

Spotlight on the Board

Notes from the District 15 School Board Meetings

September 9th, 2009

Citizens Address the Board

Seventeen citizens or groups of citizens addressed the Board of Education at the Regular School Board meeting held Wednesday, September 9th, 2009.

Detailed notes of agenda items before and after this portion of the meeting are available at www.spotlightontheboard.org/spotlight_pdfs/d15_sept_9_2009.pdf

Citizens Address the Board

Cara Singer – Lives in Silver Lakes subdivision, Palatine, Lincoln School parent (Provided a handout to the BOE.) She wants to address changes in busing for 16 Lincoln School students in kindergarten through 6th grade. The Board requested transportation to look at cost and efficiencies. The result is that stops that were at two consolidated neighborhood locations, not door to door locations have been changed to two locations directly on Smith Road. Drivers travel 45 to 50 mph on Smith Road. One of the district's own bus drivers was killed when crossing Smith Road. Consider how these stops would be made more unsafe when snow piles up and sidewalks are not cleared. A safe and practical alternative does exist. Silver Lake is easily entered and exited from Smith Road. Pick up in the neighborhood adds no additional stops and adds less than 2/10ths of a mile to the route. These new stops require 16 students to cross Smith Road to get home. Now buses are turning around in the adjacent subdivisions where there are no stops. Wellington could actually make the route more efficient. The route is not efficient. The selection of the new stops and the work around them are systematic of the ill-conceived and poorly thought out transportation plan that will eliminate efficiencies and create numerous safety hazards. A recent study concluded that negligence of a school transportation systems included unsafe stops, pick up and drop off at points needlessly exposing students to safety hazards, and stopping on highly traveled roads. Litigation further substantiates that children hold special place in the eyes of the law and require extraordinary protection. Singer was told that if it was changed for us, it would have to be changed for everyone. The changes in our bus stops are not more efficient. It is a one size fit all to the worse common denominator. Put our bus stops back to the interior bus stops that they were at last year.

Singer's handout to the BOE – www.spotlightontheboard.org/spotlight_pdfs/d15_090909_Singer.doc
Proposed route – www.spotlightontheboard.org/spotlight_pdfs/d15_090909_Singer_diagram.jpg

Thomas Tanner – Pleasant Hill School parent

Stated that he was here last year and his concern is the (3rd/4th) multiage classrooms that they have at Pleasant Hill. We were told last year by the superintendent that was going to occur and now obviously it has occurred. The concern that he wants to bring up today is that his 8 year old daughter is in a classroom with 4th graders. Of the 27 students in the class, there are only 8 kids that are supposed to be in 3rd grade. There are 19 children in that class that are being taught with 4th grade curriculum. In speaking with the teacher today after he sent an email, they are using a 4th grade education book to teach the 3rd grade students. In his opinion, since he is home now and goes through all of his daughter's homework, it seems that the 3rd grade education is being skipped. Considering that the 3rd grade education is one of the most important educations with the ISAT tests, why is the district allowing the 4th grade curriculum to overshadow the 3rd grade curriculum? That is what his concern is. Are we going to leave the 3rd graders behind so the 4th graders have their education just because there is a larger number of them?

George Smyrniotis – Lives on Bernay Road, Hoffman Estates, Thomas Jefferson parent

From what he has heard (tonight), he believes that the efficiency of the bus system will most likely be improved by having fewer stops. But by having them where they are, he doesn't know if efficiency will

be improved all that much, he hasn't seen the numbers. None of his emails have been responded to. His wife has spoken to several people in the administration. Their issue was basically that this was done for financial reasons first, efficiency and then safety is always there because they have to adhere to the guidelines of the Illinois State Rules, etc. Today he went to the district headquarters and spoke to Phyllis (assistant to the superintendent). She was not aware of any kind of written analysis of what type of efficiency we would gain by this (change) or what type of monetary savings we would have. That sounds odd that all of these changes are being done via computer – some GPS system purchased from somewhere and put Cook County on top of it. His specific bus route and the issues there he believes can be taken care of very easily and quickly and done more safely – if someone would actually listen. Now, what we are hearing from certain people is that “only the Board can change it”. That is what we are hearing. He does understand that every year bus routes change because kids come into the district, kids leave the district, kids go to Fremd HS, etc. and the bus routes are going to have to be “tweaked”. No question about it that is one issue. We all understand that. The 2nd issue is that we are all poorly informed, very poorly informed. The 3rd issue is the response that we have received from certain people have been actually inappropriate. If the Board wants to know what they are, he would be very happy to talk to them about it.

