

Dear Sparta Parents, Students, Staff and Community,

I am writing this to express my sincere apology for the transportation system failure. There is no excuse that can be made for what occurred. In addition to bussing, I want to also apologize for not being able to reply to all of the emails, phone calls, and messages received the past few days. I will do my best to continue contacting everyone as time permits.

As a school district we have gone through many changes throughout the years. This year's change back to separate bus runs for secondary and elementary students while sharing transportation services with Cedar Springs was obviously much more complicated than ever anticipated. It serves no purpose to make excuses or point fingers in assigning blame as that will not correct the mistakes of this week. Moving forward, we have to fix the system, learn from mistakes made, and make every effort to regain your confidence.

Many people have asked how this could have occurred. The following facts list events leading up to the failure, but are **not an excuse** for the system breakdown:

1. Decision to move back to separate runs for elementary and secondary runs which were used prior to going to a single bus run six years ago.
2. Sharing transportation services with Cedar Springs as a part of a plan of collaboration encouraged by the State.
3. Contracting for bus driving services due to the contractual restraints of the union contract to make it possible to share services.
4. Implementing new transportation software which was to communicate with our existing PowerSchool/student data base. The information transfer necessary for the system to work was not available until the end of August. This did not allow for confirming if student data was correct before establishing routes, pick-ups, and drop-offs. Some information (bus numbers and times) which went out to parents on postcards was incorrect.
5. The transportation phone system at the bus garage could not handle the volume of calls so phones continued to ring when lines were in use. This caused parents to think phones were not being answered.
6. Many changes for pick-ups or drop-offs were being received but not put into the system.
7. We had difficulty inputting correct information for our migrant students.
8. On Tuesday busses returning in the afternoon from the ISD we delayed for an hour due to a traffic accident. This caused all busses to be late leaving the High School in the afternoon, which in turn backed up their arrival at Ridgeview and Appleview.
9. Communication was not given to parents about the delays.
10. Students were not placed on the correct busses for their afternoon drop-offs.

Again, this information is being provided simply to explain why the problems happened. They are by no means excusing the failure of the transportation system. Since Tuesday we have been doing everything in our power to correct the mistakes. It is important to mention that the contracting for bus driving services, referred to by many as privatization, did not cause this failure. The fact is with the exception of two, all drivers drove for Sparta last year.

This is what is being done immediately to correct the transportation system:

1. Each route is being manually checked by individual student to confirm the correct assignments for both pick-ups and drop offs.
2. Once we know all information is correct, we will adjust routes and times accordingly. This is done every year after the start of school. It will also have to be done at the end of October when our migrant students leave.
3. We have established drop-off and pick-up plans at each building to make them more efficient.

We know that it is important to learn from our mistakes. The number one concern is the lack of **communication**. Not knowing magnified the problems beginning with the summer notification process to the events of last Tuesday. We will be implementing a district wide alert system as soon as possible to improve communication with parents. This will also be beneficial any time during the year such as for winter weather delays and cancellations. Additionally, we will make better use of our web page in posting information as it occurs.

Again, I want to apologize for the transportation failure and the anxiety it caused parents and students. My commitment to you is to correct these mistakes and provide a better means of communication now and throughout the year.

Thank You,

Kent Swinson
Superintendent
Sparta Area Schools