



## **School Transportation Task Force Meeting Minutes**

April 9, 2024 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

[SB23-094](#)

**Task Force Members Present:** Chad Miller, Erin Camper, Leiton Powell, Casey Unga, Dustin Kress, Daine Shiele, Robert DiPietro, Morgan Judge, Dave Slothower, Brenda Dickhoner, Nicholas Martinez, Kevin Vick, Robert DiPietro, Amy Lloyd, Albert Samora, Jen Douglas, Micheal Madden, Sarah Swanson

**Task Force Members Absent:** Trevor Byrne, Stephanie Hansen, Jana Schleusner, Joel Newton, Michelle Exstrom, Jessica Morrison, Steve McCracken, Kaycee Headrick, David Werner

**Facilitator, & Support:** *Dillinger Research and Applied Data-* Kate McDonald, Sarah Sullivan, and Katherine Tartaglia *Colorado Department of Education-* Susan Miller, Rich Hull, Rebecca Sykes

**Attendees:** Fred Stewart (*Colorado Department of Education*), Donna Grattino (*Transportation Advisory Council*), Colorado School Finance Project

### **Welcome and Agenda Review**

- Meeting started at 10:00.
- Kate reviewed the agenda items (slide 3), guidelines for interactions, deliberation, and collaboration (slide 4), and design thinking (slide 5).

### **Agenda Item #1- Data Collection Updates**

- Kate provided the members with a Data Collection Update (slide 6&7)
  - In total 1362 Parent/Guardian surveys were completed and 452 Driver surveys were completed.
  - 112 out of 180 school districts (62%) provided at least some information through the district data request.
  - Kate indicated that all data pertaining to transportation eligibility and utilization from all three sources would be reviewed during the meeting.
- Kate reviewed the current project plan and the topic areas scheduled for today/s meeting.
- Kate also informed the group that following distribution of the Task Force survey pertaining to making quorum for the July meeting, it had been determined that quorum should be possible so the meeting would remain on the originally scheduled date.
- Kate reviewed the current language from SB23-094 regarding legislation or rule changes. (slide 8)
- Nicholas asked what the language “do not exacerbate the marginalization of communities through separation while protecting public funds” meant specifically.
- Kate asked the group if anyone was specifically involved in writing language for the bill and could provide any insight. No members had any comments so Kate said that they could plan on getting more information regarding Nicholas’ question ahead of subsequent meetings.

### **Agenda Item #2- Review Current State Transportation Requirements**

- Kate reviewed the current federal guidelines (slide 9)
  - Federal law requires schools to provide transportation for students with special needs, children in foster care, as well as students who are homeless
  - Kate clarified to the group that special needs was not referring to a general classification but was instead specific to students with IEPs where transportation needs were specifically addressed within the IEP. Specific transportation needs and their reasons must be spelled out in order for students to qualify.
- Kate then reviewed the current state guidelines (slides 11-13)
  - All state requirements are “may” not “must” or “shall”

- Kate reviewed that districts may furnish transportation to students within a district, however if a student resides in one district and attends school in another, both districts must agree on the specifics of school transportation.
- Susan informed the group that these types of agreements do not happen very often. Typically if a student wants transportation to a district of choice, the student must typically get to the boundary of that district to access transportation to school.
- Kate reviewed that based on state law, districts can determine points of pick up and drop off for all students and they aren't required to cover all points within the district.
- Susan mentioned to the group that often staff shortages limit districts from being able to provide transportation to all students.
- Kate highlighted for the group that these determinations are often utilized to create walk-zones within the district.
- Kate reviewed that state law allows districts to reimburse parents for the cost of transporting students to school, however, if districts do reimburse they can not dictate the method or means of transportation provided by the parent for the student.
- Susan mentioned to the group that only a handful of districts utilize this option.
- Kate presented a "thought exercise" for the group, addressing the possibility of changing state law from "may" to "must". (slide 13)
  - In SY22-23 ~317K students were transported ~47 million miles to and from school. This works out to an average of 149 miles per student per year.
  - In SY23-24 there were ~841K students in the state, not including Charter students. This would work out to an additional ~563K students that would need to be transported. If an average of 149 miles is assumed for all, that would work out to an additional 84 million miles per year.
  - The average school bus gets between 6-10 mpg. If we assume 10 mpg that would be 8 million gallons of gas needed to transport the additional students. If gas could be purchased at 2 dollars per gallon, that would be an additional 16 millions dollars for just the gas requirements to transport all the additional students.
  - Kate mentioned that this "thought exercise" helps to highlight the complexity and magnitude of the problem to be solved as well as demonstrating that many factors will need to be considered with each recommendation.
- Nicholas asked if there was a way the Task Force would work to address current route efficiency.
- Kate mentioned that the group would review data today that addressed route efficiency, however, if route efficiency involves decreasing the number of buses then route times would increase and if route times were decreased then the number of buses would need to be increased.
- Susan mentioned that some districts use software programs to help increase efficiency on bus routes.
- Kate highlighted that based on district data, urban districts often have access to this type of software but rural districts rarely do. Kate suggested that perhaps the Task Force members could suggest recommendations that would help to financially support districts with the purchase of such software.

