school from opening — contending that it would reduce state aid to the district's three high schools by about \$2 million per year, causing cutbacks that would harm students' academic performance.

While we sympathize with the financial hit that Southland Prep is delivering to District 227, the Richton Park school is highly popular, using a lottery system to fill its 125 annual openings. It's not going away.

And district officials have no one to blame but themselves. The charter school exists only because a growing number of community leaders and parents became so dissatisfied with the educational quality of the District 227 schools that they organized to form the school.

While the district's average spending per pupil is high (about \$16,600), its students last year had an average ACT score of 17.8, about three points below the state average, and less than 30 percent meet or exceed state standards.

The annual revenue loss and its current \$10 million budget deficit are no small problem for District 227, but it's simply going to have to find a way to live within a smaller budget — and eliminate such past questionable spending as \$4 million to buy an office building and turn it into an administration center.

The school board has approved reducing the daily class schedule by one period as of next school year to save \$1.2 million a year and is looking at cutting administration and security costs and streamlining athletic programs to save about \$2.6 million more.

Another way to save? Don't spend any more on lawyers to appeal last week's ruling to the state Supreme Court.