Superintendent’s Recommendation to the Board of Education

April 6, 2009

The process of determining the best start and stop times for our six buildings began years ago. The discussions intensified when the planning started for a new elementary building/community learning center, which was to become Ellsworth Hill. A committee was formed which not only looked at our current transportation schedule, it also scrutinized the research on optimum learning times for our students. A two part recommendation was made to the Superintendent and then to the Board of Education: 1. to support and promote student academic achievement and wellness, the school district would work toward building a solution that would allow all buildings to start between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. 2. A Transportation Committee would help the district determine the appropriate level of transportation services for students, considering, in order, safety, efficiency and then convenience. The Committee will also act as a mitigating body for other transportation concerns.
The Board directed the Superintendent to create the Transportation Committee. The Board also established a long term goal of starting all schools between the hours of 8:00 and 9:00 AM.

As a result of the transportation difficulties we experienced at the beginning of this school year, the upper management of First Student offered to assist with our efforts to meet the long term goal of the Board in any way they can.

We have taken maximum advantage of their generous offer and have received assistance and advice from the experts working for First Student throughout the country. Additionally, on multiple days, our bus drivers have run multiple sets of computer-generated routes in order to provide essential feedback on times and distances to the First Student routers and planners.

This is a complex issue with a wide spectrum of options. Some say we are moving too fast and question if we have considered all the risks. Others say we are moving too slowly and should immediately take
advantage of the later start times for our older students to achieve the benefits of optimum times for their wellness, education, and safety.

I clearly see the advantages of a later start time for our secondary students. The research is overwhelming and, yes, even to start school 30 minutes later than we do currently would be a huge step in the right direction. I fully support and recommend that we move as quickly as we can, prudently and safely, to achieve later start times for Hudson’s Middle School and High School students.

Here are the issues that need resolution: 1. in order to achieve the goal, we will need to transform our current three tier transportation system to a two tier system. In order to make a two tier system possible and come close to the timelines of the goal, we need to reduce the number of stops our busses make during their routes. So, instead of our busses picking students up at their homes, some students will have to walk to a consolidated stop. For the most part, the pickup location will be one that is already in existence, but more students will have to walk to it to be picked up. We need to be sure the walk to the stops throughout our community is safe for all students. My recommendation to you tonight
will allow us a year to monitor the walks and to ensure that all of our students are safe. Further, if parents do not believe the stop is safe for their particular children, they can appeal to First Student, the Business Manager, the Superintendent and finally to the Transportation Committee who will listen to the concerns, deliberate, and make a decision. The Transportation Committee’s decision will be final.

2. The second issue that needs to be considered is the need for a centralized location in the afternoon for 2010-2011 to load our elementary students. The current plan for a two tier system is to load Evamere, East Woods, and McDowell students at East Woods where the busses will all be waiting for the arrival of the students. There will be no moving traffic during the time that the students will be walking to the waiting busses. No bus will move until all of the students are seated. Parent pickup will be separate from the bus loading area. While that concept has many advantages, it is important for us to continue to look for alternatives and to fine tune the details of such a walk for our youngest students; details such as supervision and providing an infrastructure that will accommodate the walk during inclement weather. The recommendation I give to you tonight requires only McDowell students to load and unload at East Woods during the 2009-
2010 school year. We have worked with the Principals and First Student and we are confident that the walk will be safely supervised and accomplished on a daily basis. We will continue to learn more from the experiences we will have next year with the consolidated stops and with centralized loading in order to make whatever adjustments may be necessary for implementation of the two tier system in 2010-2011.

3. The last of the big three issues that need to be considered is the later start times for our youngest learners at Evamere. We have heard from the teachers and from some parents that starting our kindergarten and first grade students later is not in the students’ best interest. We have examined the research and have found little evidence to support that the recommended start times would have any negative, lasting impact on our students in Kindergarten and First Grade. However, we have great confidence in our teachers and have tried to move the start time for those students, earlier. No workable solution has been found that would enable us to move the start time of Evamere earlier without eliminating the advantages of a two tier system for the rest of the district. Some possible solutions to this issue could include all day Kindergarten and/or extending the elementary school day by 30 minutes, making it the same as the Middle School and High School
student day. With another year to study the issue, we may be able to find a solution.

