

# CORE

Community Organized to Rescue Education

## NOW YOU KNOW

FIFTH EDITION, October 12, 2008

### CORE BUZZ

OCPS Express (E-News from OCPS) still claims the difficult decision to flip the schedule is saving millions, yet one of the Orlando Sentinel education blogs and some of CORE's e-mails include comments that say millions is being paid in overtime in the transportation dept. Is it true? Who knows? Since there was never a comprehensive study prior to the flip, it would be difficult to prove one way or the other. Certainly enough questions were raised initially about the validity of the savings claimed. Since May's decision to flip schedules, even more savings have been claimed, but no hard numbers have been forthcoming.

Requests for things as simple as enrollment figures cannot be obtained. Our e-mails report that Edgewater lost about 600 students, prompting more teacher layoffs. Olympia is reported down 300. An Orlando Sentinel blogger says we have lost 2,500 students, many due to students leaving the system because their families depend on their income, and the new schedule doesn't accommodate that. Many have left for private schools or home schooling. One CORE member let us know they left the county and enrolled their son in Seminole Community College's high school completion program.

Losing students costs the district money and it costs more teachers' jobs. The "other" cost is to the student and the student's future ability to obtain employment that offers a decent income. The DECA option that puts students in classes about 120 minutes a day and releases them for employment is not exactly "preparing the next generation," as Mr. Blocker stated. It's difficult to read the OCPS E-News and hear again how the flip was supposed to improve grades (more sleep) and protect teacher jobs when they are being laid off due to falling

"There is a difference between what you have a right to do, and what is the right thing to do."

Potter Stewart, U.S. Supreme Court Justice

enrollments. It's doubtful exact drop out numbers caused by the flip will ever be known, but it was definitely a factor.

The consequences of the flip are every bit as detrimental as parents thought they would be. Parents of AP kids (yes, the ones OCPS proudly boasts put them on Newsweek's top high school list) report the new schedule is causing exhaustion and stress and falling GPA's. Parents who provided transportation to high school youngsters in magnet programs can no longer do so, and some of those programs which usually have significant AP content have seen serious drops in enrollment.

Mr. Blocker ended this particular E-News with an outreach to the community to fill the need for financial resources, volunteer time, etc. because "we are in danger of losing the very things that got us the A grade from the state." If we assume what got the grade is the commitment and effort of students, parents, and teachers, then there really is a problem. Time and money to support schools was jeopardized with a "budget" decision that impacted this community and our schools in many immeasurable ways. It's not just the transportation savings that cannot be measured. There is no way to measure the effect on school involvement from parents, students, teachers, and the community when parents (including our teachers who are parents) are picking up kids from band practice or athletic events at 9:00 or 10:00 p.m., no one has had dinner yet, and they feel as though their concerns, or the concerns of their young people didn't matter.

Support and involvement is a two-way street.

**CORE ACTION:** LYNX bus routes used by our students to get back and forth from magnet classes, athletic practices, and extra-curricular activities were on the budget chopping block. CORE members and community contacts informed us about this issue and CORE went to work, contacting the rest of our members to inform them about the issue and contacting necessary people at the county level and city level. The result - LYNX made the decision to dip into their \$15 million reserve fund to continue the affected routes. Thank you, LYNX! Thank you to Bryan Nelson, Mayor Scott, PTA leaders, and a host of others who got involved. Thanks to our members who sounded the alarm.

### **MORE NEWS FROM THE FRONT LINES:**

From a parent at Gotha Middle School: Gotha's YMCA program doesn't start until 3:00 p.m. and ends at 5:30 p.m. Last year, the program started immediately after school and ended at 6:00 p.m. It's interesting to me that Gotha MS had to slash budgets for classrooms/labs, but now have to pay staff to stay after school to supervise 50-100 children until the YMCA program begins. "

From a magnet parent: "We've lost ten magnet students because of the flip."

From a middle school parent: "There are three buses that come early, one after the other, through our subdivision, none are for the middle school my child attends. That bus comes later. Once it came not at all, it seems they were short drivers, and another time it came at 7:45 - 25 minutes after school started. Fortunately, both times it didn't come I was home to know that and drove him to school."

"Please remove my e-mail from your mailing list. We have given up on the public schools and have moved to private. I wish you all the best in your efforts."

"I saw six buses parked at Millenia Mall during the time they should have been on the road making elementary runs. I thought they all were supposed to be making three runs."

Note: real people, real information -anonymous by request.