Joan Kelley and Marie Davis – Live on Harrison Court, Palatine, Hunting Ridge parents
They are there to speak about numerous issues about the school bus stop that their five children have been assigned to this year. These issues have been detailed in an email to the transportation department and copies sent to the BOE yesterday. They believe that stating them in this forum (tonight) will underscore the safety concerns that we have and put a face on some statistics shown earlier in the slides (transportation presentation). Our children range in age from 7 to 10 and must walk .27 miles to the bus stop – door to door. That is a 33% increase over the stated standard by the transportation department which says they have no bus stop further than .2 miles from a student's house. The bus stop is at a dangerous corner, South Hampton and Kenilworth. Kenilworth is used as a cut through street by many drivers – between Quentin and Roselle. It is extremely busy. Our children must walk literally on Kenilworth Avenue where there are no sidewalks to get to the bus. It is incredibly dangerous and on a hill. Their only other choice is to walk in a gentleman's yard and he has made it clear that he does not want them to trespass on his property. Then once they get to the bus stop, they must be on the corner with other children where there are no sidewalks. They have no choice but to stand in the street dodging cars as they turn onto South Hampton. When a car comes, they must jump into someone's yard. Obviously parental supervision is taking place at every pick up and drop off but the distance our children must walk – and even when supervised, there is literally no safe place for these children to stand. It is a clearly dangerous circumstance. Ideally we would want to supervise our children every day at the bus stop but as we are aware, there are times that for all families this will not be possible. Kelly's own situation has changed dramatically as her oldest son has been diagnosed with leukemia. His treatments are scheduled downtown so she will rely on good friends and neighbors. Yes, we appreciate any and all attempts to improve efficiency for any system. But we will never agree to efficiencies that will put our children at risk. We realize that each family has their individual situation and challenges. But these changes have put even a greater hardship on our family. They want to make the BOE aware of how a seemingly small change has affected our families. We prefer to not worry about safe transport of our children because there are truly more important things. We hope that you take steps to rectify this situation immediately before a truly tragic situation occurs.

Anupama Pradhan – Lives on North Street representing the Cedar Group of about 35 houses
This year the bus route was changed and there is now one stop for the whole subdivision. There are 26 children and two buses – one for the JH and one for Paddock School. (Both schools start at 7:55 a.m.) Six JH kids are on one bus which stops on Dundee Road, a major intersection. Her children attend Paddock and there are 20 children ranging from kindergarten to 6th grade at one bus stop. The six JH kids are on the same stop in the morning. So there are 26 at one bus stop. Then the bus goes through the subdivision to the end of the subdivision and all of these elementary kids have to walk to the end of the subdivision to wait for the bus. The bus is also late every day.

Roy Orrie – Representing Palatine North Little League

He wants to address the decision, he believes by the Board, to discontinue fliers being sent home. He is not sure what went into that decision but wants to make the Board aware of the other side of the formula. His organization has been in Palatine for over 50 years. We are a non-profit organization run purely by volunteers. They rely heavily on that direct contact with their fliers that get into the students' hands and then subsequently to the parents so they know all about our program. He realizes that there is a substitute, replacement with the E-Fliers. But we have great concerns that parents have to take extra effort to actually go to the district's Web site to look for something and that they are not going to get to know about us. This is the way that people who are new to the area get to know about the program. They service children age 5 to 12 years old. He feels that this is going to drastically impact our program. This is the way we reach out to children. He thinks they serve a great purpose in Palatine for the children. There are other organizations as well that do the same thing. One that he can speak to is PAFA Cheer. He spoke with their president and they actually had a 20% increase in registrations as a result of sending fliers through the school for the first time last year. They had no 2nd grade cheerleaders this year register. Wants to make the BOE aware, knows that parents complain about a lot of paper coming home. He had two children going through D15 schools and he does know how much comes home. He does toss aside fliers that are not for them but there are others that he is interested in. Wanted to know if anything was done to find out if people thought this was beneficial or was it just a handful of people that were concerned about the amount of paper coming home.