### **Agenda Item #3- Review Driver Survey Results**

- Kate reviewed the driver survey results pertaining to eligibility and utilization. (slides 15-28)
  - Kate mentioned to the group that no questions in the survey were required, as a result the number of responses varied by question.
  - Kate reviewed respondent distribution by district setting and type of driver,
- Results from district drivers covered when drivers drove, how long their routes typically took, whether they had a valid CDL, how many students were riding the bus, and various information regarding extracurricular routes.
- Susan mentioned to the group that often if a driver is assigned to an extracurricular route, they would be taken off the schedule for the regular bus routes for that time period.
- Robert commented that in his district extracurricular trips can take so long that the driver is not only unavailable for afternoon route home but additionally trips to school the following day.
- Results from public drivers covered when drivers drove and how many students were riding,
  - Kate pointed out to the group that survey results showed public transportation being utilized most heavily in urban/suburban areas.

- Results from alternative/third party drivers covered the types of vehicles driven, what types of routes are being driven, how many students are transported, and how long routes typically take.
  - Kate pointed out that similar to public transportation, alternative/third party transportation was most often used in urban/suburban areas based on the survey.
- Morgan asked if “alternative” could refer to a third party contractor who provides busing for a district.
- Kate indicated that this could be the case and mentioned that definitions for each type of driver were included in the survey.
- Kate asked the group if there were potential focus areas that members were interested in addressing in the minimum requirements based on the driver survey data.
- Kevin asked if there was any breakdown of responses from full time vs part time drivers.
- Kate indicated that the survey had collected that information and it had been reviewed in the March meeting but if there were specific questions Kevin was interested in knowing more about further analysis could likely be conducted.
- Kevin asked if there was any relationship between benefits and retention. He also asked about the length of time students were on the bus and utilization by students.
- Kate stated that those specific details were not discernible based on the driver survey but had been addressed in other ways through the parent survey and district data request.
- Kate mentioned to the group that although they had been reviewing specific topics in isolation, when it came time to make decisions the group would likely benefit from taking a more holistic approach.
- In response to Kevin’s previous question, Susan mentioned districts vary regarding designation of full time and eligibility for benefits.
- Kevin asked if districts have specific walk zones for transportation.
- Kate stated that information had been collected through the district request and would be reviewed later in the meeting.
- Albert said that he was surprised by the fact that the survey indicated that public transportation was used most frequently in the urban/suburban area. He said that a large number of students in the Denver area use RTD to get to and from school.
- Kate mentioned that the data received through the survey was dependent on who filled it out so most likely they simply had not received as many responses from drivers in the Denver area that drove for public transportation.
- Leiton mentioned that in his district almost half of the student population used public transit.
- Katie mentioned to the group that the designation of Denver Metro included 15 different school districts so it included several districts beyond Denver.
- Kate asked the group if there were additional areas that they would be interested in focusing on with regards to the driver survey.
- Leiton reiterated the importance of public transit in their district to help transport students from different areas of town, especially in locations where there was no school within walking distance.
- Kate acknowledged that in some locations public transportation ridership was likely higher than this particular survey would indicate.