CORE welcomes input, information and opinions from the community. To submit items of interest, please e-mail:

[orangecountycore@gmail.com](mailto:orangecountycore@gmail.com)

### **DATES TO NOTE:**

**October 28, 2008 at 2:00 p.m. Orange County Commission Meeting.** OCPS is appealing the "no" from the county's planning & zoning commission. Moving Evans it's still on the burner. If this is your issue, yes or no, get involved. Web site for group opposing the move is: [www.stopevansmove.org](http://www.stopevansmove.org)

## **DISABILITY AWARENESS WEEK OCTOBER 1, 2008 - OCTOBER 15, 2008**

Thank you to Kathy Till, Commissioner, City of Apopka for her help, her interest, and her community action on the subject of Learning Disabilities and Crime.

Over the summer, Ms. Till expressed publicly in a letter to the School Board her concern over the flip and the related potential for an increase in gang activity and juvenile crime in the middle and high school age group. Her Community Safety Initiative (CSI) did extensive research on the subject of gangs, crime and this age group. The information is readily available through a number of well-respected resources. Web sites are available by accessing <http://www.orangecountycore.org/>, and of course, more information is available from Ms. Till (407.484.3537 or [kathyspud@aol.com](mailto:kathyspud@aol.com).) A small sample of information from those resources is listed below.

Reasons to be concerned: (1) Medicaid funding at the federal level which provides health related services to low income students with disabilities is in the same budget crunch as the state funding. (Orlando Sentinel, Dave Weber, Sept. 14, 2008) (2) The relationship between crime and learning disabilities in lower socio-economic groups is well-documented. (3) Lack of services combined with lots of unsupervised free time has the potential to increase juvenile crime incidents and gang recruitment activity.

From [www.helpgangyouth.com](http://www.helpgangyouth.com). "The average rate of learning disabilities in the United States is about 3% of the population, 12% if you include conditions like ADHD. The average rate for juvenile delinquents, however, is 50% for learning disabilities and 90% if you include ADHD and other emotional disorders."

Information gleaned from other research provided by Ms. Till's citizen's committee: "School-based risk factors such as poor school performance and poor school attachment are primary factors for eventual gang involvement." In a more recent letter from Ms. Till, she states, "Research has shown that many youth with learning disabilities are at a very high risk of becoming involved with gangs. They struggle in school, experiencing feelings of isolation, frustration and low self-esteem and look for other ways to 'fit in.' Gang members target these youth and offer them that opportunity to become part of a 'family,' thereby giving the young person a sense of belonging."

According to Ms. Till, CSI is bringing together elected officials, law enforcement, business and religious leaders, and community activists to create a comprehensive program aimed at addressing these issues in schools and in the community.

THANKS from CORE to Kathy Till and all those involved in this important child and community focused initiative.

For more information:

<http://www.orangecountycore.org>

October 13, 2008. WFTV.com: "School District Bus Savings Eaten by Overtime"  
<http://www.wftv.com/education/17703417/detail.htm> for more information.

### **ELECTED SCHOOL BOARD CHAIRMAN ISSUE ON THE BALLOT IN NOVEMBER**

CORE does not endorse any candidate or issue, but provides information to parents and citizens of Orange County so they can be informed voters.

For a number of years, the issue of an Elected School Board Chairman has been studied, discussed, argued about. CORE is providing you with resources that hopefully will help you make an informed decision.

Two resources are presented. The first is from the League of Women Voters of Orange County who participated in the study commissioned by Orange County Public Schools. You may access <http://lwvoc.org>. On the League's web site you will find a PRO/CON list. The League does not endorse the ballot proposal.

The second resource is presented by LET US VOTE, the organization that launched the initiative and the voter petition drive that was responsible for this issue reaching the ballot. You may access [www.letusvoteorange.com](http://www.letusvoteorange.com) for background information and a "frequently asked questions" discussion

We hope this information is helpful to you as you make your decision. Please be aware that the ballot very long this year and the Elected Chair ballot proposal is on back page of the ballot insert. Turn your ballot insert OVER to find it!!!!!!

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### **DISTRICT 7 SCHOOL BOARD**

There is a run-off in District 7 between School Board Candidates Christine Moore-Curtis and Laura Keller. CORE thanks both candidates for their early and continuing support of CORE's position on the schedule flip and for listening to the parents concerns as they campaign.

## **Bus Arrival: Epic Fail**

By Chip Skambis

The implementation of the money saving time change for the 2008-2009 school year has had many issues arise. A few of the many repercussions of this time swap are sports being limited to when they can practice, students having to stay up into the wee hours of the morning to finish their homework, and the band not being able to get a bus to drive them to away games are. Though these effects may not directly affect the normal running of the school day, an alarming ramification has made itself apparent with the new start and end times.

