

MINUTES
McLean County Unit District No. 5
BOARD OF EDUCATION
Public Meeting
January 13, 2005

The Board of Education of Community Unit School District No. 5, McLean and Woodford Counties, Illinois, held a public meeting on transportation on January 13, 2005, at approximately 7:02 p.m. at Normal Community West High School Auditorium, 501 North Parkside Road, Normal, IL 61761

Welcome/

Introductions

Board Members present: Gail Ann Briggs, Scott Lay, Meta Mickens-Baker, Steve Whittington, and Board President Rick Percy. Members absent: Tom Ellsworth and Martin O'Connor.

Administrators present: Superintendent Dr. Alan Chapman, Assistant Superintendent of Operations/Human Resources John Pye, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Jim Braksick, Executive Director of Secondary Education Bruce Boswell, Chief Financial Officer/Treasurer Tod Altenburg, Director of Special Education-Operations Chuck Hartseil, and H.R./Community Relations Specialist Meghan Leiseberg, NCWHS Principal Tom Eder, NCHS Principal Jeanette Nuckolls, and Sugar Creek Principal Scott Peters.

Others present: Approximately 75 public attendees.

Dr. Chapman opened the meeting at 7:02 p.m. with introductions of board members and administrative staff.

Dr. Chapman provided a basic overview of the process by which the transportation system has been reviewed. He also indicated that the Board is seeking input from the public regarding the community's relative priorities in the selection of potential modification options.

Opening Remarks

Pye provided the audience with a summary of the options for potential transportation system modifications. Comparisons of the current, December 8, and January 12 options were supplied in relation to school schedules, size of bus fleet, and the relative pros and cons of each proposal. Option A was described as a "modified two-tiered" arrangement that was developed as a response to public feedback. In Option B, elementary school students would experience no wait time, but middle school and high school students would continue to experience a 20 to 30 minute wait time. Option B does not offer a significant departure from current arrangements. The December 8 proposal results in a 22-bus decrease from the current fleet size. However, Options A and B do not offer a considerable reduction in fleet size.

Pye also highlighted the following facts:

December 8 Proposal

- The proposal minimizes student wait time significantly and allows ESL and special needs students to attend an entire school day.
- It may also result in shorter ride times for students.
- The proposal will not allow instructors who teach at multiple levels to travel between buildings as easily. This will incur an additional cost to the district, potentially the addition of five teachers to meet instructional needs (\$185,000).
- It virtually eliminates the potential for zero hour courses due to an earlier start time for high school students.
- The proposal results in lunchtimes beginning around 10:30 a.m.

Option A

- This option will allow for more reasonable pick-up and drop-off times as well as feasible arrival and wait times.
- It may require that some building schedules be adjusted to accommodate staff meetings and other activities.

Option B

- Option B will standardize start/dismissal times and will not cause a significant change for before and after school care providers.
- It will not reduce wait time and it is likely that students will arrive earlier for the school day than necessary.

In terms of the financial impact of these proposals, the December 8 proposal would yield a final savings of approximately \$380,000. Option A would result in a savings of approximately \$21,000. Option B would result in minimal savings of no more than \$21,000.

Pye indicated that an average ride is currently approximately 38 minutes. With the December 8 proposal, the average ride time would be approximately 35 minutes. Options A and B would result in little or no change in ride times. The impact of changes in Options A and B is in the shortening of Option A wait time.

Pye reported that neither Option A nor B will significantly impact childcare options.

Collective bargaining will play a role in the implementation of any of these plans.

Pye stressed the fact that no plan is ideal and that there are flaws in all of the plans. When one attempts to mitigate issues in one area, other areas are disadvantaged.

**Community
Conversation**

Questions and Concerns About Any Aspect of the Unit 5 Transportation System

Chapman opened the meeting to questions and comments and indicated that it is the Board and administration's desire to hear from the community regarding its priorities in the potential changes and options. Chapman also indicated that it would be difficult to find bus drivers to operate a greatly increased number of buses. Staffing is and will continue to be an issue for the transportation department.

Q: Is making no change an option? Do we have to make a change?

