

News

Parents call for change to district bussing policy

Katie Robinson
The Progress

Parents up on Promontory are not giving up. They want their kids bused to school.

Three parents showed up at Tuesday night's board of education meeting pleading with trustees to reconsider pulling the buses for students attending schools down the hill, outside of the catchment area.

"You are entrusted not only with our children's education, but also with the safety of our children,

to and from school," said parent Matthew Erickson, who spoke on the issue at the last board meeting two weeks ago. "We are only trying to get our kids to school safely."

Approximately 80 students on Promontory were attending schools out of their catchment area last year, some by personal choice, some for French Immersion, some because G.W. Graham middle-secondary did not offer the full Grade 7 to 12 program until this year.

Courtesy busing was provided for those students last year, and in previous years. But with G.W. Graham officially becoming a

Grade 7 to 12 school this year, parents were warned last spring that the courtesy service would no longer be available.

Following the last board meeting, chair Doug McKay sent a letter to parents who expressed concerns at the meeting stating that "we are guided by our current transportation policy," which only provides transportation for students who live more than 4.0 kilometres from the nearest elementary school and 4.8 kilometres from the nearest middle and secondary school.

Students attending a school out

of their catchment area by personal choice are not eligible for free transportation.

Parents at the meeting, however, were not satisfied. They cited environmental concerns with the onslaught of vehicles now required to travel down the hill to get their kids to school. They didn't understand why the district wouldn't provide another bus, especially in light of "at least 700 more houses" popping up in the Promontory area. And they felt that their kids were being penalized for supporting the French Immersion program, a program, they said, that's been heavily

pushed by district administrators.

"Eighty kids have to make their own way to school, I think that's pathetic," said parent Derek Middleton, who has four children attending schools out of catchment.

"It's not just our four, it's 80 kids altogether. If it was five or 10 kids, maybe, but 80, that's poor judgement on your part."

The board is reviewing its transportation policy in a closed meeting next week. McKay told the parents their concerns would be taken under advisement at the meeting.

krobinson@theprogress.com

Opening the book to stronger literacy skills

Program helps businesses help employees become more literate

Ashley Wray
The Progress

A Chilliwack man wants to help your workplace be more productive, earn more money and essentially improve the economy. And he's going to do all of those things by improving employee literacy.

Michael Berger is the coordinator of Workplace Essential Skills (WES), a new program run by the Chilliwack Learning Community Society and aimed at improving literacy in the workplace.

"The program has three main objectives," said Berger. "The first is to form a network of local businesses that want to provide workplaces with essential skills training."

To find out what businesses need to enhance skills and improve productivity, Berger meets with them individually.

"I conduct a needs assessment while sitting with either an HR representative or a manager and we look at the employees as a group," he explained.

The essential literacy skills in question extend beyond just the ability to read, as Craig Alexander, vice-president and deputy chief economist for TD Bank and Financial Group, pointed out in his speech at city hall on Tuesday.

WES focuses on nine essential skills that contribute to workplace literacy. The first is the ability to read, which includes scanning for information, understanding and evaluating. Next is the skill of document use, which is broken



Workplace Essential Skills Coordinator Michael Berger with the Chilliwack Learning Community Society poses in the stacks at the University of Fraser Valley on Wednesday. KARI MEDIG/PROGRESS

down as the ability to fill out forms, and read signs, labels or lists. Numeracy, which can be applied when using a cash register or calculating square footage, is also included. Writing text and documents, in both e-mails and letters is another point, as is oral communication, which includes giving presentations and speaking in meetings. Working with others and the basics of thinking are also considered in the assessment.

"I thought that this one was the most interesting," said Berger, referring to the category 'thinking' as an essential skill. "But it focuses on the ability to problem solve and think critically, which is very important."

Computer use and continuous learning, which focuses on the ability to learn new equipment are also part of the essential skills.

Overall, the question process takes about 30 minutes and helps Berger focus on what skills need to improve for a better overall literacy level.

The next step in the program is to create a profile that shows what training opportunities are already available.

The final step is a class that will help improve the skills. According to Berger, this is the most unique part of the program.

"The program is not only unique because it is the first of its kind in Canada, but it's also

unique in its approach," he said. "It's the fact that the businesses help guide the training by using their materials."

A classroom of 20 people – each from a different business, for example – brings materials from their workplace, to apply the information to their specific trade.

As the program is relatively new, Berger is still in the first two stages. The classes aren't scheduled to start until the spring.

So far the 96-week program has had a positive response within Chilliwack, which began with approximately 25 hand selected businesses.

Continued: LITERACY/ p7

Home set ablaze to cover crime

Robert Freeman
The Progress

An Annis Road home was set on fire Tuesday afternoon to cover up a break-in, say fire officials.

No one was at home at the time of the 1:15 p.m. fire, but the family living there will be homeless for at least two or three months, said assistant fire chief Ian Josephson.

"The impact on the family is pretty severe," he said. "And in the end we all pay for it through our insurance."

Emergency Social Services is providing emergency accommodation for four adults and two children.

There were no firefighter or civilian injuries.

Chilliwack RCMP are investigating the fire, and are asking for anyone who saw any "suspicious" people or vehicles in the area to call the Chilliwack detachment at 792-4611. Anonymous tips can be made through Crimestoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS or online at www.chilliwackcrimestoppers.ca

Fire officials are not releasing details of how the fire was set, but arson is becoming a common method used by thieves to destroy evidence left behind after a break-in, Josephson said.

"We found evidence that confirms the fire was set ... basically to cover up another crime," he said.

Twenty Chilliwack firefighters responded to the fire in the 8800-block Annis Road.

The crews found smoke venting from the windows and soffits of the two-storey house, but they were able to enter the building and quickly knock down the flames.

Fire damage was limited to the main floor living area, but there was severe smoke damage throughout the rest of the first floor. Smoke and water damage was minimal to the basement and second floor.

rfreeman@theprogress.com

FALL HAS ARRIVED!

COMFORT - CLASS - STYLE - SELECTION



pr!vo

Payton & Buckle

**45930 Wellington Ave
Chilliwack, BC V2P 2C7
604.792.2375**