

Agenda Item

Type: Info

Subject: Report with Possible Action Regarding Optimizing Student Transportation for FY21

Policy: Admin Policy 4.04

Attachments: Proposed Transportation Changes FY21

Background:

Milwaukee Public Schools provides home to school transportation services to approximately 54,000 students annually for district, suburban, and private school students who live in the city of Milwaukee or, if they participate in specialty programs such as Chapter 220, Homeless Education or Foster Placement Network Programs, in surrounding municipalities. The district also provides services for a variety of other district-sponsored programs such as Head Start; Interscholastic Athletics; The Community Assessment and Training Program (CATP); Learning Journeys, and Special Olympics.

Chapter 121.54 of the Wisconsin Statutes spells out the provisions under which the school board of each district shall provide for the transportation of pupils, including establishment, administration, and scheduling of school bus routes. MPS Administrative Policy 4.04 further states that the Milwaukee Public Schools' Transportation Services is to provide safe, adequate, efficient, and economical service to all eligible Milwaukee-resident students.

The administration is exploring possible transportation modifications for FY21 that optimize a Regional Transportation System. The Administration has put together for consideration a transportation restructure alternative that maximizes bus utilization efficiency and includes several limited service reductions scenarios to support its implementation. These scenarios vary in scope and range from adjusting service types and models while maintaining existing transportation eligibility, to rethinking administrative policy to mitigate high distance, low utilization transportation. The scenarios assume "grandfathering" services whereby students already enrolled would be allowed to continue with transportation from their current address. The following are six proposed transportation changes:

- 1) Consider long-term restructure plan of moving towards a bell re-tiering strategy that increases bus utilization beyond what is available under our current transportation model. MPS currently operates under a two-tier transportation system whereby a school's bell schedule is either a first tier: 7:35a.m.-2:35p.m.; or the school is a second tier: 8:45a.m.-3:45p.m. This model further requires approximately the same number of first tier and second tier schools to maximize efficiency. Contracted vendors use the same driver and school bus to service both the first tier and second tier run.

Background

Under this model MPS procures approximately 1,000 buses. About 90% of the buses procured operate both a first and second tier on its bus each day. The remaining 10% of the buses

procured operate only a single tier daily – either due to the imbalance in first and second tier schools, or because the route itself runs too long and is not able to be paired with 2 tiers.

Under the two-tier model for MPS the average procured bus cost is approximately \$60,000 for roughly 5 hours of transportation services – 2.5 in the morning between 6:00 a.m. and 9:00a.m. and another 2.5 hours in the afternoon between 2:00 p.m. and 5:00p.m. Of that, roughly 65% of the total cost is fixed and attributed to driver benefits and equipment, whereas the remaining 35% is variable costs attributed to hourly and mileage costs for the run.

Opportunity

If MPS were to move to a three-tier transportation model, less buses would equate directly to higher efficiency, shorter bus routes for students, improved service and more stable employment for contracted drivers. Some indirect benefits would be better attendance for students, reduction in traffic congestion for the city due to a redistribution to school transit of 80,000 city families over a three-hour period as opposed to a two-hour period, and improved behavior management on buses.

The same 2,200 routes that operate with 1,000 buses under a two-tier system can be serviced with approximately 750 buses under a three-tier system. The three-tier model assumes there would be three distinct school times for all of the district's schools. For purposes of the model the assumption is 7:15a.m./2:20p.m. Tier 1; 8:15a.m./3:20p.m. Tier 2; and 9:15a.m./4:20p.m. Tier 3. Due to the shape of Milwaukee and the fact that MPS will continue to have citywide schools with students enrolled from long distances, it is not practical to assume a true three-tier model with equal distribution of schools on each tier (33%-33%-33%). Instead it would be likely that MPS would operate under a hybrid model whereby the proportion of schools on each tier would have 40%: Tier 1 - 20%: Tier 2 - 40%: Tier 3. This hybrid model would allow Tier 1 and Tier 3 packaging scenarios when bus routes are required to run extreme distances due to enrollment demographics.

It is estimated that for every 100 buses reduced in the contracted fleet, the cost for services would decline by approximately \$2,000,000. Therefore, the district could realize upwards of \$6 million dollars annually with limited service impacts simply by restructuring the district's 159 schools into a three-tier model as opposed to its current two-tier system.

