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Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

— The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

our view

► To the point

Bedford Township is wrong to deny \$20,000-a-year payments that were agreed to under a 1999 pact.

Give Bedford Schools cable TV funds

For the past three years, Bedford Township has withheld annual payments of \$20,000 to Bedford Public Schools. The payments — which had been made from 1999 to 2002 — apparently were stopped because the schools had not complied with a township board request to videotape the board's twice-monthly meetings.

But now the township's Cablevision Advisory Committee plans to recommend that the board cough up the \$60,000 in withheld payments and to resume the \$20,000 yearly payments henceforth. And the trustees should comply.

The 1999 agreement signed by Buckeye Cable Co., the township and the schools gives the township 4 percent of the cable company's local revenues. It also provides that the schools get \$20,000 a year — half from Buckeye, half from the township — to pay for the schools' broadcasting program. A few years back, however, school officials declined a request to videotape the board's meetings, reportedly because of concerns that the meetings would keep

students up late on school nights. So eventually the board hired a private firm to do the videotaping.

Schools Supt. Jon White said some of the township trustees "felt they were not getting anything in return for what they called 'their money'." So the payments stopped.

Problem is, the 1999 contract doesn't mandate any service from the schools. So, as cablevision committee member Steve Lennex observes, "The township had no authority to cut the funding whatsoever."

The township gets about \$170,000 a year from Buckeye that goes directly into the township's general fund. But for three years the school district's video department has had to skip repairs and hold off purchases of new equipment.

That's an untenable situation, and a detriment to Bedford students wanting to learn video technology. A contract is a contract; the township must restore the \$60,000 withheld from the schools and resume annual payments, just as the 1999 agreement requires.

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► **To the point**

The Bedford Township Board's \$80,000 offer to Bedford Schools should put an end to a petty disagreement over cable franchise fees.

Cable TV fees: Put dispute to rest

Last week the Bedford Township Board voted to offer Bedford Public Schools \$80,000 to resolve a dispute over missed cable TV franchise fee payments. It's a fair solution to a disagreement that's dragged on too long already.

From 1999 to 2002, the township paid the school district \$20,000 a year under an agreement signed by township and school officials and Buckeye Cable Co. The agreement called for the township to get 4 percent of Buckeye's local revenues, and for the schools to get the yearly payment to cover the district's broadcasting program.

The payments stopped, however, after school officials declined a request to tape the township board's meetings. The reason given was that the videotaping would keep students up too late on meeting nights. The township then found a private firm to do the taping.

Last December, however, the township's citizen advisory committee recommended that the township pay the schools the \$60,000 for the three missed yearly payments. That was the right recommendation, because the 1999 agreement doesn't mandate any services from the schools. And

the township's failure to pay its promised \$20,000 to the district was to the detriment of students because needed repairs didn't get made and new equipment wasn't purchased. It should further be noted that the township gets about \$170,000 a year in cable franchise fees.

So it's too bad it took yet another three months for the township board to set matters right. Worse yet, the cablevision advisory committee — a panel of volunteers — disbanded over the issue. Some of the members were not reappointed, and others quit after township Supervisor Walt Wilburn remarked that they were "airing the township's dirty laundry in public."

In truth, the panel did what it was supposed to do: deliver good advice to the township board, even if it was not what township officials wanted to hear.

The board's new offer covers the three past years of missed payments, plus \$20,000 for the current fiscal year. Arguably the district is due a share of franchise fees through 2011, when the contract expires. But it should accept the township board's offer in a spirit of compromise — and in an effort to end the petty wrangling over the issue.