

School Transportation Task Force Minutes

January 22, 2024 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

[SB23-094](#)

Task Force Members Present: Albert Samora, Brenda Dickhoner, Chad Miller, David Werner, Erin Camper, Jennifer Douglas, Jon Hanover, Kaycee Headrick, Kevin Vick, Leiton Powell, Michael Madden, Michelle Exstrom, Morgan Judge, Sarah Swanson, Stephanie Hansen, Steve McCracken, Trevor Byrne, Daine Shiele, Debra Johnson, Amy Lloyd, Casey Unga, Jana Schleusner, Nicholas Martinez

Task Force Members Absent: Dave Slothower, Jessica Morrison, Robert DiPietro, Joel Newton

Guest Observers: Facilitator & Support: Kate McDonald and Sarah Sullivan– Dillinger Research & Applied Data, Susan Miller and Amy Carman- Colorado Department of Education

Welcome and Agenda Review

- Kate McDonald began the meeting at 10:00AM by welcoming the members and public. She reviewed contact information to enable the public to ask questions or share comments (slide 1).
- Kate mentioned to the Task Force that for the month of February Susan Miller would be unavailable so if questions arise they should contact Kate McDonald, Jennifer Okes, or Amy Carman.
- Kate reviewed the agenda items (slide 3), guidelines for interactions, deliberation, and collaboration (slide 4), and design thinking (slide 5).
- Kate provided the members with a Data Collection Update (slide 6)
 - Public links for the parent/guardian survey as well as the driver survey have been posted on the CDE website and also shared with several hundred school administrators across the state.
 - Both surveys were available in English and Spanish
 - The surveys will be available until March but the timeline could be extended depending on the response rates at that time.
 - As of today's meeting 162 parent/guardian surveys have been completed and 121 driver surveys have been completed.
 - Brenda asked how and to whom the surveys were being distributed.
 - Susan provided an overview and offered to share a list of all recipients with the group if they were interested.
 - Susan shared the links in the chat and encouraged Task Force members to share out the link with others if they had specific individuals or organizations in mind
 - Brenda asked if there was a way to ensure that districts have been encouraging parents to complete the survey.
 - Kate suggested that a follow-up email could be sent to remind recipients of the first email to distribute the surveys if that had not been done.
 - Kate told the Task Force that in February's Data Collection update a breakdown of regions of the state that had responded to the survey would be presented so that the Task Force could determine if specific areas of the state would need to be targeted before the survey was complete.
 - District data request is being piloted by three districts that are represented on the Task Force.
 - Once feedback has been received from the participating districts, any necessary changes would be made to the document and it would be shared out to districts across the state.

Agenda Item #1- Review Tentative Project Plan

- Kate reviewed the Tentative Project Plan, highlighting the fact that it could change as the work progressed. She reviewed what was meant by minimum recommendation requirements for the first four meetings (slide 7).
 - Jana asked if the Task Force could talk to Jennifer Oakes about simplification of reporting for funding.
 - Kate indicated that the February meeting would focus on discussing the current funding model and Jennifer would be joining next month for funding clarity. She encouraged the group to share any materials they felt would be helpful for understanding for the group
 - Brenda indicated that a high level plan is great but wanted to make sure time was carved out for stakeholder feedback, especially in beginning exploratory conversations.
 - Kate agreed and encouraged area experts to reach out ahead of meetings to share relevant information beneficial for the group so time can be managed accordingly.
 - Kate mentioned that the Task Force members had been shared on the project plan with more details regarding goals, objectives and required decisions and asked if there was any feedback or questions. None were raised.
- VOTE: Should Task force move forward with proposed Project Plan? Vote passed with all votes being either 4s and 5s (slide 8).

