

Committee will study best way to shorten NCCS elementary day

Written by SUZANNE MOORE, Staff Writer
Thursday, April 19, 2007

CHAMPLAIN — Northeastern Clinton Central School Board is taking another look at just how to shorten the elementary day when it implements its new reading program next year. A later start had been planned for grades kindergarten through 5, which had aroused protest from parents whose jobs would take them away from home before the arrival of the school bus.

At Tuesday night's session, the School Board decided that, by Friday, a survey will go home with elementary students asking whether parents would prefer the district shave off a half-hour of the school day at its start or end.

Then, as recommended by Superintendent of Schools Robert Hebert, a committee of stakeholders, including parents from both the early and after-school perspectives, will come up with a recommendation.

"Then the School Board would have the final say," Hebert told an audience of about 30 parents, grandparents and bus drivers at the meeting.

CHILD CARE

The superintendent also outlined possibilities for child care that he had looked into since the April 3 meeting. Among other suggestions, he noted the YMCA would be willing to set up child care using school facilities either before or after school, he said, at a cost of about \$100 weekly per child.

Champlain Children's Learning Center in Rouses Point can accept some children, he continued.

"There are some positives with the Y(MCA) program," Hebert said. "The students are involved in activities or they're doing schoolwork."

Sharon Richards of Rouses Point suggested that the common planning time for teachers, which prompted the half-hour change in the mornings, be moved to the afternoon.

"You," she indicated the School Board, "arrange for an after-school program. At 3:15, (the students) leave on the buses."

"You're talking about 350 kids without supervision of a teacher," said board member Orville Nedeau.

"You have teacher's aides," Richards proposed.

And she felt sure volunteers would come forward to help, too.

SCHOOL DEFICIENCY

The issue of child care, however, had morphed into another, larger concern. Searching the Web about the Response to Intervention reading program that will necessitate the planning time, the group had learned that NCCS Middle School has been designated by the State Education Department as a School in Need of Improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act.

Is that why the new reading program has been devised, Champlain mom Tammy White asked. In part, said Hebert. Also, he said, the intensive reading instruction for grades K-2, designed to help circumvent learning problems early on, would lower its percentage of children needing special education.

White said she understands the necessity for the earlier intervention but questioned shortening the school day when children are already struggling.

Should the district not meet criteria for improvement by the 2008-09 school year, she pointed

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out, one possible corrective measure the state lists is lengthening the school day or year, she pointed out.

"We don't feel the children can really afford to lose the half-hour a day," she said.

"Even without that half-hour, we do have the longest elementary day" in the region, Hebert said.

"If you don't have that common planning time, there's no way RTI is going to be successful."

Champlain mother Samantha Blain wondered why parents didn't seem to know about the school's In Need of Improvement status.

"(It) has not been kept a secret," Hebert said, noting mandatory letters had been sent home.

The Press-Republican reported the district's presence on that list, due to substandard performance in elementary/middle school English language arts, along with that of Peru Central School, on Jan. 14.

'OPPORTUNITY'

The first meeting of the committee to study the start-time issue will be set up after the surveys are returned, probably late next week, Hebert said, and will be posted in the Press-Republican and on the district Web site. After the session, which Mooers parent Kerri Gonyo called "very productive," audience members talked over the issues in the High School lobby.

An after-school program financed and run by the school sounded workable, said some, including Blain.

She expressed dissatisfaction with the solutions proposed by the district, all of which would cost parents money.

But at least the issue made them aware of the larger issue of academic insufficiency, she said.

"This is an opportunity," she said, encouraging continued participation. "I hope we all seize it and not all disappear in a month."