

**Action Item**

**Date:** December 12, 2011

**To:** Raymond E. Lechner, Ph.D.,  
Superintendent

**From:** Crystal S. LeRoy, Ed.D.,  
Business Manager

**Subject:** Approval to Solicit Bids to Contract with Third Party  
for Student Bus Transportation

**Proposed Action by Board of Education**

Approval to solicit bids to contract with third party for student bus transportation.

**Background**

Outsourcing student transportation services was identified on the Cost Containment Plan as a possible financial savings for District 39. Currently, the District operates its own bus service, which staffs 3.5 FTE dedicated bus drivers and 7.0 FTE bus drivers/custodians. The annual cost of operating this bus service is approximately \$680,000, of which 83% of the budget is allocated to salaries and benefits. Preliminary research estimates an approximate savings of 20% of the in-house transportation budget.

In addition to the possible financial savings, the administration believes that there are other potential improvements from outsourcing student transportation.

**Staffing Benefits**

- Eliminate the difficulty of maintaining a fully staffed transportation department – recruiting and hiring “split shift” bus drivers has become increasingly challenging, leaving us with unfilled positions for extended periods of time.
- Eliminate the challenge of maintaining an adequate pool of qualified substitute drivers – we utilize the vast majority of our trained drivers for regular route assignments and have difficulty covering absences due to illness and/or vacation time.
- Improve custodial building coverage with less time out for driving – many of our bus drivers also serve as daytime custodians and are not available for custodial work at the critical beginning and end of the school day. Their absence from the building for driving responsibilities is particularly challenging during the winter months due to snow removal and impacts setting up for programs during the day, as well as our ability to address emergencies (e.g. cleaning up bodily fluids).
- Capacity to offer ongoing in-house training – as a school district, transportation is not our primary business; therefore we do not have the same internal capacity to provide coherent, focused, and ongoing training of drivers.

**Transportation Maintenance Requirements**

- Capacity of the District to purchase and maintain bus fleet – over the past few years we have deferred bus replacement as part of our cost containment plan, resulting in an aging fleet.
- Resolve the issue of parking buses – we currently park our buses behind WJHS; however, this is a challenge due to the number of parked cars for community playfield and other WJHS athletic events that share the bus parking area.
- Eliminate the issue of vandalism to buses and the “attractive nuisance”

- Remove the inconvenience, time and unpredictability of maintenance and repair of buses – the district is unable to maintain an extensive fleet of buses, thus when a bus needs repair it adds stress to our transportation system.

### **Added Flexibility to District 39**

- Offer the opportunity to explore new school hours – we are locked into a schedule that has WJHS students starting school before 8 a.m. and Highcrest students ending school at 3:40 p.m.
- Reduce wait time for students – students at some schools may be dropped off as much as 25-30 minutes prior to the start of the school day and may have to wait 15 or more minutes at the end of the day.
- Offer more availability to cover field trips and sport routes – we often contract with an outside bus service for our sports teams and/or field trips.

Although there is a potential financial savings, as well as other possible benefits, it is not without a cost. The transportation service offered at District 39 is outstanding. The personal attention and customization of the transportation program is well above average. This high level of service is something to consider while exploring the option of outsourcing student transportation. The administration believes that the following concerns would need to be addressed in the bid process:

- Consistent staffing of routes – the contract provider would be expected to provide a consistent driver for each route.
- Familiarity and knowing the driver – the contract provider would be expected to provide the district with information about the driver including name, address, driver's license, and other required personnel information within 15 days of the start of school.
- Professional conduct – the contract provider would be expected to maintain a professional dress code (uniform), conduct training on student management, hold staff to high standards of conduct, and to immediately remove any driver that the district deemed to not meet our standards.
- Safety of drivers – the contract provider would conduct periodic drug/alcohol screenings, annual physical exams, criminal background and sexual predator checks, periodic safety training, and any district required training as directed.
- Safe overall operations – as part of the bid qualifications the contract provider would be expected to provide information on the company's overall safety record.
- Personalized service – the contract provider would utilize our routing software and work with district staff to map out bus routes.
- Communication – the District would be provided with a radio allowing for instant communication with the buses and the company would provide staff liaisons during business hours to respond to District needs.

Given the potential financial savings and other possible benefits, the Administration recommends Board of Education approval to solicit bids to contract with a third party for student bus Transportation. With this bid information, the Board of Education can thoroughly explore the option of outsourcing student transportation.

**Recommended for approval  
by the Board of Education**



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**Raymond Lechner, Ph.D.**  
**Superintendent**