

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MINUTES September 17, 2015

Attendance: Laura Schulkind, Deirdre Burns, Deirdre d'Albertis, Joe Phelan, Stephen Jensen.

Transportation Issues:

The committee spent most of its time this month discussing the problems accompanying roll-out of the district's new transportation routes with Allways East. RCSD was not as prepared as it would have liked to be for changes to the system and it is important not only to explain why that has been the case, but also how these problems are to be rectified.

Joe updated members about **actions being taken** to address specific concerns.

- Tom Burnell and Joe Phelan have scheduled lengthy and repeated sessions with management of the bus company to address complaints;
- Tom has been visiting stops and speaking to drivers to correct local errors;
- Tom and Joe have been working closely with drivers at the beginning and end of each day to monitor progress;
- pre-assigned stops remain part of each route and will not be removed even if students are not riding regularly;
- radios have been installed in all buses and a base station is being installed at district offices for continuous communication;
- 40 new buses have been ordered for Rhinebeck, Spackenkill and BOCES—1 spare bus will remain parked in Rhinebeck to allow for swift replacement in cases of mechanical malfunction.

The group talked about the importance of keeping ALL members of the community informed as to progress dealing with ALL bus-related problems, for instance through BOE participation in open houses and the superintendent's tweets, School Messenger updates, and website postings.

Clarification and explanation are key, not only at the September 22BOE meeting but also as questions continue to emerge (for instance, it is not necessary to wait to outline the public sector bidding process). Joe acknowledged that changing our contractor AND re-drawing the routes to optimize capacity at the same time may have been over-ambitious. He reiterated that no bus route should be longer than 50-60 minutes and road crossings for student stops must conform to state regulations.

What have we learned from this crisis in terms of communication best practices?

Most obviously, there is a real need to man the phones when parents attempt urgently to contact the district. In hindsight, as Laura pointed out, we want to determine what resources, human or otherwise, could be brought to bear on this and any other cases

that may arise. For the past week it has been “all hands on deck.” Could there be staff in the office by or before 7 AM if buses are on the road that early? Could there be a call system (akin to Central Hudson’s) to help manage the volume of calls? Could our “Auto Attendant” feature on the phones be modified to include a new bus information prompt? Frontier may need to help with this (Joe will check with Sheldon Tieder).

Website Update:

Steve responded to some parent queries that have been coming in about design of the new district website. Not having had the opportunity to gather feedback from parent groups prior to the roll-out this summer, he is glad to receive suggestions and welcomes dialogue around how to improve the site. He is at work now, for instance, on making the staff directory more user-friendly (allowing parents to e-mail teachers without too many clicks). Ask-the-District should be up and running soon (and parents will need to be reminded that all answers to their questions will be kept anonymous when posted to the website). Steve plans to write to the community with comprehensive information about the website later this semester.

Members of the committee brainstormed about what messages and events we would like to see highlighted via the carousel of images on the site. There will be three basic categories with rotating content: Community, Extra- and Co-Curricular Events and “This is What Public Education Looks Like” focusing on classroom activities. We would like to make it possible for parents to submit images directly to the website, allowing for “crowd-sourced” photography throughout the year.

Steve is continuing to meet with faculty groups and offices/staff to answer technical questions about how to use the site. The importance of teachers “owning” their own pages cannot be overstated. Parents increasingly turn to online sources of information to learn about school events and to keep abreast of their children’s homework. Rhinebeck CSD needs to anticipate and work with those expectations.

Agenda for our next meeting:

- Discuss how our board goals relate specifically the communications;
- Follow-up on Website questions as well as communications challenges related to transportation;
- Interface with the School Start Time committee to support that group’s outreach efforts and ask Dr. Davenport about the AV Club as one communications resource;
- Coordinate Start-of-the Year BOE letter to RCSD Staff.

Respectfully submitted,

Deirdre d’Albertis