**FIVE MINUTE BREAK (10:55 AM)**

***Discussion resumed at 11:03 AM***

**Agenda Item #4- Review Parent/Guardian Survey Results**

- Kate reviewed the parent/guardian survey results pertaining to eligibility and utilization. (slides 30-45)
  - Kate reviewed with the group the district setting distribution, as well as race/ethnicity, free/reduced lunch status, and grade level distribution.
  - Kate mentioned to the group that for certain questions respondents were able to select more than one option and no questions were required, so totals from question to question can vary.
- Results of preliminary questions on the parent/guardian survey included most students are eligible for district transport, student in rural areas tend to live further away from the school they attend, more than half had been contacted by their district regarding transportation eligibility, however a very small percentage had been informed about transportation available for students with special needs, except for Denver Metro in all settings the majority of students attended

schools in their district, and the majority indicated that they would not go to a school outside of their district even if transportation were offered to other locations, most had not requested different transportation but the majority of those that had were denied to do walk-zones, not enough busses, drivers, or funding. Most families either utilize district transportation or drive their child to school themselves. Of those that drive their children a minority indicated they were not eligible for district transportation while a larger percentage indicated that they were eligible for district transportation but drove their child by choice.

- Nicholas asked if an analysis could be done to determine what proportion of families that were transporting their children to school were attending a school out of district.
- Kate indicated that could be done.
- Results also showed that most families ride for free, most families were interested in district transport as a transit option.
- Results from families utilizing district transportation indicated that they were primarily transported on a full size school bus, they were not picked up at their home address but somewhere relatively close by, most did not have after-school program transportation available but only about half that had it available used it while the majority that didn't have it indicated that they would utilize it if it was available.
- Results from families that were not eligible for district transportation indicated that the most common reason they were not eligible was because they lived within a walk zone, went to school out of district, or the district did not provide transportation at all.
- Nicholas asked for clarification on the table.
- Brenda reminded the group that 73% of families that are not currently eligible for district transportation would utilize it if it was available.
- Kate reminded the group that a small percentage of the respondents indicated they were not eligible for any kind of transportation and over 50% of those that were eligible were within a walk zone or were attending school out of district.
- Brenda stated that she felt the survey represented a random and small sample size and outside data on intra- and inter- district ridership was available that would be more helpful to the group.
- Results from families that drive their child to school indicated that the most common reasons were personal preference, length of route, and timing of drop off and pick up. Additionally, a majority of parents indicated that nothing would change their mind with regards to driving their child to school.
- Sarah mentioned that she felt a demographic breakdown of the Denver metro and urban/suburban areas would be interesting.
- Results from families that drive their child also showed a larger number of rural families drive and the most frequent reasons families wouldn't change their mind was personal preference, too much time on bus, inconvenient drop off or pick up times, and concern about other passengers. Additionally, many families indicated that they worked at or near the school so driving was more convenient. Things that would make families reconsider taking the district transportation mirrored the reasons families would not change their mind.
- Results from families that use public or alternative transportation indicated that most often students using these methods were being transported in buses and typically families were satisfied with the amount of time spent on route, the number of passengers on the vehicle and the number of stops made by the vehicle. A majority of the respondents did indicate that they would utilize district transportation if it was available to them.
- Kate reviewed the major takeaways from the parent/guardian survey with the group.
- Brenda stated that she felt the survey information overall indicated that 40% of students don't have transportation available and the survey supported the importance of the group determining how to provide transportation to families so that open enrollment was possible for everyone.
- Kevin stated that he felt the survey indicated the exact opposite. Most families that are driving their children are doing so by choice and the ones that don't have transportation available to them don't have access for standard reasons such as living too close to the school or attending a school outside the district. He also stated that the survey demonstrated that a majority of respondents didn't want to attend a different school even if transportation was available to them. He felt that transportation out of the district for open enrollment was not a major issue and it would not make sense to disrupt the entire transportation system to address it.
- Daine said that he felt this is a major problem but the people who are struggling simply did not take the survey.

