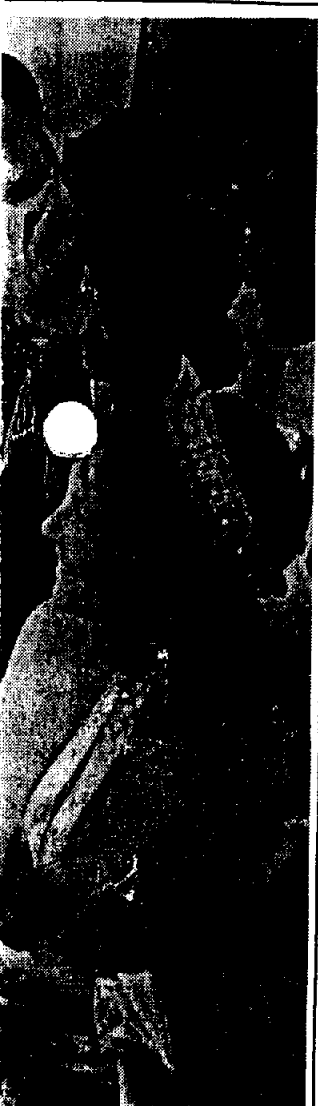


Times Chronicle

FRIDAY, JUNE 13, 1997

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Anne Fisher visited fifth graders, shown above, at the Reading School. (Dr. Young photo)

Many unhappy over plans

Parents, administrators discuss bus situation

By BRIAN MURPHY

READING - Parents of Birch Meadow children turned out in droves Wednesday night in search of answers as to why their child was among the 56 kindergarten students this year bussed across town to the Barrows School, why their kid who could simply walk the 3/10 of a mile to Birchie will now have to leave his or her neighborhood and board a bus bound for a more distant school.

They met with Richard

Davidson veteran 10 year Principal of Birch Meadow, and Dr. Harry Harutunian, Superintendent of Schools, who together had the difficult task of trying to explain why bussing Reading's kindergartners had always been done, that despite all the protesting done by parents it would continue to be this way for the next three years, but during that time a new committee charged with finding a long range solution would be formed and hopefully put an end to the bussing crisis with a new plan of

restricting. Although Davidson and Harutunian came prepared with an 11 point agenda of concerns gathered from phone calls and a petition from the parents of redistricted kindergartners, order soon dissolved among a sea of questions and frustration.

"Does the redistricting of kindergarten students to Barrows for 1997-98 mean that my child will be permanently redistricted to Barrows?" said

Continued on Page 2

Mosquito spraying starts Tuesday

READING - The Eastern Middlesex Mosquito Control Project will be controlling mosquitoes using truck-mounted aerosol sprayers in Reading on Tuesday, June 17, Wednesday, June 18, and if necessary again on Thursday, June 19. Each day the spraying will take place between dusk and 11:30 pm.

The project uses a spray for-

mulation comprised of the pesticide resmethrin and soybean oil to control the insects. Because mosquitoes are susceptible to resmethrin, they can be controlled using low application rates which are safe for people and their pets. If residents see a spray truck approaching, they are advised to go indoors for a couple of minutes while the

spray dissipates. Beekeepers do not need to take any special precautions since the spraying does not begin until dusk.

If residents have any questions related to the spraying or any questions on mosquitoes, call the Eastern Middlesex Mosquito Control Project at 617-899-5730.

am for

'Charter-Chowder Day' is Sunday

Bussing...

Continued from Page 1

Davidson, reading from the agenda. "The answer is no."

But he continued, "In the past years, the students have always come back. We cannot say that for sure this year until we go through the process of setting up a redistricting committee."

For the past 25 to 30 years, said Davidson, kindergartners have been bussed to schools outside their own neighborhood to prevent overcrowding at one school and fill vacancies at other elementary schools. Though the tradition of doing so has been longstanding, according to Davidson, a new goal of redistricting, as conceived by Harutunian, would be put in place to eliminate the problem.

Harutunian, however, stated that the redistricting of an entire town is a "Reading issue, not a Birch Meadow issue." Said Harutunian, "A permanent plan of enrollment should not be put on a Superintendent. It is simply too great a responsibility." Harutunian instead informed parents that a redistricting committee, comprised of parents, teachers and principals from all four elementary schools, includ-

ing some community members outside the school system, would be community elected and charged with finding permanent solutions over the next three years.

In the meantime, however, the Birch Meadow principal assured parents that the old system of bussing kindergartners would continue. "Nothing the parents say tonight will change my decision for next year," said Davidson. How the old system decides who will be bussed is simple, according to Davidson - a determination that Birch Meadow had a surplus of 56 students was made this year, and those 56 incoming students to be moved were those who are geographically closest to Barrows.

But what happened this year was that a disproportionately large number of students had to be bussed (only 10 were moved last year), and some parents who live within walking distance of the school will see their children bussed across town, while other kids who were to be bussed to Birch Meadow anyway will continue to go there simply because they are further from Barrows.

And the vast majority of parents in attendance on Wednesday night did not agree with the old logic, arguing that bussing children simply on their proximity to a less vacant school is unfair and arbitrary. "Why wasn't this kindergarten redistricting a community decision?" asked one parent. "It's not fair that you (Davidson) should have the authority to do this."

Another added, "this strikes me as a unilateral decision that was shoved down our throats. That's not how my town operates."

Other parents offered their own suggestions on how to solve the bussing problem and keep kids going to schools in their own neighborhoods. One parent suggested that to be fairest a circle with Birch Meadow as its center should be drawn, and kids within that circle would be allowed to attend kindergarten there. Another father told the assembly that he had driven Davidson's proposed bus routes and found that they took 40 percent longer than simply taking kindergartners who are already being bussed to Birch Meadow all the way to Barrows.

Annie Sgroi, also a Reading parent, suggested that a couple of rooms at the nearby High School could be renovated to temporarily accommodate the 56 students. Harutunian dis-

agreed, however. "The rooms are too small, about 780-820 square feet, and the state requires 1100 square feet for kindergarten classrooms." Harutunian also added that accessing larger spaces at the High School would require extensive renovations at far too high a cost.

Still other parents argued that the bussing plan smacks a favoritism, that some students were not chosen to be bussed because they were living in new, expensive developments in town, a charge that Davidson vehemently denied. "That's absolutely not true," said Davidson.

In order to accommodate additional students at Barrows, two portables currently in use at ~~Birch Meadow~~ will be moved within the next three weeks at a cost of \$57,000. Harutunian did note, however, that money has already been allocated in the budget for such a move and that were the portables to be moved to nearby Killam, as some suggested, the increase in students there (up over 700) would warrant the hiring of a Vice Principal commanding a \$55,000 a year salary, payable by the taxpayers of Reading.

So it appears for the next three years, or at least until a long range plan of redistricting is in place, kindergartners and their parents will have to cope

A **HUMPTY DUMPTY SCHOOL** **1**
B
C **Don't**
1 **Miss** **2**
3

