

**Policy Committee Meeting
November 5, 2009
5:00 p.m.**

MINUTES

Attendance: Commissioner Elliott (Chair); Commissioners Brennan, White, Campos, Williams, and Evans (joined meeting at 5:50 p.m.). Absent: Commissioner Powell.
Student Representative: Sarah DeLaus

District Staff: James Sheppard; Chuck Johnson; Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Commissioner Elliott convened the meeting at 5:08 p.m.

I. Discussion regarding Transportation Policy

Commissioner Elliott presented a proposed amendment to Transportation Policy (8400), which would ensure provision of transportation to all students in grades K through 8, rather than the current practice of only providing transportation to those students who reside more than 1 ½ miles from school. She noted that this is an urgent issue because of serious concerns for children's safety.

Commissioner Brennan pointed out that the existing policy had not been enforced in previous years, so that a great deal of confusion and consternation was caused when enforcement began this year. He also stated that the circular grid model for providing transportation beyond a 1.5 mile radius from school is not a good model for Rochester because safe and unsafe neighborhoods can be as little as a few blocks apart. Commissioner Brennan emphasized the need to have District staff present to be able to determine exceptions that should be made within the resources available for the short-term. For longer term, he recommended establishing criteria such as safety in making determinations about provision of transportation, rather than relying on a specific distance marker.

Commissioner Elliott reported that of the 840+ students displaced from transportation services this year, only about 150 have had these services restored by the Transportation Exception Review Committee. She also stated that minimal information was provided to parents and students until just prior to the start of the school year, and decisions seem to have been made without consideration of parents' work schedules or the safety of students.

Commissioner White agreed that much of the furor at this point stems from the Transportation Policy not having been enforced adequately in the past and standards not having been applied. He asserted that the Superintendent has attempted through current practices to establish a more democratic and equitable process. Nevertheless, enforcement of the policy at this point is creating confusion and resentment because of concerns regarding student safety and the inability of certain individuals to call up their contacts to obtain an exception.

Student Representative Sarah DeLaus inquired as to the goal of the proposed amendment, asking whether students in grades K through 8 would be picked up at their home or at a central bus stop. She also expressed concern for high school students in terms of the long distances to reach RTS bus stops to get to school.

Commissioner Campos voice concern especially for younger children and agreed with the need to act quickly on this issue. However, she stated that she cannot take action without information regarding the financial ramifications of amending the policy, the ability to question the Administration about possible arrangements and specific items for which funds may be reduced to pay for transporting additional students.

Commissioner White concurred, stating that Board members are not only responsible for students' safety but also for the sound fiscal operation of the District. He stated that he would like a dialog with Administration to discuss the financial implications of modifying the policy.

Commissioner White noted that the data from Jim Fenton indicates that transporting all students in grades K through 6 would cost an additional \$7.5m and these funds have not been allocated in the budget. For transportation of all students in grades K through 8, an additional \$10.7m would be incurred. He noted that the State limits reimbursement for transportation expenses to students residing 2.5 miles from school, so that none of these costs would be eligible for State reimbursement. Commissioner White also pointed out that the Governor has announced mid-year budget cuts.

Commissioner White highlighted the portion of the data from Jim Fenton stating that "additional capacity is available to transport 700 students", but this would take several months to implement. Commissioner White questioned the rationale for this length of time, particularly considering the urgency of the issue. He also emphasized the importance of having the Administration present so that questions could be asked such as the number of kindergarten students and whether this is above or below the 700 capacity level.

Commissioner White also pointed out the importance of including the City of Rochester in these discussions, considering that the District alone cannot address the safety issues on City streets. He indicated that the Rochester Police Department has an important role to play, particularly for those students for whom the District may not be able to provide transportation.

Commissioner Williams suggested a number of possible ways to cover the costs of transporting additional students: 1) Estimated cost savings of \$41m over three years with new health insurance plan; 2) Estimated cost savings of \$7m with implementation of two-tier transportation system; and 3) Another \$13-14m in the reserve fund. He inquired whether a portion of these savings could be used to transport at least some of the students.

Student representative Sarah DeLaus emphasized that it is not only young children who are unsafe on City streets, citing a recent incident in which a man followed her after school and she was able to locate a police officer for assistance. Ms. DeLaus also pointed out that many streets do not have crossing guards to look out for children's safety. She suggested checking the website to identify the location of known predators to deploy security officers in those areas.

Commissioner Elliott proposed restoring transportation to every student that has been denied these services this year, as a measure that can be acted upon immediately. She stated that the implications for elementary and high school students can be examined in the longer term.

Commissioner White and Campos underscored the importance of having key District staff present to provide information to enable Committee members to make a responsible and fiscally sound decision.

Action Item: Board staff will schedule another Policy Committee Meeting of the Whole as soon as possible with key District staff present to address transportation issues.

III. Receive Public Comments regarding Student Arrests

Commissioner Elliott pointed out that the data indicate that student arrests have declined by 70% in the last year. She explained that the Policy Committee had offered to conduct a public hearing on this issue and opened up the meeting for public comment.

Several individuals came forward to express concern regarding mental hygiene arrests of young children, stating that the circumstances leading to the child's behavior were not examined prior to calling for the arrest. These individuals reported extreme measures being taken in these cases, thereby escalating the child's distress and behavior. According to these reports, no efforts were made to involve other qualified professionals (i.e. counselors or social workers) prior to arresting the child.

Other individuals reported on frequent harassment of children of color by the Rochester Police Department, stopping, questioning, and even arresting these children for no apparent infraction or extremely minor offenses (i.e. jaywalking). Discussion focused on the way in which these patterns affect perceptions and expectations of children of color, particularly regarding law enforcement. In this way, a vicious cycle is established and children end up with records for no reason and their future is jeopardized.

Suggestion was made to have community members mediate between residents and police officers, who do not know the residents or understand their history and culture. Similar suggestion was made to have parents in schools to advocate for children and assist teachers and administrators in understanding them.

Motion to adjourn by Commissioner Brennan. **Adopted 6-0**

Meeting adjourned at 6:56PM.

Next Policy Committee Meeting: To Be Determined