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Bus plan proposed

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Members of the Oak Ridge schools' Transportation Committee have a plan both the School Board and school superintendent may want to consider for the 2008-'09 fiscal year.

The plan, proposed by schools' Transportation Supervisor Clifford Bunch, would "eliminate the walk zones," says Assistant School Superintendent Ken Green.

Presented to the Transportation Committee during its first meeting Thursday evening, Bunch's proposal would take 18 buses to transport children across the school district.

Bunch said he "mapped" the entire city to create "blocks" of service that could encompass transporting all students.

"We're talking about a major revamping of our system to make this work," he said.

Under the proposal, middle and high school students could be asked to walk a quarter of a mile from their homes to catch the school bus; and elementary-aged students could be asked to walk no more than .15 of a mile.

As a financial belt-tightening measure in 2006, the School Board cut transportation to those students who live outside a one-mile radius of the city's schools.

Then, in late 2007, board members implemented a plan that provided transportation to elementary-aged children within the walk zones that were created by the earlier decision.

"It's worth considering," parent Nichole Zawisza said of the proposed plan.

"The whole goal is safety for the children. We don't need any more scary times like what happened with Ashley," she said after Thursday's meeting.

Zawisza is serving on the committee as a parent representative from Linden Elementary School, where two of her children attend school. She is also the mother of a seventh-grader at Robertsville Middle School and a student at Oak Ridge High School.

The Transportation Committee was formed in December 2007 after RMS seventh-grader Ashley Paine was fatally injured the month before after falling beneath the wheels of a school bus while riding her bicycle home from school.

The committee is charged with "supporting safety measures for students crossing major intersections through transportation services; and determine how to increase transportation services to all students within available funding sources," according to the agenda.

It is to make a recommendation to the school board and superintendent of schools for implementation in the next budget cycle.

Committee members include numerous parent representatives from each school, including a parent who lives inside and outside the schools' walk zones; Bunch; Director of Business & Support Services Karen Gagliano; Assistant Superintendent Ken Green; all the school principals; School Board member Dan DiGregorio; and Mayor Pro Tem Jane Miller.

The committee members asked several questions about the current transportation system, and school officials provided background information during Thursday's meeting.

Gagliano and Green suggested the committee members take time to consider the proposed plan, and offer any ideas they'd like to discuss.

School officials will spend the next few weeks obtaining cost estimates for Bunch's proposal and gathering information requested by the committee members.

The Transportation Committee will meet a second time on Feb. 21, in the Board Room at the School Administration Building. The meeting time will be determined later, Green said.

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