

**SOUTHERN COLUMBIA AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
800 SOUTHERN DRIVE
CATAWISSA, PA 17820**

The December 8, 2008, Special Board Meeting of the Southern Columbia Area School District Board of Directors convened in the High School Auditorium at 7:00 p.m. with President Michael Yeager in charge of the meeting.

The Pledge of Allegiance was said by all.

President Yeager welcomed everyone, followed by a roll call of Board Members.

BOARD MEMBERS

Timothy Benner (*Absent*)
Charles Porter
Thomas Slusser

Paul Starr
Richard Steele (*Absent*)
David Stellfox

Timothy Vought
Michael Yeager
John Yocum (*Absent*)

OTHERS PRESENT

Charles Reh, Superintendent; Daniel Rodgers, Business Manager; Tresa Britch, Board Secretary; Richard J. Roberts, Solicitor; Roger Nunkester, James Becker and Robert Mehalick, Administrators; district residents and members of the media.

President Yeager introduced Labor Counsel, Mr. Carl Beard, and his assistant Mr. Jason Imler.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Mr. Reh's report included the following topics:

1). He announced that the Senior Citizens Dinner, which is sponsored by the district, would be held Tuesday, December 16th. The first 150 senior citizens that sign up would be invited to attend. A concert is scheduled for December 19th in the high school auditorium at 7:00 p.m. The group Twelve-Twenty Four will perform and all proceeds will benefit future senior citizen's dinners.

CONTRACTORS' PRESENTATIONS

Tim Krise – STA of Pennsylvania, Inc. – Punxsutawney, PA

Mr. Krise reported on highlights of his proposal (**per Appendix A**). Historically, in similar situations in other school districts with which they contract, at least 80 percent of the existing drivers were hired by them and remained on the same runs. It was also noted that state reimbursement is higher with a contractor than for district owned transportation programs.

Mr. Beard asked if Mr. Krise would provide something in writing pertaining to their benefits package and salary information they would be offering for collective bargaining purposes. Mr. Krise replied affirmatively. Mr. Beard asked how many employees are employed and how many buses are being run by STA. Mr. Krise replied that STA has approximately 1,200 employees and about 1,100 buses just in Pennsylvania. They have approximately 6,500 buses and vans with 7,500 employees nationwide. Mr. Porter asked in what role Mr. Krise would envision the supervisor. Mr. Krise replied that it was not yet determined if the current supervisor would be available. If not, they would hire someone to act as a liaison between the school district administration and the contractor. Mr. Porter asked if it would be acceptable for the district to hold several buses back for some special education runs and/or activity runs. Mr. Krise's

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associate, Mr. Pete Pearson replied that it is not unusual for a school district to hold back a van for smaller groups, but the proposal could change somewhat.

Mr. Beard asked if STA could provide a sample contract. Mr. Pearson replied affirmatively. Mr. Beard asked who would be responsible for purchasing the fuel. Mr. Krise replied that he would plan to use the district's fuel tanks and several options would be available, such as purchasing through consortiums.

Robert DiMino – DiMino Bus Service - Hawley, PA

Mr. DiMino was accompanied by his son, Robert DiMino, Jr. Mr. DiMino reported that he owned a small bus company with 400 buses in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. He stated that his company is very much safety oriented. He noted that with his company, the parents would be the beneficiaries. He could provide a much better bus service. His company is family operated. The drivers will see pay increases because they want to keep the drivers. He noted that they offer basically the same as the other companies.

Mr. Beard asked if he could provide the Business Manager with a wage and benefits package that he would contemplate offering based on the current structure. Mr. DiMino replied affirmatively. Mr. DiMino purchases the fuel and honors his contract. The district would not be involved with added fuel costs. Mr. DiMino agreed to provide a sample contract. President Yeager asked if they would provide a dispatcher. He replied affirmatively and explained that the dispatcher would start one hour before the first run and would remain on campus until the last bus is back and all students are accounted for. Mr. DiMino stated that he supplies all drivers with a Nextel or Verizon cell phone. Some radios are necessary. Mr. Beard asked if he would provide a surveillance system. Mr. DiMino stated that he would probably retain fifteen of the district's buses. He would purchase new buses to fill the fleet and would equip them with cameras. President Yeager asked his purchase price for the buses. He replied that it was \$333,000.

Frederick Bennett – FishingCreek Transportation – Orangeville, PA

Mr. Bennett stated that his company owns forty school buses. Mr. Bennett stated that he has read all of the letters regarding parents' concerns of safety. He took Bloomsburg School District Superintendent, Mr. Joseph Kelly's rebuttal letter in the Press Enterprise as a compliment to his company.

