

JANUARY 16, 2023
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING

The Waterloo Region District School Board held a Committee of the Whole Meeting this evening at 7:00 p.m. in the Education Centre Boardroom, with the following members in attendance: J. Weston (Chairperson), B. Cody, C. Johnson, F. Meissner, S. Piatkowski, M. Radlein, M. Ramsay, C. Watson and K. Woodcock.
Virtual Attendance: M. Snyder and M. Waseem.

Student Trustees V. Raina and K. Soror were in attendance, virtually.

The following senior administration members were in attendance: j. chanicka (Director of Education and Secretary), D. Ahluwalia, E. Dougan-McKenzie, N. Landry, S. Miller and G. Shantz.

Other staff in attendance: M. Mayer, S. Reidel and E. Rodriguez.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson J. Weston called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

1. Moved by S. Piatkowski, seconded by B. Cody:

That the agenda of the January 16, 2023, Committee of the Whole Meeting be approved.

-Carried-

DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

Trustee M. Ramsay joined the meeting at 7:06 p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

DELEGATIONS

The following delegations spoke at this evening's meeting:

- Jean Stacey - Grand River Transit Bus Passes for Students
- David Todor - Transparency and Communication

Trustees were provided an opportunity to ask questions of clarification of delegations.

2. Moved by C. Watson, seconded by M. Ramsay:

That the delegation by D. Todor be referred to staff.

-Carried-

Opposed:
C. Johnson
F. Meissner
S. Piatkowski

REPORTS

UPDATE ON THE BUS DRIVER SHORTAGE

N. Landry, Controller, Financial Services, provided background and governance structure information on the Student Transportation Services of Waterloo Region (STSWR). He reviewed the responsibilities and contractual agreement information between STSWR and the school bus operators. Neither the WRDSB nor STSWR recruit bus drivers; this is the responsibility of school bus operators. He reviewed the challenges around bus driver recruitment and the strategies that have been put in place. He showed an example week and the challenges that occur with planned and unplanned absences.

Trustees asked questions regarding cancelled routes, provincial associations for school transportation, driver retention, budget shortfalls for transportation and advocating to the Ministry of Education. Staff agreed to provide information on the number of routes that have been cancelled, geographical information on frequently impacted routes and route delays as part of the annual STSWR report to the Board of Trustees in February.

3. Moved by K. Woodcock, seconded by M. Ramsay:

That the WRDSB write a letter to the Ministry of Education advocating for transportation concerns as outlined in the OPSBA Advocacy Day handout regarding Student Transportation: and

That the Chairperson raise this concern at the next Ministry of Education Chairs' teleconference; and

That copies of the letter be sent to local MPPs, OPSBA, Waterloo's Regional Chair and Ontario public school boards.

-Carried-

Trustee questions continued regarding liability.

STAFF AND BOARD REPORTS

MOTION: GRAND RIVER TRANSIT BUS PASSES

This Notice of Motion was served at the September 19, 2022, Committee of the Whole meeting by former Trustee J. Herring with support from former Trustee L. Tremble. The term has ended for Trustees J. Herring and L. Tremble so Trustee M. Radlein introduced the motion.

Trustees discussed the motion. A friendly amendment was made to include North Dumfries and Wellesley as part of the possible partnerships.

An amendment was moved, requesting that parents of students who ride the bus be consulted. Trustees discussed the proposed amendment highlighting that only specific parents are consulted.

Amendment 1:

4. Moved by C. Watson, seconded by M. Ramsay:

That the motion be amended to include “That parents and guardians of students who ride the bus are informed of this process and consulted through this process with information and that staff would gather feedback from these parents,” so that the motion reads as:

That the Waterloo Region District School Board request a report exploring the feasibility of partnering with the Region of Waterloo (and/or the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo, Wilmot, Woolwich, Wellesley & North Dumfries) to provide free bus passes for secondary school students as well as free transportation for students from Kindergarten to age 14 (currently free for children under 4) as currently being modeled in the program in place in Kingston between the City and the Limestone District School Board; and

That parents and guardians of students who ride the bus are informed of this process and consulted through this process with information and that staff would gather feedback from these parents; and

That the possibility of partnering with local businesses to assist with ongoing stable funding for the program also be investigated; and

That the existence of possible ongoing stable funding supports that might be in place to encourage public and active transportation be explored; and

That a report with the results from these investigations and all costs associated with the program, be provided to the Board of Trustees as soon as possible and as scheduled by the Agenda Development Committee.

-Amendment 1 Defeated-

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Discussion continued on the main motion and a second amendment was proposed to include a less restricted public consultation. Trustees discussed the proposed amendment and it was noted that the consultation process would be up to staff.

Amendment 2:

5. Moved by K. Woodcock, seconded by M. Ramsay:

That the motion be amended to include “That public consultation be included as part of this investigation.” so that the motion reads as:

That the Waterloo Region District School Board request a report exploring the feasibility of partnering with the Region of Waterloo (and/or the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo, Wilmot & Woolwich) to provide free bus passes for secondary school students as well as free transportation for students from Kindergarten to age 14 (currently free for children under 4) as currently being modeled in the program in place in Kingston between the City and the Limestone District School Board; and

That the possibility of partnering with local businesses to assist with ongoing stable funding for the program also be investigated; and

That the existence of possible ongoing stable funding supports that might be in place to encourage public and active transportation be explored; and

That a report with the results from these investigations and all costs associated with the program, be provided to the Board of Trustees as soon as possible and as scheduled by the Agenda Development Committee; and

That public consultation be included as part of this investigation.

-Amendment 2 Carried-

Trustees resumed discussion on the main motion and staff noted that the WRDSB would not be removing the yellow bus fleet, that this motion relies heavily on community partnerships and there may be limitations as to what options will be available to the Board of Trustees. It was noted that this is an affordability issue for families.

Amended Motion:

6. Moved by M. Radlein, seconded by C. Johnson:

That the Waterloo Region District School Board request a report exploring the feasibility of partnering with the Region of Waterloo (and/or the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo, Wilmot, Woolwich, Wellesley & North Dumfries) to provide free bus passes for secondary school students as well as free transportation for students from

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Kindergarten to age 14 (currently free for children under 4) as currently being modeled in the program in place in Kingston between the City and the Limestone District School Board; and

That the possibility of partnering with local businesses to assist with ongoing stable funding for the program also be investigated; and

That the existence of possible ongoing stable funding supports that might be in place to encourage public and active transportation be explored; and

That a report with the results from these investigations and all costs associated with the program, be provided to the Board of Trustees as soon as possible and as scheduled by the Agenda Development Committee; and

That public consultation be included as part of this investigation.

-Carried as Amended-

Abstained: C. Watson

QUESTION PERIOD

Trustee C. Watson asked about a possible shortage of Educational Assistants (EAs) and how it will be addressed. Associate Director S. Miller shared that there have been rare instances where Alternative Continuum of Education (ACE) classes have been cancelled or that students have been asked to remain home because staff were unable to ensure their safety due to increased staff absences. Many strategies are being utilized to mitigate this from happening wherever possible, such as deploying central staff or staff from nearby schools to schools in need. Students with the most complex needs are being prioritized. Associate Director G. Shantz shared that staff have been working closely with the Educational Assistants Association regarding retention and recruitment strategies for EAs but details of the collective agreement cannot be shared in a public meeting.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

There were no future agenda items.

ADJOURNMENT

7. Moved by C. Johnson, seconded by M. Radlein:

That the Committee of the Whole Meeting of January 16, 2023, be adjourned.

-Carried-

The meeting adjourned at 8:38 p.m.