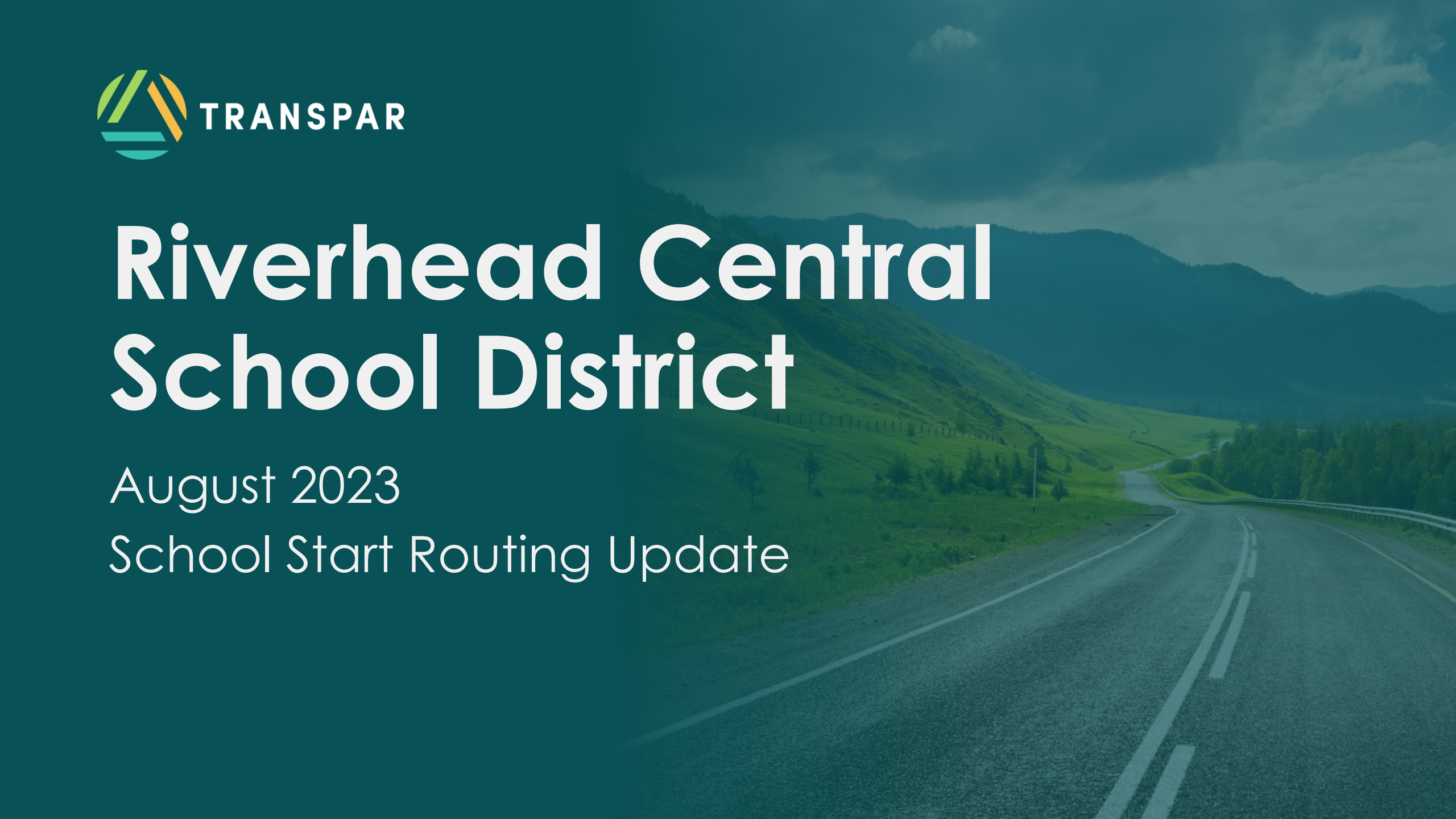
TRANSPAR

Riverhead Central School District

August 2023

School Start Routing Update



AGENDA

- Welcome New Board Members
- State of Student Transportation
- Who is TransPar & Why Are We Here
- Understanding RCSD's Specific Transportation Challenges
- What the Data Revealed: Route Efficiency, Bell Time, and Policy Study
- Primary 2023-24 Recommendations
- Route Development Process
- First 4-6 Weeks & Points of Emphasis for Start-Up
- FAQ's

