

# Recommendations 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]
- Planning for Three Re-Opening Scenarios
- Major assumptions
- Prerequisites to operationalize school transportation services
- Looking at service level and state minimum requirements
- Ridership forecasting
- Fiscal impacts

# MA DESE Initial Guidance: Excerpt

[June 25,2020]

*As of July 15<sup>th</sup>, no further information provided by DESE.*

## **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**.

# Planning for Three Re-Opening Scenarios

Scenario	Major Impacts on Busing	Other Notes/Considerations
All students return to “in-person/in-school” learning with restrictions	Depends on DESE regulations pertaining to any bus load restrictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District will need to decrease service levels</li> <li>• Increased costs may be incurred for extended time needed to transport, monitors, or cleaning</li> </ul>
Hybrid schedule with student population halved 50/50: in-school/at home remote learning	Current fleet of buses will be sufficient capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bus costs remain same</li> <li>• Significant bus fee revenue loss</li> </ul>
Full remote learning from home	No buses running	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced operating costs</li> <li>• Lost fee revenue</li> <li>• Possibly required to still provide in-person/in-school learning to students with disabilities and English Language learners</li> </ul>
Combination of one of models above	Busing will fluctuate based on scenario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential single or multiple school closures during the year</li> </ul>

# Major Assumptions

- School start and end times remain the same/close to the same
- We will continue to operate a three-tiered busing schedule
  1. High School
  2. Sherwood/Oak Middle Schools
  3. All Elementary Schools
    - *\*\*Our legal responsibility to transport students to Assabet Valley Tech. H.S., St. John's H.S., St. Mary's School, Montessori, Al-Hamra Academy, and Lilliput remains and their re-opening plans may differ from Shrewsbury Public Schools*
- Regardless of re-opening model, bus ridership will decrease by:
  - [Percent of students who opt for remote learning] + [Percent of students who attend in-person and were riders last year but opt out of busing this year due to Covid concerns]

# Prerequisites to Operationalize School Transportation Services

Pre-Requisite	Positive Control by District?	Action Required	Notes
Knowing the “rules/guidance” from MA DESE	No	Await information	Plan now for bus ridership restrictions 26-28 students per bus
Knowing exactly what students need a ride	Yes	Open bus registration	Reduce planned ridership by revising eligibility for service
Time to Develop Routes	Partial- routes are developed by our vendor, AA Transportation	Use current routes as a first default/starting point	
Time to Communicate Bus Information	Partial	Parents need confirmation/bus information by Aug. 19th	Time is of the essence

# Environmental Factors

- High degree of uncertainty on our learning model at start and throughout the school year
- Potential for periodic school-based closures
- Bus fee introduces many complexities into this environment
- Equity issues regarding different families' ability to transport their children to school must be considered

## 2019-2020 Ridership Data

	Under 2 Miles		2 or More Miles		Total
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	
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
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1422</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>3010</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>4432</b>

# Major Recommendations

1. Waive the bus fee for at least the first half of the school year
2. Take a phased approach to busing eligibility until we can measure our ability to provide service under DESE regulations
3. Open bus registration now with reduced eligibility for service

# Phased Eligibility Recommendation

- **Phase 1** [Now and until we can assess DESE bus regulations]

Restrict eligibility for busing to students who live two or more miles from their assigned school

- **Phase 2** [DESE regulations published]

Potentially expand eligibility for ridership by including students who live closer to their school

# Rationale for Recommendation

- We have to plan for, right now, a full return to school of all students as that represents our highest demand for services
- We have to plan for, right now, rules that will restrict ridership thereby reducing our carrying capacity
- To the best of our ability, we need to be able to actually provide the service if a student is registered and not change plans on parents later by finding out we exceeded a bus carrying limitation

# Rationale for Recommendation

This is a process of estimating...not an exact science/calculation

Action	Estimated Impact on Ridership	
Restrict eligibility to students 2 or miles from school	-30%	
Student Opt Outs for Remote Learning	-10%	Awaiting more data from parent survey
Student Opt Outs on bus ridership due to Covid Concerns	-10%	Awaiting more data from parent survey
<b>Total Projected Reduced Ridership</b>	<b>-50%</b>	<b>At this level we can likely provide service to all students &gt;2 miles from school with bus capacity limited to 50% of normal capacity</b>

# Rationale for Recommendation

- If we determine the  $\geq 2$  mile limit is overly restrictive we can reduce it to be more inclusive
- If it's decided to start the year with a hybrid model, we can likely adjust back to our current scenario of providing transportation to all K-12 students who register for service

# Recommended Action and Vote

- The following motions are recommended:

*1) To waive the bus fee for the first half of the 2020-2021 school year*

*2) To restrict ridership eligibility for bus transportation to students in grades K-12 who live two or more miles from their school, and to convey the authority to the superintendent of schools to further expand eligibility for ridership beyond this threshold based upon a) evolving state regulations, b) budgetary resources, and c) equity of student access, with the goal of providing the option of bus transportation to as many families as possible.*

# Next Steps

- We await guidance and/or regulations for school transportation
- If the recommendation is approved, we will open bus registration as soon as we can re-program our registration pages to accommodate this new set of ridership eligibility rules.