

MINUTES OF THE WORK SESSION OF THE BOARD OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES

MILAN COMMUNITY SCHOOL CORPORATION

SEPTEMBER 5, 2012

The Board of School Trustees met for a work session at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 5, 2012. Attending were Board members Linda Baker, Gregory Lewis, Edward Amberger, and Timothy Tuttle. Randy Kirk was absent. Also attending was Superintendent Dr. Thomas Reale. President, Timothy Tuttle, presided. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Tuttle explained the purpose of the meeting was to address any concerns bus drivers had. He noted having such a work session was not normal practice, but the Board wanted to get together as a group to hear what the drivers had to say. He also stated it was against the ISBA code of ethics not to have the superintendent present at such a meeting, but the drivers should feel free to speak without worry of retribution. Bus drivers attending were Jim Berger, Ken Lewis, Chris Schmaltz, John Brandt, Linda Hyde, Debra Hackman, Irene Thielmann and Linda Jackson.

Mr. Tuttle stated the Board wanted to get all the facts on the table and get the bus issue behind them.

Mrs. Hackman stated she used to be a bus driver, but now was only a chauffeur. She commented she didn't know why the bus routes had to be changed and was upset the drivers had no input on the re-routing. She stated the drivers were told to come to the central office to look at the new routes, but when they did so, neither the transportation director nor the superintendent were present to explain the changes. She also said when she attended the bus driver meeting, she found out that she didn't have a route any more, but was only a driver for the career center students. She noted there were drivers who were ready to quit and asked what the Board would do to find replacements and if this is what they were striving to accomplish.

Mr. Tuttle thanked her for her comments and stated there would be no decisions made on any issue at this meeting.

Mrs. Jackson asked if it was safe to have a bus full of children turning around on Highway 101. She said one particular bus pulls into 600N and backs across the highway and then comes back out onto 101 to start her route. She stated the danger of this maneuver would increase if there would be fog, snow or traffic. Mrs. Hackman stated the route is dead ended at this location. Dr. Reale stated this is

the route of Linda Rohrig and in her defense, he asked whether this meeting was really about her. Mr. Amberger asked how many students were on the bus when it turned around and was told approximately six students. Mr. Schmaltz said according to state requirements, a bus driver was not supposed to pull into a road and back out onto a highway because it was too dangerous. Dr. Reale stated this was the driver's choice to do this, and he had been unaware this was happening until it was mentioned tonight. He asked why none of the other bus drivers were concerned enough about how the bus was being operated to report this to the central office. Mr. Amberger stated a parent had told him about the turnaround and he had witnessed it himself. Mr. Schmaltz stated this concern was not against Mrs. Rohrig. Mrs. Hyde said it was the route design, but Dr. Reale said that was not true.

Mrs. Thielmann asked about one of the buses going over railroad tracks that hadn't been traveled over for many years. Dr. Reale noted the state police stated as long as the rules for crossing tracks were observed; there should be no reason not to cross the tracks.

Mrs. Thielmann asked why there was a need for a short route when Mrs. Hackman and Mrs. Hyde would be available to drive for extracurricular trips. Dr. Reale stated the 'short' route picks up all the students in the trailer court and the bus is full after seven minutes. He noted it would not be feasible to have a 'long' route do this. Mrs. Thielmann then said it wasn't fair that the 'short' route would make \$55.00 per day and the 'long' routes make only \$70.00 per day because the 'long' route drivers were on the bus longer. Mr. Tuttle asked why this bus picked up on 101 and then the trailer court. Dr. Reale stated this bus picked up along the highway so as to allow the other four north buses to express into school without getting behind a bus picking up students. Mrs. Hyde stated in the past, there had been two buses picking up in the trailer court. Dr. Reale noted it was more efficient to have only one bus do this. He stated although there are five buses that pick up students in town, they do not overlap. It was also noted that about fifty students ride on the 'short' route bus.

Mr. Amberger asked how many routes cross each other. It was noted routes have always overlapped at some point, it was impossible not to.

Mrs. Thielmann asked how it was saving money with many drivers deadheading. She was upset because pay for the bus didn't start until the first pick up, and also because she had to record her pre-trip inspection. Mr. Amberger stated it was the law for drivers to do a pre-trip inspection.

The drivers were polled on how many miles they deadheaded; Mr. Berger 2¼ miles, Mr. Lewis 3½ miles, Mrs. Thielmann 7 miles, Mr. Brandt 1 mile, Mrs. Jackson 2 miles, and Mr. Schmaltz 5 miles. Dr. Reale stated all of these drivers, except Mr. Schmaltz, live in the northern part of the district, so therefore there is going to be deadhead time. Mr. Brandt commented that money is an expression of a person's time and value and the Board should take that into consideration when deciding when a driver really starts their route. Mr. Tuttle agreed there will be deadhead time due to driver home location.

Mrs. Thielmann expressed here irritation that she was not considered to be on the job until she picked up her first student. Dr. Reale noted most all of the drivers will receive the \$70.00 pay rate. Mr. Tuttle clarified that in the past, the rate was \$62.50 for all drivers and that included the pre-trip inspection. The drivers were upset because with the new pay scale, the pre-trip inspection was denoted as \$10.00 of the bus pay. The drivers were polled and all of them said they were dissatisfied with the pay scale, but the proposed benefit package was good. They had voted on this issue in August and the vote was 17-2 , with only 2 drivers being dissatisfied. Mrs. Thielmann said she thought she was only voting on the benefits, even though the pay scale was part of the papers voted on. Mr. Schmaltz stated he and Mr. Berger had met with Dr. Reale the day after the vote and voiced their opinion that the pay scale was not fair. Mr. Tuttle asked how long it took to complete a pre-trip inspection and the drivers said 15-20 minutes.