State of Student Transportation

Districts across the nation have started back to school. Challenges with student transportation have never been more pervasive and nationally recognized. The most prevalent challenges:

- Worst school bus driver shortage in history
- Increasing demand for transportation services despite limited resources
- Inadequate staffing of transportation operations and fleet maintenance staff
- Limited and/or inadequate tools and technology to promote more efficient daily operations

These challenges have caused districts in worst-case scenarios to:

- Cancel bus routes and/or postpone the start to in-person learning
- Provide transportation only to a select few – those absolutely mandated by state and/or federal laws – and/or rotate busing schedules for different groups of students
- Operate combined/"doubled up" routes with significant delays
- Strict adherence to district and state policies, enforcing *no transportation* for any ineligible students and maximum walk-to-stop, bus stop placement, and ride time policies for all eligible students

For districts who were proactive ahead of the start to this school year, these challenges prompted:

- A realistic review of the challenges
- Assessment of resources – supply side of the equation – # of drivers/buses available
- Assessment of transportation requirements – demand side of the equation – programs, policies, eligibility
- ***Development of a 23-24 plan to enhance service delivery with the resources available per the requirements of district and state policies***

Who is TransPar & Why Are We Here?

Who is TransPar?

- TransPar is the largest consulting and management company in the nation *dedicated* to student transportation
- Partnered with school districts and educational entities for more than 27 years, across 41 states and 4 provinces, to complete more than 500 projects
- Dedicated to ensuring equitable access to transportation through responsible student transportation
- Our work provides our expert team with a unique vantage point of industry best practices, challenges, and conditions, as well as the latest trends, tools, technology and resources available to improve upon and enhance operations

Why are we here?

- District Administration and Board Leadership were seeking to identify factors which had contributed to challenges within RCSD's transportation operations over the course of the last five (5) years
- **Goal: Implement sustainable changes that enhance the delivery of RCSD's transportation services**

Who is TransPar & Why Are We Here?

Following a challenging start to the 2022-23 school year, RCSD released an RFP seeking the assistance of a qualified student transportation consultant to evaluate its student transportation operations. RCSD simultaneously released an RFP to conduct an electric vehicle feasibility study to proactively prepare for the state's 2035 electrification mandate.

TransPar was awarded both opportunities to partner with RCSD; however, the emphasis and priority was on addressing the immediate challenges with transportation efficiency and the quality of service delivery.

TransPar began the transportation operations and route efficiency review in October 2023, focusing on the following:

- Time and capacity utilization analysis of all school bus runs and routes to evaluate overall efficiency
- Organizational staffing evaluation to determine adequacy of staffing levels across the transportation department
- Reviewing and evaluating use and strength of transportation tools & technology
- Identifying the challenges which were preventing consistent and reliable service delivery
- Developing data-informed recommendations to improve service delivery in the 23-24 school year

Understanding RCSD's Specific Transportation Challenges

It is not enough to understand the context of the industry; while every district may be facing similar factors, each district also has its own unique characteristics and circumstances which compound the national challenges. Some of Riverhead's most pressing challenges which have been building over the course of the last five years include:

- RCSD is the largest district in geographic size on Long Island
- Census data from 2010 to 2020 indicates a population increase in Suffolk County of ~20% in persons 18 or younger:
  - Created increased demand for number of students requiring transportation
  - Increased traffic density and congestion, particularly during morning and afternoon school start and end times
- **~11 drivers short at the end of last school year, worsened by a 15-20% daily absenteeism rate, which translates into another 10-15 drivers short on a daily basis, for a total of anywhere from 11 – 26 drivers short daily**
- **Severely understaffed transportation operations and fleet maintenance staff, nearly all of whom were being pulled to cover routes as drivers on a daily basis**
- Additional runs/routes added year-over-year, for the last 6-7 years to support enrichment, sports, and late/after school programs, and the separation of afternoon Riverhead Middle School and Pulaski Intermediate runs

