



FERRISBURGH CENTRAL SCHOOL fifth-grade teacher Kathy Douglas and students Cyrus Devine, Bess Gramling and Shannon Cole stand with an anti-pollution sign in front of the school. Members of the class believe that one of the benefits of having traffic lights at an intersection near the school will be less pollution because kids will be able to walk to school instead of being driven.

Independent photo/Andy Kirkaldy

Ferrisburgh kids

(Continued from Page 1A)

calls for red and green lights from 7 to 9 a.m. and then again from 2 to 6:30 p.m., with flashing yellow lights the rest of the day — will get a fair look.

“I had a conversation with VTrans and was assured that the agency would conduct a traffic warning analysis at the intersection,” she said. “I believe the RPC (Addison County Regional Planning Commission) is less in favor of a traffic signal for the established reasons of maintaining traffic flow to the north.”

But the students and Douglas believe they have a strong case. The central factor is that a number of students who would like to walk or bike to school cannot safely cross the heavily traveled state highway.

Cyrus Devine, 10, made that point. “So many accidents have happened there. We’ve seen buses almost get hit, and it’s just an unsafe way (to get to school). Also, parents would let their kids ride their bikes to school, kids who live on Middlebrook Road, and normally they don’t let them because the traffic is so bad,” Devine said.

Douglas said Devine is right about the accidents.

“We’ve had a couple teachers that have been rear-ended,” she said.

Cole said not only students trying to get to school are affected. The traffic also frustrates students who want to visit after school, as it did once when she wanted to make such a visit.

“My dad said no because he didn’t want me crossing Route 7 to get to Middlebrook Road,” she said.

“When Mr. Clark and Mrs. Lanpher came, they said when people in the state capitol hear cutting down on pollution, they’ll like it.”

— Cyrus Devine

FCS teachers and administrators have also emphasized walking and biking as a healthier way to get to and from school. Landowners in the Round Barn Farm subdivision to the north have agreed to allow a walking path through the neighborhood to the school, Douglas said.

But Route 7 cuts off FCS from homes to the east, and students there from those benefits, said Bess Gramling, 10.

“We were trying to promote kids to get healthy ways to get to school instead of just sitting in a car or bus. It would be much easier if there was a traffic light,” Gramling said. “People could get more exercise that way.”

The students also made the point that there would be less pollution if fewer cars had to wait twice to cross Route 7 to drop

students off and leave, and also wait in line in front of the school, where there are signs asking cars not to idle.

“Another reason is because it would cut down on gas, and there wouldn’t be idling,” Cole said.

The students said they also learned a lesson in politics from their representatives, and made sure to make that point in their proposed law.

“When Mr. Clark and Mrs. Lanpher came, they said when people in the state capitol hear cutting down on pollution, they’ll like it,” Devine said.

In an email, Lanpher said the students made good points in their bill.

“They made a very well-thought-out, compelling case that the hazards at the intersection prevent them from accessing their school via bike

or walking. Both of these activities are encouraged in establishing and maintaining healthy communities,” Lanpher said. “The amount of gas used by all waiting vehicles was also included in the students’ points of concern.”

Douglas also pointed out the students took into account the needs of motorists in picking the hours. First the students met in groups to write drafts, then gathered in a group to make a final determination.

Cole said the students considered the issue carefully.

“We did a lot of thinking about the times,” Cole said. “We did a lot of research ... trying to make sure we got the right times.”

The students won’t be at FCS when and if the bill gets passed and takes effect, which would be a year from July at the earliest. In a year from September, they are scheduled to enter Vergennes Union High School as seventh-graders.

But they would be happy to see their younger peers, and in some cases siblings, be safer.

“I have a sister who is only three, and a younger brother in second grade. So they might be able to benefit from it,” Devine said.

Meanwhile, the process is more exciting than a typical civics lesson.

“It’s a little bit mind-boggling to think a class of fifth-graders got a bill this far, and how fast it happened,” Cole said.

And they remain optimistic that the effort will end up being more than a lesson.

“I think we might have a good chance of getting that bill passed, because we’ve done a lot of work,” Gramling said. “The Legislature and government might understand that.”

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