

Outsourcing Transportation Frequently Asked Questions March 2012

At its meeting on March 19, 2012, the District 39 Board of Education approved the outsourcing of student transportation. Below are the answers to some frequently asked questions.

1. *What bus company has the District contracted with and what are the terms?*

The Board of Education approved the bid from North Shore Transit with the costs to the District as follows for the 2012-13 school year:

- Regular transportation - \$752,637
- Transportation for sports and field trips - \$31,735
- Summer school transportation - \$25,296

It is a three-year contract with a 3% increase in each of the following two years.

Although bids from other companies were solicited, based on the District's requirements, North Shore Transit was the only company to submit a bid.

2. *Will outsourcing allow the District to at least break even on student transportation?*

While outsourcing will save the District money, we will continue to show a deficit in the transportation budget based on our current fee structure. During the first year of our contract with North Shore Transit, we receive an equipment trade-in credit so we anticipate a small profit in the transportation budget. In the subsequent two years, we anticipate a deficit, but a significantly smaller deficit than we projected if we were continuing in-house transportation. Over three years, outsourcing will save the District more than \$860,000. These savings in the transportation budget mean additional money is available to be applied to educational programs.

3. *Will bus fees change?*

The student bus fee for next year has been approved at \$495 for round trip transportation, the same as it has been since the 2009-10 school year. Fees are determined each year by the Board of Education. Our projections do not include an increase in student bus fees over the next three years.

4. *Where did the idea of outsourcing transportation originate?*

As part of the Program Costing prior to the referendum, transportation outsourcing was raised as a viable alternative by a group of parents. This option was discussed at numerous community meetings (prior to the election) and District 39 promised it would investigate this alternative. The District has outlined the rationale behind the exploration of outsourcing student bus transportation in a public hearing, as well as in conversations with the union.

5. *What will happen to D39 drivers?*

Any qualified District 39 bus driver who does not have a District position will be able to work for North Shore Transit.

6. Will outsourcing affect current custodial staffing?

Our custodial staffing level will remain unchanged with outsourcing. Each building will still have the same amount of custodian hours as they have currently. However, we intend to schedule the custodial staff to better meet the needs of our buildings. Outsourcing will allow us to address the concerns that our principals have been raising for several years about the lack of custodial staff when custodians leave to drive buses. We believe we will more efficiently use our custodial staff and have them available at critical times throughout the day.

7. What factors did the District consider in this decision?

The decision to outsource transportation was not easy and was not merely financially driven. Over the past few years, we have found it increasingly difficult to fully staff our transportation department. We have tried unsuccessfully to increase our pool of qualified drivers, even encouraging additional custodial staff to be trained to drive. Due to overall District financial concerns, we have delayed bus purchases, resulting in an aging fleet and increased bus repair costs. In order to avoid service disruptions, we have had to double-up routes and use our Transportation Director as a driver. These transportation challenges have also had a negative impact on our school buildings as we frequently called upon all of the custodial staff in a building to drive, leaving the building without custodial support at the beginning and end of days. Our in-house transportation has become stretched too thin for us to ensure quality service. While we appreciate the dedication and service of our transportation staff, the challenges we face are too great and the time is right for us to make this change.

Safety was also a primary concern. North Shore Transit provides a much more extensive safety and training program than we are able to offer. In addition, they utilize a newer fleet of buses and will have back-ups available in case of mechanical problems. The District is receiving a trade-in credit for its current fleet of buses, but the only buses that can be used by North Shore will be those that meet the age and safety standards specified in the contract.

8. Who will parents contact if there is a bus question or issue?

We will maintain an in-house bus coordinator to assure a high quality of service. Parents will still have access to a D39 employee to assist with bus matters. They will also have access to a coordinator from North Shore Transit with longer hours of availability than we currently provide.

9. How will student disciplinary issues be handled (i.e. bullying/inappropriate behavior)?

The District is responsible for student behavior and our standard discipline procedures will apply. Parents should feel comfortable in contacting District administration whenever they have a concern about their child at school, on the playground, or even the bus (regardless of the driver). Discipline issues will be handled in the same manner as they are currently being handled. The driver will continue to address initial issues. The building administrator will get involved if issues escalate.

10. What will happen with items left on the bus?

The same procedure will remain in place. Parents may inquire with the designated transportation personnel regarding lost items. Found items will be held in the appropriate school building.

11. How might this change impact “chaos” at the start of year?

Certainly, there are growing pains with any transition. Even with our in-house bus service, the start of the year is always challenging. It is expected that the same challenges will exist with North Shore Transit as well.

12. Kenilworth does not offer any transportation service. Is this option for us?

Yes, technically this is an option for District 39. Because of the geographical location of our schools, none of our students qualify for regular transportation, under the legal definition of required busing. However, District 39 has approximately 3,700 students and covers five square miles. As a service to our parents, we feel it is important to make student transportation available. Approximately 1,200 D39 students ride the bus. Kenilworth is a significantly smaller district, in enrollment and in area, which allows for the majority of their students to more readily walk to school. The same is true in Sunset Ridge.

13. What part of transportation does the state pay?

For FY11, the District received \$9,000 in state revenue towards general education transportation. The District also received \$16,500 in state revenue for special education transportation. The District is obligated to provide only special education transportation.

14. Where the District currently outsources with Septran for students with specialized transportation needs, students are sometimes on the bus for an hour or more. With outsourcing, will this become a problem for general education students too?

No. Routes will be established to minimize time on the bus. Currently, the District uses Septran for students with specialized transportation needs and one bus handles the entire district, which could result in somewhat longer bus times.