Considerations

The re-tiering restructure would require the district to do the following:

- a. Determine which school types would be on which tier. The recommendation is that:
 - i. High schools operate under the 3rd tier due to national studies and school district movements to later start times for high school students that correlate improved attendance and achievement for high school students if they start school after 8:30a (as it increases sleep duration for young adults)
<https://www.startschoollater.net/wake-up-calls-fast-facts.html>

- ii. That specialty schools operate on the Tier 1 given they have the largest transportation regions and could not operate on a true three-tier model due to the total distance that some of those school's runs operate
 - iii. Attendance area schools and middle schools would then operate on the Tier 2
 - b. Maximize the number of schools that have a transportation region of 7 miles or less to support the three-tier model. This is required due to the fact that each of the 3 daily runs must take no longer than 45 minutes maximum – as the timing between bell times is only 1 hour. This further requires that the district evaluates exceptions to the 7 mile distance requirements continually to standardize the exceptions.
- 2) Reevaluate Neighborhood and Citywide Specialty School Transportation status and revise select School(s) Transportation Policy after identified.

The Administration is also recommending the evaluation and recertification of all existing citywide specialty transportation programs that currently exist. Any modifications to the total number of citywide schools has a direct impact towards maximizing efficiency when implementing the proposed modification of school start times to a three-tier pupil transportation model.

Background

At its June 25, 2009 meeting, the Milwaukee Board of School Directors directed the Administration to review the city-wide and neighborhood specialty designations of current schools. Since that time some schools have lost their designation as a citywide or neighborhood specialty school while other schools have created a citywide or neighborhood specialty.

City-wide specialty schools do not have a designated attendance area and accept students from throughout the city. Transportation is provided to all students whose residence is more than one mile from their elementary schools or more than two miles from their secondary schools.

Neighborhood specialty schools are schools that reserve enrollment preferences for students located within a defined radius of the school. Unsubscribed seats are available for students who reside elsewhere in the city. Neighborhood Specialty Schools provide transportation to students whose residence is more than one mile from their elementary school if they live within 7 miles of their school, or in the case of Montessori Schools – if they are within 5 miles from the school.

Schools with specialty school status must be high performing places of learning, employing effective educational practices and serving a distinct district need. The specialty is woven throughout the fabric of the school and is not merely a service provided by the school. Since citywide and neighborhood specialty schools enroll students from the entire city, their transportation costs are significantly higher, on average, than attendance area schools.

Previously, citywide status had been granted on an individual school basis. The Administration recommended that citywide status for schools be based on a continuous, specific, district-authorized specialty, and that this specialty be available in grades K4-12.

Historically, schools designated as citywide must implement the specialty school-wide, and they must substantially meet the criteria found in the matrix for distinguishing specialty schools, included in the attachments. A superintendent-appointed advisory group reviewed the requests for citywide status, conducted site visits and staff interviews and made recommendations to the superintendent. The superintendent then recommended to the Milwaukee Board of School Directors if citywide status was to be granted. Schools that do not meet these guidelines may apply to be neighborhood specialty schools or revert to traditional, attendance area schools.

Neighborhood specialty schools must employ a distinctive specialty and they must substantially meet the criteria found in the matrix for distinguishing specialty schools, included in the attachments. A neighborhood specialty school is not required to have the specialty implemented in grades K-12 as citywide specialty schools do. The specialty may be unique to that school. The same superintendent-appointed advisory group would recommend to the superintendent requests for neighborhood specialty school status, and the superintendent will forward a recommendation to the Milwaukee Board of School Directors. Schools that do not meet these guidelines will revert to traditional attendance area schools.

Traditionally, the following specialties have been granted city-wide or neighborhood specialty status:

- a) Arts
- b) Gifted and Talented
- c) Language Immersion
- d) Montessori

Opportunity

Recertification allows the district to reevaluate the status of the specialty in the school to determine if the expanded transportation services continue to be pertinent given their program offering. Any transportation region modifications would support the retiring model being proposed and would also result in transportation savings if high distance transportation situations are reduced. The amount of savings to be realized under this option depends on the schools that would continue to be citywide or neighborhood specialty after the evaluation period. Savings range in scope from \$1,000,000 to \$3,000,000 in the aggregate.

Considerations

Any changes to a school's citywide or neighborhood specialty status would undoubtedly have an impact on the enrollment of the school for which the changes are being applied and overall options for families selecting a school. For illustrative purposes only, if all Neighborhood Specialty Schools alone lost their specialty status and became region schools approximately 1386 students - (54%) of its current enrollment demographic – would not have been able to

select that school if transportation is needed. The cost savings would be \$1,377,000 without retiering and would increase if done in conjunction with a three tier restructure. Similarly, if all Citywide schools were to instead move to Neighborhood Specialty Status – 2,207 students enrolled – would have had to select another school when making the decision if transportation was necessary. The cost saving would be \$2,300,000 without retiering and would increase if done in parallel with retiering.

This item does NOT recommend which schools should remain citywide or neighborhood specialty but instead recommends that a recertification process be instituted to consider the merits of each individually.

- 3) Combine Transportation at all K–12 or 6–12 school sites.