Agenda Item #2- Transportation Innovation Grant Program

- Kate expands on “minimum requirements”- focus areas and must-haves that the group would be deciding on during the meeting (slide 10).
- Kate reviewed the requirements of the SB23-094 bill with regards to the Transportation Innovation Grant Program (side 11).
- Kate reviewed the specifics of the previous bill with was proposed but not passed by the General Assembly (HB 22-1395) (sides 12-17)
 - Nicholas asked if the bill eligibility was limited to students of color and under resourced communities.
 - Kate explained that additional eligible groups were mentioned in the bill regarding discussion around applicant priority during the selection process. She also emphasized that Task Force members could expand language if they wanted to enable others to apply for the grant program.
 - Daine asked if special education populations were mentioned in the bill.
 - Kate explained that there was mention of possible grants to help address transportation needs for special education populations.
 - Susan mentioned that the bill specifically called out BOCES, who have a major focus on supporting students with special needs.
 - Steve asked who was in charge of deciding who the grant awardees would be.
 - Kate explained that decisions would be made by the state Board of Education. She mentioned that in its current format the bill indicated that they would give priority to high poverty populations and rural school districts.
 - Kate reviewed the current requirements for applicants.
 - Susan reminded the group that this bill did not pass.
 - Nicholas asked how this bill was different from the E-TAG grant program that currently exists.
 - Susan explained that this bill was very different because E-TAG was an Emergency Transportation Assistance Grant program Department of Education program regarding transportation of students from low performing school districts.

The E-TAG grant allowed recipients to acquire funding to transport students from low performing schools to ADJACENT high performing schools. Susan also explained that the E-TAG grant program ends at the end of the 23-24 school year.

- Nicholas suggested that the group review the specifics of the E-TAG grant program to help determine what criteria may help to get the Innovation Grant Program passed by the General Assembly.
 - Brenda supported the idea of learning from the E-TAG grant program and emphasized the importance of basing the design of the program on a ground-up solution over top-down solution. She feels that local innovation as opposed to state innovation always works better.
 - Michelle asked why the legislation did not pass when it was proposed.
 - Brenda explained that her understanding was that the bill was intended to be funded by ARPA dollars, however the money earmarked had already been promised elsewhere.
 - Nicholas asked if the original bill enabled community partners affiliated with multiple schools to apply for the funding.
 - Brenda explained that the original bill did allow for partnerships.
 - Kate clarified that community organizations would just needed a partnership with a district/multiple districts
 - Debra was interested in the group thinking through solutions regarding the retention piece.
 - Michelle mentioned that she agreed with Nicholas's comment in chat "For a 2024 and beyond option the solutions should also address chronic absenteeism". Additionally she mentioned that she was puzzled by the wording "significant impact..." in the original version of the bill. She felt this was very vague, very subjective, and problematic. She suggested the group should include suggestions about metrics both in the application process as well as the reporting process.
 - Chad asked about the group including language that would enable grant funding to go to innovations that would support transportation to before or after school programs. He feels this is an important equity piece not listed.
 - Jen felt that driver training as a possible grant avenue would be an important addition to the bill. Because the bill focused on the driver shortage she felt this might help retain drivers.
 - Jon encouraged the group to think about what they needed to do to create conditions that would make it more likely that funding would be approved. (Seconded by Michelle)
 - Brenda mentioned that transportation across the state is currently drastically underfunded and that it would be important to push for the state to start to prioritize this area.
 - Kate mentioned to the group that during the first 4 months they shouldn't pass over a potentially great idea due to concerns about limited funding. She recommended that the group make a bucket list and then identify priorities.
 - Sarah agreed and hoped the Task Force members' diversity will help raise awareness.
- Kate reviewed the topics that had been discussed so far with regards to potential changes/minimum requirements for the Transportation Innovation Grant Program. They included:
 - Learn from E-TAG bill to help determine what may be success and non

- successful components
 - Broadening the eligibility pool
 - Refining the priority list
 - Addressing chronic absenteeism
 - Including metrics to understand impact
 - Addressing before and after school programs
 - Addressing training for drivers
 - Thinking through how to ensure funding
- Kate asked the group if there were other components of the bill that they wanted to address.
 - Susan said that she felt in its original format the bill emphasizes the importance of getting kids transported to and from school for day to day education. She was interested in other members' thoughts.
 - Kaycee felt the language could go either way. She also asked if there was a dollar amount associated with the original grant, and whether the grant was intended to be ongoing?
 - Kate indicated to the group that regardless of the original intent, the group could determine a time frame that they felt was appropriate.
 - Kaycee felt that getting a dollar amount for the original bill could help inform priorities for the group.
 - Michelle looked up the fiscal note for the original bill and shared with the group on the chat that the original bill was a one time allotment of 7.6 million.
 - Daine asked if there was a way to include Transportation contractors to fill gaps and help low income families that cannot provide transportation. He also felt that drivers are retained when they feel they are being treated well because they are typically doing it for the students, not the money.
 - Brenda mentioned that Arizona has an innovation fund that is currently funded at 20 million/year. She shared the link with the group in the chat.
 - Jen said that she felt that important considerations for language changes would be including something about scalability of the solution, and making sure the solution was replicable. She wondered if sustainability was important because it might prevent some organizations from suggesting something extremely innovative if there was no plan on how to sustain it.
 - Nicholas felt that schools that are chronically underperforming should be added to the eligibility list. He felt this was important because it would help give kids the opportunity to choose better school options if transportation was available.
 - Steve felt that a scoring rubric would be important for the selection process.
 - Susan asked how these suggestions would be used to overhaul the original bill. She wondered if the intent was to put something together and vote on a new document.
 - Kate indicated that the list of items discussed today would be used to make recommendations regarding how the original bill would be adjusted. Today the group was simply identifying a list of pieces that needed to be adjusted and in future meetings the specifics of how things would be adjusted would be finalized.
 - Susan mentioned to the group that there are statutes in place that prohibit school districts from crossing districts to pick up students due largely to the effects it has on budgeting and routing.
 - Brenda explained that with an MOU, they can cross
 - Susan confirmed that this was true but both districts Boards of Education needed to approve the MOU. She indicated that she wasn't aware of any that were