John Coons – Lives on Bishop Court, Palatine

He wants to address bus transportation. He has heard many things by listening to so many people tonight and hearing words like "efficiency", "effectiveness" and "safety". He doesn't know where that happened. His kids are on the bus longer in the morning and on the way home. Their bus stop wasn't consolidated, it was moved. It affects his family and another family in their subdivision. It has been difficult to talk to people in the district with exception of Phyllis (asst to superintendent) who was wonderful a couple of weeks ago when we called to voice our concerns. By listening to the BOE tonight and listening to where you started with this plan, and where it began – he thinks it was ill-conceived. He hears about "tweaking" this plan to make it right. His feeling is that you should go back to last year and "tweak that". The sheer number of calls that you are getting this year should tell you something. Compared to last year, he doesn't think there were hardly any calls or issues with transportation. This year there are. It is safety issues, it is time issues. It has to get fixed. If you start with last year's system, you would be in pretty good shape.

Cynthia Jeon – Parent of children at Marion Jordan and Sundling JH

She is representing the Marion Jordan PTA and is also a resident of Inverness. She stated that she is not going to repeat everything that has already been said tonight. Safety is her major concern and of many parents. Jeon wants to formally request an additional meeting with the transportation department. Parents cannot say what they need to say in two to 3 minutes (at a BOE meeting). There are many issues to be discussed especially 1st and 3rd grade children crossing 40 mile an hour roads. Other children waiting at a bus stop that was moved, not consolidated – but moved to a location where they will be waiting up against a barricade on Palatine Road. Not at an intersection. In Inverness there are a lot of streets without sidewalks. That is an issue when they have to walk – even a tenth of a mile. She has gotten a lot of calls from parents that attend MJ and live in Hoffman Estates. There is one stop that has 45 children at one bus stop. Some parents have taken them off the bus and now there are 30 children at the stop. It is a major problem. She would like to request an additional meeting to further discuss this.

Naomi Carlson – Lives on Whitehall drive, Hunting Ridge parent

She stated that their current bus route needs help. Their stop is not safe and the driver agrees. The current bus stop location is a safety issue. It is not safe to stand at that corner to wait or be dropped off there. It is not a corner, there are no sidewalks on that side of the street, it is at the end of a median and the street is actually four lanes wide at that point. It is at the outside of a bend in the road which is an issue when the roads are slippery. It is farther for all of the children that use that bus stop. The proposed bus stop (from the parents) is actually a corner with a stop sign and the bus stops there

anyway because of the stop sign and it is on the route. This is a safer place; the parents' proposed bus stop is at Kenilworth and Whitehall. We need your help moving this bus stop on the records and the computer system so the children can move there.

Charles Sweetin – Conyers Learning Academy parent

Stated that he is a member of the Teamsters Union Local 731 and they know all about safety as truck drivers. In the beginning of the year, they have a special safety course to learn how to stop their trucks appropriately near school buses. He lives on Rohlwing Road in the Corporate Condominiums. Their bus route was moved and is now in the middle of the street on Rohlwing Road where the cars are going 40 mph. He has a child that goes to Conyers Learning Academy and they are picking her up and dropping her off on Rohlwing Road. All we are asking is for the bus to come 100 feet and come into the complex to pick up his child. He stated that there was a recent court ruling on a case involving the Town of Justice, Illinois. The judge ordered that people who live in an apartment complex or condominium, the buses should come into it to pick up the children. It is a lot safer to come in the complex and pick up my child versus Rohlwing Road. He has had the police department come a couple of times. Cars are not stopping for the school bus. That is a \$250 fine. The cars are going around the school bus. And we have had good weather so far. Officer Henderson of the Rolling Meadows police department said to him that there have already been six to 7 children injured in the State of Illinois from coming in and out of the bus.