Understanding RCSD's Specific Transportation Challenges

Challenges continued:

- Inconsistent adherence to district transportation policies and/or state law for route development, as well as limited and/or inadequate tools and technology to promote more efficient operations
- Severe data breach at the end of December 2021, in which transportation was unable to recover much of its previous route information
- Implementation of a new routing software in the summer of 2022 with limited data to pull into the system due to data breach
- **25 different start and end times across all Riverhead schools, charter, private, parochial, and shared services programs and a state requirement to provide transportation to all students who reside within Riverhead's boundaries, but do not attend Riverhead schools**
- ***Average*** **AM and PM route lengths, due to geographic area and traffic are 40 minutes in length with 30 minutes or less between bell time tiers in the afternoon**

What the Data & Analysis Revealed: Route Efficiency, Bell Time, & Policy Study

Given the constraints in bell times, the geographic area of the Riverhead and the non-Riverhead schools transportation must serve, and the limitation on resources, *bus routes were severely limited in their ability to become more efficient*. Data and analysis revealed the following:

- ***Average morning bus run time = 42 minutes*** with a standard deviation is 20.6 minutes
- ***Average afternoon bus run time = 38 minutes*** with a standard deviation is 19.6 minutes
- This indicates that ***a minimum of 60 minutes, or one hour, between clearly delineated bell time tiers in both the morning and afternoon would be necessary to address on-time performance concerns, particularly between the second and third tier***
  - ***Note: State Education Law 3635 does not dictate a maximum ride time for students and has ruled 90 minutes as being allowable in some circumstances; while most students in Riverhead were routed for under 60 minutes, buses were not arriving on time due to inadequate time between bell tiers***
- **District policies and/or state law and guidance pertaining to transportation were not being consistently enforced**, which further eroded efficiency and compounded bell time challenges due to:
  - Routes having a high number of stops which increased the time required to run the route
  - Stops not being placed at centralized locations at "reasonable" distances, but in close proximity to one another causing more frequent stops and longer runs
  - Buses traveling down private roads, cul-de-sacs and/or areas which limited efficiency in route path planning due to single exit and entry points, difficult spaces in which to turn the bus around, and/or due to not being maintained in a similar manner to public roads, particularly during inclement weather

Primary 2023-24 Recommendations

RCSD was presented with the following recommendations to begin working towards improved service delivery in the 23-24 school year:

- ***Adjusting bell times to provide a minimum of 60 minutes, or one hour, between clearly delineated bell time tiers in both the morning and afternoon***
  - ***However, due to District constraints, including but not limited to earliest/latest allowable start and end times, teacher contract length of days, and State-required minimum instructional minutes, the District elected to implement:***
  - ***AM = 45 minutes between first and second tier, 55 minutes between second and third tier***
  - ***PM = 39 minutes between first and second tier, 55 minutes between second and third tier***
- ***Thorough policy review and confirmation of transportation's ability to adhere to policy***
- ***Employee union discussions to prepare drivers for any approved routing changes and to address driver/monitor concerns to improve driver/monitor staffing***
- ***Enhancing staffing to address operations' staff shortage – particularly in routing, mechanic, and administrative positions***

Route Development Process: Key Milestones

District Policy Committee reviewed and approved adherence to policies in routing on 3/8/23

- The review of District policies began in February and final review and approval for adherence to policies was granted by the Policy Committee and District Leadership in March

TransPar's contract to support routing development was approved on 3/16/23

- Contract approval allowed TransPar to lead and oversee all routing activities

The Board unanimously approved bell time changes on 5/23/23

- Bell time scenarios were reviewed and discussed with District Administration and School Leaders to present for approval prior to the end of the 22-23 school year

