

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Grimsby-Lincoln Room
5:30 p.m.

Present:

Trustee Committee Members: Kevin Maves (Committee Chair), Lora Campbell, Diane Chase, Cheryl Keddy-Scott (for Jonathan Fast),

Trustees: Jennifer Ajandi, Sue Barnett (Board Chair), Helga Campbell, Linda Crouch, Dale Robinson (Board Vice-Chair)

Administration: Stacy Veld, Superintendent of Business Services
Lora Courtois, Supt of Sec. Education, Planning & Transportation
John Dickson, Superintendent of School Support Services
Wes Hahn, Superintendent of Education – Elementary
Paula MacKinnon, Superintendent of Education – Secondary
Helen McGregor, Superintendent of Education – Secondary
Kelly Pisek, Superintendent of Education - Elementary
Filomena Goldsworthy, Community Outreach Coordinator
Lori Powell, NSTS Executive Director

Recording Secretary: Brenda Buckingham, Business Assistant

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Kevin Maves called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Committee Chair Kevin Maves requested that the agenda be amended so that the Review of Board Policy J-01 *Transportation Eligibility and Service* be addressed immediately following the approval of the agenda in order to ensure sufficient time for the Trustees serving on the Student Trustee Senate to attend that meeting scheduled for 7:00 p.m.

Moved by: Cheryl Keddy-Scott
Seconded by: Lora Campbell

“That the agenda be approved as amended.”

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

REVIEW OF BOARD POLICIES

Policy J-01 *Transportation Eligibility and Service*

In response to presentations by two delegations requesting exceptions to the District School Board of Niagara's (DSBN) transportation eligibility policy at the October 13th Board Meeting, and in consideration of the financial impact associated with any changes to present practices, Senior Administration recommended that Superintendent of Business Services Stacy Veld and Superintendent of Education, Planning & Transportation Lora Courtois provide a report to the Finance Committee for the review of the current policy. Lengthy discussion took place on this matter, with Superintendent Lora Courtois, the Superintendents of Education, and Niagara Student Transportation Services (NSTS) Executive Director Lori Powell providing clarification and additional information.

Superintendent Lora Courtois explained that the applicable sections of the policy in this matter are #5 and #6 regarding the eligibility of courtesy transportation for students with exceptional needs and for students attending a school other than their home school for approved program attendance such as French Immersion, Specialized School to Work, English as a Second Language and Special Education.

It was explained that, prior to 2008, the DSBN spent approximately \$2 million over budget per year in courtesy transportation. In order to bring expenditures in line with Ministry of Education funding, the transportation policy was methodically reviewed by staff and approved by the Board to bring practice in line with policy. In 2009-10, courtesy transportation was removed resulting in a savings of \$2,000,000 which was directed into the classroom to support Instructional Coaches, Early Intervention Teachers, additional classroom Teachers, Educational Assistants, DreamBox Math, etc. Since that time, the DSBN has continued to realize efficiencies in this area which has contributed further to student success through support in the areas of Math AQ courses, Mental Health training, ESL teacher support, FNMI programming, and additional staff professional learning.

The potential cost associated with the transportation of siblings of a program student to the same program school is \$838,000 annually. To provide home to school courtesy busing to all students who attend an alternate school other than their home school is \$2,973,000 annually. This amount is conservative if transportation is offered to all students attending an alternate school. If courtesy transportation was reinstated, budget cuts totaling over \$3 million will be necessary. These cuts would impact on classroom learning supports and the DSBN would no longer be consistent with its practices that resulted in the current 'high' rating obtained in the Ministry's transportation Effectiveness and Efficiency (E&E) review. Superintendent Veld and Lori Powell explained that the E&E review is similar to an audit and that a high rating results in the MOE funding 100% of the prior year transportation deficit where a 'moderate high', for example, results in only 90% being funded.

Superintendent Courtois also provided background and additional information in the following areas.

- When alternate school requests are granted, parents/guardians are made aware, and acknowledge, that transportation is not provided for the student or for their siblings to attend the alternate school.
- Empty seating on a bus can be attributed to various factors. Assigning an empty seat to a student outside of the policy parameters impacts on the harmonized practices of the NSTS for both the DSBN and its coterminous board, and would be insufficient to satisfy a significant demand. The cost of adding another bus to an existing route is approximately \$35,000.

