

ISD Plan Will Save Local School Districts Money on Special Education Busing

By Paul Gingras

School districts that pay to bus students to special education programs in the Eastern Upper Peninsula may save hundreds of thousands of dollars, collectively, owing to a plan by the Intermediate School District, which has offered to take over special education busing for districts that do not qualify for special education transportation relief under the State School Aid Act, said Peter Everson, superintendent of the ISD. Saving money on busing will help reduce school debts and help districts ensure that they have enough revenue for their educational programs, administrators say.

The ISD qualifies for a 70% reimbursement from the state for special education busing costs. For local districts to get involved and realize the savings, Mr. Everson is pushing local school boards to take action this month.

"I think it will benefit our district greatly, and we will be providing exactly the same service," said Mike Springsteen, superintendent of St. Ignace Area Schools. "I anticipate [the school board] will formalize the action at the May meeting."

The plan is specific to bus routes that transport children to facilities

with special programs, such as the Rudyard Area Service Center, or buses dispatched separately that have special equipment like wheelchair lifts. The plan will not cover regular buses on which special needs students ride to school.

Schools are mandated to provide special education equipment and services, which are often expensive, but do not receive extra funding from the state to do so, Mr. Springsteen said.

The ISD's plan will not disrupt procedures for students who ride buses to special programs. They will probably take the same buses they ride now. Drivers and bus aides working on special education bus routes will keep their jobs and will be paid through the ISD, Mr. Everson said.

The transition from local to ISD oversight will help districts save money for other education needs.

"We are expecting a seamless transition," he said.

If local school districts take part in the ISD's initiative, they will begin seeing savings on transportation costs at the beginning of the 2009/2010 school year, at the earliest. To get results by then, local districts must agree to take part in the plan this spring, Mr. Everson said.

To get local districts involved, he has been talking to school boards and superintendents for the past several months.

Locally, St. Ignace Area Schools, Les Cheneaux Community Schools, Rudyard Area Schools, and the districts they cooperate with for special education transportation stand to benefit from this plan, Mr. Everson said.

Reports detailing transportation

costs are prepared the year after the transportation takes place. The following data is based on the 2006/2007 school year:

St. Ignace Area Schools spent \$34,056 transporting special needs students to the Rudyard Area Service Center. If costs remained the same, and the route were taken over by the ISD, the district would save about \$22,000.

The calculation for Les

Cheneaux, Pickford, and DeTour schools is more complex because these districts collaborate on special education busing. Collectively, for Pickford and Les Cheneaux, it is \$52,519. If this figure stayed the same, the ISD could reduce the expenditure by about \$27,000, minus Pickford's contribution, Mr. Everson said.

Rudyard Area Schools spent \$147,426 in 2006/2007. The ISD

could reduce this by about \$104,000.

Other districts in the ISD that will save money include Tahquamenon Area Schools, which spent \$99,082 and would save about \$70,000. The Sault Area Public School District spent \$376,551 and would save about \$265,000.

The price of fuel has jumped about 33% since these figures were calculated, so school districts now have even higher transportation costs and are likely to save even more, Mr. Everson said.

The ISD is pushing to get the project in motion because it has to prepare legal documents and possibly purchase some of its own buses, which can take months, Mr. Everson said.

St. Ignace Games, Prizes Will Highlight Super Saturday

Super Saturday Children's Celebration and 4-H Expo will be Saturday, May 3, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at Little Bear East Arena in St. Ignace. The event includes games, crafts, stories, a bicycle rodeo, and wagon rides. Admission is free of charge.

More than 20 exhibitors from community agencies will be there to present "hands-on" activities for youth, along with parenting information for families. There will be 4-H exhibits, prize giveaways, and food.

More than 500 people attended last year's Super Saturday fair, said George Ford, chairperson of the event, which is a combination of two previous fairs, the 4-H event called Super Saturday, and the Great Start's Early Childhood Fair.

Super Saturday is sponsored by Michigan State University Extension's 4-H Youth Program, 4-H Council, the Great Start Program of the Eastern Upper Peninsula Intermediate School District, civic organizations, and local businesses.

Event Is Saturday Women's Expo Is 'Stop, Shop, and Learn' Day

About 200 women are expected to fill the hallways, classrooms, and cafeteria at the St. Ignace Middle School Saturday, May 3, for the first Woman's Perspective Expo. The event will highlight women's issues and include workshops, exhibits, shopping, and door prizes. Organizers are calling it a stop, shop, and learn event.

