

**Re: CKPG News Interview Request**

Darleen Patterson <DPatterson@sd57.bc.ca>

Tue 22/11/2022 10:37 AM

To: Nathan Jordan <Nathan.Jordan@pattisonmedia.com>

Cc: Greg Fry <greg.fry@pattisonmedia.com>; Cindy Heitman <CHeitman@sd57.bc.ca>; Lee Karpenko <LKarpenko@sd57.bc.ca>

Hi Nathan

I thought I would provide some background which might help with your story.

Due to the COVID19 pandemic, SD57 did not enter into a transportation contract tender process when the Diversified Transportation contract initially expired, the district extended that contract for a number of years to meet the needs of students. During the last contract extension year Diversified was provided with notice that SD57 would be engaging in a transportation contract tender process for the new school year. That last year proved to be very challenging as Diversified often had driver absences and was combining and cancelling routes regularly without notification to the district.

In November 2021 the district sent out a letter inviting Canadian transportation companies to submit a written expression of interest to participate in a prequalification process to identify qualified contractors to bid on a Student Transportation Services contract. In addition to the companies specifically invited to participate the invitation was also posted to BC BID.

The district received responses back from a number of transportation companies indicating challenges primarily around the timing of the contract award and the ability of the company to procure a fleet due to COVID related vehicle manufacturing shortages. In response to this the district moved forward the contract award timeline. In December one company withdrew their expression of interest.

In December 2021 the district sent out Pre-Qualification requirements to the companies having expressed an interest in the process. In January another company withdrew from the process. During January staff responded to Q&A documents from both proponents. By the deadline pre-qualification documents were received from only one company another submitted when reminded of the timeline. Early February staff reviewed and scored the pre-qualification submissions.

The district received final bid submissions in early March. Staff reviewed the tender, interviewed the proponents and contracted references. The contract was awarded by Board motion to First Student at the end of March 2022. The contract award was for eight years.

There is no local solution for bussing contracts. Although Diversified Transportation used to be a locally owned company, it is part of Pacific Western Transportation which was recently acquired by Student Transportation America/Student Transportation Canada.

The Board has not changed their expectations for student transportation in the district and expects that students are transported in accordance with the student transportation policy.

The district has had regular and repeated communication with the transportation contractor to discuss concerns around when and how information being provided by them to families. Message and tone matter. The contract the district has with First Student requires that they supply and maintain a suitable number of buses and personnel as are required to fulfill the District's needs for transportation services - this is clearly not the case currently. SD57 senior staff are reviewing the contract in light of the districts concern regarding the current inability of the contractor to meet the needs of SD57's students and families.

In response to other questions that you had regarding driver shortages, although we understand from our experience with Diversified last spring that drivers nationwide are in short supply, the shortage at First Student was not brought to the districts attention until the week before the start of school and was

compounded by additional drivers leaving the contractor that weekend. SD57 was aware of First Student driver recruitment that was happening in the region, however prior to the first week of school the focus from First Student was on the lack of licensed fleet.

Fist Student invoices the district for kilometers driven, if less kilometers are being operated by the contractor the invoices will be less than the total contract awarded by the district.

The district has put a number of practices in place to deal with the shortfalls of the student transportation contractor including providing allowances where transportation has consistently been cancelled and recently, through parent feedback, establishing the ability for bussing schools to provide extended supervision for drop-off and pick-up to accommodate parents more easily. This is not a solution and SD57 staff continue to work with the contractor to improve service.

Happy to discuss this with you.

Darleen

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**From:** Nathan Jordan <Nathan.Jordan@pattisonmedia.com>

**Sent:** Tuesday, November 22, 2022 9:57 AM

**To:** Darleen Patterson <DPatterson@sd57.bc.ca>

**Cc:** Greg Fry <greg.fry@pattisonmedia.com>; Cindy Heitman <CHeitman@sd57.bc.ca>

**Subject:** CKPG News Interview Request

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Good Morning Darleen,

Just checking in on your availability today for a quick interview about the SD57 Bussing Contracts, and the ongoing staffing challenges with First Student.

I will be available to meet with you anytime today between 11am and 230pm.

hope we can make this work!

Nathan Jordan  
CKPG News  
250 645 5582