

Principal Update

- SMART Boards have been delivered and will be put into classrooms by the end of the year; additional 2 boards will be in 2nd week of November
- Additional flat screens have been purchased and will in various common rooms that can be hooked up to additional technology in the rooms
- Pictures are in – retakes are Nov. 14th. If you want to do retakes, send your student with their pictures on Nov. 14th. Trotter will be onsite doing the re-takes. Anyone can do re-takes, even if you didn't do pictures the first time around.
- Update on the irrigation system for the garden: we are on the list of 10 schools in the district to receive funding from the district to have an irrigation system installed. The list of schools is with Dr. Adams for approval. We do not anticipate approval before spring.
- Library update – Mrs. Hatcher, the new librarian for this school year. We share her with Oak Hill. She is new to the position, she is working with Ms. Moll for training and learning about the role. She is receiving PD from the district and additional help from Ms. Moll. The district doesn't hire librarian's, they hire library aides. We have her 2.5 days/week.
- American Cricket association of STL is coming to campus and going to come Nov. 16th and teach cricket to students. In the spring we hope they will return and be able to go outside and provide opportunity for kids to play. (update from Mr. Narrow)
- Thank you everyone for flexibility on Voting Day! Thanks for sharing comments and concerns, those comments have been shared with the district and those who make decisions about polling places. Appreciate the feedback.

Volunteer Updates

- October was a busy, busy month!!! Thank you to everyone who took part in our many volunteer opportunities:
 - Beautification day – over 50 volunteers
 - We are tentatively scheduling Dec. 8th to clean up leaves around the campus. More to come on this.
 - Taco Bar, Soup, Chili was a big hit! Thank you to everyone!
 - Scholastic Book Fair was a HUGE success (on VIP day \$8000.00 worth of merchandise was sold!!). From the week-long event, the school will receive 5800 scholastic dollars!!
 - Trunk or Treat – good times despite the weather! Amazing Trunks this year!!
 - Don't' forget to fill out volunteer form and turn them in. The forms need to be filled out every 2 years.
- **Bottle Cap Drive** - The committee is working with the Student Council to schedule a time to sort and weigh the bottle caps. The committee believes we have collected the necessary 200lbs needed for our bench. Until we have confirmed our needed, weight, we will continue to collect bottle caps in the crate at the front door of the school. Any overage will go to Columbia, our sister school.

- A garden bed in the garden is now home to several decomposing pumpkins! If you would like to watch your jack-o-lantern turn to mush over the course of the fall/winter, bring them in and put them in the Pumpkin Graveyard!
- **Canned food drive will start on Nov. 12 and run through Dec. 14th.** We are having a friendly competition with Kennard this year. Just to let you know, last year, they had almost double the weight of canned goods than what we had. So, we have our work cut out for us. The Principal of the losing school must wear the spirit clothes of the winning school!!
- At our January meeting we will have a uniform exchange. If you have uniforms to donate, bag them up and bring them to the January PTO meeting for the exchange!
- If you don't already have the Shoparoo Ap on your phone, download it today! You can take pictures of grocery or other shopping receipts and submit (I see many of you at Target each week – Target receipts can earn you points too – so get the ap, scan your receipts and let's continue to raise money for our school). A certain amount of money goes to the school from all the receipts we submit.
- A group has been formed to discuss ways that we can become greener. Karen Hamon is leading this group, contact her if interested in getting involved.

Budget Update:

- **The Fund Drive** started on Oct. 1st and we exceeded our goal for the first month, with over \$15,000 in contributions!!! Way to go Dragons!! To date, we're almost at \$16,000, over 60% of goal. We still have a way to go to get to our goal of \$25,000 – so let's keep pushing!!! Remember that all contributions are tax deductible and don't forget to check with your employer if they will do a matching gifts contribution for any donations!
- Music Instruments have been purchased
- SMART boards for Kindergarten will be here mid-Nov
- \$1000 for teacher conferences & support is part of the budget and Mr. Thomas is continuing to work with teachers to be able to utilize that money for PD opportunities.
- If you've donated to the Fund Drive, you will receive a thank you letter, via email (or mail if you don't have email). That letter is your tax donation receipt – so save that for tax time!

First Student and SLPS Representatives to discuss bus-related issues this school year. Please see notes below from Susan Buchner Plank – thank you Susan for taking such good notes and letting me include in the meeting notes.

Overall

Toyin Akinola, SLPS Transportation Director, shared that she believes it has been a rough year. She explained that SLPS even has a new Contract Liaison from First Student due to the problems.

Communication from SLPS

We explained our frustration with learning of Mallinckrodt's re-route on the day it happened. Ms. Akinola sincerely apologized for the late notice and took full blame. The re-route happened due to a request made from a Mallinckrodt parent. It was meant to fix late arriving buses. It was pushed out and the communication wasn't there. Ms. Akinola explained that she has learned a lot from this and is reaching out the SLPS Public Relations to get ideas on how to do better.

