

Pineview parents advocate busing changes

Memory of the blizzard of '77 may have slipped away but for Pineview School parents who have just completed a study of the incidents on January 28 which resulted in frostbite to several children, it still burns brightly. Thursday, a parents' committee will present a report to Halton Board of Education containing a detailed account of school bus problems encountered that day, along with recommendations dealing with needed improvements.

The buses were cancelled January 27 and the big storm which was predicted didn't materialize so the buses "might have operated safely." "On Friday, January 28, weather forecasts again predicted high winds, severe cold, snowfall and drifting conditions. Because there were no immediate appearances of these conditions and because of the previous day's experiences, the buses were despatched as usual. Throughout the morning weather reports continued to

predict severe conditions and in fact some evidence of deterioration appeared in the northern area," the report relates.

Cliff Shaw, who supervises bus operations in the north for C. H. Norton bus lines, was contacted at 11:05 a.m. by Pineview School and told to dispatch the buses in anticipation of an 11:45 a.m. school closing.

Shaw, school officials and parents, all had difficulty getting through to the school because of heavy telephone traffic. There is only one line into the school. Shaw had to have a Bell Telephone operator break in on calls several times to relay emergency information to the school. This problem has prompted the parents to urge the board to have more telephone lines installed.

Most of the buses were able to get away shortly after the school closed. However, because of poor road condi-

tions, difficulty in reaching parents and worsening weather conditions, four buses were held at the school and not released until 2:40 p.m. when conditions temporarily improved.

All bus drivers were instructed that day by Shaw and principal Grant Hutch-

ings to bring any children who couldn't be dropped off back to the school.

The report says the bus driven by the driver, who later reportedly ordered children off the bus in the bitterly cold weather was one of the last to leave the school. Since the incident the driver has

been fired. "The driver of bus number five was in an agitated condition throughout the period prior to release of the buses and evidenced a strong intent to return home under any circumstances," the report claims.

Shortly after 3 p.m. the bus arrived at the corner of the Fifth Line and Steeles Avenue and found the route up as high as 15 feet and a bus from Stewarttown School stuck in the snow.

Mrs. Dave Moffatt, who lives on the Fifth Line, arrived on the scene and told the driver she would ensure her children got home safely.

"The driver asked Mrs. Moffatt what should be done regarding the other Fifth Line children. Mrs. Moffatt advised the driver that the children were the driver's responsibility. At this point

the driver instructed all Fifth Line children to leave the bus. Mrs. Moffatt had no choice but to assist the children. She was given no record of the names or addresses of the children or an accurate count of the number of children released from the bus."

"The driver made no attempt to ensure the children had their clothes fastened, or to share articles of clothing among the children to ensure maximum protection for all,"

the report claims. Mrs. Moffatt received help from four Stewarttown students, on the stuck bus, in getting children home.

Of the 15 pupils ordered off the Pineview bus six received frost-bite. Two later needed medical attention.

The report reveals there were three other incidents the same day. In one case two children were dropped off on the Ninth Line instead of the Tenth, and found later picked

up by another bus driver driving in the direction of Georgetown.

Another incident involved three children, two kindergarten age, being dropped at the corner of the Eighth Line and 10 Sideroad with a considerable distance to walk to get home. The other incident involved children being dropped at the corner of the Third Line and Five Sideroad and being forced to walk half-mile to get home.

Reject increase

Regional Land Division Committee Chairman Brian Fletcher won't get a stipend increase from \$4,000 to \$5,000 a year after all.

Council rejected an increase of \$1,000 after a brief but brisk discussion Wednesday.

Motions awarding increases of \$1,000 and then \$500 were defeated in turn and council decided to leave the salary at the same level it has been since the position was developed in 1974.

Councillor Vern Connell

tried to increase the benefit by having one third of the salary declared as expenses and not subject to income tax. But to Connell's amazement the motion was ruled out of order by Chairman Ric Morrow.

"You can't rule it out of order because it is done on the same basis as your salary was handled," Connell said. Regional Council agreed that even though Mr. Morrow cannot be declared an elected official, he should be entitled to deduct one third of his salary as expenses.

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Pineview parents report Jan. 28 busing problems

Pineview School Concerned Parents Committee will present a report to Halton Board of Education this Thursday containing 12 recommendations designed to improve school busing. An incident last January in which a number of children were allegedly told to get off a bus in severe weather conditions and suffered frost bite, precipitated the report. The parents are calling for

improved communications, better bus operating policies and procedures and more stringent bus mechanical conditions.

In the area of communications the committee suggests a private radio system be installed in all buses and that each school have a private outgoing phone line for communications with parents, bus officials and board personnel.

In addition, they are urging all schools have their records updated to show both the parents' home and work numbers, and an alternative number for use when neither parent can be reached. They suggest if a parent refuses to provide the numbers they be required to sign a waiver allowing the principal to act on their behalf.

The report says the need for improved communications stem from incidents on January 28 when the limited numbers of school phone lines became quickly jammed and if a bus is stranded the drivers can't communicate with the school, or bus company for assistance, so radios are badly needed.

The lack of extensive parent phone records means working parents can't be contacted so they know their children will be arriving home early when a school is closed, the report points out.

In the area of improving bus operations, the parents are suggesting more clearly defined lines of authority and communications.

They are urging the board to insist on all bus drivers being trained in first aid and believe all drivers should have a complete passenger list containing addresses and phone numbers. The report says when children are bused back home the pupils should be checked off the list and any change in the route back home authorized by the principal.

The committee will ask the board to give the drivers instructions "regarding authorities to release children at other than normal drop-off points." The instructions should include what the driver should do if they are over-ruled by a parent or older high school student regarding where a child will be dropped off.

Randomly selected buses should be inspected by a board official, parent representative, bus company official and a Ministry of Transportation and Communications Inspector "to ascertain the conditions of buses on a given day." In addition, on-going quarterly inspections of buses by provincial and board officials should be made with the results given to the school involved.

The parents' committee wants the board to contact other boards and determine when they force a bus into retirement based on age or mileage and then establish a policy "in line with the most stringent" used by the other boards.

All new drivers hired should be tested for basic mechanical knowledge especially as it relates to pre-operational checks. Drivers already employed a training program should be set up along with annual testing for all drivers.

The daily pre-operational check list should be changed so items which would prevent the bus from being used and things which need attention soon will be reflected.

The report urges the start of a driver's log book system which will reflect what needs to be fixed, bus mechanical performance, discipline problems, hazardous incidents involving other vehicles, instructions received which deviate from the normal procedure, contacts with parents and injuries to children.

The report also reveals the committee has asked Halton-Burlington MPP Julian Reed have the Ministry of Transportation and Communications to look into the certification of buses. The province has also been asked to review school bus system standards.

Other committee suggestions include a disqualified drivers black list to be exchanged between boards, a yearly board review of bus operations and a limit on the number of children allowed on a bus be established.

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