Henry Jiang – Whiteley School parent

His two children are on FCW Bus Route 2. There are eleven students are all living on one side of Mumford Street yet the bus stops at the other side. Those 11 children have to now cross Mumford which is a main street in and out of the community. Parents are frustrated. He has measured the distance and has drawn a map (handout given to BOE and transportation directors). The route he is proposing will add no more than 30 seconds to the route. Explained that all of the students now have to cross Mumford, they do not feel safe crossing so they wait until the bus stops. Then it takes time for them to cross the street and the bus waits for them. It takes much more time than the time you save with this new route. Tonight he has heard that the number of bus routes has not been reduced. Then why do we need to consolidate bus stops? Also for children to walk longer than originally (last year) – Generally he would say that you reduce the bus time but you have increased the kids walking time and the parents supervision time. So he is not seeing a lot of savings in time. And especially in the winter when it is 20 degrees below zero – children will be waiting there even longer. Consider that.

Jiang's Handout to the BOE – www.spotlightontheboard.org/spotlight_pdfs/d15_090909_Jiang.doc

Joanne Wents – Grandchild attends Conyers Learning Academy

Her son-in-law already spoke about her 4 year old granddaughter that attends CLA. Last year, she was picked up at the door and dropped her off at the door. There were no problems. This year, they are making her walk about 50 yards more but the problem is that she has to stand out there in all of the different weather. Her daughter does not drive a car so she cannot sit in her car and wait for the bus. Her daughter has asthma and bronchitis so it would not be good for her to be standing out there in the cold. She cannot understand for 50 yards that it is going to make that much of a difference. The first day she went to school, the bus driver was going to leave her off on Kirchoff Road. She wouldn't have even known where she was supposed to go but she was smart enough not to get off the bus. She hopes that something would change because last year, it was wonderful, there were no problems.

Crasomera Spasso and a neighbor – Lake Louise parents

In regards to Lake Louise Route 6A, he is disappointed and has two concerns. His wife and neighbors had been complaining so he decided to take his child to the school bus stop. He is sorry but crunching numbers to make it faster; it is not safe for the drivers. They are watching that time to beat, 30 minutes or we will be late. When the kids go home, they are saying "get in the seats, we need to leave". He doesn't know why this is happening. Last year was fine, no problems. The school bus was stopping on Old Hicks Road. Now they have moved the stop to a narrow curve where the drivers are always speeding. The GPS system which they purchased is not going to give you the weather

conditions. Nobody is cleaning the sidewalks. Another issue is that my wife tried to get through to their (transportation) office – they were all arrogant. My wife is with injury and my neighbor has small kids. The Board of Education needs to take care of a simple change of the bus stop. He doesn't understand this; this is out of his comprehension. Please send an email out or something. Listen to us.

Eva Bartenski, Anna and Edna – Live at Carriageway in Rolling Meadows, St. Colette School parents
They live in the Carriageway complex and last year the bus stopped at each building. She used to wait in her building for the bus to come. This year, they have to walk across the street. In the morning especially it is a busy street when everyone goes to work. **Anna** – For her children, they have the bus come by the entrance on busy Algonquin Road to her complex. There are three complexes there. Her concern is that there is no snow removal so they will have to either stand in the street or on a pile of snow. For the past seven years, the bus system worked fine. To put efficiency and safety on a scale, she would put safety first. She is looking forward to change something for better not for worse. Their biggest concern is the safety of their children. This is just like waiting for an accident to happen.
Eva – You have to consider many types of weather. Her children have to stay in front of the building and they saw the bus pulling up. The bus then actually passed them by and had to go around.
Anna – There is no saving of time. They leave at 7 a.m. now and last year it was 7:10 a.m. They are on the bus longer than last year. She really doesn't understand the changes. She asked "why fix something if it is not broken?"

