

Prepared Notes for Board Meeting – Impact Award
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The impact award was created a few years back as a way for the Board of Education to honor and recognize an employee for exemplary work, for going above and beyond the call of duty.

As I contemplated the job that Mr. George Sontag and his department has done over the years, there have been plenty of instances of “above and beyond” but rather than trying to single one or two of them out, I wanted to talk about the quiet competence that defines the Worthington Schools transportation department.

How many folks here have had the kind of job where the only time you get noticed is when you screw up? Such is life for the transportation department.

Did you know that the department is responsible for transporting 4651 students each day for a total of 4800 miles? Did you know that when you throw in field trips and sporting events, the 67 regular drivers drive almost a million miles a year, and they do so with no fanfare, no drama and no headlines, just a bunch of caring, competent professionals who get the job done, day in and day out.

But it’s more than that. As George Joseph will remind us every chance he gets, most school bus drivers in Worthington take the time to get to know the kids and the families they serve. We are required by state law to have a statement prohibiting bullying on School Buses but there is a world of difference between prohibiting something and enforcing that prohibition. Our bus drivers came together and declared our buses will be “no bullying zones”, meaning that bullying will not be tolerated on their bus. As a result, such incidents have declined in our community and hopefully, between programs like this, one leg at a time and the character education program we’ll hear about this evening, such incidents will soon be history in our district.

I want to just take a moment to quote, with permission, from the blog of the principal of Granby Elementary School, Patti Schlaegel. She wrote a series of anecdotes about George, but the one that hit home with me went like this:

One evening, I received a voicemail on my cell phone from George Sontag regarding one of our Gators. I returned his call, he stepped away from a dinner gathering at a restaurant, and he filled me in. Her bus driver had reported that this consistently happy-go-lucky child was visibly upset when getting off the bus that day. George wanted to make me aware and I was able to follow up that evening with a phone call to a parent and an opportunity to talk to this student to find out what happened and make sure that she was okay.

Our bus drivers make a difference in the everyday world that Worthington's kids live in.

Our Board generally only hears from Mr. Sontag when he wants to buy new school buses, but I'm really pleased he's made an exception in this case. At this time, I'd like to call up Mr. George Sontag and any bus drivers that happen to be in the audience this evening for the purposes of presenting them with the staff impact award.