

Coventry Board of Education
Coventry, Connecticut

Transportation Committee Meeting
Approved Minutes of Thursday, September 16, 2021
Administration Building Conference Room

Committee Members Present

Michael Sobol, Committee Chair
Eugene Marchand
Robert Williams
Jennifer Beausoleil, Board Chair

Administrators Present:

Dr. David J. Petrone, Superintendent of Schools
Robert Carroll, Director of Finance and Operations
Christian Marcinczyk, Transportation Liaison
Patrick Cox, Athletic Director

Others Present:

Nicole Irvine, M&J Dispatcher
Jon Hipsher, M&J Chief Operating Officer (arrived 9:00 a.m.)

I. Call to Order

M. Sobol called the meeting to order at 8:46 a.m.

II. Audience of Citizens

There were none.

III. VOTE: Approve the minutes of July 21, 2021

MOTION: To approve the minutes of the July 21, 2021 meeting

By: E. Marchand

Seconded: R. Williams

Result: Motion carries unanimously

IV. Information and Discussion: Driver Shortage Impacts

A. K-12 Impact

Dr. Petrone reviewed the shortage of bus drivers, which is a state-wide issue. He said this may impact athletics and has already affected the time of many bus runs, including the late bus schedule. Dr. Petrone added that Ms. Irvine has done an incredible job making sure our students are taken care of in a timely manner; the issue is not for a lack of effort on behalf of M&J.

M. Sobol asked about having to eliminate runs and what that looks like for rerouting. Ms. Irving said she had to compare the routes and added students to other runs that made sense.

E. Marchabnd asked about the number of riders. Ms. Irvine said the numbers are not over what we are allowed.

M. Sobol talked about comparing numbers from the beginning of the year and if adjustments need to be made. Ms. Irvine said she is down one driver at this time and it will be a challenge if someone is out sick. Dr. Petrone said it will be a challenging year, and everyone's patience is appreciated. He said communication to parents will be very important.

J. Beausoleil asked if the students are taking the same bus in the morning as in the afternoon. Ms. Irvine said everyone should be now, accept maybe one or two students, or if there are special individual circumstances as requested by parents.

E. Marchand talked about the process for complaints. C. Marcinczyk said it is a joint effort between her and Ms. Irvine. She added that there are not many complaints; there are more changes to where students are getting picked up or dropped off.

The Committee discussed the chain of to who complaints should be directed.

Dr. Petrone stressed that all concerns, beyond where a bus may be, should go directly to the administration [Ms. Marcinczyk]. He added that this ensures the administration is aware of all concerns and issues.

E. Marchand said following this chain will make everyone's life easier.

C. Marcinczyk said there have been no major complaints or angry parents, mostly just clarification of stops.

J. Beausoleil asked that a list be kept of any concerns that have been addressed and brought to the Committee.

M. Sobol thanked M&J for the work they have done and that parents, overall, are very pleased.

Mr. Hipsher said how pleased they are with the work of Ms. Irvine.

J. Beausoleil agreed .

Dr. Petrone asked Mr. Hipsher what M&J is doing to secure drivers. Mr. Hispher explained the various actions taking place, including hiring incentives.

The Committee discussed other options on how to attract drivers. Mr. Hipsher continued and talked about the challenges the bus companies are facing state-wide.

Mr. Hipsher talked about the challenges associated with drivers being vaccinated or having to be tested weekly.

J. Beausoleil said there are concerns in the community about buses being late and the related communications to parents. Ms. Irving said she notifies the schools as soon as she hears from the drivers and the schools send out an email and text notice to affected parents.

M. Sobol said, as a parent, he has been very pleased with the communication coming from the schools.

B. Athletics

Mr. Cox said at the high school level there hasn't been an issue with the manipulation of the schedule. He said many games have been moved to evenings. He said this will be a problem as it gets darker earlier with the unlit fields. He added that we can use Sundays, but we are trying to avoid that. He continued and talked about various challenges with the middle school students. Dr. Petrone said it is possible we will have to shorten the middle school schedule. Mr. Cox said the middle school fields are not lit. He added that the issue is with the shortage of drivers, which means the pickup is delayed.

Mr. Hipsher reviewed the challenges associated with athletic events, and noted that they have always been a challenge, but with the shortage it becomes more evident.

The Committee reviewed the various challenges and options associated with athletics.

Mr. Hipsher offered to work with the district to see if the middle school sports could continue while using the M&J network.

J. Beausoleil said she is not comfortable with parent drivers; the liability and the "have and have not" are the two issues. The Committee discussed this option and realized it was not viable.

M. Sobol said we should do whatever it takes to be sure middle school sports are operational. Dr. Petrone said they would look into possible commercial buses. Mr. Cox said most districts are stuck in the same position. Dr. Petrone said he would look into staff who are licensed and go from there as far as possibly renting vans.

The Committee asked the administration to continue to work on options and do the best they can.

C. Late Bus Runs

The Committee discussed the ridership for the late bus runs. C. Marcinczyk said the bus is arriving at approximately 4:30 p.m., which is 30 minutes late.

R. Willams left (10:23 p.m.).

Dr. Petrone said this is on the agenda to officially make the Committee aware of the ongoing challenge. The Committee agreed that parents understand the current situation.

V. Information: Bus Route Update

M. Sobol reviewed various changes and noted they are due to the consolidation that took place. Dr. Petrone said there were no changes to bus stops, only pick up and drop off times.

MOTION: To approve the updated routes as presented

By: E. Marchand

Seconded: M. Sobol

Result: Motion carries unanimously

VI. Adjournment

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting at 10:34 a.m.

By: E. Marchand

Seconded: M. Sobol

Result: Motion carried unanimously

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberlee Arey Delorme
Board Clerk

Approved: September 23, 2021