In short, I agree with the Transportation Committee’s recommendation regarding the steps necessary to phase in a two tier system over a two year period. The first year, 09-10, we should consolidate bus stops as best we can, and further, we should align McDowell and East Woods start times on the 2nd tier and require the drop off and the pick up of the McDowell students to be at East Woods. Finally, we should align Evamere, Ellsworth Hill and the Pre-school on the third tier and eliminate the pre-school shuttle buses. These changes will allow us to monitor these and other issues during the 2009-2010 school year and to make whatever adjustments may be necessary to move to a two tier system the following school year, 2010-2011.

As you know, saving money was never a motivator for considering later start times. The primary emphasis for considering changing our start times has always been to improve the educational, wellness, and safety benefits for our students. Moving forward with this recommendation will achieve those goals in the long run, and taking an additional year to
prepare for the change will ensure that it is done safely and with the additional due diligence it requires.

As a result of the extensive study that was done by our Transportation Committee, I am going to recommend some changes to our level of service provided by the Transportation Provider. These changes were recommended, to me, by the Transportation Committee and I pass them on to you as changes that will make our system safer and more efficient.

**Pick-up and Drop-off Locations:** Individual Students will be picked up and dropped off at one designated location everyday during the school year. These locations may be changed two times during each semester. The designated pick-up and drop-off locations do not need to be the same location. A three-business-day notice will be required for a change in designated stops. Court ordered shared parenting arrangements will be honored.

**Going Home with other students:** Students enrolled in grades K through 5 will have the option of riding to another student’s bus stop. However, students in grades K and 1 will not have this option until the second semester. A parent/guardian must fill out and provide a written permission statement on a school district provided form. The form will be distributed to the school office, the student’s teacher and given to the bus driver. A separate form will be required for each day that a student
is riding to another student’s stop. The provision will not be used to circumvent the designated drop-off location provision or accommodate groups of students going to a single location, such as birthday parties, scout groups, etc. Some buses may be designated as “no extra riders” due to bus capacity issues.

**Students Waiting For Bus Pick-up:** The District expects the students to be outside waiting for their bus at their designated pick-up times. If students are not waiting at the designated bus stop, the bus will continue on with its route and will not return for students. If a student misses the bus, the family is responsible for the student’s arrival at school.

**The Transportation Committee:** The Transportation Committee recommends the level of transportation services for all students eligible to ride a bus. In addition, this committee will act as a mitigating or appeals body should a transportation issue remain unresolved through the initial channels of communications with First Student, the business manager’s office or the superintendent’s office. Hearings for transportation appeals will be scheduled at specific times throughout the school year.

With the changes in service outlined earlier, the exact wording of my recommendation to you is found on the agenda on page 2 item VII A.

“Be it resolved that: The Hudson City School District Board of Education adopt the Transportation and Start/Stop Times
Recommendation for the 2009-2010 school year and direct the Superintendent and Administrative Team to prepare for a two-tier transportation system for the 2010-2011 school year. It is the intent of the Board of Education to implement a two-tier transportation system, in order to maximize the health, education, wellness and safety of our students, in the 2010-2011 school year.

The process for establishing this recommendation has been open and transparent. We have had three open forums for the public to tell us what they think and we have learned much from those discussions.

As stated in the beginning, this is a complex issue. I believe the recommendation before you, if adopted and implemented according to the timeline described, will move our district in the right direction long term, and will permit our students to benefit from the enormous advantages gained from later start times.

Finally, I want to thank the Start Times Advisory Committee for the outstanding work they did investigating this issue and for bringing it to our attention. I also want to thank the Transportation Committee for the great work they have done in studying and coming to a consensus on
the recommendation to me. And a huge thanks goes out to our public who have come to our Open Forums and have given us their thoughts, concerns and suggestions in a very respectful way.

Now before opening our meeting up to public comments on agenda items, I would like to ask the members of the Board of Education if you have any questions about the recommendation before you. Paul, Phil, and I will do our best to clarify or elaborate as necessary so you all have a clear understanding of the recommendation.