The expo begins at 10 a.m. and runs until 4 p.m. Admission is \$5.

Workshops will be offered every half hour on topics including financial planning, gardening, child custody issues, will and estate planning, gardening, make-up tips, medical issues, organization, and meal planning. Financial advisor Kimberly Medler will hold a workshop on money and power, and author Mary Seger, who wrote of "Invite Joy Into Your Life," is scheduled to lead a workshop on menopause.

About 25 exhibitors will have information and shopping booths including clothing, baskets, plants and gardening supplies, cosmetics, jewelry, golf supplies, and educational opportunities. Massages and manicures also will be available. Mackinac Animal Aid Association will have a food booth.

The expo is sponsored by *Woman's Perspective* magazine. Co-publishers Kathy Keaton and Susan Tamlyn-Massaway of St. Ignace are expecting to draw women from area counties including Mackinac, Luce, Chippewa, Otsego, Cheboygan, Emmet, and Charlevoix.

Attendees can register for prizes at each booth and event door prizes include a day at the spa, three hours of reorganization, a facial makeover, and writing of a will and testament.

Proceeds from the event will benefit the St. Ignace Parent Teacher Organization.

St. Ignace Students To Present Play Sunday



"Crabapple Academy" cast members include (front row, from left) Ivy Thurston, Angela Cena; (middle row) Shelby Peters, Megan LaRocque, Colleen St. Onge; (back row) Erin Barthelemy, Audrey Wyers, Lewis Steiner, Samantha Kitchen, Molly Dandona, Nickole Lanczak, and Dana Perry.

Rehearsing "Crabapple Academy: A Comedy" Monday, April 28, the LaSalle High School Players are preparing to perform the play for St. Ignace students Thursday and Friday. A performance is open to the public and begins at 2 p.m. Sunday, May 4. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$3 for students, and \$15 for families.

The actors portray rambunctious second grade students who give their substitute teacher a rough beginning. High school English teacher Kathy Schacht is directing the production that teaches a lesson about not following peer pressure. The young characters, who want to be popular and liked, surmise that means not

studying. Teacher Beatrice Quackenbush, played by Audrey Wyers, advises the second grade class, "Make yourselves into a class of winners. Be successful. Then it won't matter what anybody else thinks." The actors have been rehearsing lines since February and will perform four songs.

Mackinac Island

Artificial Wood Considered for Historic Buildings

By Ryan Schlehuber

A new artificial wood trim called Azek will be allowed to replace rotting wood trim around the exterior of Mackinac Island Public School. City planners are now mulling over the idea of allowing such material on historic buildings, as well.

After hearing an Azek Building Products representative explain how low maintenance and long-lasting his product is, Mackinac Island Planning Commission, at a special work session Tuesday, April 22, voted 7-0 to approve School Superintendent Roger Schrock's request to use the material to replace badly damaged trim all around the school building.

The material is said to last 10,000 years and needs only to be painted once.

The trim replacement project is expected to start June 1 and completed before school opens in the fall.

The school building was built in 1960, with a large gymnasium added in 2000.

Commissioner Michael Straus led the discussion into whether the city wants to allow such material to be used on its historic buildings.

"It all comes back to the Master Plan," he said. "What will the Island look like in 40 to 50 years? If all the siding looks like this, it would stay the same, and if people are happy with that, then so be it."

The city's nine-member master plan committee has yet to complete its revisions of the master plan, "a work in progress," said Kelly Bean, assistant to the mayor. The committee has split into smaller groups to review each section of the document. The committee doesn't plan to meet as a whole until each group is ready, and there is no timetable for that.

Azek is used on the Island more than people think, said city building inspector Dennis Dombroski after the meeting. It does not violate the ordinance, he said, because it is not considered siding, only trim pieces.

Mary Dufina is concerned that if the Island wants to be a historic resort and sell that image to its visitors, it must remain historically accurate.

"I know it's not a simple black



Roger Schrock, superintendent of Mackinac Island Public School, points out a rotted section of the building's trim (close up, inset) to school board and building and grounds members Trish Martin and Larry Rickley Jr. Thursday, April 24. The school received permission from the city's Planning Commission earlier that week to replace the building's trim with artificial wood. Planning Commission is now debating using the material on historic buildings, a move that would cut maintenance costs over the years.

and white thing," said Mrs. Dufina after the meeting, "but if we want to be historically accurate, we have to use genuine articles. I don't want historic buildings to just look authentic, I want it to be as authentic as it can be."

