



November 3, 2023

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Michael J. Martirano, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Subject: Transportation 60 Day Review

This memorandum is in response to the Board of Education's motion passed on July 13, 2023.

Move that the Board of Education direct the Superintendent to have staff conduct a review of the first 60 days of transportation and non-transportation areas to assess what's working and not working. The assessment will include, but not be limited to, attendance tracking for students no longer receiving transportation for the 2023-2024 school year compared to historic attendance in these areas. It will also review safety incidents compared with historic trends. The assessment should include recommendations for remediation of identified areas of concern.

WHAT IS WORKING WELL

Improved On-Time Arrival

Following the adjustment to school start times on Wednesday, September 20, 2023, to support the on-time arrival of student transportation vehicles, the on-time arrival of school buses and alternative vehicles to each of their stops and destinations is much more closely aligned to past years. As noted on the following chart displaying the five school days before the Sept. 20 start time adjustments and five days following the adjustments, September 20th tier 2 arrival times improved by 16% and tier 3 by 12% compared to the day before the adjustments were made. In the afternoon, significant on-time improvements were made at tier 2 and 3 schools by 19% and 63%, respectively.¹

¹ GPS data provided by Zum Services.

Morning	Tier 1		Tier 2		Tier 3	
	First Stop	School	First Stop	School	First Stop	School
09/12	98%	83%	88%	79%	82%	75%
09/13	97%	81%	87%	79%	81%	75%
09/14	97%	83%	88%	80%	83%	76%
09/18	97%	81%	88%	80%	82%	74%
09/19	96%	83%	87%	80%	83%	76%
09/20	97%	93%	95%	96%	94%	98%
09/21	97%	91%	95%	97%	94%	96%
09/22	98%	96%	97%	98%	98%	97%
09/26	94%	90%	95%	97%	99%	99%
09/27	97%	96%	98%	99%	98%	98%

Afternoon	Tier 1		Tier 2		Tier 3	
	School	Drop off	School	Drop off	School	Drop off
09/12	96%	87%	79%	69%	39%	26%
09/13	97%	87%	78%	69%	39%	25%
09/14	96%	87%	79%	70%	38%	26%
09/18	97%	86%	78%	69%	37%	25%
09/19	97%	87%	79%	69%	38%	25%
09/20	99%	95%	98%	82%	91%	65%
09/21	97%	93%	90%	78%	82%	70%
09/22	99%	94%	94%	79%	90%	68%
09/26	99%	97%	96%	80%	89%	65%
09/27	99%	96%	96%	80%	91%	71%

Driver Availability

For several years, the school system was forced to overcome a bus driver shortage, resulting in an average of 85-95 driver vacancies on any given day. Currently, no driver shortage exists, resulting in all planned routes having a bus/alternative vehicle and driver.

Increased CDL-Certified Drivers

The lack of sufficient drivers with a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) to begin the school year required several routes to be transitioned onto multiple vans. The continuous increase of CDL-certified drivers is now allowing adjustments to be made back to buses, increasing efficiencies and the ability of current van drivers to serve as bus attendants.

Timely Notifications

Timely notifications to families of bus delays are occurring for HCPSS families whose child receives transportation services.

Special Education Services

HCPSS and transportation contractors have made many improvements, specifically on routes that serve students with disabilities. Staff in the HCPSS Department of Special Education have been instrumental in coordinating between the HCPSS Office of Student Transportation, the families, and advocacy groups that best understand the needs of our students with disabilities.

Athletics Transportation

Each week, improvements have been made regarding transportation for our athletics teams. Games no longer have to be rescheduled due to a lack of transportation. As transportation contractors secure additional certified drivers, HCPSS will be in a better position to ensure full on-time coverage of athletics events. Issues continue to be mitigated as they arise to ensure athletic transportation is in place for all teams.

Safety Concerns

The Office of Student Transportation has been actively working with families who have raised concerns about both safe walking routes as well as bus stop locations. Since March of 2023, 100 official Walking Route Committee appeals have been submitted and reviewed in addition to several hundred other informal inquiries. Currently, three appeals are being processed by the committee, and there is one appeal to the Board. Since the end of August, staff have been in contact with many families regarding bus stop location questions and concerns and continue to work closely with partners in the Howard County Police Department, Howard County Division of Traffic Engineering, and the Howard County Office of Transportation to ensure the safety of all students.

Field Trips

To alleviate potential issues for schools scheduling transportation for field trips, beginning September 3, 2023, the Office of School Management and Instructional Leadership advised schools to wait only two business days for confirmation of a bus request, after which they were free to utilize any of our bus contractors. Anecdotal evidence from school and central office staff indicates this has been a successful process, and field trips are running as scheduled.

ATTENDANCE

Comparison of the first 60 days of attendance

The data presented below provides a comparison of the attendance rates for all students enrolled in the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years, categorized by school type.