Background

Golda Meir, WCLL, Obama, MacDowell and Audubon are all schools that service—at a minimum—grades 6 through 12 and in some cases grades kindergarten through 12. These schools have been provided yellow bus transportation services in a manner that separate the high school students from the primary, or middle school age students. This transportation model is not consistent with the transportation model of kindergarten through eighth grade schools in the district where all students ride the same bus to school regardless of grade.

Opportunity

Combining all students that attend the same school on the same school bus is more efficient and would result in a \$300,000 reduction in transportation expenditures for the district. Further this model does not reduce or eliminate any services for students.

Considerations

Schools that have made the separation have done so intentionally to separate the student body in supports of the school organizational structure. The transportation groupings by elementary and secondary further assist with behavior management and allow for tailored corrective actions specific to the development of the student age and maturity.

- 4) Revise Transportation Region for Traditional Middle Schools to a seven-mile zone.

Background

To be in line with the district’s seven-mile transportation standard and to support the 3 tier transportation model being proposed, an additional service reduction scenario would be to adjust the transportation region for Traditional Middle Schools from the current model to reflect a seven-mile transportation region. This change would impact the following schools:

Audubon MS	Lincoln MS	Roosevelt MS
Douglas MS	Morse MS	Wedgewood Park
King MS		

Opportunity

The transportation savings if we moved the above mentioned schools to a seven-mile transportation – 330 students – save \$354,000 without retiering and if implemented with the retiering proposal would contribute to the larger efficient operations proposed when discussing impacts of the two-tier to three-tier modification.

Considerations

Roughly 330 students of the 3,513 students (9% of the total middle school population) would have had to select a different school during the enrollment process if this change were in place.

- 5) Revise service type for any transportation eligible High School student over 7 miles from their enrolled school to Milwaukee County Transit bus.

Background

Milwaukee Public Schools currently utilizes the county bus for approximately 2,500 students. Students are issued weekly M-Cards that are valid Monday-Friday with unlimited rides during these days at a fixed rate of \$17.50 per card.

In order for the yellow bus to be cost advantageous a particular route would need to service approximately 45 students. For this reason, Citywide or Attendance Area High Schools that provide yellow bus to its students but do not attract a high volume of students from a particular neighborhood end up costing a higher per pupil rate for yellow bus than would be the case for county bus.

Opportunity

This creates an opportunity for cost savings in high mileage situations where schools enroll a smaller percentage of families and therefore the per pupil cost of providing yellow bus services is high. The annual per pupil cost for county bus (based on 178 days) is fixed at \$623. This also is a prerequisite for effective retiering of yellow bus transportation being proposed in the item. This change would reduce transportation expenditures by \$800,000 without retiering and would increase if implemented with retiering.

Considerations

Would change service for impacted students from yellow Bus to Milwaukee County Transit System bus (MCTS). Would change service type from yellow to city bus for approximately 1,800 high school students

If we further moved that service type change at 6 miles the cost implications change.

6 Mile Yellow Bus – greater than 6 miles MCTS

- a. Approximately 2,744 students would ride MCTS instead
 - b. Would save approximately \$1.1 million dollars
- 6) Revise All District Neighborhood Specialty Schools Transportation Region to mirror a Montessori’s region at 5-mile zone

Background

Another scenario that is available, but is a service reduction scenario, would be to adjust the transportation region for Neighborhood Specialty Schools from the current 7-mile transportation region to a 5-mile transportation region similar to the existing Montessori Specialty Schools.

Carver	Hawley Environmental	Starms EC & DLC
Hartford	Milw Parkside	Victory

Opportunity

This change would standardize all Neighborhood Specialty Schools with the already in place Montessori Specialty School region and would reduce district transportation costs by approximately \$645,000.

Considerations

This modification would result in a delayed savings – requiring between 6 months and 1 year to realize partial cost reduction and up to 2 years to realize full savings. Immediate cost savings can only be had if students impacted are not grandfathered (enrolled students greater than 5 miles provided services until their resident address changes). This modification would eliminate or phase out transportation services for approximately 693 students. This is not a requirement to facilitate the proposed retiring proposal but would support and further aide effective retiring in the aggregate. The change does standardize district policy as it pertains to Neighborhood Specialty schools, putting Montessori and all other Specialties onto the same transportation region policy.

Proposed Timeline

- Actions for FY21 implementation:
 - i. September 2019 detailed changes to bell schedule presented
 - ii. October 2019 Transportation Region and Service Type changes advertised and applied to Early Admissions
 - iii. January-July 2020 Transportation Region changes applied to all other enrollment periods
 - iv. January-July 2020 Pupil Transportation Restructure and planning adjustments to model for FY21 implementation