

April 25, 2022

As the President of the Wappingers Central School District Board of Education, I would like to set the record straight regarding inaccurate comments and information being published both in social media and in print as well as heard in our community about the WCSD Transportation Department. The facts are important and I will address comments below:

Wappingers CSD has the largest self-owned and operated bus fleet in NYS. This is something that makes the District proud - WCSD employees driving WCSD students to our District buildings.

As such, to house the needs of the fleet, the Fishkill Plains bus garage was built to replace the condemned garage at the same location and to save costs related to the rental of facilities. Additional advantages of having this garage re-built are: driver safety (workers compensation injuries and personal vehicle repairs); updated school bus maintenance facilities; paved surface for parking school vehicles; additional bays for the mechanics to repair vehicles; in-house bus wash; additional diesel fueling station; and an in-house paint spray booth. There was also a training space incorporated that has proven very beneficial for the no-cost driver training school that the District initiated. To date, 32 bus drivers have been trained and received valid licensure with another 10 currently in training at no cost to the District taxpayers. Centralized dispatching is also based out of the Fishkill Plains compound. Now that pandemic restrictions have been lifted, staff can also enjoy the use of the training and driver rooms for their respective purposes.

Contrary to what was stated publicly, the Fishkill Plains Bus Garage was not “emptied” and all drivers and monitors “dumped” into the “pre World War 2 era building at Wappingers Junior High”. WCSD Drivers and WCSD monitors were relocated to best meet the needs of the facility and the Wappingers Transportation team. It should be noted, there are no Orange County Transit drivers dispatched from any Wappingers CSD Transportation facility.

On the ballot for May 17, 2022 is a capital improvement project referendum that includes work to be done at the Wappingers Junior High Compound office space. One toilet room has already been remodeled with the additional two to be completed as part of this capital project. As stated earlier, there are no Orange County Transit staff dispatched nor vehicles housed at any WCSD Transportation location.

Many comments have been made pertaining to why Wappingers CSD utilizes contract transportation and the possible outsourcing of the entire WCSD Transportation Department - here is the truth: the bus driver shortage has been a national conversation for years before the pandemic. WCSD Transportation has always annually contracted for 15-19 routes for out-of-district student needs to support the existing Transportation Department for many years.

When school re-opened in the fall of 2020 and staff returned to work, there were not enough bus drivers to cover the routes for WCSD. Since WCSD is an educational institution and the students need to be in school for teaching and learning, the bid for additional contracted transportation services was prepared to assist in getting this job done. Wappingers CSD does have a contract for a specific number of routes with Orange County Transit. These routes were legally bid and approved. These drivers and vehicles are not dispatched from any of the WCSD Transportation facilities. The drivers at Orange County Transit must meet the same requirements as WCSD drivers with regard to licensing and medical clearance as well. This arrangement with Orange County Transit should not be interpreted as the elimination of the excellent in-house WCSD Transportation Department.

As WCSD is committed to the largest self-owned and operated fleet of school buses, training needs to continue as does recruitment. Still today, there are buses with banners recruiting monitors and bus drivers on school property and further recruitment efforts continue to be made. As noted above – the driver training school has 10 additional applicants to train as of this writing!

As for the multiple comments made pertaining to Mr. Broas as acting interim Transportation Supervisor and his exorbitant salary - the search for a Transportation Supervisor, a position that requires a civil service test and approval, has been ongoing since September 2020 when the position was vacated. The civil service list has not been viable and to fill the gap of responsibilities for this position for the largest self-owned and operated bus fleet in NYS, two interim supervisors were appointed; Mr. Ronald Broas, Director of Facilities and Operations and Ms. Kristen Crandall, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Business Development. These two members of the Senior Staff team are paid an annual stipend to work collaboratively with the WCSD Transportation Department to get the job done. This is being accomplished at a savings of almost \$70,000 per year. The work done by the entire WCSD Transportation team should be commended - drivers, mechanics, monitors, office and supervisory staff!

Comments have been made about the change in the school calendar for the Superintendent's Conference Day. The original date of March 11th was still in the midst of wintry weather season and in lieu of having an additional snow day that would have interrupted spring break a change in date was made to May 16th. Yes, this did alter the mandated in-service training for WCSD bus drivers and monitors. However, alternate arrangements were made and a vast majority of WCSD drivers and monitors have already completed this requirement without issue. Follow up sessions of the mandated in-service sessions have also been scheduled so that all will be compliant in advance of the May 1 compliance date.

There have been office staff location re-assignments and replacements based on retirements. Again, working within the Civil Service requirements, the WCSD Transportation team continues to evolve and meet the needs of WCSD students and their families. Bus drivers utilize non-driving days to wash buses using the bus wash at Fishkill Plains. Over the recent spring break - the majority of the large vehicle fleet visited the bus wash.

As Board President I would be glad to meet and speak at the District Office with anyone in the community who would like the facts about WCSD Transportation. I am proud of the WCSD Transportation team and the inaccuracies, as reported, need to be set straight.

John Lumia
President, Board of Education
Wappingers Central School District