Doug Watson – Lives in Charlemagne subdivision, HE, Thomas Jefferson and Sandburg JH parent
Basically everyone here has said everything that we wanted to say. His wife prepared a letter that the Board can read. Feel free to call us, we will be happy to sit down with you. We have many very bright people here; we have many engineers to lend a helping hand. If you need that, he is an engineer himself. Everything that he is hearing here (tonight) is just bad. The primary focus is on the safety. When we are talking about moving a bus stop 50 feet would be a major improvement because then you are not crossing a road. Once the snow starts and those plows come through, all of these kids will be sliding down trying to get into the bus, falling on the road. From one woman he heard that the kids are walking along a ledge on a busy road. It is just insane guys; it just makes no sense to me. He analyses things for a living and his brief analysis of this is that it is all wrong. He understands that the district spent a lot of money on your systems. But if it is wrong, you stop. You don't keep pouring the good money over bad. Are you really expecting to save hundreds of thousands of dollars with these changes? And even if you were, is it worth the additional risk to my children?

Watson's letter to the BOE documenting conversations with transportation
www.spotlightontheboard.org/spotlight_pdfs/d15_090909_watson.pdf

Stephanie Stanke - parent

Pretty much everything that everyone said is the same for her, the same issues. She has one son on crutches and she waits at the bus stop with him because they moved our stop way down. That is not an issue, these kids are kids and they can travel. However, the bus stop that they put him at has no traffic signs and it is a crossway. Our street is used a lot to cut through. Teenagers are flying up and down the street constantly. Yesterday when the bus came, a truck was going the opposite way of the bus. Our streets are 15 ft 6 inches wide. The bus had to go off the road to get around the truck and not get hit. Now when it snows and there is snow piled up and there are no street signs, no stop signs, no yield, and no nothing there. There are no sidewalks. Where are they supposed to go when the cars come? Our kids' original stop was at a dead end street, very safe. It is just one block difference and it leads to Ela Road. Why was it changed I can't tell you. I have tried six times to get a hold of someone and no one has responded to me.

Erin Nichols – Lives on Cedarwood St, Palatine, WCE and St. Thomas School parents
Four of their children ride D15 buses. Since the beginning of the school year, she has been meeting her children every day at the drop off at Hicks Road and Old Bridge. Old Bridge is a block south of Cedarwood. Yesterday when she met the children at the stop, three cars blew past the bus with its red lights flashing. She feels that part of this is that they were being careless and they don't care. The

second part is that somehow the word hasn't got out to people in the community that the bus stops have changed. She asked "Why was there no media campaign saying that there will be more stops on busy streets?" That is something to think about. She also wondered if the district had talked to the police department regarding the safety of the bus stops. People who drive Hicks Road, if the light at Cunningham is green they are driving 50 mph. The parkways there are very short, they are 4 foot parkways. She doesn't see how this was seen as an adequate stop for children especially for little kids with heavy backpacks. Hicks is such a heavily traveled road, people don't walk it. They don't want to get splashed. The residents don't clear it necessarily. They haven't been told that they need to clear it because there was no media effort.

The Citizens Address the Board portion of the meeting concluded at 9 p.m. and the majority of those in the audience left the boardroom. The Board of Education members began speaking amongst themselves however it was extremely difficult to hear what they were saying due to the noise of people leaving the room and talking. It did appear that they were asking to receive a report from transportation within the next seven days on the issues brought forth that evening.

UPDATED 9/29/2009 - FOIA response for Study/Report of Transportation Issues
www.spotlightontheboard.org/spotlight_pdfs/Mondy%20FOIA%20P1%20092809.pdf

Detailed notes of agenda items before and after this portion of the meeting are available at
www.spotlightontheboard.org/spotlight_pdfs/d15_sept_9_2009.pdf

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