

Spotlight on the Board

Notes from the District 15 School Board Meetings

September 9th, 2009

Transportation Update Presentation/Comments

Transportation Update

Superintendent Daniel Lukich – The Board had requested an update in regards to transportation and the start of the school year. He does know that this district had studied and struggled with transportation – wanting to improve it, wanting to coordinate transportation in terms of start times, sometimes later, sometimes earlier. Various studies were done that were expensive. In 2007/08, with interim business and transportation managers and it was the last year of Dr. McKanna’s term (as superintendent), the BOE did arrive at a two-tier model that seemed to be the kind of model that would work best in D15. Safety is a primary concern when we think of moving children. On the other side of that equation was looking at the efficiency and effectiveness. The efficiency part has to do with resources and the effectiveness has to do with picking kids up on time and getting them to the building on time. Last year, he was new to the district along with the assistant superintendent for business and two new transportation directors. The start of transportation last year did have its issues but was a relatively smooth start up. The BOE that hired him had as one of their primary concerns was to continually improve the transportation system for all D15 students. The business and transportation managers worked on that last year. They made reports to the BOE in October, November and finally December about what we thought as new people to the transportation systems – and our very firm recommendation was that the two-tier system worked. The building principals strongly recommended not changing the bell and start times again. In January 2009, it was a directive of the BOE that no further changes were to be made but the BOE wanted to continue to seek efficiencies and effectiveness in using taxpayer dollars in transporting 10K kids every day. What that meant to him was looking at every way possible to use taxpayer dollars in transporting kids - #1 safely and balance that with efficiencies and effectiveness. In February, March, April and May, former business manager Ms. Allard was working with transportation in computerizing and attempting to map/look at the shortest, most effective route and also the kind of stops that would balance safety with efficiency. Those discussions were held in May and June. Lukich readily admits that things fell through the cracks and led to a lot of the concerns that were brought to us, the BOE and a lot of other people by parents that was our lack of communication. In retrospect, if we would have been able to do this over, he thinks they could have done much better.

Asst. Superintendent, Jim Garwood - *(Conducted a slide presentation which was not available prior as an agenda attachment on the district’s Web site nor as a handout to the audience.)*

Slide – Goals of the Transportation Department

- 1) Transport approximately 10K students to and from school in a manner that is safe and efficient. Efficient means time, resources and money
- 2) We want to improve communication from the transportation department to the public, parents, to Board members and school personnel.

While he doesn’t think that if we informed everybody back in the spring that we were going to have unspecified stop changes, he doesn’t think that would have changed the amount of upset caused by stop changes. But it was a lapse on the administration’s part that we did not get more proactive communications about that. However, we would not have been able to send out what the new bus stops were back in the spring. Those stops were formed as we enrolled students until August. We do recognize that we have some improvements to make in the area of communication.

Slide – Brief History

- 4 tier system with tiers 3 and 4 rotating every 3 years
- 4 tier system without rotating times

Garwood – The reason they rotated every 3 years is because nobody liked being that last tier that got out late (9:10 a.m. to 3:40 p.m.) When the referendum failed (2/2005), that 4 tier system was said to have had a cost change every three years in terms of human resources to make that change. When the referendum failed, the tiers were frozen. The rotation no longer occurred and that caused some upset with our parents as well.

2 tier system (2007/2008)

2 tier “modified” system (2008/2009)

Garwood – That was followed by a two tier system in 2007/08. That system did close the gap between the earliest and latest time, it also had some complications and proved to be a little bit costly. So last year, we operated a two-tier modified system. This current year is our second year of the two-tier modified system. It is essentially two main tiers with a couple of minor tiers where some schools start 15 minutes before or after one of the main tiers.

Walt Doughty, Transportation Director – (continued with the slide presentation)

Slide – *Changes for 2009/2010*

New VersaTrans Software and new Cook County Tax Map

In order to achieve a more efficient system the department has consolidated bus stops

Basically part of the beginning process of that was that the district had purchased a new mapping upgrade from Cook County. Our VersaTrans routing software that we had reached its maximum improvement point with the current map that we had. So the BOE had purchased a new map from the Cook County Tax Assessor’s Office along with an upgrade from the VersaTrans software program. In April, we were finally able to install that from Cook County and then overlay our routing software program with that so that we could again begin the process of establishing new routes. In order to start, we went through the system and set up to consolidate bus stops and keep the efficiency goal that we had in mind overall.