Route development was underway by June 2023 and all routes were completed by 8/11

- Earliest routes have been completed in recent years, according to Transportation Team

Student bus information was mailed out beginning 8/14

- Parent portal updates began on 8/16

Driver route bid and selection will occur on 8/28 after the Union required 10-day posting of routes

- Dry runs began immediately following route selection for drivers to rehearse routes and provide any final feedback ahead of school start

Route Development Process: Applying New Bell Times

Approved 23-24 bell times were updated in Traversa

- All elementary schools were shifted to a 9:25 AM – 3:40 PM schedule
- Pulaski was shifted to an 8:30 AM – 2:45 PM schedule
- RMS and RHS times remained the same

School	Arrival Time	Start Time	Dismissal Time	Departure Time
Riverhead High School	6:55 AM	7:15 AM	2:01 PM	2:07 PM
Riverhead Middle School	7:55 AM	8:00 AM	2:40 PM	2:45 PM
Pulaski Intermediate	8:15 AM	8:30 AM	2:45 PM	2:55 PM
All Elementary Schools	9:15 – 9:20 AM	9:25 AM	3:40 PM	3:47 PM

Route Development Process: Adhering to District Policies & State Law

District transportation policies and state laws were reviewed and applied, with a particular emphasis on the following:

- Policy 8410-R:
  - All resident kindergarten students shall be entitled to transportation service
  - All resident students in grades one (1) through four (4) living one half mile or more from the school attended shall be entitled to transportation service
  - All resident students in grade five (5) and six (6) living eight-tenths (8/10) of a mile or more from the school attended shall be entitled to transportation service
  - All resident students in grades seven (7) through twelve (12) living one and two-tenths (1.2) miles or more from the school attended shall be entitled to transportation service
  - Bus routes shall be established so that an authorized stop is available within a reasonable walking distance of the home of every resident student entitled to transportation
  - Children with disabilities will be provided transportation in accordance with their Individualized Education Plan (IEP)
- Education Law 3635, which states that students should walk no further than eligibility distances to bus stops – two (2) miles for students grades K-8 and three (3) miles for students grades 9-12 – with no stated maximum ride times for students

Route Development Process: Repairing/Tiering – The Bigger Picture

Following bell time and policy adjustments, the route re-pairing and re-tiering process entailed:

- Printing and posting all in-district and out-of-district runs to assess "the bigger picture"
- Reviewing all PM runs individually, first, to mitigate previous afternoon challenges
- Pairing runs together to create more efficient route packages based initially on geography and time, then based on open tiers and special program/late bus needs; process repeated for AM

Overarching areas of emphasis in repairing runs to redevelop routes:

- Geographic location of schools served
- Length of runs – ability to complete runs prior to next tier
- Bus capacity
- Shared services/BOCES runs – location, length, capacity
- Shuttles, late runs, and extracurricular needs

After runs are manually paired, they are then linked in Traversa to:

- Conduct a final review of any timing conflicts detected by the system in the Fleet Schedule
- Determine where any opportunities may exist to reduce runs, and possibly, routes
  - RMS and Pulaski runs were able to be consolidated from 44 runs to 37 runs for AM and PM

Routing Goal: To redevelop runs focused on getting students to and from school safely and on-time within the approved bell time structure, within the allowable adherence to District policies, and with the resources (drivers, monitors, and buses) available, seeking also to mirror as many Riverhead CSD runs as possible to create greater consistency in AM and PM runs, in an effort to increase resources needed to meet the 3:15, 4:30, and 5:30 late run requirements

Riverhead has engaged in many changes to enhance its transportation service delivery for the 2023-24 school year; change will take time to embrace and students, parents, school staff and administration, bus drivers and monitors, and the community will all be undergoing these changes together

First 4-6 Weeks: Points of Emphasis for Start-Up

Weeks One – Three :