School Type	# Students	Tardy Rate	Absence Rate	Attendance Rate
Elementary Schools FY23	26,318	1.9%	5.3%	94.7%
Elementary Schools FY24	26,291	2.2%	4.2%	95.8%
Middle Schools FY23	13,264	3.2%	4.8%	95.2%
Middle Schools FY24	13,230	4%	3.9%	96.1%
High Schools FY23	18,411	5.4%	6.5%	93.5%
High Schools FY24	18,389	5.7%	5.2%	94.8%
Alternate School FY23	225	7.1%	18.9%	81.1%
Alternate School FY24	273	9.4%	19.8%	80.2%
Attendance Rate for all FY23	58,203	3.3%	5.6%	94.4%
Attendance Rate for all FY24	58,175	3.8%	4.5%	95.5%

Attendance Tracking for Students in New Non-Transportation Areas

The data presented below compares the attendance rates of students who are enrolled in the 2023-2024 school year, returning to the same school, remaining at the same address, and were eligible for bus transportation last year but are not eligible this year.

School Years	# Students	Tardy Rate	Absence Rate	Attendance Rate
2022-2023	1,478	3.5%	5.2%	94.8%
2023-2024	1,478	6.2%	4.5%	95.5%

The data presented below compares the attendance rates of students who are enrolled in the 2023-2024 school year but are not eligible for transportation this year.

School Years	# Students	Tardy Rate	Absence Rate	Attendance Rate
2022-2023	2,377	3.2%	5.0%	95.0%
2023-2024	2,377	5.9%	4.1%	95.9%

Revised Start Time Adjustment Attendance

On Wednesday, September 20, 2023, staff implemented revised start times to better support the on-time arrival of student transportation vehicles. The data presented below, as requested by the Board, focuses on the mean attendance figures from two weeks prior to the revised start time and two weeks after the implementation of the revised start time. The data is categorized by school type.

School Type	Date	Average Attendance
Elementary Schools	September 6	96%
Elementary Schools	October 4	96%
Middle Schools	September 6	96%
Middle Schools	October 4	97%
High Schools	September 6	96%
High Schools	October 4	95%

The data was obtained using the Hoonuit Dashboard; information from the individual school can be found [here](#).

SAFETY INCIDENTS

The data below compares safety incidents reported in the first 60 calendar days of the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years. Incidents are categorized by type.

Type of Incidents	2022-2023	2023-2024
Bus accidents-no student injuries	11	6
Bus accident with student injuries	1	0
Motor vehicle incident in the parking lot	1	1
Other bus incidents, e.g., disabled bus, flat tire, or hitting a mailbox	0	5
An unidentified person approaching a walker	1	3
Total Type of Incidents	14	15

Additional information regarding the table can be found [here](#).

WHERE IMPROVEMENTS CAN BE REALIZED

Accurate Data

Accurate real-time and historical data related to the on-time arrival of student transportation vehicles to their scheduled stops and destinations remains difficult to acquire consistently across all of our transportation contractors. In the spring and summer of 2020, all existing school buses were outfitted with GPS trackers and new buses were outfitted as they were brought into the fleet in subsequent years. School system staff intend to install the same model GPS trackers on the Zum Services fleet in order to track all buses serving HCPSS routes through one system. Additionally, existing software has been providing routing assistance, school bus telematics, and bell time and boundary modeling and will be further leveraged to receive and decipher bus data to take that burden off current transportation contractors and school administrators related to the on-time arrival and departure of buses.

Driver Availability

It is important for transportation contractors to continue to increase the number of available drivers for the rare instances when more drivers call out than there is coverage for, or an additional bus is required to account for an unexpected circumstance.

Special Needs Support

At the start of the school year, HCPSS staff served as adult support on specialized bus routes. On October 2, 2023, Zum Services solicited an HCPSS approved staffing agency to provide these supports as they continue their hiring efforts. All temporary employees were trained and certified by HCPSS. This certification follows COMAR guidelines, ensuring that all necessary training and paperwork are met and in compliance with COMAR standards. It is important for long-term assistants to continue to be hired by transportation contractors, so the staffing agency will no longer be necessary.

CONCLUSION

Though I was extremely disappointed in the challenges we experienced on a widespread basis with student transportation to begin the school year, I am very pleased with where we are currently. While many districts in the State continue to be challenged by significant driver shortages, daily route cancellations, and late bus arrivals, we have no driver shortage, extremely rare cases of route cancellations, and an extremely high number of buses arriving at their destinations on time each day.

Meeting the transportation needs of the student population is an ongoing process that requires continuous improvement. To achieve this, we will regularly evaluate our processes and identify opportunities for improvement. Additionally, we will address and overcome daily challenges on an individual basis as they arise.

If you have any questions, please contact Jahantab Siddiqui, Chief Administrative Officer.

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Board of Education Office