

April 1, 2015

Notes:

The Sub-committee convened today to discuss the matter of the Bus Scheduling problem occurring among Buses 1,2, &3 for the WPS.

Liz Yusem, Michael Shepard, and Julie McMahon were the 3 school committee members included in the committee with Liz Yusem as chair. Superintendent Dr. Jean Fitzgerald and business manager Charlie Kellner were also present on the sub-committee. In the public audience were WMS Principal Kimo Cater and Hosmer Principal Robert LaRoche.

Liz Yusem re-read the School Committee chair, Eileen Hsu Balzer's chairman's report dated 3/2/15 to those present for this sub-committee to open the meeting to readdress the identifying issues causing the necessity of having a Bus Scheduling Subcommittee meeting. See attached.

An updated hand out was distributed to the sub-committee highlighting the continued historical and chronic lateness of Buses 1, 2, & 3 to the Hosmer. See attached.

All present at the meeting agreed:

That children sitting in hallways waiting for long periods of time for buses that are chronically late has a negative impact to the well being of those children.

From the handout, it is clear that the average bus arrival to the Hosmer school for afternoon dismissal are on average 10-20 minutes late. In the worst cases, a bus might be as late as 30 minutes which translates into children arrive home up to an hour after school ends.

This is a situation that has many facets of complexity and cannot be totally and completely solved and will need a broader time frame of study other than the 1 year focus that is proposed today. This sub-committee's purpose is to isolate and remedy this particular problem and address an unacceptable situation that creates conditions of frustration at the end of the day on many levels, most importantly to young children who are kept waiting for the bus to arrive, for the parents who are waiting on the other end to receive their children, and to the teachers who are responsible for managing the safety of the children until they are able to board a bus.

The superintendent proposed a solution that would require a 5 minute earlier start time for WMS and 5 minute later time for Hosmer.

This proposal would translate into:

WMS: School start at 7:35am and end 2:05pm end vs the current start of 7:40am and 2:10pm end.

Hosmer: School start at 8:25am and end at 2:40pm vs the current start of 8:20am. and 2:35pm. end.

The business manager for WPS also included information that a fourth bus proposed by school committee member, John Portz, at the 3/2/15 school committee meeting was included into the budget as a bid alternate of \$16,000 and a viable solution to alleviate the problem. The fourth bus would operate according a two tiered system.

The two tiered system would operate accordingly:

The current buses would maintain their current operational status with pick-up and drop off at the WMS and Hosmer and a fourth bus would be introduced that would only do pick up at the Hosmer in the afternoon. For example, Bus 1, 2, &3 pick up at WMS. Bus 1 & 2 then return to Hosmer to pick up students. Bus 3 which typically crosses the most problematic intersection in Watertown, Watertown Square and crossing the river, will continue to drop off WMS students but will not return across Watertown Square to pick up at Hosmer because a fourth bus will already be en-route to pick up students at Hosmer.

Discussion further ensued among school committee members about the implications on the broader community of changing start and end times at both the WMS and Hosmer given the opportunity that introducing a fourth bus is possible.

Given the aforementioned scenarios of changing times at WMS and Hosmer by 5 minutes and introducing a fourth bus, it was queried:

- Is 5 minutes going to help alleviate the problem given that the information provided is showing 10-20 minutes on average a late arrival of the buses at Hosmer?
- What will be the impact on families whose children attend the middle school and the issues of tardiness given that children will be starting even earlier than current scheduled time of 7:40am?
- Do the number of stops need to change for MS students to address issues of arrival at Hosmer?
- How to fairly address the impact of children who are marked late because they do not take the bus because traffic problems are varied and exist throughout town and can be caused by a variety of reasons on any given day—typically children who take the bus are not marked late if the bus is late and how is that typically addressed for non-bus riders?
- Is it fair to include changing the start time for the MS as part of the solution?

The responses by district administration and leadership to these queries were:

- 5 minutes across the board seems to be the least disruptive way to fix the current problem on many levels.
- Leadership at schools are very aware that unforeseen situations occur where tardiness is unavoidable due to severe weather and are able to help ameliorate those situations so that students are not penalized.
- Changing the number of stops between arrival and departure of a single route become a logistical nightmare for students and administration and is not a viable solution.
- Leadership at schools are aware of students who are chronically tardy and make efforts to address the issue with a broader perspective of family engagement.
- The issues concerning the bus scheduling problem is a districtwide issue because of the many different stakeholders and is not an individual school issue.

Given the discussion, the superintendent proposed an alternate solution:

Changing the start time of the Hosmer to start 10 minutes later and not to change the start time of the middle school.

This proposal would translate into:

WMS: No change in school hours.

Hosmer: School start at 8:30am and end at 2:45pm vs the current start of 8:20am. and end at 2:35pm.

Given this scenario the discussion included the following queries:

- What happens to Hosmer families if start times are 10 minutes later?
- Is there an issue with students being dropped off early that are not attended and are not in an early morning program?
- What is the overall impact on after school programs?
- How are teaching staff affected after school with their professional development team and coordination meetings?

The responses to these queries were:

- Given a later start time will definitely have an impact on families and hopefully giving families 5 months advance notice to prepare for a change will help them coordinate their needs.
- The PEP grant will last 1 more year and has had a very positive impact of allowing children free early morning athletic programming. It will be important next year to ensure that PEP programs at Hosmer are widely publicized if the 10 minute later start is an issue with some families that are not enrolled in the early morning fee based programs.
- There are many children enrolled in the after school program at Hosmer so the impact on after school programs is negligible because the students will already be in school.
- The impact to teachers is two fold: While we alleviate the issue of teachers waiting long periods of time after the school day has officially ended, the Hosmer teaching staff will be getting out 10 minutes later than teachers at the other two elementary schools, Cunniff and Lowell. A proposed solution would be to have monthly team meetings at Hosmer next year and the details of these administrative issues will be worked out by the Superintendent and WPS leadership teams.

The Superintendent further emphasized that the problem being addressed by this sub-committee was not a permanent solution and would be further analyzed and studied in the next school year to see the overall affects of any recommendation put forth today. Furthermore, the issues concerning the start and end times at all WPS schools would be part of a much broader study which could be included in the district's goals next year.

After much discussion and given the complex situations which arise from both proposals to address this problem of bus scheduling, the sub-committee made a motion that was seconded and unanimously voted to put forward to the full school committee on April 6, 2015 for consideration:

It is the recommendation of the Bus Sub-Committee to address the Bus Scheduling Problem whereby:

Knowing that the issue of the Bus Scheduling problem is not an individual school's issue within the WPS system; but rather, it is a district problem which has negatively impacted the youngest children within the district for many years and must be addressed:

It is the recommendation by the Bus Scheduling sub-committee that the WPS administration address this issue by only changing the start time of the Hosmer school to a later start and end time by 10 minutes in the next 2015-2016 school year.