- Nicholas said that he felt the survey represented a small sample size. He also wondered about getting more information about school choice and finally asked if the survey had been translated and had been available in Spanish.
- Kate indicated that the survey had been translated and was shared out in both English and Spanish and that the data had been combined.
- Nicholas said he would be interested in seeing if there were any differences between the two.
- Susan stated that it would be interesting to know why families are choosing to attend school outside their district. She feels that depending on the situation there may be more or less reason for districts to provide transportation.
- Robert mentioned to the group that his district was already having to turn choice students away due to capacity constraints and he was concerned about how this would impact other districts where students are leaving with regards to student learning and gains.
- Nicholas stated that he felt the charge of the group was to think big and reimagine how transportation could look. He felt it was important to ensure that students had a choice to access quality education and that was an equity issue.
- Kate stated that while she agreed with what Nicholas was saying she wanted to remind the group that if they were going to focus on the equity issue it would need to be addressed across all regions of the state. If a student on the western side of the state wanted to attend a school in Denver how would the group address that and how could they make things truly equitably for all students in Colorado.
- Nicholas stated that he believed in most cases families who were looking for open enrollment options were only doing so across district boundaries and that those other cases would be extenuating circumstances. He reiterated that he felt the goal of the Task Force was to shake up the system.
- Daine stated that as a parent on the Task Force his approach was to focus on change that would look out for the best interest of the kids. He felt that kids should have the option to choose the school that would provide the best quality education for them.
- Amy stated that she was dumbfounded as to how to solve potential transportation across district lines. She said that in her district many routes already take 1.5-2 hours due to traffic and construction and she couldn't imagine how long it would take if transportation was happening across district boundaries. She asked the group if that was really in the best interest of the students. She felt that the group needed to create some boundaries for themselves to work with when creating recommendations.
- Jen stated that she felt there were geographical limits to what was practical for the group to suggest when discussing access to high quality options. She asked the group about working to remove barriers to students without access to high quality options.
- Daine stated that he felt transportation was the key to the access to these options.
- Albert mentioned that while he agreed with Nicholas that the group needed to think outside the box and push boundaries to provide students with better access to transportation, he wanted to acknowledge the inherent limitations given that transportation is a support system within education. He felt that additional factors such as the length of transport would need to be considered to help ensure student quality of life and education. He also asked the group how to handle schools that are not doing well. He felt this was not a transportation fix but if a school's enrollment is down it will affect funding and these further reduce the school's ability to provide quality education. He cautioned the group to look at transportation as anything other than a supplemental system and suggested they be careful about trying to solve inherent educational shortcomings through transportation.
- Brenda suggested to the group that perhaps there were principles that could be shared across districts that would help address some of the issues being discussed.
- Jen suggested focusing on a set of priority areas.
- Kate reminded the group that when making recommendations, solutions could cross recommendation areas (for example: eligibility and the innovation fund)
- Jen said that she agreed with Albert but felt that they could not leave students with no tools to access quality education while the larger school quality issue was being addressed.
- Nicholas commented in the chat that he felt the Task Force could transform the transportation system from a supplemental system to one of empowerment.

