

D-49's Response to Gazette Editorial

Below is an editorial that appeared in the Gazette newspaper. In the past, these types of letters generally went by without a response from the District, but this most recent letter needs a response since there was incorrect information within the letter.

Feedback is always welcome in Falcon School District 49 and we encourage and look forward to hearing from parents and constituents. We certainly respect everyone's personal opinion, but when the facts are misstated and incorrect we will be sure to correct them in a very professional manner so those that read such a letter, can compare fact with fiction.

The name of the author on the letter below has been removed.

*The district's response is highlighted in **red**.*

Wasteful D-49 officials have hands out again

Flabbergasted beyond words does not begin to describe my reaction after reading The Gazette's April 7 news report, "District 49 faces new budget shortfall." D-49 just campaigned and received a significant increase in funds from last November's elections, and is already preparing to ask for even more money? The stated reason for the November property tax increase was that the district had too many students and had to have more schools. Now officials say they lack adequate revenue to operate and staff these new schools because they did not have the expected influx of students last year.

This smacks of creating the perception of a crisis to scare people into giving the district more money to waste. At its least, we have a clear, uncontested example of incompetent people getting ready to ask the taxpayers for even more money.

The district has long lagged behind when it comes to funding for operations. We are currently the only school district in the Pikes Peak region running without an operating mill levy. Here are the real numbers: D-11 receives over \$700 dollars per student for operating costs, D-20 receives \$621 per student for operating costs and D-2 receives just over \$500 per student for operating costs. All of these amounts were approved by each district's voters. D-49 receives \$0.00 per student for operating costs. These are the real numbers which are available to the public.

In November, voters approved 80.5 Million dollars for construction and buildings to help with school overcrowding (not for operations.) Those dollars are being spent on exactly what voters approved: a new Elementary School #9, an expansion to Springs Ranch Elementary School, an expansion to Meridian Ranch Elementary School, an expansion to Skyview Middle School, the conversion of Falcon High School to Falcon Middle School, a brand new Falcon High School and a new high school #3 near Dublin and Powers. It's no secret that Falcon School District 49 is still crowded even with these new additions. Again the numbers tell the real story. Even with the above-mentioned projects completed, D-49 will still be 799 seats short at the Elementary School level (Elementary #9 will be opening with portable classrooms). At the Middle School level the district will be approximately 436 seats short. Here's the good news: when the new High Schools are complete the district will have enough space for all High School students (these numbers take into consideration the loss of students to charter schools). Here's another real number, next year D-49 will be using 130 portable classrooms. When D-49 goes back to voters it will be for a good reason, to build more schools and classrooms to accommodate one of the fastest growing school districts in the state.

The District is not painting a picture to scare constituents we are simply telling the truth backed by real numbers and data.

The D-49 officials try to justify this incompetence by saying the two new charter schools are complicating their ability to budget for their requirements and that these two schools will take 500 D-49 students. That number has been known since February, because charter enrollment was decided by lottery. If D-49 has to deal with 500 fewer students, doesn't that free the district of the requirement for the funds those 500 students would require? I find it extremely hard to believe the charter schools are complicating D-49's revenue equations.

We do not yet know the actual charter school enrollment numbers or which schools will be impacted by those numbers. We will not have this information until June 1, 2006. Yes, the charter schools lotteries were held in February but those schools don't have to provide the district with names of students until June 1. To date, the only information we have is that 500 D-49 students are registered with the charter schools. Simply contact the charter schools and they'll be the first to tell you they have until June 1 to provide us with actual names of students from D-49.

We have subtracted \$3 Million from our budget because of the anticipated loss of 500 students. Why are we doing this? School Districts receive a certain dollar amount from the state for every child enrolled. For Falcon School District this number is about \$6000 per student. When you take the number of students lost to the charter schools (500) and multiply it by the amount of money the district receives per student (\$6000) you get the amount of money D-49 loses from next years budget, which is \$3 Million. So the fiscally responsible thing to do is work with a projected budget that takes into account the loss of \$3 Million. It would be fiscally irresponsible to ignore the fact that 500 students won't be returning next year and count on the \$3 Million in the budget.

If those students return, it will require an expenditure of \$1 Million to hire teachers for them. The remaining \$2 Million would be put towards additional teachers, transportation, counselors, other support personnel, training, supplies for schools, and salaries.

We recently received a D-49 "newspaper." The lead story was an extremely biased, poorly justified advocacy piece against the coming state ballot initiative that would require 65 percent of all school funds go to the classroom. The district personnel stated that the district cannot be expected to manage the schools on the remaining 35 percent of their total budget. The administration requires over a third of its budget to administrate? The article the author is referring to is from the Falcon Flyer (which you can read by [clicking here](#)) and it's about the proposed 65% initiative coming to the ballot in November. The proposal would require school districts to spend 65% of their operational budgets on what the group behind the measure calls "into the classroom" expenditures. No need to go into the details, which you can read in the actual article, but one part does need to be highlighted. The "into the classroom" definition does not include counselors, nurses, building administrators, staff development, transportation, nutrition security or utility costs. The backers of the initiative have also failed to show any correlation between increased costs in the classroom and student achievement ([click here to read the study using cold hard facts and numbers to prove it.](#))