Garwood – In preparation for this presentation, he reviewed the video recordings of past BOE meetings. What we found was that over and over again the BOE was providing us with some direction to have more efficiency in the system, to reduce the amount of time that students were on buses so that they weren’t 45 minutes to an hour as was happening under the two-tier system in some cases. We tried to be mindful of some of the wishes of the BOE where it specifically mentioned the consolidation of bus stops.

Slide – *Parental Concerns with New Stops*

Distance from door to stop

- Too far
- Can’t see the stop

Safety

- Can’t see stop
- Street crossings
- Stops on busy streets
- No sidewalks
- Overcrowding issues

Timeliness of the routes

More children at a stop take more time to load the bus

Tying up traffic

Doughty – Basically with the consolidation of the stops, there are four different areas of concern. First is the distance from the child’s residence is too far. The parent cannot see the child from their house or from their driveway. Secondly, we have gotten calls in regards to the personal concerns of safety. Again, the parent cannot see their child from the residence, child is now having to cross streets that

they didn't have to cross before and that we have established stops where child are waiting on busy streets, there are no sidewalks leading from the residence to the bus stop. We have also have had some calls about overcrowding issues where we have had more than three students to a seat on a bus. Again there were concerns about the timeliness of the routes. And again with more children at a stop, it is taking up more time for them to load the bus and of course tying up traffic at the bus stop.

Garwood – Part of the result of some of these changes is that some stops that have been in place for 10 to 15 years have changed and change has been very difficult for many people. We do understand that especially with our lack of communication ahead of time. We are addressing the concerns as quickly as we can. It is not as quickly as many people would like to have their concerns addressed. We have had hundreds of people calling and we have transportation staff trying to make adjustments. We have tried not to make adjustments based upon what we are hearing. It often involves going out to visit a stop or site so we can make the best possible check. We don't want to start creating all sorts of new stops without being well-informed to whether that would be advisable. In the letter we sent out a few days prior to school, we did advise parents that the request to adjust stops would begin to take place on September 8th. We started getting calls the day after we sent those letters out. The transportation department tried to work diligently to make adjustments where they felt it was appropriate from day one. We are still very much involved in that process. There have been a lot of tweaks and changes. They anticipate having to go through several weeks more of making the tweaks and changes. It doesn't mean that we are going to replace every bus stop that parents are requesting. We are going to evaluate those one at a time to make sure that they are appropriate and don't put us back into a situation where our ride times are at levels that are unacceptable to all parents and the BOE.

Slide - Concerns

All of our stops are within acceptable distance as per Illinois School Code

Seeing the stop from a residence is not a parameter addressed in Illinois School Code

D15 finds it acceptable to have bus stops out of sight of the house

We have reduced the amount of door to door stops

Students are able to cross streets

Part of the responsibility for safe supervision to the bus stop rests with the parents

Per Illinois School Code, students are able to cross the street to their bus stop with the exception of four lane highways.

Neither the State or the BOE have established the lack of sidewalks as a sole criteria in establishing bus stops

There is a hazardous matrix that the State uses to determine what is a hazardous bus stop or hazardous location. It assigns point values to different factors. Not having sidewalks is one of those factors. By itself, it doesn't necessarily rule out a stop.

Garwood –

Overcrowding - We did have quite a few complaints about that. Since the first day of school, six new routes have been created to address those overcrowded buses. We have been working on that.

Timeliness – The department continues to improve routes that have initially been proven to be not on time. We still have a few buses not getting to school on time at this point. We talked about a couple of those routes today and the department is working on rectifying that issue as well.

More children at stops tying up traffic – He is not really sure how that will pan out because if you have more stops, you tie up traffic more often. Maybe for a smaller amount of time because fewer children are getting on at each stop but if you have stops spread out, more children get on than when it makes a stop, you are tying up traffic for a bit longer. So it is either a longer period of time or you are stopping more often. Doesn't think there is any validity that using stop to tie up traffic more or less. It is probably more of a wash.