## **FIVE MINUTE BREAK (12:04 PM)**

***Discussion resumed at 12:09 PM***

### **Agenda Item #5- Review District Data Request Information**

- Kate mentioned to the group that before the recording was restarted, Susan had stated that no matter what the Task Force decides with regards to recommendations, it would be impossible to address every aspect of the problem and meet all expectations and concerns so the group will need to prioritize.
- Kate reviewed the information collected through the district data request. (slides 47-59)
  - Kate reviewed with the group the district setting distribution.
  - Kate mentioned to the group that as before, totals would vary by question depending on how many districts had provided information.
- Results indicated that district transportation is provided in the majority of districts although type varies by grade especially in the Denver metro area. Most districts have walk zones but they tend to be larger in more urban areas and public transportation is not typically available across the state. The number of buses owned and/or leased by districts varies significantly across the state as did the number of routes run by districts. Very few districts indicated that there were any buses running over capacity
- Susan commented that no buses should be running over capacity based on state regulations.
- Results further indicate that urban districts often utilized software to develop routes but rural districts typically did it manually. Additionally, the majority of districts across the state track utilization manually.
- Susan asked if there was any information available regarding the number of students that drive themselves since this was a large percentage in older grades, especially in more rural districts.
- Kate indicated that was not specifically asked in the data request.
- Sarah asked how data that tracked system utilization could be used by a district.
- Kate stated that if a district has the data they can make changes to routes if utilization is low and this would help address route efficiency.
- Katie mentioned that a follow-up questionnaire would be going out to try to get information on a few items that were not clear from the request.
  - The questions were reviewed with the group and the group was asked for feedback.
  - Noone had any feedback on the proposed question or suggestions for additional questions.
- Kate asked the group what they would like to focus on with regards to minimum requirements for eligibility and utilization.
- Sarah stated that she was curious what yellow school buses were the standard and wondered whether they should consider other vehicle options.
- Susan stated to the group that buses were actually much safer than cars or other vehicles especially in the mountainous terrain of Colorado. Traditional yellow school buses must meet strict safety standards including the terrain rack and load and Kentucky pull test. She stated that Colorado has some of the highest safety standards in the country. Additionally, federal laws prohibit the use of certain types of vehicles with regards to transporting students.
- Brenda mentioned that based on comments from the survey several parents had concerns about walk zones for many districts and some stated that their kids had to cross highways to get to school. She suggested that maybe the group could make recommendations for a clear and parent friendly appeal process to help address concerns about walk-zones.
- Kate mentioned that Brenda's suggestion spoke to the idea mentioned earlier in the meeting regarding removing barriers.
- Albert mentioned that in his district they utilize a national points system to determine the risk for a student to walk to school The system incorporates a variety of factors that help determine problem areas so that the district can create Hazard Routes to transport students that live in these areas.
- Kate asked the group if utilizing the points system was something that all districts do and whether the group could perhaps make that a recommendation.
- Robert mentioned that the point system can be utilized to determine bus stops as well and also questioned what additional factors could be considered to address risk and safety.
- Based on the discussion so far, Kate created a draft statement regarding minimum requirements that she shared with the group.

- *Create standard systems to help address identified barriers to transportation including walk-zones, potential school choice, and how district make determinations regarding transportation eligibility*
- Kevin asked if “standard guidelines would be more appropriate to helping address variability across the state.
- Brenda said that she agreed because the group would want to ensure that local communities had some flexibility to find a solution that was right for them. She felt the statement should allow an opening for innovative solutions that would help to reduce barriers.
- Kate asked if she wanted to create a cross reference with the innovation grant recommendation
- Brenda said she didn’t
- Kate suggested the wording “support districts”
- Susan suggested “assist”
- Jen wondered if they should say “access to potential school choice” and directly refer to the concept of quality education.
- Kate suggested the wording “quality education to potential school choice”.
- Brenda stated that she felt a simpler version was better.
- Albert agreed with Brenda and thought that simpler was better. He also felt that funding should be included in the statement.
- Kate edited the draft statement and shared it with the group.
  - *Create standard guidelines to assist districts in addressing identified barriers to transportation including walk-zones, access to school choice, and how districts make determinations regarding transportation eligibility, and transportation funding.*
- Chad agreed with Albert that funding was an issue for some districts and that was likely the cause of limited transportation in some instances.
- Michael mentioned to the group that not all barriers are going to be addressed but there should be a means to consider them.
- Susan also mentioned that staffing was an issue in many cases.
- Kate edited the draft statement and shared it with the group.
  - *Create standard guidelines to assist districts in considering identified barriers to transportation including walk-zones, access to school choice, and how districts make determinations regarding transportation eligibility, transportation staffing, and transportation funding.*
- Brenda questioned the “standard guidelines” language and asked if to achieve this the state would do or mandate a series of guidelines.
- Kate stated that it could be done that way, using the example Alert had brought up regarding using the national points system to determine walk zones.
- Susan suggested removing the “standard” to help ensure that communities could find the best solution.
- Kate made final edits to the state and shared with the group.
  - *Create guidelines to assist districts in considering identified barriers to transportation including walk-zones, access to school choice, and how districts make determinations regarding transportation eligibility, transportation staffing, and transportation funding.*
- No further comments were made by any Task Force members so a vote was taken. The minimum requirements statement was passed with all votes being either 3s or 4s.

#### **Agenda Item #6- Next Steps**

- Kate reminded the group that the next meeting would be on Monday May 13th at 10AM. She pointed out to the group that it was a Monday as opposed to a Tuesday as was common.
- Kate indicated that the agenda and pre-reads for the meeting would be sent out the week before the meeting and encouraged Task Force members.
- Kate reminded the group that if anyone materials or additional data that they wished to share with the group that they be forwarded to herself and/or Susan.
- Kate thanked the Task Force members for attending and closed the meeting at 1:01pm