

Clay County School Board Meeting, September 17, 2007 7:00 pm

Good evening Chairperson Vallencourt and members of the Board, my name is Michael Sharpe. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you tonight.

My concern is a change not in policy but in the practice of the Clay County School Bus Transportation Department.

I attended the School Board Workshop titled "Discussion on student transportation involving walk distances, hazardous walking condition policy and school bus stops".

However, when the workshop began it was noted that this only concerned K-6, and did not cover the other students.

As a parent of a school age student, which most of the board are not, I have a concern when changes are made and proper notification of the change is not delivered. We have lived in our home for 7 years. We moved into the neighborhood mainly because of the schools that our daughter would attend. For 7 years school buses came to our neighborhood picking up all grade levels. This year our daughter waited for the bus on the first day of school, and it did not show up. Our daughter called my wife, who had to leave her job, and my wife took her to school. I attempted to contact the Clay County School Transportation number where I left numerous messages for a return call. I never received a return call. We assumed that since it was the first day that there must be a mix up. My wife again had to leave work in the afternoon and pick up our daughter. We were never officially notified that the bus was not coming to our neighborhood until on the third day of school, after calling the Superintendent's office, I was connected to the Transportation office and talked to an individual named Ina. She informed me that the Florida law had changed and that since we lived within 2 miles of the school we would no longer have bus transportation. I asked her to please confirm this and by what route was this measurement. She told me that the route was Forrest Dr to Doctor's Lake Dr to Birchwood, to Moody to the School. I measured this route in my car, my wife's car and my brother's car and all came up with 2.2 miles. I again called the Transportation office and left numerous messages and never received a return call. Again I contacted the Superintendent's office who got me in contact with Ina. This is now week two of the school year. She told me that she would have someone physically go and measure the distance and would call me back. A week passed without a call. I called and Ina told me that a Steve had walked it and that we lived 10,000 feet from the school. She gave me his number and I called him. He verified that we did live 10,000 feet from our property line to the school's property line by traveling a completely different route than what was initially measured. Two miles is 10,560 feet. He also again told me that the Florida law had changed.

I was told that there was a special meeting of the school board and that if I wanted I could attend and voice my concerns. I called the Superintendent's office and was informed that it was not a special meeting, but was, however, a workshop and that yes I could attend.

In anticipation of this meeting I researched the internet and found and printed all current Florida Statutes concerning school bus transportation. The law, rule, or policy that had been quoted to me numerous times was last revised on Jul 20, 1974. So to my point at the beginning of this statement my concern is the change in practice of the School Transportation Department not the change in policy.

Why the staff could not provide these details at the time of the workshop is unknown. It appeared that the staff had already made the board's decision for them and were only providing information that was relevant to the department's needs.

The bus stop on Forrest Dr was the last bus stop prior to reaching Lakeside Junior High School. The bus leaves Indians Springs on Moody Road enroute to Lakeside Junior High. The stop on Forrest is no more than 4 tenths of a mile from Moody road, roundtrip. A school bus's MPG is approx 8 miles per gallon at a cost of \$3.00 per gallon. 4 tenths of a mile would result in a cost of 15 cents, round trip is 30 cents, 180 school days in a year equates to \$54.00. Assuming the other 8 stops are within this same distance the School District is saving \$486.00 per year. This is not saving the School District any significant amount of money.

I am sure if the board requested what the cost savings would be for the 9 bus stops that were discontinued and for not servicing Bear Run, they would find that it would be minimal compared to the amount of hardship that is being imposed on the effected families.

I urge the board to demand from the staff an accurate assessment of what has truly happened here. I know that we all want to save money due to budget constraints, however, there must be a better way, such as not approving an over 7% pay increase for School administrators this year.

I have one comment left. I am sure that each board member was made aware of the workshop and I would certainly hope that each board member would gather all information needed prior to such a meeting to formulate an educated decision on a matter such as this.

Thank you for your time.