A: No change is an option, but we have an opportunity to correct some problems. If we can take advantage of this opportunity, that would be best. We still have a number of students who miss a significant portion of the school day as the result of the current transportation system. If there is a way to make sure that all students receive a full day of school that would be a priority. The issue of long wait times at the schools for transportation has been long-standing, but if we can improve it, we desire to do so. We could leave things the way they are, but it doesn't seem responsible.

C: The Parkside PTO's priority is a start-time issue. We want to keep start times closer to the current schedule in order to avoid any childcare issues that may arise from a change.

C: I have been through the elementary system and now have children in high school. Starting the elementary children late leads to emotional turmoil. Getting childcare for kids is an ongoing and emotional problem. I realize that no plan is perfect, but I think that our focus should be academic. We should not get caught up in the issue of co-curricular activities. A very early start time for high school students would eliminate the zero hour class. This morning time allows academic flexibility as well as time for students to meet with teachers and to work on academic pursuits. The December 8 proposal eliminates zero hour and forces elementary students to start late, which is contradictory to their

natures. We should start high school students late and allow young students to learn early, as they are intended to do. A 10:30 a.m. lunch is unacceptable – kids are starving by 3:00 p.m. with a normal lunchtime. I would love to see the times flip-flopped somehow, so high school students get to start at a time that is beneficial to them. Option A is the best of what has been proposed.

- C: The article in today's *Pantagraph* mentioned that high school could start at 9:00 a.m., and I support that proposal (a student).
- C: Childcare issues are my biggest concern. The current day has me starting work at 9:00 a.m. – any change that starts the school day later will leave me less time with my kids.
- C: I drove a bus for Unit 5, but had to quit because I couldn't get enough hours to keep the job. The new plans will allow bus drivers to keep the job full time because it will pay a living wage. I am currently a daycare provider, and I have kids arrive as early as 6:30 a.m. I also get them back at the end of the day. However, in the new plan, I only get them in the morning. This is a disadvantage to daycare providers. My son wants to come to school early so he can work an evening job. He already comes to school early to be here and to talk to teachers.
- C: I'm the parent of a high school student. I appreciate your efforts to reduce the number of buses, wait times, and discipline problems. Seven-thirty in the morning is too early for high school students to get to school. Getting home in the dark is also unacceptable. I don't know what the answer is. Option B may be the best if there has to be a change. Saving just \$21,000 may not be worth the change. My primary concern is starting at 7:30 a.m.
- C: My problem with the December 8 proposal is the early start time. The commute time will force students to get up very early and will not allow them to take zero hour. Zero hour allows for make-up credits as well as Orchesis that are not offered any other time. Co-curriculars are essential for creating a well-rounded student, and this plan would jeopardize them. (a student)
- C: I am the parent of two high school students and I am concerned with the 7:30 a.m. start time. The impact of the plan upon academics could be large. For the kids who can get up early and are productive it is great, however, most are not ready to be productive at that time. It isn't worth the change.
- C: An older student being responsible for taking a younger student to and from school is also a childcare consideration. Supervision issues at the middle schools should be considered. Zero hour is very attractive for incoming parents and should be kept. I am concerned with the special education and ESL kids missing instructional time – perhaps how this is organized (where they attend school etc...) could be considered beyond the bus routes.
- C: I appreciate the complexity of this task. The issue is enormous. My primary concern is the high school start time. Adolescent sleep cycles do not allow teenagers to perform well at that time of the morning. If our primary goal is to educate high schoolers, then we shouldn't send them to school until they are ready to learn.
- C: I am new to the District and have lived in several other locations. In the previous district where I lived, the buses stopped at the neighborhood parks and picked up even bigger groups of students. Parents agreed to this system and took informal turns making sure that things were safe at the stops. High school teachers indicated that kids aren't ready to learn at 7:30 a.m. Also, a 10:30 a.m. lunchtime is very unattractive.

