

Region 14 administrators fear bus mess will hurt repair plan

If **Region 14** administrators and school board members ever iron out the district's bus problems, they will have to convince a wary public they can handle a multi-million-dollar renovation of three schools.

Several parents were overheard saying last week that the district better not ask taxpayers for any money to renovate the schools after the school bus debacle, or at least until the court battle over elementary school reconfiguration is resolved.

The school board is expected Tuesday to hire a construction manager to oversee an estimated \$26 million plan to renovate Bethlehem and Mitchell elementary schools and Nonnewaug High School; the issue is expected to go to referendum in February.

Last year the school board voted to make Bethlehem a school for all kindergarten through secondgraders, and put third- through fifth-graders at Mitchell, after taxpayers rejected a more extensive and expensive \$37 million renovation project. The issue is tied up in court, with two residents accusing the district of acting illegally by approving the reconfiguration.

Members of the renovation project's Building Committee expressed concern two weeks ago that the public will not embrace the project because so many people oppose reconfiguration. They must be shaking their heads in frustration now that the district has created a public relations disaster by mismanaging its bus routes.

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Longtime board member provides moral support

The tension in Region 14 Superintendent

Robert D. Cronin's office was palpable last Wednesday night, the day the **Woodbury** and **Bethlehem** school district's bus transportation woes became statewide news.

Cronin looked exhausted; his hair was tousled, and his tie was loose around his neck, at least until a TV reporter showed up for an on-camera interview.

Business Manager **Jay Hubelbank** paced back and forth between his and Cronin's offices with piles of paper in his hands, a look of concern on his face. **Cyndi Kostas**, director of curriculum and instruction, looked as put together as always, but she, too, appeared exasperated at what had transpired earlier in the day.

The only relaxed one in the room was **John Howard**, former chairman and member of the Region 14 Board of Education, who is a staunch supporter of the district's controversial elementary school reconfiguration. Howard, of Bethlehem, did not run for re-election, and has been off the board for two months, but he was back by Cronin, Hubelbank and Kostas' side when the chips were down Wednesday night.