

## Participants

School transportation professionals and School Finance Unit staff

Facilitator: Reggie Walker

## Meeting Expectations

The group identified the following expectations for the meeting.

### School Finance Staff Expectations

- reexamine the administration of transportation funding
- find ways to improve customer service to transportation professionals and streamline the transportation funding process
- get recommendations to take to the commissioner of education about how to lobby the legislature for changes to school transportation funding law and increased transportation funding
- identify overly cumbersome requirements in the administration of transportation funding that can be modified or eliminated

School Finance staff reminded meeting participants that although the group could come up with suggestions for changing funding formulas, those formulas are set in statute and can be changed only by the legislature. They pointed out that nonstatutory transportation funding policy and procedures, however, can be changed by the TEA.

### School Transportation Professionals' Expectations

- give information and suggestions
- set up a dialogue between the field and the TEA
- gain a better understanding of the existing state funding process
- find ways to keep the administration of transportation funding simple (keep it simple, silly [KISS])
- find ways to show the legislature that transportation professionals and the TEA are united in their purpose / have a common goal so that the legislature is more likely to increase funding
- identify ways to update the funding process so it fits twenty-first-century needs
- identify ways to level the playing field / account for differences in district size, density, and wealth

### Desired Meeting Outcome

Solicit ideas to improve the administration of the transportation allotment

## Identifying Challenges

The group identified the following challenges in the administration of the transportation allotment.

### Cumbersome Documentation

- burdensome recordkeeping and paperwork
- time-consuming, costly, and labor-intensive head counts and turn-by-turn reporting requirements (head counts lead to buses running late)
- ineffective head count process
- difficulty of creating and maintaining all the necessary supporting documentation
- burdensome documentation related to cost service / funding codes

### District Diversity (Geography, Density)

- what works for some does not work for others

### Inflexible Law

- linear density levels need revision

### Lack of Funding

- not all transportation is funded / districts are providing unfunded transportation
- loss of funding for TEA-approved weather-waived days
- lack of funding for transportation of voluntary transfer students / transporting students to magnet program schools
- lack of timeliness (long time from data submission to receiving funding)
- lack of funding for bus evacuation training
- unfunded requirements and mandates (clean air requirements)
- Chapter 41 schools not receiving funds
- cost allocations (with regard to funding codes?) present problems

### Outdated Policy

- having a set day for the monthly student count unfair
- communicating student eligibility requirements to district staff difficult
- interdistrict travel presents problems
- having many route miles but few riders presents problems (**Note:** This issue is related to linear density, which is part of law.)
- disconnect between number of miles actually driven and number of miles eligible for funding
- voluntary transfer students are being transported by the district but are ineligible for funding
- linear density groupings and rates skewed (**Note:** The linear density groupings and rates are part of law.)
- to increase level of linear density funding requires major changes in district density (**Note:** The linear density groupings and rates are part of law.)
- requirement to begin and end a route at the same campus is not good policy

## Identifying Strategies to Address Challenges

The group identified the following strategies that can be developed to address the transportation allotment challenges.

### Cumbersome Documentation

Meeting participants identified the following ideas to cut down on cumbersome documentation.

#### Route Reports

- Require less detail in reports, and get rid of the requirement to document routes to the tenth of a mile.
- Get rid of the requirement for turn-by-turn route descriptions if funding is to be based on actual miles.
- Allow reporting of the actual miles driven per route.
- Allow reporting of only totals (miles and riders).
- Eliminate the need for duplicate reporting.

#### Head Counts

- Simplify head counts by —
  - allowing driver to simply count the number of students / do a head count by number and not name
  - allowing the district to choose its own most advantageous one or two days to do a head count, by route

### District Diversity (Geography, Density)

Meeting participants identified the following ideas to help level the playing field for districts of varying sizes and densities.

- Find a new way to determine route miles.
- Fund transportation as a percentage of cost.
- Link funding to the actual cost of providing the service; use a statewide average.

### Inflexible Law

Meeting participants identified the following suggestions for changing law to meet current district needs.

- Lobby the legislature to increase the linear density grouping allocations per mile (have not been increased in 24 years).
- Lobby the legislature to fund on linear density and not the lesser of actual cost and linear density.

## Lack of Funding

Meeting participants identified the following suggestions for ways to increase transportation funding.

- Modify student eligibility requirements.
- Eliminate bus evacuation training requirements or fund them.
- Lobby the legislature to double the linear density grouping allocation per mile.
- Lobby the legislature to increase special education transportation funding and hazardous-route funding.
- Allow funding for all district programs requiring transportation, including —
  - magnet schools / intradistrict transfer programs
  - ESL program transportation for voluntary transfer students (relates to preceding item)
  - afterschool programs, including tutorials
  - band, Child Nutrition Programs, etc.
  - University Interscholastic League

## Outdated Policy

Meeting participants identified the following ideas for updating outdated policy.

- Use a state average as the basis for funding.
- Use Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) data so that less reporting is required of districts.
- Allow bus drivers to use clickers to count riders.
- Alter policy so that it is no longer necessary for districts to omit reporting of certain routes to maximize funding. (**Note:** This issue is related to linear density, which is part of law.)
- Allow funding of total miles driven (bus-barn-to-bus-barn mileage).
- Eliminate the set monthly head count day and allow each district to choose its own most advantageous one or two days to do head counts.
- Modify route (including hazardous route) and ridership reporting requirements.
- Change student eligibility requirements.
- Allow funding of all student transportation (extracurricular activities, voluntary transfer students, summer school, afterschool tutorials, etc.).
- Update policies to reflect how students are assigned to or choose their schools.
- Form a study group to research and recommend to the commissioner new policies.
- Do not allow "bean counters" to do the rewriting of policy.

## "Parking Lot" Ideas

These are ideas that meeting participants would like to explore further but for which there was insufficient time in the current meeting.

- Develop a student ID / bus pass system (to be used in lieu of head counts)
- Change the basis of funding from number of students to number of miles traveled
- Count bus drivers separately from other FTEs

## Next Steps

- (Meeting participants) send any additional comments to School Finance staff.
- (School Finance staff) send an email message to meeting participants to provide meeting notes.
- Have monthly meetings until March.
- (School Finance staff) send invitations for future meetings directly to district superintendents, copying meeting participants