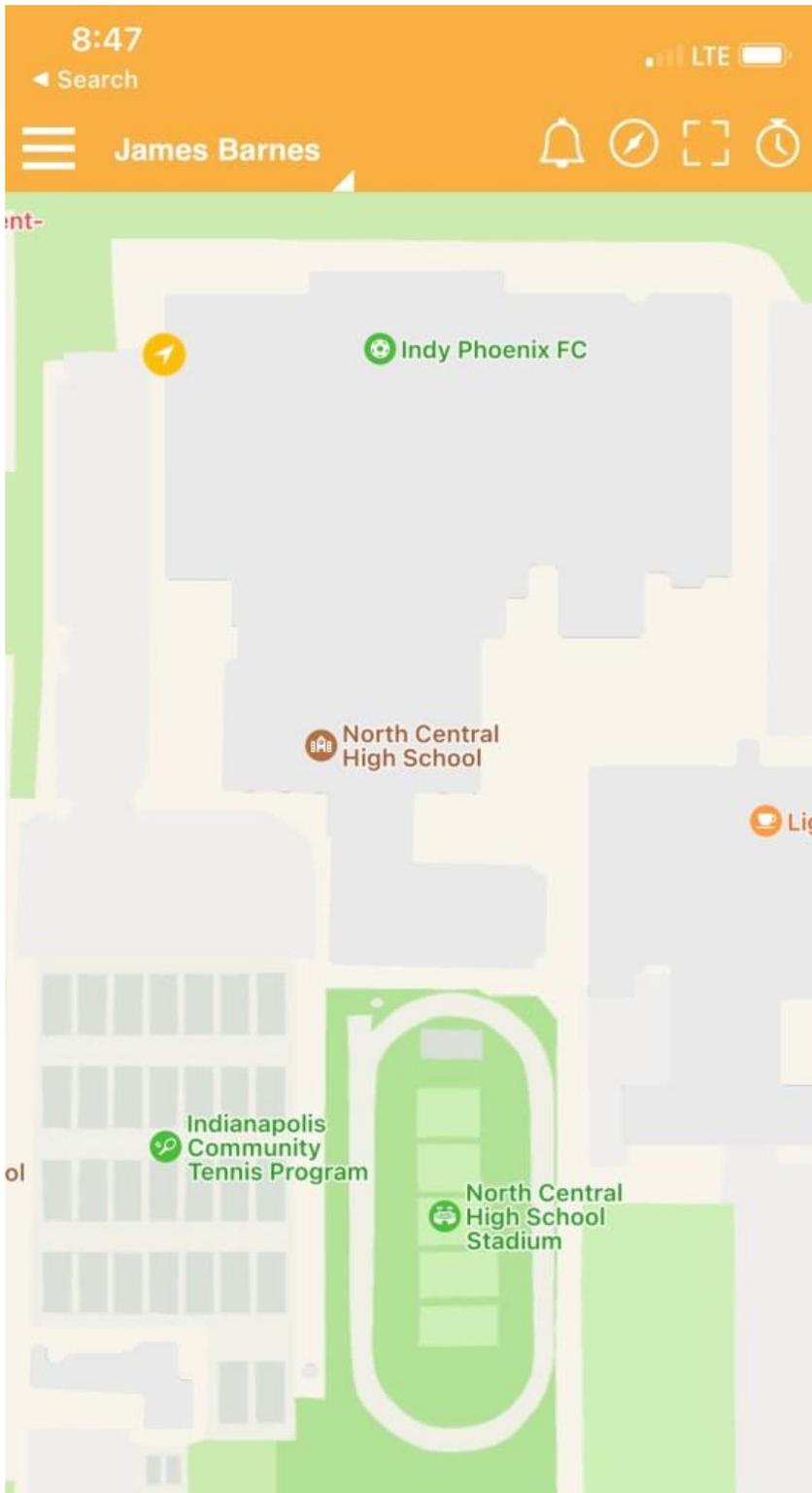




Washington Township Schedules Transportation Meeting to Address Parents' Concerns

August 11, 2022 by Educator Barnes

My twin sons have attended school in Washington Township since kindergarten and are now in sixth grade. As an educator, I do not expect the bus to be on time during the first few days of school. During the first week of school, everything is delayed. Teachers know lunch might start and end late. Electives teachers might not be ready to dismiss on time. Getting all the



students to the right cars at dismissal will take longer than usual. Fortunately, most of those items get rectified; however, transportation issues seem to be recurring. This school year, the frustration bubbled over among parents.

My children's middle school bus arrived 30 minutes late on the first day of school. Washington Township uses the Here Comes the Bus app. The app showed that the bus (white arrow in the yellow circle) was at North Central High School at 8:47; my sons' pick-up time is 8:44 a.m. Washington Township extends from the NW side of Indy to the NE side. North Central is in the middle. Being an NW side family, I knew the bus would be really late when I saw it was still at the high school. When the bus driver arrived, she was kind. She apologized for the delay and explained that the earlier bus routes were behind schedule. She waved and wished us a nice day.