Mrs. Hyde stated the town route was eliminated last February and it worked, so why should there be a short route again. Dr. Reale reiterated this bus fills up with students in seven minutes or less. Mr. Tuttle noted we need to be more efficient. Mrs. Hyde stated a main gripe of drivers was that in the past all drivers received the same pay, but one driver had a short route and was starting to get extracurricular pay before most drivers had even finished their routes. Mrs. Jackson stated the other drivers who did not come for the meeting were afraid to attend. Mrs. Hyde stated the career center route will only pay \$65.00 even though the drivers are out for three and one half hours. She then stated if one of the career center drivers would happen to get a regular route, the pay scale would be lowered by \$10.00 because the pre-trip pay is included in that rate. Mrs. Hackman stated all the career center drivers in the surrounding schools also had a regular bus route.

Dr. Reale stated the routes were reduced by two because many of the buses were traveling well under capacity. He noted with the reduction, there were sixteen drivers and fourteen routes, therefore as a value judgment, it was decided to keep all the drivers and make the career center routes separate routes, so no one would lose their entire income.

Mrs. Hackman questioned why everything had to be kept a big secret until school started. She stated she had bills to pay and her income had been cut in half. Dr. Reale noted Mrs. Hackman had only driven the career center route for four months last year, so she didn't have the double income for many years. He also noted there had been three bus driving opportunities available at neighboring schools, but neither she nor Mrs. Hyde had applied for the jobs. Mrs. Hyde questioned the difference between being a custodian or a café worker and having a route, and one driver having two routes. She stated she had driven a regular route for Milan for eighteen years and the career center for five years, and she had felt secure in her position. She noted when a driver quit last January and Mr. Gayheart was hired, the drivers received a letter stating the routes were going to be restructured and the drivers would be asked for input. She stated Mr. Gayheart should have been informed before he was hired that there was going to be restructuring and his route could be eliminated. She commented Mr. Gayheart has a full time job and therefore his bus driving position should have been eliminated when the routes were restructured. Mrs. Thielmann stated she was never asked for input on the routes and expressed each driver should have been asked what they thought about the new routes before they were put in force. Dr. Reale stated the routes were laid out in the board room at the end of June and drivers were asked to come in at their convenience. Mr. Berger said he came in to look, but Mr. Ferguson was not available, so he really didn't know what he was looking at. Dr. Reale stated he had taken the advice of Pam Comer, the transportation director of Jac-Cen-Del Community Schools and had started the redesign from scratch. Mr. Berger questioned the unmarked railroad crossing he has to traverse and Mr. Lewis noted he had crossed those tracks back in the seventies when he was a young driver.

Mr. Tuttle stated he had talked to a couple of people concerning the new routes, but his only concern was too many students on any one bus. Mr. Berger stated last year he only had about 30 students and this year, he had 60. Dr. Reale noted Mr. Berger had a 78 passenger bus this year. Mr. Tuttle was concerned with the 'accessories' students bring on buses, such as backpacks, band

instruments, lunch boxes, etc. and whether there was room. Mr. Amberger expressed concerns about the safety of sitting three students to a seat with all of their accessories. Mr. Schmaltz stated he has assigned seating and sits most elementary students three to a seat, but the older kids are two in a seat. He noted he had a crowding problem at first, but the problem was alleviated by transferring some of his riders to a less crowded bus. Dr. Reale commented a 72 passenger bus had 24 seats and with only two riders in a seat, the capacity would be 48 and that was close to the target number. Mrs. Thielmann stated bus rider numbers will change with the seasons. Mr. Schmaltz commented it might get a little bit crowded if there would be a snow emergency when all the students had to be taken home during the day. Mrs. Hackman stated Mr. Ferguson called her a liar twice when she reported her numbers last year. Dr. Reale apologized on behalf of Mr. Ferguson, stating it was inappropriate behavior if it occurred. Dr. Reale stated Mr. Ferguson had ridden all the bus routes in May to get a head count. He noted it was approximately 573 students and when he devised the routes, he added 130, and made the number of riders 700. He noted that after school started, adjustments had been made to keep the number of students per bus to no more than 55 students. Mr. Amberger expressed his concern that safety is not limited to the capacity of a bus. He stated the main concern should be to get the students to school in a safe condition. Dr. Reale noted Mr. Berger's overcrowding issue would be taken care of and 7-9 students would be put on a bus that presently only had about 40 students on it.

Mr. Amberger asked how many miles were being traveled this year versus last year. He noted it would be good to have those statistics.

Mrs. Thielmann thanked the Board for listening to the drivers. Mr. Schmaltz said he disagreed with the pay scale but the benefit package was great. Mr. Amberger asked if the drivers would rather be paid by the hour. Mr. Schmaltz stated the pay had always been a flat rate. Mr. Brandt said a driver is a driver and they should all be paid the same daily rate. Mrs. Hyde stated if there was a difference in pay, it should be by years of experience, not on route length. Mr. Lewis stated he had been driving for 41 years, 35 of which were as a contractor, so this was all new to him. Mrs. Hyde noted at one time there had been three different pay rates. Mrs. Thielmann again expressed her dissatisfaction with the town route being paid \$55.00 and the other routes \$70.00. She thought this was unfair because the short route driver spends less time on the bus than the others.

Mr. Tuttle thanked the drivers for attending the meeting stating they deserved to be heard. He stated the new routing needed to be in effect for at least one year to know if it was going to work or not.

Mr. Lewis motioned to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Mr. Amberger. Motion carried 4-0.

Meeting adjourned 8:28 p.m.