He noted that he contracts with five districts in the area. Drivers hired by FishingCreek Transportation have the opportunity to participate in all five districts. Mr. Bennett noted that parents seem to be concerned that they would not know who would be driving their child's bus on a daily basis and that drivers would be moved around on a regular basis. Mr. Bennett introduced several of his drivers that have been driving the same runs for up to 30 years. Mr. Bennett noted that he was a citizen of Columbia County. He noted that all of his drivers are local and they put the well-being of the students first and foremost. He noted that all drivers are reminded constantly to check the buses for sleeping children. He noted that most bus drivers are housewives or retired men. They choose to drive bus because of the children as they are parents themselves. He stated that the school district is the customer and if the district needs something done differently, his company complies. Mr. Bennett stated that he is available twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. There is no cut-off time for contacting him.

FishingCreek Transportation would offer the district \$950,000 for the fleet of buses, but they are offering \$16,800 for the use of the facilities. Mr. Beard asked Mr. Bennett if he would provide a sample contract and a wage and benefit package to Mr. Rodgers. Mr. Bennett replied affirmatively and noted that he would provide copies of all five of his current contracts. He stated

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that he could offer a one dollar per hour raise at this time and would enter into a discussion with the drivers regarding benefits.

BOARD COMMENTS

RECOGNITION OF THE PUBLIC

District resident, Fred Reck, stated that he is a business owner and is about to have his third child that will go through the Southern Columbia Area School District. He stated that he assumes that health benefits for the drivers are a big financial concern for the district and also a big issue for the driver's themselves. He supports keeping the school buses in-house and continuing to provide health insurance for the drivers. He feels that the district has an obligation to its employees and the members of the community, and it also has a fiscal responsibility to keep the tax dollars in the local community.

Mrs. Susan Adam stated that the contractors will be making a profit while providing services and she asked why the district can't provide transportation services and break even. Mr. Porter stated that the state formula for reimbursement is skewed to favor contractors.

Ms. Tammy Meyers stated that if the district would have been purchasing new buses all along, the district would not be in the shape it is now.

District resident, Sandy Herr asked for some reassurance that her child would still be picked up at her driveway and not at a centralized stop. Mr. Bennett stated that all routes and stops would be approved by the school district. The contractor would not unilaterally change a stop. Mr. Krise and Mr. DiMino echoed Mr. Bennett's response.

Mr. Porter asked Mr. DiMino if he had any plans for the district's current support staff, such as the mechanics and transportation supervisor. Mr. DiMino stated that he would be very interested in hiring the mechanics and the current supervisor would have first right of refusal.

Mrs. Adam asked how many students the contractors normally have on a bus on a regular basis. Mr. Bennett replied that although a bus roster may be for 72 students, there are fewer students actually riding the bus. State reimbursement is based on the roster; not on the amount of students actually riding the bus.

President Yeager reminded the audience that the format of this meeting was for public comment only. All questions would be answered at another time.

Mr. John Stine stated that each of the contractors stated that they would provide a better service. He asked if the district currently has a bad service or if the bottom line is money.

Mrs. Adam asked when the public would know the bottom line on what a contractor would cost compared to the current cost of the transportation system. Mr. Beard replied that the proposals have been received and Mr. Rodgers has made some preliminary cost projections. The next step is to get additional information from the contractors regarding wages and benefits packages and then to prepare to begin negotiations. He noted that economy and efficiency will be considered, but it is a service issue as well. They will be looking at the totality of the cost over the next several years and will give the union the opportunity to look at it as well. He did emphasize that unfortunately, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania greater subsidies are being provided to those third party vendors, almost discouraging school districts to maintain their own fleets. He stated that the question was asked why the district doesn't buy new buses. He explained that the purchase of buses at \$65,000 per bus with a fleet this size really does take a toll on the capital resources of a small school. He added that what it will come down to is taking a look at the total cost. They will be working over the next few weeks to gather all of the necessary information and pass it on to the union representative. Nothing is a done deal. The Board will

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need to determine which vendor offers the best overall opportunity for the school and approach the union to discuss it, which is a necessary part of the process because of the contract between the district and the union.

Mrs. Kathy Malkoskie stated that a daughter of a close friend of hers fell asleep on a bus and for an hour the mother had no idea where her child was. Her daughter was a kindergarten student and did not want to set foot on a bus for about a month following the incident. In the beginning of her 1st grade year, she was dropped off at the wrong bus stop and as the bus was pulling away, the girl was crying that there was no one there to pick her up. Mrs. Malkoskie asked for some assurance that the same thing would not happen again. Mr. Bennett stated that there are no guarantees, however, his policy and procedures bolster and promote, agitatingly so, that all drivers need to check for sleeping children. All drivers are urged and constantly reminded to check their bus before and after a run to check for any child left behind.

Mr. Beard thanked everyone on behalf of the Board and administrative group for coming out to take part and for expressing an interest in the process. President Yeager also thanked the contractors for attending the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Slusser and second by Vought, the meeting was adjourned at 8:27 p.m. The motion carried by unanimous affirmative voice vote.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tresa J. Britch
Board Secretary