

**West Carroll Board of Education
Transportation Committee / Committee of the Whole
Special Meeting
August 23, 2011**

A Transportation Committee/Committee of the Whole meeting of the Board of Education of West Carroll Community Unit School District No. 314 was held at the West Carroll Intermediate School Library/Media Center, 801 South Street, Thomson, Illinois.

The meeting was called to order by President Highland at 6:00 p.m.

Members present: Jerry Anderson; Tim Atherton; John Brigham; Mike Highland; Bev Kilpatrick; Mark Klein; Dawn Rath (arrived at 6:10 p.m.)

Administration: Superintendent Craig Mathers

Others present: Linda and Randy Starr, Mindy Williams, John and Ida Krahn, Faye Opheim, Scott Gengenbach, Donna Opheim, Lisa Johnson, Tami Duggan, Jennifer L. Rice, Kim Gengenbach, Whitney Pannell, Judith Beck, Angela Appel, Melinda Appel, Teri Houzenga, Aaron Appel, Ashley Boardman, Chris Keckler, Kathy Lattin, Kim LaShelle, Brad Tuftee, Deana Aljets, Les Mitchell, Rita Mitchell, Sara Burns, Eric Burns, Casey Gehant, Gene and Brandy Gonyier, other members of the public, Media (Bill Gengenbach, Michael Miller)

Public Comments

Mr. Highland set the parameters for the public comments for the evening: The Board will allow only five speakers and their comments must be on transportation only. If anyone disrupts the meeting the Board will recess to the conference room to continue their meeting with only the press/media present. It is asked that everyone give constructive, helpful comments. If you wish to say something and do not get an opportunity to speak there are comment sheets the Board asks you to fill out and those comments will be treated as public comments.

Randy Starr – What drove the decision not to have a pick-up at the school? What about weather issues and cold – only common sense decisions should be made.

Highland informed the audience that there would be no answers to any of the comments.

Eric Burns – Why so early in town?

Melinda Appel – She had started a petition on-line “Help Our Kids Succeed”. All the parents want is to have their kids teachable and they feel that is not the way things are with the routes the way they are. It is not fair. Please consider if a child gets on first that they get off first. Run the routes in reverse. She understands budget cuts. A lot of people have had to do that especially those who have lost jobs. Everyone needs to come together to make a decision.

John Krahn – I ran the routes for Savanna and Thomson for twenty years. The district runs too many free trips. The drivers need to stop using the buddy system. I have seen buses with only one or two students on the bus. It is a waste of money. Transportation needs better management. The Board needs to start their cuts at the top and work their way down.

Kim LaShelle – The Middle School students have a 20-30 minute study hall after school is out. Why is this? Are they waiting for buses? When our students are done with school they should be on a bus and headed home.

Highland thanked everyone for their comments.

Superintendent Mathers told Melinda Appel that he has shared her email with all the members of the Board. She thanked him and stated she just wants to help if at all possible.

Review Transportation Details

Mr. Mathers gave a brief informational review of the district. Enrollment has dropped 210 students from the 2005-2006 school year and revenue for transportation and general state aid has dropped just under a million dollars from the 2008-2009 school year. The poverty level has increased to 56 – 57%. By law a school district must serve breakfast to its students when the poverty level is over 40%. The budget reduction plan adopted in March 2011 by the Board cut almost \$750,000 from all areas; education, operations and maintenance, and transportation. Highland stated that all salaries for the district administration, department heads, and bus drivers have been frozen for the current school year. Negotiations are still ongoing with the teachers and the support staff is in the last year of a three year contract.

Superintendent Mathers presented to the Board the information that they asked for at the regular meeting on August 17. Presented was a list of the current bus routes with the number of students on each and pick-up and drop-off times; a list of all field trips and the mileage incurred for 2010-2011; a list of all extra-curricular activities for 2010-2011; FFA dates and miles; music dates and miles; and transportation field trips in purchased services.