Slide – State Guidelines for Bus Stops

Not to exceed 1 ½ miles from property to bus stop

School district is not required to provide door to door service

Slide – Comparisons with other neighboring school districts

Barrington 220 – Serviced by Barrington Transportation – Less than 3/10th of a mile of residence
Mount Prospect 59 – Bus stops are all placed at corners. There is no more than 3 blocks that a student has to walk. They follow the rule that a city block is determined by an 1/8th of a mile. So their walk distance is 3/8th of a mile.

Arlington Heights 25 – Their guideline is 6 blocks.

Schaumburg 54 – No fast guidelines but have a parameter that stops are not less than 1/10th of a mile but we do know that they have several stops that are 2/10ths and 3/10ths of a mile.

Slide – D15 Guidelines

Doughty – They wanted to make sure that what he used to create stops was within a reasonable walking distance from a student’s home to the bus stop of less than 2/10ths of a mile in most cases.

Slide – Compares data from last year to this year

2008/2009	2009/2010
31 minutes average time on bus	23 minutes average time on bus
1503 regular bus stops	850 regular bus stops
2174 door-to-door	1145 door-to-door
9373 students traveling less Than 1/10 th of a mile	7637 students traveling less than 1/10 th of a mile to bus stop
190 students travel more than 1/10 th	1983 students traveling between 1/10 th and 2/10 th of a mile
	185 students between 2/10ths and 3/10ths of a mile

Garwood – Doesn’t have financial data to share with the BOE right now. He hopes to come up with that in the near future when they have more time to analyze the financial picture here.

Garwood – Displayed a diagram to show what 1/10th of a mile looked like. He chose Carpenter Street in Palatine to show that it is the distance of 7 houses. He went to that street, got out of his car, pretended to be a kid with a backpack – it took him about two minutes to walk that distance. To him, that was a good demonstration to feel comfortable about 1/10th of a mile. It is really not that bad in terms of distance. But on Carpenter Street it is a straight shot to the bus stop. A parent could walk out to the end of the driveway and see the child walk to the bus stop. In many cases, a child does have to go around a corner and the parent can’t see them from the residence.

Slide – Distance from Home to Stop

7637 (78%) of students walk a distance less than 1/10ths of a mile (a distance of 7 houses)

1983 (20%) walk less than 2/10ths of a mile (approximately 4 minutes)

185 (1.8%) walk between 2/10ths and 3/10ths (a distance of 20 houses)

10 (.05%) walk more than 3/10ths of a mile

Doughty – Most of those ten students live on dead-end streets where the buses could not go down and be able to turn around.

Slide – Safety – Supervision to and from the Bus Stop

Question – Who is responsible for ensuring a child’s safety?

Answer – The responsibility of the driver ends when the student is discharged from the bus. Once the child leaves the bus, the parent is responsible.

Doughty – Because of that we have had different concerns. Hazardous conditions have been brought to our attention. We continue to evaluate those. We are basing those on the Illinois Department of Transportation Matrix for School Bus Safety.

Garwood – Finally he would like to wrap up by saying that we are continuously evaluating the safety of our bus stops. There have been many cases where parents have brought forth concerns about the safety of their bus stops and we have been able to address those when we have concurred with their concerns. In other cases, we have not concurred with parent concerns. Some examples are: He has had parents spend quite a bit of time on the phone with him who were unhappy because previously

they have walked two houses down. Now they have to walk two doors down, cross the street and walk three more doors down and cross that next subdivision street for a distance of five houses and three streets. Again, we ask for everyone's patience and understanding that we are trying to address these concerns as quickly and as fairly as we possibly can. We have quite a few requests pending that we are trying to work through. We ask for patience as we get through the adjustment period.

Board questions/comments –

Board President Gerald Chapman – Don't we have students that walk significantly more than 3/10ths of a mile because they do not fall in the guidelines for free bus service? If they live 1.4 miles from school, do they walk to school? That is significantly more than 2/10ths of a mile.

Garwood – They could walk to school or they can opt to pay for transportation if we have stops already existing. We have quite a few people that do pay.

Board member Peggy Babcock – Some of the parent frustrations are that their comments have not even been acknowledged. Will you have anything in place where we can at least say that we got your complaint, we are working on it and we will get back to you so that we can at least acknowledge people?

Doughty – In the best response we can try going forward on the phone, we explain to parents or callers that in the event we are able to address the concern and if there will be a change that will take place, we will communicate that in a letter so that everyone is aware of the change and what the effective date will be. **Babcock** – How about emails? Have all of the emails been acknowledged?