- The coterminous board conducted a short-term pilot several years ago on courtesy busing to younger French Immersion siblings when that program was first offered in their elementary schools. They found that offering courtesy busing was difficult to manage from both an administrative and cost perspective, and discontinued granting eligibility exception based on siblings enrolled in a program.
- Superintendent Lora Courtois noted that there have been 76 exceptions to the policy in the 2015-16 year which are short-term in nature and were granted to both Boards through the harmonized policy.
- The Ministry of Education recognizes courtesy busing as an ineffective and inefficient use of resources due to the lack of transparency and fairness in policy application, the barriers it presents to achieve efficiencies, and the time required to administer it.
- Magnet busing provides opportunities for students to access double credit courses in another school in their community. Extending that courtesy for single credit courses would result in a strain on secondary enrolment balances that the current policy supports.
- Busing is not provided to students attending Specialist High Schools Major (SHSM) programs. However, with the offering of 50 SHSM programs in 14 subject areas across 18 schools, with 2 regional programs, there have been very few requests by students to attend an alternate school in their Grade 11 and 12 academic years. However, alternate school requests are considered on a case by case basis. Superintendent Paula MacKinnon explained that all SHSM courses offered at DSBN schools are school-driven, i.e. designed to meet the needs of that school's students, and must be vetted and approved through the Ministry of Education with assurance that the appropriate components of the trade can be provided to the students at that school.

During discussion, the following matters were addressed:

- The effect that honouring secondary school boundaries has on maintaining balanced enrolments, which ultimately support a community school model. Courtesy busing has the potential to result in sharp increases in students requesting alternate school placements, therefore putting enrolment pressure on the alternate school and decreasing enrolment at the home school.
- The effect on families and their ability to provide or afford transportation for their child, and siblings, when they have chosen to attend an alternate school. Superintendent Kelly Pisek assured the Trustees that there is a high level of compassion demonstrated at the school level to address a student's needs prior to consideration of an alternate school request. If there are scenarios known to Trustees, they are asked to notify the Area Superintendent. Lori Powell also noted that the NSTS and the school works with families to find alternate solutions and make policy exceptions for transportation on a short-term compassionate basis.
- Use of regional/local transportation schedules do not always line up well with the school day.
- Offering transportation on a fee for service basis is prohibited through the Education Act, i.e. busing is publicly funded, so there should be no charge for seats.
- A total of 31,500 students are bused through the NSTS, of which 16,000 are DSBN students receiving eligible transportation. The October 13th delegations are the first to come forward since the formation of the NSTS.
- The coterminous board follows the same policy and it therefore does not disadvantage the DSBN students over the coterminous board.
- The cost to the DSBN to offer courtesy busing to a number of students is significant. The required reductions to the budget to support courtesy busing, and resulting loss of support to classrooms, will impact many students.

Following all discussion, it was

Motion by: Lora Campbell
Seconded by: Cheryl Keddy-Scott

“That Policy J-01 *Transportation Eligibility and Service* be confirmed as presented.”

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Board Chair Sue Barnett noted that she will liaise with the Director of Education and the appropriate Superintendent and respond with a written letter to each delegation from the October 13th Board meeting.

Jennifer Ajandi, Helga Campbell, Wes Hahn, Paula MacKinnon, Helen McGregor, and Lori Powell left the meeting at 6:40 p.m.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 13, 2015, MEETING

The minutes of the October 13, 2015, Finance Committee were reviewed and it was

Moved by: Lora Campbell
Seconded by: Cheryl Keddy-Scott

“That the minutes of the October 13, 2015, Finance Committee meeting be approved as presented.”

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There was no business arising from the minutes.

REVIEW OF BOARD POLICIES

Revisions to Policy C-04 *Community Planning and Partnerships*

Superintendent of Business Services introduced Filomena Goldsworthy, the DSBN's Community Outreach Coordinator, who was instrumental in the revisions to Policy C-04 *Community Planning and Partnerships*.

Superintendent Veld presented and reviewed the revised policy and explained that the revisions are housekeeping in nature in order to bring the policy in line with Ministry of Education's Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline.

The Committee was supportive of the revisions and it was then

Moved by: Lora Campbell
Seconded by: Cheryl Keddy-Scott

“That revised Policy C-04 *Community Planning and Partnerships* be approved as presented.”

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Filomena Goldsworthy left the meeting at 6:45 p.m.

AWARD OF CONTRACT FOR TONER CARTRIDGES

Superintendent Stacy Veld reported that the District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) had been purchasing cartridges from Computer Media Group under the terms of a cooperative tender through the Ontario Educational Collaborative Marketplace (OECM). This contract expires at the end of October. To move forward for another three-year contract term, the OECM conducted a competitive process to secure Vendors of Record which resulted in OECM awarding contracts to PrintersPlus and Staples Advantage.

Based on DSBN's past toner purchases, staff conducted an analysis revealing that cost savings of approximately \$2,000 per year would be realized if the Board purchases through Staples Advantage. The estimated cost of a three-year contract with Staples Advantage, again based on toner cartridge purchase history, is \$600,000 or \$200,000 per year.

It was confirmed that the three-year contract would be effective November 1, 2015. The contract will contain a two-year renewal option, at the Board's discretion.

Moved by: Diane Chase
Seconded by: Lora Campbell

“That staff be directed to enter into a three-year contract with Staples Advantage, effective November 1, 2015 to September 9, 2018, for the provision of toner cartridges, with the option to renew for an additional two-year period.”

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for November 18, 2015, at 6:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

**Kevin Maves
Chair**