

Transportation Services Memo

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MPS is studying a community school model to see if community schools would provide a more integrated educational experience. We are also looking at the impact of revised boundaries on the MPS Transportation system in an effort to see if changing boundaries can also help reduce the complexity of the transportation system and improve the quality of experience for our students and families.

Background

As the City of Minneapolis continues to evolve its traffic patterns with traffic calming strategies, mass transit options and bicycle lanes, school buses are finding it more challenging to navigate neighborhood streets, impacting ride times and on-time performance. The industry wide school bus driver shortage requires us to look at ways to reduce the number of routes and miles traveled in response to scarcity of resources.

Community school boundaries in this study were established to mirror as closely as possible Minneapolis' neighborhood boundaries, then adjusted to try and meet project goals for decreasing economic and racial isolation, as reasonable, to maintain boundaries.

The current MPS transportation system is complex and impacted by the percent of students for whom we provide special transportation services. The expanded school option model has buses crisscrossing the district, often traversing by schools more closely situated to a student's home address than where the student attends school.

Our district's current bell schedule also complicates matters:

- It's a five-tier bell schedule (eight different start times for elementary and middle schools).
- The time between the 4th and 5th tiers does not allow for the bus to be 'reused' for the next school's transportation.
- Our buses have an average run length (the length of time from the first neighborhood bus stop to school) for general education, without Homeless Highly Mobile transportation, of 37 minutes, and as high as 88 minutes.
- The district currently has 143 regular education buses running in the morning.
- Due to hazard designations based on the amount of traffic on surface streets, the average walk distance for students in the walk zone currently is 0.3mi.

Opportunities

To maximize any potential transportation savings in regular to- and from-school transportation with existing community school boundaries, a three-tier bell schedule (consistent school start times across the district at only three specified times), based on geography — not school configurations — should be considered. With a goal of 25-30-minute bus rides at maximum, a three-tier bell schedule with school start times of 7:30, 8:15 and 9:00 a.m. may be possible.

We anticipate in the community school model that elementary schools would have bus ride times of no more than 25-30 minutes. Middle school ride times may trend longer as they cover a larger area than an elementary school boundary, so that would need to be considered in a full bell study. Additionally:

- We would experience a reduction in regular education buses running in the morning to as few as 105- 120 buses.
- MPS anticipates a similar reduction for special equipment buses.
- We project an annual savings of up to \$5 million with the community school boundary model as currently studied. Changes to walk zones, magnet program locations, bell times, expanded after school programs and other investments will impact those potential savings.
- Any model would need to include adequate time (beyond the run length) between bell times for the system to recover between tiers, in case of unforeseen delays. Without this time built in, an additional bus has to be put on the street to accommodate the bell schedule, which negatively impacts transportation expenses.
- A more standardized bell schedule would also support equitable distribution of programs including after-school enrichment.

Financial Overview

MPS receives some revenue for special transportation (special ed, Homeless and Highly Mobile, care and treatment, 504 plans) through the Special Education Excess Aid calculation. Several years ago, the state rolled specific regular transportation revenue into the Basic General Education Revenue. MPS reports allowable Transportation expenses by type to the Minnesota Department of Education based on an actual miles cost allocation model. Using the cost per mile allocation method, the 2018-19 Transportation costs by type were reported as:

Regular/Excess:	\$10,346,524.11
Special:	\$13,090,758.91
HHM:	\$10,998,811.74
Deseg:	\$1,773,060.34
Summer School:	\$264,297.58
Field Trips:	\$3,187,638.10