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## Consultants offer advice after busing 'emergency'

(<http://www.pioneerlocal.com/palatine/news/565749,pa-D15transpo-092007-s1.article>)

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By [MARIO BARTOLETTI](#) Staff Writer

In the wake of an emergency declared at the School Board meeting last week, Elementary School District 15 officials met Tuesday with consultants from the school bus transportation company TransPar.

"We briefed them on the issues we're facing and got them up to speed on the district," said board member Sue Quinn, who was in a teleconference with the consultants and district business officials. "They told us their plan for addressing our problems. They're able, and willing to move quickly."

The School Board declared the emergency at the Sept. 12 board meeting after weeks of complaints inundated the district's transportation department.

Rolling Meadows parent Ronda Bischoff asked the board if anyone would want their child on the bus for an hour.

Palatine parent Teri Havansek said her children weren't picked up for more than 40 minutes before school started.

"For a 6-year-old, that's a lot of time," Havansek said.

'Like a war zone'

Palatine parent Dianne Novosad said her son was sleeping in the halls of Conyers Learning Academy in Rolling Meadows along with many other students.

"It looks like a war zone in there, kids are in backpacks laying around," Novosad said in a telephone interview Monday. "Because of all of this, I'm taking him off the bus. I thought they had a consultant come in and say this would work."

The district had rotated four starting times. There were different starting times for different schools depending on where students live in the district.

The district shifted the starting times on a three-year rotation cycle for 30 years until March 2004, when a change was proposed that district officials said would result in savings of \$300,000 over three years.

The district hired Versitran as a transportation consultant to find a permanent start-time solution; the firm studied options for two months.

In March of this year, the board approved permanent school start times changes dividing district schools into two non-rotating tiers. The changes were implemented at the start of this school year in August.

"There have been challenges beginning this year," Board President Tim Millar said. "For years, we've had the same schedule. You would expect it would not be perfect in a few weeks after the start of school after changing 600 routes."

Millar said in order to take action swiftly to remedy the situation under the school code, a bona fide emergency had to be declared.

"To be able to get it on the agenda and act quickly, and we have issues at the Conyers Learning Academy that qualify," he said. "The board authorized the business office to hire (TransPar) up to \$25,000. They've come in at about \$11,500, considerably less than the maximum."

Interim Assistant Superintendent George Lingel said he expects recommendations from the consultants within the next three weeks.

Millar said the consultants will present the board with certain options that may not be possible to implement this school year.

"You can't make wholesale changes," he said. "Obviously, we can add new buses or make routes more efficient or make better pairings without changing too much. We're still learning to deal with the construction, which is actually a big impact."

Millar said the volume of complaints to the transportation department have gone down.

"We do need to get back to people," he said. "It's important to communicate any changes."

Despite the influx of complaint calls, many parents said the transportation department has been helpful and has tried to deal with problems within their control.

"I spent all day baking cookies for the transportation people," Palatine parent Lisa Traina said Monday. "They're compassionate."



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