



**WHITE PLAINS BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
EDUCATION HOUSE  
FIVE HOMESIDE LANE  
WHITE PLAINS, NEW YORK 10605  
914-422-2071

**Rosemarie Eller**  
*President*

**Cayne Letizia**  
*Vice President*

**Sheryl Brady**  
**Jessica Buck**  
**Valerie Daniele**  
**Craig Mondschein**  
**Charlie Norris**

**Dr. Joseph L. Ricca**  
*Superintendent of Schools*

**Michelle Melendez**  
*District Clerk*

December 2024

Dear White Plains City School District Community Members:

Over the last three months, the White Plains City School District (WPCSD) Board of Education and district staff have been working to address a budgetary challenge pertaining to the earlier start and end times of Church Street Elementary School's hours of operation moving forward and beginning in the 2025-2026 academic year. For a number of years, Church Street Elementary School's hours, beginning and dismissing 30 minutes earlier than the other four elementary schools, have served as the "earlier" choice for families seeking to start and end the school day earlier than the rest of the district's elementary schools. This arrangement has been of great benefit to many of our students' families over the years.

Unfortunately, the cost of school bus transportation services has increased dramatically over the last several years, due to driver shortages, collective bargaining agreements, insurance, cost of fuel and the cost of new buses. As a result, the district planned for an anticipated increase of \$2.2 million for the cost of transportation services in future contracts. Additionally, in preparation for the request for proposal process, and to gain a better sense of the overall fiscal sustainability of our present paradigm, the WPCSD conducted an audit of the Transportation Services during the 2023-2024 academic year.

The outcome of the audit identified that market conditions would likely result in upwards of a 30% to 40% increase in costs or a \$4 million increase. However, the actual results of the market yielded an increase of 51% to 61% or a \$5 million increase. As the district planned for a \$2.2 million increase, these increases left a shortfall of \$2.8 million.

The audit also identified that the stand-alone transportation tier at Church Street Elementary School was not cost effective and that the WPCSD should consider realignment of the Church Street Elementary bell times aligning with those of the other elementary schools in order to maximize efficiencies, especially in light of the anticipated increase in transportation costs. Unfortunately, the cost of maintaining a separate tier of bussing, which is required to maintain the earlier start and end times at Church Street Elementary School, is approximately \$2.1 million in the first year. To realize the resources necessary to pay for the market driven cost increase, the school district would either need to cut resources elsewhere in the organization, which would reflect cuts to programming and/or services, or increase taxes above and beyond the tax levy cap. Every member of the Board of Education has sought alternatives to these two choices. They simply do not exist.

As our community knows, the Board of Education and the WPCSD educational community remain committed to preserving the instructional core of programming and of our obligation to maintain a fiscally conservative

approach to any potential tax increase during the course of the district's annual fiscal planning. To preserve our program and services, we will support the administration's plan to bring the WPCSD's elementary school start and end times in line district wide. This adjustment is necessary to maintain the sustainability of our overall transportation services and the organization's fiscal health. Therefore, beginning in the 2025-2026 academic year, Church Street Elementary School will begin at 8:40 AM and end at 3:20 PM.

For students and families interested, there will be expanded Before and After Care services available in each elementary school and offered at the lowest possible cost for families. Additionally, WPCSD team members will work to support any family that expresses a unique need for assistance. We know that this change is a challenge for many of our families and we wish that there was another fiscally responsible solution available that did not require cutting programs or exceeding the tax levy cap.

Throughout this process and understanding that any change to a school schedule is not insignificant for the children and families that it impacts, we endeavored to engage in conversation with the Church Street School community a full year in advance of any potential change to the school day schedule.

During the months of October and November, we took the important steps to engage with parents, guardians, colleagues and students to learn about their concerns, thoughts, feelings and preferences. We shared feedback survey opportunities with the school community over the course of a five-week period and we are grateful for the feedback that was shared with over 300 respondents participating. On Monday, December 9, 2024, the WPCSD administrative team shared the feedback received and much of the information shared identified the challenges that any change to the day's schedule may bring. There were also those who expressed concern with increasing taxes and/or cutting diverting resources from other areas within the organization. We also learned from those who indicated that the change would have no impact or even that the change is welcomed. In short, we heard from all who were interested in sharing their opinion and concerns. We are grateful for that opportunity. Accordingly, we will direct the administration to continue to work to support the Church Street Elementary School community by providing assistance wherever we are able. Opportunities to sign up for Before and/or After Care services will begin in the spring of 2025 so that those who are interested may secure that service sooner rather than later.

In the end, this decision was not made lightly and comes following a concerted effort to seek alternatives to enacting a change, as well as listening to and learning from the families who will be most impacted by the change. Moving forward we will continue to provide support where needed and simultaneously continue to seek efficiencies within the organization to reduce costs where possible. As you know, the Board of Education is comprised of community members who are singularly focused on preserving the outstanding programming offered to our students. The Board of Education will remain committed to involving our community in conversations related to any changes in an open, transparent and timely manner.

Thank you for your continued support of our Tigers and of the White Plains City School District.

Sincerely,



Rosemarie Tonge-Eller  
President



Cayne Letizia  
Vice President