

# Pownal School Board member disagrees with busing decision

KEITH WHITCOMB JR., Staff Writer  
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POWNAL — Pownal School Board member Marilyn Gardner said Friday that she disagrees with the board's decision to continue operating its own bus service instead of hiring an outside company.

The matter was discussed in an executive session Wednesday by the school board. Board member Gudrun Hutchins said the school district's business manager, Richard Pembroke, had gathered quotes from two private busing contractors. Because the quotes were just to get a sense of potential costs and not official bids, the matter could be discussed under executive session. She said the decision to do so was made because the discussion involved personnel.

Gardner said that by switching to a private bus company instead of using its own operation, the school could save a substantial amount on its transportation budget. She would not give the amount of money, because it was discussed in an executive session.

Gardner said the school currently has \$27,000 in its bus sinking fund to purchase vehicles, which would not be needed if it sold its buses to a contractor and used a contractor's services.

According to a draft of the 2010 fiscal year's budget, Pownal Elementary has budgeted \$132,549 for the bus operation. The school gets \$48,037 in state aid for transportation.

Gardner said transportation for field trips, special education and after-school programs are accounted for in other line items. According to the 2010 fiscal year budget, the school has budgeted \$5,000 for special education transportation, for which it uses smaller vans and private contractors.

Board Chairwoman Cynthia Brownell said the board didn't have enough information to make the change from its own busing system to a contracting company. She said the school would still get state aid for transportation, but it is not clear what would happen to the school's bus drivers. The school currently possesses four regular buses, one special needs bus, and one older bus it uses as a spare. The school employs four full-time bus drivers and one substitute.

Brownell said the current drivers have served the school well, and she believes it would be desirable if they kept their jobs. She added that a switch would not necessarily save as much as Gardner has suggested. "Without having the complete facts, we are not ready to give up our buses," Brownell said.

Cindy Dufour, operations manager for Dufour Bus Co., a busing company that supplies transportation for numerous area schools, including Mount Anthony Union High School in Bennington, said Dufour has offered quotes to Pownal Elementary in the past and has been the cheapest. She declined to give dollar amounts.

Hutchins agreed with Brownell, saying that if any savings were to be had, there might be a risk in giving up the bus system. "Once you sell the busses, you can't go back, so we would want to look at this very carefully," she said Friday.

Contact Keith Whitcomb at [kwhitcomb@benningtonbanner.com](mailto:kwhitcomb@benningtonbanner.com).