

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF ALACHUA COUNTY, FLORIDA  
MINUTES OF BOARD WORKSHOP  
MAGNET SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION  
February 14, 2007

The School Board of Alachua County, Florida, met in work group session duly called at 9:05 a.m. in the Boardroom, 620 East University Avenue, Gainesville, Florida. Present were: Virginia S. Childs, Chairman; Janie S. Williams, Vice-chairman; F. Wesley Eubank, Tina Pinkoson, and Eileen Roy, members; W. Daniel Boyd, Jr., Superintendent; and staff members.

The meeting was called to order by Superintendent Boyd. The purpose of this workshop is to discuss Magnet School Transportation.

Dr. Boyd introduced Mrs. Sandy Hollinger, Deputy Superintendent for Instruction and Curriculum Services, and turned the meeting over to her. Mrs. Hollinger welcomed staff and thanked the Board for the opportunity to present information on Magnet School Transportation. Mrs. Hollinger introduced Mr. Keith Birkett, Assistant Superintendent for Planning, Budgeting and Systems Accountability, and thanked Steve Githens, David Deas, Lola McNeal, Diana Lagotic, Allison Fissiden, and Kathy Dixon for serving on an informal committee to identify current issues and parent concerns and to provide a recommendation for Board consideration.

An overview of the following was provided:

- Purpose: Mrs. Hollinger reviewed the current model, provided an introduction of the new model, and discussed the recommendation of the Committee.
- Current Model: Currently, transportation is stop-to-stop and no parameters on geographic areas. The Committee identified length of bus ride, safety of students, consistency of bus schedules, and cost of running buses half full and running additional buses as top issues within the current model.
- Proposed New Model/How It Will Work: Mrs. Hollinger provided an overview of the proposed new model of “pick up and drop off at zoned schools.” She turned the meeting over to Mr. Birkett, who provided specific examples of how the new model would work within elementary, middle, and high schools.
- New Model Benefits: Mrs. Hollinger reviewed the benefits of the proposed new model which address parents’ concerns of length of bus ride, safety, and consistency. The following considerations also were discussed: (1) parent drop off in the mornings; (2) parent pick up in the afternoons; (3) impact on families attending multiple schools; and (4) impact on specific schools (not interfering with normal bus schedules-traditionally, magnet buses will run early).
- Recommendation: Mrs. Hollinger proposed that the Board implement the new model for the upcoming 2007-2008 school year and begin communication to schools and parents in March.

Mr. Eubank suggested that an item be placed on the next agenda for Board discussion. He asked staff to look at the pros and cons of combining middle and high school times, as well as looking at the energy impact.



Mrs. Pinkoson discussed the need for information on magnet transportation be prepared and attached to the magnet application form. Parents would need to sign the form as a record of commitment to the new model.

From the schools' standpoint, Mrs. Childs thought the consistency of bus times would be a positive factor. She asked staff to look at breakfast starting times at schools, and suggested that July 1 be targeted for publishing bus schedules. She identified the following possible problems/concerns: change is difficult; children presently in magnet programs are accustomed to current transportation model; planning time; elementary-to-elementary; mixing middle and high schools; and impact with siblings.

Mrs. Roy discussed the importance of providing parents sufficient time to review the new model information, having an opportunity for public discussion, and providing parents with tentative schedules and an acceptance letter to be signed and returned. This would ensure that adequate communication on the proposed changes had been provided.

Mrs. Childs stated that consistency of the new model is of the utmost importance, and that only in extreme situations would exceptions to established routes be made.

Mrs. Hollinger stated that staff has listened to parents' concerns and feel that the three (3) key issues expressed have been taken into consideration when developing the new magnet transportation model. Some parents may have difficult decisions to make with proposed changes.

Mr. Eubank asked Mr. Steve Githens, Director of Transportation, if he knew the number of students riding buses to magnet programs. Mr. Eubank expressed concern that the new model will not create a negative enrollment in Magnet programs.

Mrs. Pinkoson stated that home schools offer quality programs for students, and this change may be a strong proponent for other programs.

Mrs. Roy agreed that all schools have strong programs; however, not all schools have magnets.

Mrs. Childs again expressed her thanks for the recommendation and asked that the subject of Magnet School Transportation be added to the next Board agenda and information placed on the School Board Website. In addition, the PowerPoint documentation should be provided to Magnet principals.

Mrs. Williams inquired about possible savings to the District. At this time, it is difficult to determine an exact savings amount, but there is potential.

Dr. Boyd thanked Mrs. Hollinger, Mr. Birkett, and staff and directed that this subject be placed on the upcoming Board meeting agenda as discussed.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:15 a.m.