- C: I am the parent of a special education student. The population is small in comparison to the larger population. They are, too, entitled to a full day of education. Any program that would cut or limit their education is not legal or allowed.
- A: Each of the proposals moves things in a better direction for these students. None of the proposals pose additional detriments to special education students.
- C: Option B limits instructional time.
- A: It does make things better. We are trying to correct an existing problem
- C: I have math first hour and in the season of the sport I participated in I had morning practice and was unable to concentrate. A 10:30 a.m. lunch is very close to a 7:30 a.m. breakfast. That is also a long time until dinner. Districts that have switched to high school students starting later in the day have maintained that system because it works. We need to try starting high school later. A change to later start times at high school will not prevent high school students from participating in co-curriculars. School is school and we must prioritize academics. It is hard to get up and be productive when you've been up all night working hard on homework. (a student)
- Q: I am an educator in District 87 and our elementary students arrive at 8:00 a.m. and are dismissed by 3:00 p.m. Seven-thirty start times are too early for high school students. Could we flip-flop start times so that elementary students start first?
- A: We did consider an early start time for elementary and a late start time for high school. As a committee, we leaned toward the plan presented on December 8. No discussion is closed. With a 9:00 a.m. start, high schoolers go to school until 4:15 p.m. If students are involved in co-curriculars, they won't be home until 6:15 or 6:30 p.m. High school students must also leave school to participate in some co-curriculars and that could result in more missed school time.
- C: I came from a much larger school district – they started at 7:15 a.m. for high school. Elementary began at 9:00 a.m. The district did comprehensive research and felt that this arrangement was best for the education of the students. My student was still a straight A student, in spite of these times. It is an issue of discipline and needing to make students go to bed at a decent hour. There is a time when we just have to be parents. My student went to a lot of co-curricular events and had a job in this schedule. The zero hour class time could be moved to the end of the day. That is what my previous school district did. My student is used to this system. Everyone learns by habit. A child can learn early if they practice doing so.
- Q: The start times are a significant issue to me. A 9:00 a.m. start time is far too late for an elementary student. You are doing great work and the district is wonderful. No one really likes the December 8 proposal, but your body language suggests that you aren't positive. How are you feeling about the December 8 proposal now? Option A is my vote.
- A: I'm not trying to look grim. Thanks for the compliments and comments. The concerns we've heard regarding the December 8 proposal are ones we've heard for the past few weeks. Your comments are reinforcing what we've heard. We want to find a solution that is most helpful. There isn't a solution that will satisfy everyone in the room perfectly. We are hoping to move in a positive direction and we are attempting to do our best. If we do present a proposal to the Board and they approve it, some of you will be satisfied and others of you will be upset and will feel that we haven't listened. There is nothing we can do to make everyone happy about this issue. This forum is helpful to us in obtaining feedback from you.

- Q: The one sacred cow we have is the elementary starting last and high school starting first. Could we consider switching the order around and attempting to gain some of the value contained in the December 8 proposal? Combining parts of all may be the best way to go.
- C: I don't have a child in the system, so I don't have childcare concerns, but I am a first grade teacher. As a teacher representing my school, we feel that prime learning time for young students is in the morning. We schedule as few special events in the morning as possible because elementary students are hard to reach past 2:00 or 2:30 p.m. Just as high school students feel that they can't learn early, elementary school kids can't learn late.
- C: My concern is that my child is picked up at 7:00 a.m. and comes home at 4:30 p.m. This is as long as my 10-hour workday and I get Fridays off, she doesn't. I am concerned about wait and ride time. If there is anything we can do to shorten either of those time issues that would be my priority. The children's schedules should be your priorities.
- Q: I am very concerned about zero hour. My first concern is educational opportunities. There is the possibility that kids could loose out. My student could miss an entire class period with the elimination of zero hour. If we move zero hour to the end of the day, they cannot participate in the work program or other work opportunities. If we don't get elementary school kids to school early, what will they be doing in the meantime? Sitting in front of the TV? There is not much gain from the December plan in terms of ride time for the amount of disruption it will cause. Wait times are by-products of the main goal of education. Are we in the business of education or transportation? When I was a Unit 5 student, I spent a lot of time on the bus, but I did homework on the bus and was fine.
- Q: My main concern is start times. The December 8 proposal is appalling in terms of start times. Option A is even unacceptable. For those who live far away from the schools, every minute counts in terms of morning preparation time. In Apollo Acres, buses come through that don't even stop. Why are we running a bus if there isn't anyone riding it? Most of the high school students are driving to school everyday and don't need the bus service. I would be glad to sign a waiver of busing to eliminate some routes. If you know for certain that kids aren't getting on the bus, you can use the buses at other levels to alleviate wait times. You could combine junior high and senior high students on the same bus as well. If people felt it was a problem to have junior high and senior high students on the same bus, you can have the savings in fuel and buses would pay for a monitor and the cost of that monitor.
- A: I don't have knowledge on whether parents can officially waive transportation rights. I don't have a good response but will find out. We have attempted to limit the amount of buses that have a mixture of junior and senior high students on a single bus, but it does happen in rural areas where we simply cannot send two buses. We also over-estimate bus ridership based upon the fact that a number of students don't ride.
- C: Academics, health, and safety issues are of great concern. Start and lunch times are a problem. I really disagree with the December 8 proposal in a lot of ways, but I do agree with reducing the number of drivers and making sure that they are well trained. It would be nice to have the same person the whole time who knows what they are doing.
- C: If you go ahead with the December 8 proposal, you will have to be prepared to explain why you've selected a plan that will disadvantage students at all levels academically. This will be a hard sell. The most convincing thing I've heard tonight is the fact that special education and ESL students aren't getting a full

