

TAAC Minutes November 17, 2009

The Catawba County Schools' Teacher Assistant Advisory Council (TAAC) met on Tuesday, November 17, 2009, at 4:30 p.m. at the Catawba Rosenwald Education Center. The following members were present: Susan Coleman (Arndt); Pat Shook (Balls Creek); Lisa Cunningham (Banoak); Diane Kelly (Blackburn); Angie Sigmon (Bunker Hill); Monika Williams & Shannon Cansler (Campbell); Carol Sharpe (Catawba); Amy Fitzgerald & Patsy Shoemaker (Foard); Dawn Bradley & Sandra White (Maiden Elem.); Paula Murphy (Maiden Middle); Terri Evans (Mtn. View); Kim Gilfillan (River Bend); Jan Laws (St. Stephens High); Shirley Hildebran (Sherrills Ford); Janice Berry (Snow Creek); Teresa Biggerstaff (Startown); and Lorraine Lawing (Tuttle).

Central Office administrators present were Assistant Superintendents Pat Hensley and Steve Demiter, Chief Technology Officer Dr. Judith Ray; Finance Officer Sondra Wolfe; Student Services Executive Director Dr. Paul Holden; and Elementary Education Director Leslie Barnette.

The following questions were discussed:

#1 - Can Teacher Assistants have their meetings and workshops on a workday instead of coming out during the week and at night time? We feel we can get better attendance.

Answer: First, Assistant Superintendent Pat Hensley asked for verification that this question came from the TA Association, and she was informed that it did. Mrs. Hensley responded that although this is certainly a reasonable request, it might be difficult due to covering the responsibilities at your school since there are so fewer TA's now than last year. She recommended that what needs to happen is that the leadership of the TA Association schedule a meeting with Dr. Markley to talk with him about this request.

#2 - Can the bus garage put instructions in the book for the new activity buses? How to start and shut them down?

Answer: Steve Demiter responded that per Transportation Director Cecil Davis, each new activity bus should have an owner's manual on the bus. If not, we need to know which buses don't. Mr. Demiter stated that there may be features on the new buses that you are not familiar with and individuals who are concerned because of this. If this is the case with drivers at your school, he offered to arrange for an activity bus to be taken to your school for a demonstration to go over all the features. This could possibly be arranged on a workday or you could come by the bus garage on a workday. Please let Mr. Demiter know if you have an interest in doing this. In conclusion, he stressed that safety is our number one priority and he also stressed the importance that, at the end of the route, drivers should always take a few extra minutes to do a walk-through to make sure all students are off the bus.

#3 - What are the guidelines for TA's to volunteer for Athletics such as Gates and Concessions?

Answer: If volunteering as a parent, a Teacher Assistant can work (volunteer) for their child up to 10 hours per year sporadically. If the TA is not a parent, they cannot volunteer—they must be compensated for their time. This ruling is under the Fair Labor Standards Act.

#4 - When someone from the Bus Garage comes during the day to switch out buses, could they let the driver know before the end of the day so the students can be informed?

Answer: Mr. Demiter suggested that a solution to this concern would be that the Transportation Director at your school be the person informed.

#5 - When a driver's bus is returned to the school during the day, could it be parked back in the same parking space as the bus that is picked up? Parking the bus in a different parking space means the driver and the students have to look for their bus, plus it increases the chance that a student will get on the wrong bus and then have to be returned to the school.

Answer: Mr. Demiter will make a recommendation to Transportation that a replacement bus be parked in the same parking slot as the regular bus whenever possible.

#6 - Many times the bus garage might bring a smaller bus as a replacement and the bus is too small to get all the children on it. Can this be stopped from happening in the future?

Answer: Mr. Demiter will request Transportation to check the capacity of the regular bus brought in for repairs and to replace that bus with one of equal capacity when at all possible.

#7 - A student who rides my bus must walk through a patch of woods to get to her assigned bus stop. It is right at 1/10 mile and there are no houses close by. Someone needs to go out and look at this situation because I feel this is a safety issue for this female student.

Answer: A bus stop change request form must be completed and submitted to the Transportation Department. They will look into the situation and a response will be given.

#8 - Although I have never seen a sub driver list, I know of two TA's who called some of the drivers on the list and they were told "unless your route is over an hour long, I won't sub." Are they allowed to continue to refuse to drive for this reason?

Answer: Specific information regarding this question to be submitted to Mr. Demiter and he will investigate.

#9 - We learned at our last meeting that some principals are telling their TA's that they can't go to conference this year. TA's need to go to their conference in order to get the necessary hours to keep up their certification. Most TA's would not go until Friday and would still drive their morning route; therefore it would only be necessary to get a sub driver for the Friday afternoon route.

Answer: Mrs. Hensley and Finance Officer Sondra Wolfe responded that this is probably more an issue of the TA's not being there and their responsibilities being covered, than it is a funding issue. It may be a little early for this decision to be made and some principals are probably responding very conservatively. Mrs. Hensley stated that we will have to look closely to see what we are dealing with and whether we might be able to find enough sub drivers to cover the routes.

#10 - A child on my route is wheelchair bound. There are only two people at the school who know how to operate the wheelchair lift. With the upcoming new bus training class, is there any way that others could be trained on this as well?

Answer: Assistant Superintendent Demiter responded that he will check to see if this can be added to the next bus driver training session.

There being no further questions, the meeting ended at 5:00 p.m.

The next TAAC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 19, 2010, at 4:30 p.m. at the Central Office Boardroom.