Mr. Dombroski believes buildings like the Stuart House museum should have traditional materials,



but older commercial buildings should be allowed some leeway.

"I think it's a good choice for commercial building owners because of cost issues," he said.

There is still a lot of work and discussion ahead to determine where to draw the line in preserving historic buildings with modern materials, said Mrs. Dufina. More work sessions about this topic, and similar issues, like stone and cement siding, will be planned.

Mr. Straus will invite a representative from the state's historic preservation office to attend the

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Old Blockhouse Renovation Is Approved at Clark Twp.

By Amy Polk

The reconstruction of the historic Long Island blockhouse, a distinctive structure that has stood at the West Entrance to Hessel for 98 years, was approved by Clark Township Zoning Board of Appeals at its April 22 meeting. The board also approved construction of an addition and attached garage to the Sandra Lee Leffel home on Beavertail Point, which lacked the proper setback from the water, according to zoning. The board granted a three-foot variance for the Leffel addition, which will be only 32 feet from the waterfront instead of the required 35 feet. The board did not receive any public comments about either proposed variance.

Zoning board member Mike Lofdahl said granting the Leffel variance will allow "substantial improvement to the structure and the environment of abutting uses" because it will not impede the use of the abutting properties, as stated by the ordinance. Mr. Lofdahl also cited undue hardship created on the lot by the narrowness of the parcel and drain field placement. The variance, approved unanimously, will allow construction of a 20-foot by 24-foot addition to the home and a 12-foot by 27-foot attached garage.

Mr. Lofdahl cited the same reasons for approving the blockhouse reconstruction.

Considering the building too costly to repair and too much of a landmark demolish, the building's owner, Ann Davis, sought permission to rebuild it on the existing foundation. The foundation, however, is closer to the water than zoning allows. The building now has 30-foot sideyard setbacks from the lakeshore, instead of the required 35 feet, but 50 feet between the front of the building and the lakeshore, and 600 feet between the back and the building to the east.

Representing Mrs. Davis at the April 22 meeting, Cedarville contractor Brian Kenney said the new structure will be constructed of white cedar and will closely resemble the old one. The only thing miss-

ing will be the fieldstone fireplace because the family decided it would be too expensive to build a new one.

An image of the blockhouse is on the Hessel billboard on M-134. Jutting out on the tip of a narrow peninsula on Long Island, the fort blockhouse profile can be seen in the West Entrance from the shore and by boaters in Lake Huron outside the island chain.

Mrs. Davis told *The St. Ignace News* the blockhouse was built around 1910, following construction of her family's Long Island lodge in 1901 and a cabin in 1905. She is a descendant of the Seiberling family of Ohio, which owned Long Island and established two family camps there. The island, which is exactly one mile long, was originally known by its American Indian name, Kauk-ge-nah-gwah ninishe, which means giant minnow, said Bonnie Mikkelsen, one of the Seiberling cousins.

One of the two Long Island family camps was Cedar Lodge at the west end of the island, and the blockhouse was considered part of the family camp and used to accommodate family members and guests who couldn't fit in the lodge and cabin.

The blockhouse had no indoor plumbing or electricity. It was a favorite of the boys in the family, Mrs. Davis said, and they enjoyed pretending they were protecting a fort. The structure once had built-in bunks upstairs for sleeping, Mrs. Mikkelsen said, while clothing trunks, other furnishings, and a dry sink were downstairs.

The building was driven off its foundation by ice in the late 1980s, during a period of high water levels. Only minor repairs have been performed over the years, but the ice damage dealt what Mrs. Davis called "the final fatal blow," and she has been seeking ways to keep the structure standing ever since. When those attempts failed, reconstruction seemed the last resort.

"At least we'll have that blockhouse form in the same place for hopefully another 98 years," Mrs. Davis said.



The 98-year-old Long Island Blockhouse at the West Entrance of Hessel will be demolished and rebuilt in the same style of log construction. The stone chimney will not be rebuilt, but the distinctive profile of the building will remain as it has for nearly a century. (Photograph by Joe Eger)