- Students and families acclimating to new bell times, centralized stops, traffic patterns and flow
- Schools, *particularly in the afternoons*, establishing student loading and bus departure/exit routines
- Extracurricular activities and special program runs will already be underway
- **Points of emphasis:**
  - ***Changes were made to enhance service delivery***
  - Aside from students with IEP accommodations, ***routes were developed in adherence to district policies/state laws and guidance and*** through the use of transportation ***routing best practices***
  - ***Unless a district policy and/or state laws and guidance is being violated, and/or a student has an IEP, stops must remain at the designated locations in order to promote efficient operation of buses***
  - ***Support from schools on unloading and loading students safely and quickly will be critical*** for morning and afternoon on-time performance

First 4-6 Weeks: Points of Emphasis for Start-Up

Weeks Four – Six:

- Students whose parents may have taken them to school the first few weeks may now begin riding, which will require them to settle into routines that others settled into in weeks one and two
- Additional students enrolling or withdrawing from the district and/or non-district schools will begin to impact ridership and will require adjustments by the routing team to account for fluctuating ridership
- Students have settled in and become more comfortable, which is when student management challenges can become more prevalent for drivers
- Extracurricular activities and special program runs will only continue to increase
- **Points of emphasis:**
  - ***Balancing and adjusting of routes for ridership and timing challenges will be underway***
  - ***Support from schools on loading students quickly and supporting drivers with any student management challenges will be critical***

FAQ's

Why was a parent survey not conducted ahead of making bell time changes?

- TransPar's contract was delayed in approval by the Board by a month and a half which pushed back the start to project tasks, one of which was a parent survey
- TransPar worked collaboratively with District Administration and met with Riverhead and non-Riverhead school leaders to develop scenarios that sought to mitigate previous challenges
- The final scenario was not reviewed until the end of May, which was publicly presented and unanimously approved by the Board on May 23, 2023

What improvements to routes were made?

- Routes were designed to operate within the newly approved bell time tiers to focus first on getting students to school safely and on-time; they were developed in adherence to district policy/state laws and guidance and with the available resources required to operate the routes

Why is my student on the bus for 40-50 minutes if bus routes were "improved"?

- New York State does not provide a maximum allowable ride time for students, nor does the District outline a maximum ride time policy. "**Education Law (EL 3635) does not contain a maximum length of time that a pupil may be expected to spend riding on a school bus. However, it is widely accepted that the en route time must be reasonable. The Commissioner of Education has held that numerous factors may be considered in determining whether the amount of time is reasonable. Such factors as the following and others may be considered: age of the pupil, distance between home and school, safety, efficiency, cost, available buses, the number of schools on a particular trip, and the opening and closing times of schools…The Commissioner of Education has held, in Judicial Decisions, that a trip of 1 ½ hours, in particular situations, was not unreasonable**"
- Bus routes during the 22-23 school year were arriving late to schools due to the fact that there was not enough time between bell tiers, not due to routes exceeding or violating policy lengths

FAQ's

How can my bus route be shortened?

- To reduce the time of any run, either the number of stops have to be decreased and the distance between stops has to be increased, meaning that students walk further to bus stops; the number of students riding the bus must decrease to reduce load times at each stop; and/or the number of runs has to be increased in order to split runs into smaller segments, which requires more drivers and/or buses

Why has my bus stop changed and/or why is it no longer able to be in front of my house? Is this the same for KG students?

- **Unless specifically required by an Individual Education Plan (IEP), New York State Education Law 3635 states "The distance students must travel to stops needs to be established and the criteria strictly adhered to within the district. Education Law 3635 requires that students be provided transportation if they live more than two miles (K-8) or three miles (9-12) from school. Students can not be asked to go further than this to a school bus stop, unless the school board determines that the road where the student lives is too hazardous for school bus travel. Districts can choose to provide a higher level of service. There must be voter approval for any lesser distances and there will be no state reimbursement for distances under one and a half miles."**
- Despite the policies above, routes were developed in this transitional year to try to require students to walk no more than half of the allowable distances outlined in policies to bus stops

Questions?

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Thanks for your time today

Micah Brassfield
Director of Advisory Services
mbrassfield@transpar.com