Possible Responses to Thomson Concerns

Mr. Mathers stated that as many adjustments to the routes as possible have been made. The first day of school did not go well and anything that could go wrong did. Within 48 hours the school had received 125 special transportation requests from parents; kids had been informed by parents to ride certain buses that were no longer correct; grade 4-5 teachers had never experienced the bus loading and shuffling before; students were dropped off on the wrong side of the road. The fix to that problem has added time to the bus route. Karl Popkin has been working with drivers to reduce driving time as much as we can. Highland stated that the safer adjustment for delivering students was worked out with the driver and the same type of adjustment had to be made north of Thomson but these types of adjustments will delay the delivery of other students. The number of miles traveled for field trips and athletic events were discussed. Highland stated that field trips may be part of the district reduction plan in the spring. The district will need to get input from the teachers to see about reducing the number of field trips. Rath suggested that all areas of transportation be looked at and deductions made from all areas, each area must take a cut; even sports. Atherton stated then we will have a whole different bunch of parents complaining. Klein and Highland both stated that input needs to be gotten from all involved. The district has 218 square miles. Last year the buses drove 348,118 miles with 288,593 being claimable.

The request from parents at the August 17 meeting is that they want a shuttle at 7:00 – 7:15 a.m. How will this be accomplished? Mr. Mathers stated the district would need to use a spare bus and hire a driver. If a p.m. shuttle is necessary it will be necessary to purchase or lease a bus because all the spare buses are used for athletic events. Highland said if the district would provide a shuttle in the a.m. how would it be run? Popkin stated it would depend on how far you would take the shuttle. Each bus has 71 seats. You could put three students in a seat but it is not advisable. You may need three buses. It will depend on the numbers. There are 38 students that go to the Middle School from Thomson. That would require one bus and depending on the numbers to the Primary School you may need two. Do you take the shuttle to encompass 1 1/2 -2 miles or do you make it a drop point for parents. You could possibly have a 6:45 a.m. pick-up at the school.

Brigham asked what time must students arrive at school for breakfast? Students need to be at school by 7:25 - 7:30. A solution could be to serve a brown sack breakfast which would be delivered to the classrooms. The breakfast would be cold, it would take up instructional time, and it is not equitable for

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the students. Many kids really need a good breakfast. Even if shuttles are reinstated the Thomson routes will need to be run. Not all parents will be bringing students into town. Highland wondered if ½ of the students could be dropped off and then pick-up the other ½ but that is not workable because of the shuttles to the other towns. Atherton asked if you could make two “hubs” or pick-ups; one at the school and the other at Bucks Barn. You would still need to pick-up students at their homes. You would end up needing extra shuttles. The spare buses are limited. If you use all the spares for shuttles you would have nothing if you have a bus problem. One spare could be used for one shuttle. A shuttle could be operated in the morning only. The Board asked what the driver options were. All the drivers have been recalled so a driver would have to be hired or hire two drivers and lease another bus. Superintendent Mathers stated the only way to cut time on the bus routes is to add more drivers more routes.

Highland asked Krahn what he would do. He said he would pick up the students in the area and take one bus to Savanna and one to Mt. Carroll. He would hire a driver so you would not be duplicating driver time. When he ran the routes he cared for his students. They would search the routes for safe turn rounds. All the drivers should come together at one point and drive back to their barns in a car and not the bus. It is wasteful to drive an empty bus. A parent asked if the students could be picked up at the school for weather protection. Superintendent Mathers said that has already been discussed and the building can be opened up for bad and cold weather.

Rath thanked the audience and wants them to know that the Board is trying to do the best they can but sometimes it takes compromise. She as a parent is also dealing with an early bus time.

Closed Session

Motion by Highland to go into closed session at 6:55 p.m. for the discussion of item G. Litigation, pending or probable. Second by Kilpatrick. Roll call vote: 7 yes. Motion carried.

The Board of Education returned the regular meeting to open session at 7:20 p.m.

Board members discussed further ideas for the transportation issue. The Board directed Brigham and Anderson to meet with Superintendent Mathers and Transportation Director Popkin to further evaluate the situation.

Jennifer Rice stated she had a safety concern. There is no crossing guard for students trying to cross the highway or for preschool students coming to school. Highland stated that was an oversight on the part of the district and it would be looked into.

Adjournment

Motion by Atherton to adjourn the transportation committee meeting of the whole of the Board of Education at 7:39 p.m. Second by Brigham. Roll call vote: 7 yes. Motion carried.

Sandra Aude
Recording Secretary

Beverly Kilpatrick, Secretary

West Carroll Board of Education

Michael D. Highland, President
West Carroll Board of Education