

Spotlight on the Board

Notes from the District 15 School Board Meetings

February 5th, 2007

This was a Special meeting held at the Kiszka Educational Center at 9 a.m. to discuss information regarding options for students from Arlington International Racecourse. It was called a Special meeting because at least three Board of Education members were expected to attend. Kelly Keenan and Wendy Rowden were the only Board members in attendance.

Also in attendance were Dr. Robert McKanna, Superintendent; Dr. Cheryl Wolfel, Second Language Programs; James Garwood, Executive Director of Administrative Services as well as social service liaisons representing the Arlington International Racecourse families and students.

Arlington International Racecourse Students

An informal discussion was held to understand the history of the education provided for students living with their families at Arlington International Racecourse, Arlington Heights. Arlington Park Racecourse lies within Palatine School District 15 boundaries.

Background Information

Illinois is the only state that allows children to live on the backstretch of racetracks. The backstretch is the area where racehorses are stabled and where their training takes place. Backstretch workers include assistant trainers, horse groomers and others that care for the horses 24 hours a day creating the need for close proximity to the horses. Housing is provided for these workers and their families.

Approximately 150 kindergarten through eighth grade students reside at Arlington Park Racecourse from early May through mid-September each year. These students then move with their families to Hawthorne Racecourse in Cicero from mid-September until late-April/early May when thoroughbred racing resumes at Arlington Park.

Education History

Since at least the year 2000, the Arlington Park Racecourse students have been receiving their education in the Cicero School District. District 15 has been providing transportation for these students to Cicero for the time they reside in Arlington Heights – approximately 8 weeks of the school year (three weeks in late August/September, five weeks in May/early June).

District 15 has not charged the Cicero School District for this transportation. District 15 does receive some reimbursement for this transportation from the State of Illinois.

Current Situation

District 15 sent an invoice for busing transportation of these students to the Cicero School District this past December. Upon receipt of this invoice, the Cicero School District decided to ask District 15 for reimbursement for the education (tuition) of the students for the time they reside in District 15 boundaries - citing budget shortfalls.

At this time, Cicero is asking that District 15 now educate the children for the time they are residing in the District's boundaries beginning May, 2007. Cicero does not want to see the children bused for extended periods of time (1 hour or more each way from Arlington Heights to Cicero).

After meeting with the Cicero School District in January, Dr. Wolfel compiled a list of options for these students. That list including considerations was distributed to those in attendance.

Recommendation from Social Services representing Arlington Park Racecourse families

The social services representatives explained that a past informal poll of the parents of these students indicate that they would like their children to be educated in Cicero. They state that the children are happier, there is less disruption to their education and the families live in Cicero for the majority of the school year (24 weeks).

Many parents feel that it is enough to communicate with teachers in one school district and want their children as close as possible to home. They feel that they can deal with the extended transportation for the few weeks in the beginning of the school year and the few weeks at the end of the school year.

The social services representatives felt that the children's education would be comprised by being bounced back and forth from one district to another during the school year. They believe that the children should stay in the Cicero school system because of social issues and the request of the parents. It has worked out well over the years even with the long bus ride for eight weeks of the school year.

District 15 Concerns

Garwood mentioned that research has shown that students who move around a lot are more at-risk than other sub-groups for not meeting educational standards. This is further complicated when English is not their first language.

He further indicated that District 15 would have to find the space, additional teaching staff, etc. to accommodate these students this coming May.

Wendy Rowden, Board member wanted to explore other options for these students including the possibility of a traveling teaching staff. She is concerned with the continuity of education and opportunities for these students.

Next Steps

Dr. McKanna will contact the Cicero School Superintendent in order to set up a meeting to discuss this issue for the coming school year rather than make a change in May, 2007.

In the meantime, District 15 will look into the costs of transportation as well as the actual costs of District 15's portion for education in Cicero. District 15 will also ask for Cicero's opinion on other options not listed in the original proposal.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:15 a.m.