

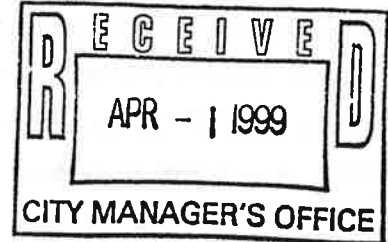
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PUBLIC WORKS
DEPARTMENT
CITY OF GAINESVILLE



March 12, 1999

The Honorable Paula DeLaney
Mayor of Gainesville
200 East University Avenue
Gainesville, FL 32601

Dear Mayor DeLaney:

Regional Transit System Director Perry Maull and I had occasion to speak Monday of last week on transportation issues involving Alachua County schoolchildren. Specifically, our conversation focused on the transit needs of students participating in the University of Florida's College Reach-Out Program (CROP).

Funded by the Florida Legislature, CROP identifies sixth through twelfth grade students coming from low-income, low-achieving backgrounds; CROP provides tutoring and mentoring as a means for encouraging young people who otherwise do not see postsecondary education as an option. CROP consortiums exist all over the state; our area's program is administered through the University of Florida and includes Santa Fe and Central Florida Community Colleges.

Central to the program's and the student's success is the tutoring session offered four times weekly at the Rosa B. Williams Community Center. While over one hundred families (students and parents) have signed contracts to enter the program only twenty-five students-- on average-- attend the daily sessions. This compares to the seventy-five students who attended the tutoring sessions throughout last year.

On a recent visit to the Community Center I inquired of the coordinator about the reasons for the significant decline in student attendance. The number one reason, according to Mr. Tim Smith of Santa Fe Community College, was the elimination of the Easy Rider Bus Pass. Prior to this year the program purchased these "punch" passes for students, allowing them to use the passes at their leisure. The Consortium does not have the funds to purchase seventy-five semester passes at the current rate and therefore student attendance is limited to young people who can get to the Center through means of their own. Remembering these students come from low-income families it is no wonder that the tutoring sessions have seen such a drastic decline in participation.

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The administrators of the program approached me for help upon my recent visit to the tutoring session. My initial interest resulted from my membership on Florida's Postsecondary Education Planning Commission (PEPC), the state-wide administrator for the College Reach-Out Program. Trying to learn more about the actual work done at the local level, I asked to visit one of the sites. Upon learning of the many, many students who are not being served simply because they do not have transportation, I volunteered to help. I subsequently contacted Mr. Maull who has eagerly offered his and RTS's assistance-- with approval from the City Commission.

As we spoke, Mr. Maull and I agreed that the issue of transportation for young people in our community is a large one, and the focus of my concern of regional transit availability and affordability was not limited to students participating in CROP, it reaches much farther and much deeper. We agreed that making changes for CROP students would be important, but represented only a band-aid in larger issue of how Gainesville's youngest citizens commute to and from home, school, work, the mall, the movies, etc.

In this far too lengthy (necessarily, I think) letter I have attempted to outline for you a specific case where your attention is vitally needed; I have also articulated the bigger issue of which I am sure you are each well aware. While the issue of transporting CROP students is one that can be remedied immediately, the issue of regional transit availability and affordability for young people is one that will require much more dialogue and additional deliberation. **Specifically, the program administrators and I hope that the City Commission will support the allocation of sixty complimentary bus passes to the student participants in the College Reach-Out Program beginning in Fall, 1999.**

I hope you will take advantage of both of the presented opportunities. Helping young people find their way to post-secondary education by supporting their transportation to tutoring sessions, and supporting the efficient, safe, and environmentally-friendly movement of our youngest residents across town are worthy issues and in need of your attention.

Please feel free to contact me if additional information is required; as always, thank you for your time and your support.

Sincerely yours,

Brian

Brian Dassler

cc: Commission
City Manager

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