Garwood – He receives 30 or 40 emails, hard to respond to everybody.

Babcock – But we are going to review all of this after the fact once everything is closed and try to work out some procedures to get back to our parents.

Board member Sue Quinn – One clarification regarding parent responsibility for seeing their children get home from the bus stop. That is true except for kindergarten. There is the exception that the bus driver will not release a kindergartner until there is a parent. We are still doing that.

Doughty – Absolutely. Parents are required for loading and unloading kindergarten students as well as for our special needs population.

Board member Richard Bokor – Did you anticipate as many problems when you approved these changes before they went into effect? **Doughty** - No. With the guidelines that we followed, we did not anticipate there would be as much cause of inconvenience with the changes.

Bokor – He thought that at the last meeting you said that you did not anticipate any problems?

Quinn – Regarding the reduction in the number of routes, it is substantial – going from 31 to 23 minutes. That is a huge change. Being a BOE member that lived a lot of the transportation issues over the last several years, trying to achieve that kind of a route time would have been very costly. To be able to do that by route consolidation is a direct benefit to kids. She would like to see how that plays out for our kids that are on the high-end, the ones that were one the bus for 45 minutes before. Are those kids being brought down? She would like to see the maximum amount of time spent on the bus not just the average amount.

Garwood – We will get back with the # of kids at various amounts of time. One of the things that was very disconcerting last year, we had some kids traveling 45 minutes to an hour each way.

Quinn – As was said in the beginning, she would like to say again that safety is our number one priority. It is not convenience, it is not cost, it is safety. **Garwood** – Bare in mind the definition of safety. **Quinn** – If a parent thinks that safety is being able to see their child from the driveway, that is really convenience. But there are genuine safety issues. And those will be addressed?

Garwood – Yes have been addressing.

Board member Tim Millar – Could we somehow get on the district's Web site a list of the complaints that you have had with Route #s up, just so parents could know that they have been reported. And that you are getting to them and some status. A lot of complaints that he gets a lot is that they don't know if they are even being listened to and are these going to be scheduled to be looked at. He thinks

it would be a good feedback mechanism. **Garwood** – Again his concern with doing that is that it takes time away from us being able to actually address the problems. **Millar** – Because you may get more emails (if you don't). **Garwood** – Some of these are people who have conversations with Doughty or himself and are not satisfied with the answer. They keep sending emails. We are trying to get to those that have not yet had a response. Truly we are not going to be able to please everybody unless we go back to what we had before which was routes times of 45 minutes to an hour for some kids.

Millar – We do have to balance this with customer service. The other question he had was "What is the number of buses that we currently have on the road right now?" **Doughty** – We have 145 routes.

Millar – How many did we have last year?

Doughty – 145. We are not saving in the number of routes or buses.

Bokor – Have the routes been affected by current road construction in terms of drive time?

Doughty – Some of them have especially around Winston Campus.

Chapman – There are significant numbers of emails and calls that have not been responded to. It doesn't mean that if somebody hasn't been responded to that no attention will be given to them for that issue. He thinks that is important to realize. Every one of those situations will be evaluated eventually. And a decision will be made for either the status quo or adjustments. He knows that he hasn't gotten back to a lot of emails but that doesn't mean he isn't concerned.

Garwood – He has now been put in a position where he is supervising Transportation (since former Asst. Superintendent for Business resigned effective July 1st). He is now getting people asking him to evaluate or change their bus stop. At this point, he is not micro-managing the transportation department where he is unilaterally changing bus stops. When parent requests come to him, they are forwarded to Doughty or his assistant. The transportation department makes those evaluations. He has been able to help expedite some situations but he is not going out and determining what appropriate bus stops are.

Lukich – A transportation report will be scheduled for the October 14th Board meeting.

Citizens Address the Board portion of the this meeting can be found at

www.spotlightontheboard.org/spotlight_pdfs/d15_sept_9_2009_citizens.pdf

Fifteen citizens or citizen groups spoke that evening about transportation safety issues.

Spotlight on the Board notes for the other agenda items/discussion held during the Wednesday, September 9th, 2009 BOE meeting is available at

www.spotlightontheboard.org/d15_spotlight.htm

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