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Easthampton parents lament bus policy

By CATHERINE BAUM
Staff Writer

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Monday, August 31, 2009

EASTHAMPTON - On the first day of school this morning, school officials will discuss the busing rules, which typically generate about 30 written requests for exceptions from parents a year.

Prompted by appeals from parents unhappy with the school transportation policy, the meeting starts at 9 a.m. today in the municipal building at 50 Payson Avenue.

"We're not changing our policy but we do make exceptions," said School Superintendent Deborah Carter. "None of it is easy."

Students required to walk to school are kindergarten through fourth grade students who live less than 1 ½ miles from school and fifth through twelfth grade students who live less than 2 miles from school.

"I know rules are necessary but there are times when exceptions should be made," city parent Sandy Houle told members of the School Committee Thursday. "It seems to me that a lot of other people are having this problem."

Houle, a working single mother, brings her 9-year-old son to his grandmother's during the school year at 7 a.m. Although his grandmother lives 2 ½ miles away from Pepin Elementary School, he lives less than 1 ½ miles away from the school on Adams Street, which means he is not eligible for a bus.

"I have no other way to get him to school," Houle said. "The message I got was that the school can't do anything about it. Asking my son to walk 2 ½ miles in the winter is not acceptable and is not safe. I need help."

The district seeks to accommodate students in situations similar to Houle's with its Fill the Bus program. The program determines the degree to which the bus company can transport additional non-eligible students for the school year. But it usually takes a month after school starts before calculations can be made and the Fill the Bus program goes into effect.

"So, for the first month of school my son should not go to school?" Houle said to the School Committee. "I don't have a way to get him to school."

Mayor Michael A. Tautznik recommended parents look into a carpool arrangement with others in similar situations until Fill the Bus begins.

Ladonna Crow, policy subcommittee chairwoman, said the carpool idea may be discussed at the meeting this morning.

"We have to go through the policy and see what happens," Crow said. "It's kind of indefinite at this moment."

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Mon, 08/31/2009 - 11:55 — Theresa1

Let the superintendents walk

Most superintendents and some city officials get paid mileage for using their cars for "business", perhaps they should park their cars a mile and a half from their starting points and walk to their cars EVERYDAY- in the rain, snow, dark, freezing temps, when they are tired or don't feel well (but not sick enough to keep home), carrying awkward backpacks that weigh more than they do on their backs or over their shoulders, without sidewalks, and all alone. Somehow, I don't think they will do this. Yet they make the children for whom it is their job to ensure not only safety, but to put the children first walk. What a bunch of irresponsible hypocrits.

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Mon, 08/31/2009 - 11:03 — HampTaxPayer

Why isn't there an article about Northampton's bus policy?

Northampton just changed their bus policy to include children in grades KINDERGARTEN TO 5TH GRADE who live under 2 MILES (instead of 1 1/2 as other surrounding towns and their previous policy). Those little kids who live between 1 1/2 and 2 miles have to walk to school, or their parents have to fork over hundreds of dollars per child to pay for the costs of buses. This city is putting a price on our children's safety. We have dangerous roads and sex offenders living on the streets--- why is this acceptable? Why didn't The Gazette run a story on this and bring it to the attention of tax payers who wouldn't otherwise know about this policy? I think they have the right to know that their tax dollars aren't being used as they think they are!

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Mon, 08/31/2009 - 07:54 — colin

Beware carpoolers

If you transport another persons child to or from school you need to notify your insurance company. I assume it means an additional premium to the driver doing the transporting....

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