

Considerations for School Transportation Services in the Covid-19 Environment 2020-2021

Patrick C. Collins

Asst. Superintendent for Finance and Operations

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Topics

- *Guidance versus Regulations* from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MA DESE]
- School start and end times [aka Bell Times]
 - Parent drop off/pick up time traffic implications
- Timing of policy and protocol decisions: state and local
- Looking at service level and state minimum requirements
- Ridership forecasting
- Fiscal impacts
- Cleaning protocols for buses

MA DESE Initial Guidance: Excerpt

[June 25,2020]

Below is list of additional topics on which DESE intends to issue guidance:

- **Fall reopening checklist**, including operations, teaching and learning, student supports, training, and communications needs.
- **Process for handling a COVID-19 positive case in the school community**, including when a school or classroom would need to shut down.
- **Remote learning resources**. We are actively exploring how best to support districts and schools with improving remote learning.
- **Facilities and operations**, including entry and exit procedures, cleaning and ventilation, procurement, food distribution, and signage.
- **Transportation**, including bus scheduling options, addressing bus capacity, and alternative modes of transportation, and operational considerations.
- **Guidance for special programs and student supports**, including special education, English learner education, and other programs and supports.
- **Athletics, extracurriculars, and electives**.

School Start and End Times [aka Bell Times]

- As part of the school re-opening plan, we may need to adjust our school start and end times to:
 - Allow for more school bus debarkation time at school to maintain student physical distancing
 - Allow for more time at arrival and dismissal to regulate the flow of students into/out of our school buildings
 - Allow for more parent traffic that will surely result due to decreased school bus ridership
 - Allow more time for students to arrange personal belongings such as jackets/coats, backpacks, lunches etc... into their lockers or cubby spaces in a manner that provides appropriate physical distancing

Timing of Policy and Protocol Decisions: State and Local

- As of 7 July 2020, the state has not provided any written or definite guidance nor regulations regarding school transportation for the fall.
- We have not opened up bus registration, since we don't know if there will be ridership/capacity limitations.
- These the statewide decisions are unlikely to occur in a timeframe that allows us to subsequently communicate to parents, have them make a decision, and then provide information to our contractor for routing and accountability purposes.

Looking at Service Level and State Minimum Requirements

- If bus ridership limits are implemented, then we may need to reconsider our service levels given the fact that we have a fixed number of buses under contract for 20-21 and the likelihood of expanding that is very low due to unavailability of buses, licensed drivers, and budget resources to pay for more vehicles.
- Instead, we may need to cutback on whom we transport beyond state minimums and re-purpose those buses to meet demand for those we are required to transport; K-6 students who live 2 or more miles from school.

2019-2020 Ridership Data

	Under 2 Miles		2 or More Miles		
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Total
Beal	63	24%	200	76%	263
Coolidge	243	87%	37	13%	280
Floral	218	39%	346	61%	564
Paton	133	65%	71	35%	204
Spring	151	70%	66	30%	217
Sherwood	251	30%	584	70%	835
Oak	279	33%	566	67%	845
High School	84	7%	1140	93%	1224
Totals	1422	32%	3010	68%	4432

Fiscal Impact

Bus Fee: Potential Different Approach

- Given all of the uncertainties, the School Committee may want to consider waiving the bus fee at least for the time period between the start of school and the December Break.
- In an environment of potential individual or districtwide closure, possible hybrid schedules, and a period of full/in-person education it is much more difficult to manage a bus fee model that has traditionally had a one-time up-front payment and no refunds.
- We need to avoid the possibility of refunds next year as it takes a great deal of administrative/management time that we are not staffed to manage.

Fiscal Impact

Bus Fee: Potential Different Approach

- The budgeted total bus fee revenue for FY21 is \$750,000.
- We typically have had bus registration occur between April 1st and June 30th and then had the next six weeks [July to mid-August] to arrange bus routes and communicate back to parents.
- A final recommendation will be made next week for your consideration and incorporation into the FY21 overall budget plan.

Cleaning Protocols for Buses

- No guidance nor regulations have been published by the state on this topic.
- Our contractor has procured cleaning supplies and plans to implement a reasonable level of sanitizing to likely be done by drivers.
- However, if significant protocols are enacted that go beyond some threshold of time/effort or cost, then the contractor may be entitled to additional payment for such services as they were not incorporated into our original contract.

Next Steps

- We await guidance and/or regulations for school transportation
- We will make recommendation [possibly next week] about potential changes in the bus fee and/or ridership eligibility beyond state minimums