day of instruction. This is an issue in and of itself and should not necessitate changing the entire school day.

C: I have to get up at 7:00 a.m. to go to school if I'm driven. If I take the bus, I have to get up at 6:30 a.m. If we do the December 8 proposal, I'll have to get up at 6:00 p.m. My older sister stays up until 11:00 p.m. doing homework already and would like to take a zero hour. At elementary, the youngest grade is kindergarten and they can't stay at home alone in the morning or walk to school alone in the morning. (a student)

Q: My kids will have to be on the bus by 6:30 a.m. and get up by 5:00 or 5:30 a.m. It is definitely not light outside at that time. What about the bus drivers that have to run these very early routes? It is not logical.

Q: With the December 8 proposal, would co-curricular activities occur directly after the end of the school day? Could co-curriculars be held before school?

A: Activities take place both before and after school now. I don't imagine that this arrangement will change greatly no matter what option we'd select. However, the earlier the start times began, the less likely before-school activities would be.

C: With the size of our district, it will be hard to please everyone and we want to please the most people possible. I sympathize with the individuals here tonight who have unfortunate transportation circumstances. I think that we are a school district first. With as much focus as there is on grades and No Child Left Behind, we need to focus on academics first and foremost. Co-curricular considerations are only secondary.

Q: Based upon growth projections, what is the life for your existing bus facility? What considerations in terms of expense of wear and tear from additional trips from a smaller fleet of buses have you taken?

A: The life of a school bus is based upon the number of miles it is driven. The life span of the fleet would be shorter with a December 8 plan. I don't have an answer in terms of the life of the transportation facility.

Q: I have a high school student who goes into school early to talk to teachers to get help. If we change to the December 8 option, will it have an impact upon the next contract? Will they agree to these changes in start times? Sleep studies indicate that absenteeism will be reduced if high school start times are moved back to 9:00 a.m. Would absenteeism be impacted in your opinion if we start high school later?

A: My experience is that most students are very good attendees. Nine-four to ninety-five percent were on time. Those who were habitually tardy would have been tardy no matter what time school started – more of a behavior issue than a sleep issue. Most students do quite well in our current structure. Julie Basting served on the task force and is well acquainted with the issue. We are willing to deal with this issue with the unions if a change is necessary.

C: I drive a bus for Unit 5. I start picking up elementary kids at 7:58 a.m. and they are full of energy at pick up and while going home. High school students are alert 50 percent of the time and sleepy the other half of the time. Don't combine high school and middle school kids on buses. Middle school kids aren't as mature or able to take care of themselves.

C: My husband and I try to work opposite shifts so our kids don't have to go to daycare. If we go to the December 8 plan, we'll have to put our children in daycare. The December 8 proposal is not a good choice for kids overall and will be very disruptive to families. I prefer Option A of the choices offered.

Closing

Dr. Chapman closed the meeting with words of thanks and offered the opportunity for audience members to provide additional feedback to board members and members of the administration after the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:31 p.m.

Richard B. Percy, Board of Education President
Community Unit School District No. 5
McLean and Woodford Counties, Illinois

ATTEST:

Scott Lay, Board of Education Vice President

Approved: _____