



## New year may bring another bus system in Palatine schools

By Sara Faiwell | Daily Herald Staff

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For the second time in as many years, schools in Palatine Township Elementary District 15 could get new starting times.

The school board will continue to discuss changes to its current bus schedule and school start times during a meeting next month. Any changes would go into effect next school year.

This year, the district changed school start times to either 7:55 a.m. or 8:45 a.m. This whittled the previous four-tier bus system to two tiers.

But under a new proposal for next school year, buses would run on a three-tier system, with schools starting at 7:30, 8:15 or 8:55 a.m.

Junior highs and parochial schools would have the 7:30 a.m. start time.

District 15 operates its own bus fleet, one of the largest district-owned fleets in the state. There are more than 10,000 students transported daily, including students at area parochial schools.

Parent Cheryl Stout, who has a son at Immanuel Lutheran School, says regardless of the busing situation, it's hard to start school at 7:30 a.m.

"They aren't thinking about the fact that this is another switch," she said. "It's not fair to jerk around the kids for a third year."

The reason school officials are talking about the busing switch is because there were so many problems with this year's new routes.

With only two tiers this year, parents have complained about long bus rides, children arriving late to school and rides that are out of the way.

Earlier this year, students at one school had to wait for after-school buses so long that they'd sleep in the hallways, parents said.

District transportation officials say the changes for next year are necessary to shorten the routes and have fewer students on each route.

There also are cost savings, they say.

"If we have a three-tier system, we'd need less drivers and less vehicles," Assistant Superintendent George Lingel said. "It's a much more economical system."

Because there were so many complaints about this year's bus service, the district has been forced to spend extra money on more buses.

Just this week, the board voted 4-3 to lease 14 more buses for one year. This comes at a cost of about

\$11,000.

The district also spent \$25,000 this year to hire an outside school bus consulting company.

Some school board members think the current system works fine. They say having later start times for schools is beneficial to students.

Others say the two-tier system isn't working and that something needs to change.

The school board will discuss the busing issue at next month's regular meeting, which is Feb. 13. Officials say they'd have to approve a new plan by March to give people plenty of notice.