Although we wished the bus was on time, we understood this was a possibility and appreciated the bus driver's kindness and explanation. However, I was disappointed that we didn't receive communication from the district. Typically, if the bus is behind, we receive a message informing us. Our account is set up to receive messages via email and text on our

landline and cell phones. There wasn't a peep. However, there was a lot of noise online, especially in the Nextdoor Neighborhood app.

Most of the time, the Nextdoor neighborhood app is a soap opera with all types of foolery, silly drama, and confusing happenings. I still don't know if the same chicken is escaping the coop or if multiple chickens are escaping from different locations. I also don't know if the neighbor who threatened to fry the chicken if a chicken wandered onto his property actually succeeded. Maybe one day, I'll find out.

Sometimes there is information that is interesting to follow. Once you get past the bickering in the comments, you learn that some Washington Twp parents have had no transportation issues, and some have. The ones who have had issues feel as if they can't get their issues resolved. Some of those parents shared that it isn't about this being the start of the school year because they have had issues for at least as long as the previous school year.

I believe them. Last school year, almost every other week, we would receive a phone call saying the bus was running late. On one hand, I knew my sons would not be counted as tardy because they arrived on a school bus, but on the other hand, I didn't want my sons getting a late start to the school day because that can impact the rest of their day. Additionally, telling parents who drive their kids to school to get them there on time while failing to get students to school on time who ride the bus seems like hypocrisy.

Last week, during the first week of school, one parent even asked other parents for their transportation stories.

I need my neighbors. I am going to file a formal complaint against the Washington township transportation department, the head of transportation, and that rude lady that answers the phone for the transportation department. I need some of my neighbors who would be willing to write a statement of their interactions with said parties. I have had nothing but trouble since the very beginning of last year. I've lost wages, time etc. I'm sure many of my neighbors have had a similar experience and would like to see some change.

One parent replied and mentioned there was a "rude lady that answers the phone for the transportation department," and another parent called the transportation department "rude af."

During that same week, Washington Township provided a bus transportation update:

The district recently implemented rerouting. The routing system will continue to change during the first two weeks of school. Bus stop times, bus numbers, and bus stop locations may change to balance school bus ridership throughout the district.

We encourage families to check Skyward daily to make sure that they have reviewed their school bus information for any changes.

All kindergarten students must be with a parent/guardian at the bus stop in the morning and met at the bus stop in the afternoon. If a parent/guardian is not at the bus stop in the afternoon, the kindergarten student will be taken back to their school.

Please be at your bus stop 10 minutes before your assigned pickup time each morning.

Currently, the Here Comes the Bus app is not working correctly. We are in communications with the software vendor and will let families know when it is fixed.

We appreciate your patience as we continue with significant driver shortages as well as bus tier changes, school start and end time changes, and re-routing in the district. These situations will affect some bus timeliness.

Bus drivers are still needed. If you know anyone who is interested in driving a bus for WTS, please share the link provided under the Human Resources section below.

Due to road construction, building construction, and traffic congestion buses may run behind from time to time.

Reminder, if your student doesn't ride a WTS bus for at least two weeks, they will be removed as a bus rider in our system.

If a family is requesting their student to change from a car rider to a bus rider, routing may take up to two weeks for the change to be effective in our system.

If you need to contact Transportation please call 317-254-5510 between the hours of 10 am - 2 pm.

The district provided a list of their limitations and issues out of their control, such as road construction.

As concerns grew among parents, including parents threatening to attend the board meeting, the district finally decided to hold a meeting addressing transportation concerns.

The message sent to parents yesterday, included in part below, started with what was missing from the previous message: an apology.

Back-to-School Transportation Webinar Opportunity for Washington Township Families

Your voices are being heard and we are striving for improvement.

We want to begin by apologizing for the transportation concerns that you may have experienced during the start of the year. We have heard your voices and are working on improvement areas.

We want to remind families about an additional tool, along with Skyward, that provides direct access to finding your child's transportation routing information: [Family Bus VersaTrans Information Look-Up](#).

A student or parent can log in as "guest" with the password "guest" and look up their information directly in VersaTrans (Transportation Routing Software) eliminating a layer of complexity and confusion.

Due to concerns still existing after the first few days of school, we want to extend an opportunity for families to receive information and ask questions specific to transportation. As we continue to work through routing and staffing issues, we are offering the following webinar opportunity for families. A presentation will be given to update attendees on critical information from the WT Transportation Office, and a panel will field questions.

Washington Twp parent Samantha Franklin said, "The issue bigger than transportation is the rudeness that I received when I called the office ... Bus drivers, nurses, after-school staff, cafeteria workers can make or break a district."

Hopefully, tonight's meeting will include an explicit apology for rude communication and a path forward. Parents understand that many districts are struggling to find bus drivers. However, kindness, care, and concern should always be evident, even amid struggles.

Washington Township sent families information to register in advance for the meeting which will take place on Zoom on Thursday, August 11 from 6:00-7:30 p.m.