



MEMO TO: School Board Members
FROM: Paul Peterson
DATE: December 9, 2019
RE: Tiered Busing Recommendation

The following information is background and rationale regarding the recommendation to move to a tiered busing system beginning with the 2020-2021 school year. Also included are the next steps the school district is prepared to take pending School Board approval of the tiered busing recommendation at the December 16 meeting.

Background

Steady enrollment growth is a great benefit to school districts, and Mankato Area Public Schools (MAPS) has benefited from increased student numbers over the last several years. Strong enrollments have provided us with the ability to maintain and enhance programs and services to students and families, and consider new ways to better serve the school community. Growing school districts also face challenges, as previously well-functioning systems sometimes no longer are as effective and/or efficient as they once were. For MAPS, student transportation is one of these areas.

Crowded buses, long bus rides, congested and complicated transfer locations have provided significant challenges in delivering effective and efficient transportation services to all school sites for eligible students. Currently, the school district's two transportation providers (Yaeger Bus Service and Palmer Bus Service) transport over 4,000 students daily on 93 buses. Except for a handful of minor deviations, Palmer and Yaeger run a single-tiered system with all buses servicing all eligible PreK-12 students at the same time.

The Study

Tiered-busing, resulting in buses running more than one route, has been considered as a potential option to address transportation challenges within MAPS for the last several years. The second half of the 2018-2019 school year and the first half of the 2019-2020 school year marked the most detailed study to date, including data collection and analysis from other school districts, school district interviews, district staff and community feedback, mock routing, and possible effects on elementary, middle and high school start and end times.

Over the last 10 months, the school district has completed the following:

- Established a Transportation Committee Working Group
 - This subset of the school district's Transportation Committee led the tiered busing study. The group met several times between May 2019 and November 2019. Pending School Board approval, this group will lead the planning and implementation work for tiered busing in for the 2020-2021 school year.
- Yaeger and Palmer Mock Routes
 - As part of the Transportation Committee Working Group, Chad and Cara Yaeger (Yaeger Bus Service) and Shane Johnson and Shelly Goettl (Palmer Bus Service) prepared and shared potential bus routes and times under a tiered-busing system.
- Data Collection from School Districts Using Tiered Busing
 - Shakopee, Northfield, Eastern Carver County, Forest Lake, Rochester are some of the schools that information was sought and collected regarding their experiences with tiered busing. Those who use a tiered approach report liking it.
- Activities Directors' Early-Out Analysis--School Activities Directors Joe Johnson and Todd Waterbury provided information on likely adjustments to early out patterns if high school dismissal time would change.
- District Leadership Team Presentations and Feedback
 - Information was shared and feedback sought from district leaders at meetings held during the summer and fall of 2019.
- Superintendent Stakeholder Sessions at School Sites
 - Information was shared and feedback sought from faculty and staff during fall listening sessions.
- Community Awareness and Feedback
 - Care Provider Letter (October), Community Survey (November), KEYC Morning Show (October, November), River 105.5 (November), KTOE Talk of the Town (November)
- School Board Updates and Study Session
- Yaeger and Palmer Bus Service Individual Meetings with Superintendent and Director of Business Services.
 - Managers for each provider confirmed information that was shared at Transportation Working Group Committee meetings regarding route times, bus capacity, transfer sites and non-public school service. Both providers are supportive of a tiered approach.

Recommendation Rationale

The recommendation to move to a tiered-busing schedule is based on several benefits, primarily the efficiency and flexibility it provides the student transportation system.

Transporting elementary and secondary students separately addresses crowded buses in a manner that does not increase costs.

Additional benefits of tiered busing were also identified through the study. These include less congested student transfer locations, shorter durations of time on buses, age-alike routes, later school start time for high school students, the ability for additional families to enter private transportation contracts, and the ability to accommodate homeless students on bus transportation rather than relying on taxis.

Finally, due to MAPS' current and forecasted growth, moving to a tiered approach to busing is inevitable. Implementing this now is a proactive measure that will prevent greater disruption in the future with an even larger student population.

Plans to Address Challenges

The shift to tiered-busing will require adjustments in current routines. Significant time and attention has been spent on identifying the new challenges this move may create, and considering ways in which the school district can appropriately address these areas.

During the study, the following areas were identified as potential challenge areas:

- After-School Care; Access and Cost
- After-School Activities
- Parent/Guardian Pick-Up and Drop-Off Schedules

The school district is committed to developing plans that address each of these areas, and will respond to anticipated new challenges that may occur during the implementation process. For example:

- MAPS is committed to serving all families interested in ACES programming. Waiting lists have long existed for ACES due to staffing and space limitations. Program costs are also a barrier for some families.
 - Increased staffing through the expanded use of paraprofessionals and students involved in the education career pathway are being examined.
 - Schools that host ACES programming have adequate square footage to support increased ACES enrollment. Additional room use for after-school programming will be communicated to school staff. This is not considered a significant barrier to program expansion.
 - Eligible families involved with county programs can qualify for child-care assistance, providing resources to off-set ACES costs. School district personnel is prepared to provide information, registration materials, and any needed resources to county partners as they share ACES options with families.
- MAPS is committed to minimizing the loss of instructional time for high school students involved in co-curricular activities.

- Activities Directors Joe Johnson and Todd Waterbury remain committed to protecting as much academic time as possible when scheduling with conference and non-conference schools.
 - Numerous Big 9 schools are examining later start times for their high schools. As schools consider these moves, activity start times will likely shift and continue to be reviewed.
- MAPS will provide adequate morning supervision in middle schools if parent/guardian drop-off schedules require students to arrive to school early.
 - Supervision schedules are set by the school district based on student and program needs. Adjustments to traditional work schedules can be made if/when needs arise due to early student drop-off.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.