"Since the start of school, there has not been a single day when all the buses were on time," said Dr. Ford, 9th grade dean of students.

Ford also oversees the bus transportation at Edgewater. Ford explained that the reason the time change saved money was OCPS' ability to eliminate a large number of bus routes. By removing these extra routes, the School Board hoped to use the same buses to drive each of the routes for elementary, middle, and high schools. Unfortunately, it seems that the buses are not able to drive their routes in the amount of time between elementary and high school end times.

"The problem is that the bus routes are now too long," said Ford, "It's really taking away from the student's first period class."

Students who are unfortunate enough to be on these buses are feeling the strain in the classes they miss, but they are also feeling the strain on their personal lives.

"The worst part of this, too, is the fact that these buses are even later in getting here after school than before school," said Ford, "Some days, I have had to stay here until 5:30pm waiting for one bus or the other."

To better illustrate this problem, Ford described the predicament of bus 4224. Bus 4224 is consistently late after school. While there is approximately an hour between the end of elementary school and high school, bus 4224's last stop is about 22 minutes away from Edgewater—without traffic—but he usually arrives at 4:15pm.

"One bad rainstorm or accident is enough to make this guy severely late, and that has serious repercussions for the kids," said Ford.

BUS ARRIVAL - EPIC FAIL...continued from page 3

Students on these buses have jobs after school, and they rely upon the buses to get them home in time for them to get to work. With the buses this late, it makes it nearly impossible for these students to work after school, let alone get all their homework done.

"My bus comes in late every day, and I'm always late to biology. I'm having a hard time learning it," said Esther Critton, a student who rides one of the late buses.

The buses which are most often late are buses 4202, 4205, 4215, and 4216 which cover the Colonial, Maitland, Pine Hills, and Rosemont areas, respectively. OCPS maintains its position that the time change was in the best interest of the students. Their knowledge of the problem is minimal.

\*\*\*Prior to publication Dr. Ford was overseeing transportation and was the dean of 9th grade students. Budget cuts eliminated her position and she is teaching 10th grade English at Edgewater\*\*\*

*CORE applauds Edgewater student, Chip Skambis, for his in-depth report. The original article appears in the student publication, the Edgewater Eagle. Chris has a future in investigative journalism!!*

## TOWN HALL MEETING

School Board member, Daryl Flynn is hosting a town hall meeting Wednesday, October 16 at Liberty Middle School, 3405 S. Chickasaw Tr., Orlando 32829. Reception begins at 6:00. Meeting at 6:30. General budget topics are on the agenda.

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## BUDGET STUDY COMMITTEE

Superintendent Blocker is forming a committee made up of budget and finance experts from local businesses and institutions to look at operations costs and impact. A second committee of citizen organizations is also being proposed. Blocker is confident this will advance the stated mission of OCPS of involving the community.

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"Whenever people are well-informed,  
they can generally be trusted  
with their own government."

Thomas Jefferson

CORE is continuing its efforts for accountability and meaningful engagement from OCPS. Your membership in CORE is vital to that effort. If you have not already done so, jump on the CORE website and register as a member. And, if you can, help with a donation - however small it may seem - every bit helps. Thank you.

[www.orangecountycore.org](http://www.orangecountycore.org)

## THE SUBJECT IS PAY

CORE so appreciates our teachers - that in the face of severe schedule difficulties and rising household costs, they are still on the job - loving and teaching our kids, providing supplies and even food for them out of their own pockets.

We continue to monitor issues that affect teachers. Pay raises, according to the Classroom Teachers Association are on hold at all levels due to budget cut backs. From some of the media blogs CORE has been monitoring, there is also a lot of discussion and debate even among teachers themselves as to whether overtime is being paid or teachers are in a no-pay, volunteer situation for extra hours.

Shortly after the Orlando Sentinel published an article about pay scales for superintendents in Florida (Mr. Blocker indicated he was underpaid at \$300K per year), CORE received a letter from an Orange County teacher that reveals the frustration and morale of teachers, and offers what may appear to be a "radical" solution. Read on:

"Before services are cut at any individual school, or teacher pay not sufficient to cover cost of living expenses, drastic cuts need to be made in area and county-wide administrative positions. Positions may need to be eliminated, but at the very least, before services to children are directly impacted, temporary 'across the board' pay cuts need to be imposed on administrators.....consider also the favorable impact that sacrifice would have on teacher morale, which is at an all-time low, as I'm sure you must be aware."

Note from CORE: Source of these comments wishes to remain anonymous.