Communication to First Student

Many of you have experienced long wait times when you have called First Student looking for a bus or child. We were told that First Student is aware of their phone system malfunctioning and has asked their provider to investigate. They say it is a high priority item and hope to have it fixed ASAP. Ms. Akinola asks parents to call her office (if it's before 4:45) if your wait time is more than 10 minutes. One of her team members will try to help. Their number is (314) 633-5107.

- Because of the issues with the phone systems, First Student is partnering with Spectrum to conduct a full assessment of the system and Spectrum will be improving the phone systems asap. They indicated this was high priority.

Additional communication information

All bus drivers have radios, but they are not all on the same channel. They can speak to dispatch with the radios. Drivers might have cell phones but are under strict orders to not use them while driving. If a driver is using the phone while driving, please contact Ms. Akinola.

Bus Break Downs

All representatives confirmed that there have been more breakdowns this year than in the past. They explained that a lot of the buses have an environmentally friendly fuel system to comply with emission regulations. I may not get this explanation exactly right, but diesel fuel used needs to be burned off, but this requires going at highway speeds. Our routes are in the city where buses can't get to these speeds. Once they figured out that this was the cause of the problem, the mechanics at the depots now clean the buses and take them on highways in the off hours to prevent the breakdowns. There are new buses coming; about 30 in December/January.

- Due to high number of breakdowns, First Student has connected with the bus manufacturer to understand more about the bus systems and get to root cause of issues.
- They have also re-trained drivers to better understand the alarms on the bus and how to properly manage the alerts that they receive. Overtime, drivers are becoming more educated with alert systems.

Bus Driver Manifesto

I asked First Student's reps to tell us about what information drivers have with them on the bus since parents reported drivers getting lost or not knowing which kids get off at which stops. Every morning they get on the bus with their route sheets (paper sheets that get updated every few weeks) and a list of students by stop. We learned that it was only very recent that they started carrying a list of students older than 2nd grade. This has happened because Ms. Akinola requested it. (Honestly – that they didn't have all names before shocked me.) The question was asked, why are you using paper sheets – seems wasteful and inefficient? We learned that in the future (no time frame given) there will be electronic tablets in the buses that can be updated quickly. One issue they discovered is that bus drivers weren't giving feedback to dispatch when they found their routes were wrong or inefficient. They would just drive a different way and then substitute drivers would take the wrong route because it was never updated. They have asked drivers to take ownership and give feedback.

Bus Tracking

The tool SLPS has given us to track buses is called EduTracker. It is not an app but a web page. It uses Google Maps to display the bus. There was a whole lot of technical talk around this and I didn't really understand it all, but we were given the impression that it is the best SLPS could get. They are talking to the company about developing an app. This ability to track was all done (paid for/provided) by SLPS, not First Student. I don't know why we can't see First Student's routing system. There could be a lot of reasons but one potentially obvious one is there is a cost involved. I think it is best that we remember that while EduTracker is not perfect, it is something. It is more than we had one

year ago. If we waited for it to work perfect or for SLPS to have the money to get something better, we would have nothing at all. It isn't uncommon for companies (or organizations like SLPS) to deploy an imperfect solution with improvements to come in upgrades. I am not an IT expert so there may be some that can explain this better, but we need to keep perspective on it. If you have issues like your child is not in system, I advise you email Ms. Akinola.

- There are many technologies & systems that go into routing the busses, all this technology is new this year.
 - Parent Question: Is there something mobile that could be used?
 - Answer: It is more complicated than it might seem. We cannot do this right now.
 - Parent Question: Even when parents re-refresh, the bus on the tracker doesn't show up even close to where the bus is at.
 - Answer: Recently it was discovered that the tracker has a 5-minute delay due to using two different mapping systems (Google Maps and Bing Maps) and they are not talking to each other (this is my non-technical explanation of the situation). Programmers are looking at this issue.
 - Parent Question: Is it possible to see the route that the bus is supposed to be following?
 - Answer: Not right now.
 - Parent Question: Can we put tablets on the bus?
 - Answer: That is newer technology, that we don't have yet.

Bus Driver Behavior

Some parents had complaints of bus driver behavior. We learned that every bus has video and audio recording units that should capture this. If you have a question about an event or incident, contact Ms. Akinola and ask her to review the video. I believe parents are not allowed to view these videos but SLPS and Mr. Thomas can see them. The question was asked if there was a way that parents can rate drivers (think Uber). The answer is no. First Student is struggling to keep drivers (let alone good ones) and you see driver shortages across the board, so this isn't unique to them, but they also admitted that they can improve their culture. I recommend that if you have a great driver who is going above and beyond, you let her/him know and then you send an email to Ms. Akinola who will pass it on.

- Parent Question: What is the process for discipline if needed on the bus?
 - Answer: Drivers will do a write-up, connect with a First Student supervisor, connect with school principal to address the situation, first Student cannot suspend students from the bus.

Contact info

Toyin.Akinola@slps.org
(314) 633-5107

Contact First Student Routing Department at 314-389-2202 for bus schedules. (6:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.)

For issues with the '1000' series route numbers, please contact 314-772-3184. (5:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.)

For issues with the '2000' series route numbers, please contact 314-389-1111, ext 1. (5:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.)