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Walkers want to use hallways again, parents call driveway closing inconvenient but officials cite student safety concerns

Closing the south driveway between the elementary and middle schools and shutting the middle-school hallways to walkers and runners prompted several residents on Oct. 12 to ask the Cedar Grove-Belgium School Board to re-open both after school hours.

Elementary Principal Craig Gunderson said the driveway barrier between the two schools has made it much safer for students getting on and off buses or being picked up by parents. They can cross the street without worrying about getting hit by a car.

It also makes it easier and safer for teachers and students to use the practice field for physical education classes, he said.

However, a major traffic jam during a recent volleyball tournament and the inconvenience of having to go to two driveways to pick up students in different schools from after-school activities prompted parents to suggest the driveway be opened to through traffic after school hours.

“We love the safety for bus schedules, but can it (the through driveway) be used after school?” resident Jennifer Meerdink asked. “It was chaos during the volleyball tournament.”

If the barrier stays, better signs are needed, said Jill Scholton, an architect who helped design the recent middle-school renovation and additions to all three schools.

“The whole idea was to have one main campus so everybody could get from one school to another,” Scholton said. “At the least, we need better signage.”

The large marquee sign on Union Avenue implies that is the main entrance, she said, but it ends just before the middle school with no clear direction on how to get to the other buildings.

Board President Jim Lautenschlaeger said the barriers are a temporary, relatively inexpensive solution to the traffic hazard at the elementary school.

“We spent $5,000 on the railings to find out if they work,” he said. “It definitely helps as far as buses and parent drop-off and pick-up, but we also know it made a parking fiasco at the tournament.

“We also heard from the fire department wanting to know if they can get through if there is a fire. Whether it will be up next year, I don’t know. We like getting your feedback.”

Signs can be posted to direct people to the various schools, Supt. Steve Shaw said.

The drive off Union Avenue now only provides access to the elementary school.

To reach the high school and middle school, the north driveway off Main Street or the Second Street entrance must be used.

The parents also want to be able to walk and run through the long middle-school hallways. The elementary and middle schools have been locked after school hours after a man was found wandering in the hallways.

“We had a problem with a person roaming the hallways, and we don’t know if that’s gone away yet,” Shaw said. “I was told by the sheriff’s department to lock the schools down.”

“We’re asking that he’s dealt with not us,” Meerdink said. “We’re the eyes and ears in the building, and we help keep it safe. We’re asking to use it when students aren’t there, or if they are there, we can watch them.”

The women said they appreciate that the high school is open, but the hallways are not as conducive for running because of the many turns.

The middle school is open for gym and swim on Wednesday nights, but the hallways are gated shut.

The gates were put up because kids were often running in the hallways during gym and swim, Shaw said.

“You act responsibly with your children, but not everyone does,” Middle School Principal Jeanne Courneene said.

Shaw said the district could use money from community funds, which are not subject to state tax levy limits, to hire a supervisor to watch the hallways if they are opened again.

A supervisor has been hired to patrol the commons area during gym and swim.

The issue was scheduled to be discussed Wednesday, Oct. 19, by the School Board. The board also was to review the budget and set the tax levy.