currently in effect.

- Brenda indicated that she was aware of some and could send examples.
- Nicholas asked if someone could explain how districts' transportation budgets are put together and why this would prevent cross district transportation.
- Albert explained that districts have an enrollment budget and a transportation budget. Enrollment budgeting considers eligible students within boundaries and the district can look at historical data for those from outside but risky, so they only look at historical enrollment in the boundary. Transportation budgets are reimbursements from miles per pupil. MOU doesn't happen often because they would be taking dollars from enrollment funding since districts need to cover whatever transportation costs are not covered by reimbursements.
- Nicholas asked that the group looks beyond current "ways of doing business" to help find ways to serve all populations of students.
- Albert noted that some solutions would be limited by time and distance; he suggested the group look at the prospective student because the student will weigh the value of their education and travel time when making decisions.
- Jana agreed with Albert and reiterated that often when students are allowed to choose, that ability doesn't necessarily come with a guarantee of transportation. She feels that there are more issues that complicate the topic of school choice for everyone.
- Michael highlighted for the group that per pupil funding and enrollment are based on estimates in June and funding goes up and down as evaluated/updated, then funding is finalized in January. Transportation is scheduled based on where students are, and reimbursement is at most 25% of cost so burden is high for out of district transportation.
- Casey highlighted that in many locations in Colorado school district of choice is not an issue (due to the inherent lack of choice) however a big issue was getting kids to the school in their districts. Many drivers are 65 and up so driver shortages are a real and ever present problem.
- Daine asked that the group consider covering all age brackets.
- Kate asked the group about expanding options on eligibility, would they be interested in making the language more broad.
- Stephanie felt that the list of eligible organizations was good.
- Jana felt that the description about who was eligible should be expanded.
- Kevin asked if the term under-resourced refers to rural specifically?
- Kate explained that under-resourced could include rural but that rural was specifically called out later in the bill.
- Stephanie suggests that regarding eligibility vs priority the group should make sure the state's "most vulnerable students" is called out.
- Kate suggested that the group could recommend opening up eligibility but suggest a rubric that would prioritize areas of need/impact.
- Chad asked to clarify what is the point of the innovation grant, was it intended to supplement little things to be more effective or fund something larger and more innovative?
- Kate stated that she believed it was proposed more in line with the second scenario, because language in the bill says it should be something new and different that doesn't exist. However, she mentioned that it was ultimately up to the work group to decide the overall approach and requirements.
- Jen mentioned that she was confused about "students who struggle to access district of choice" given Susan mentioned statute regarding traveling across districts. She asked the group if they wanted to prioritize quality education.

- Stephanie felt that the bill should focus on a quality “path” to education, so that could include additional considerations such as transportations to before and after school programs.
- Nicholas indicated to the group that he would love to see emphasis on what situations would receive special priority.
- Susan suggested the group consider languages to expand reach. She suggested “struggle to access school districts, schools of choice, and or career pathways/before after school programs”.
- Kate reviewed with the group that it appeared that on the whole the group was looking to expand eligibility options, but get more specifics on priorities.
- Stephanie suggested that the bill needs to track impact of efforts in yearly DOE submission through the identification of how their solution would have impact as well by tracking impact during implementation.
- Stephanie also felt that including a requirement to identify sustainability would limit an organization's ability to dream big
- Michelle would like to see the addition of ability to replicate in the bill.
- Kate explained to the group that a grant funding match is not required for eligibility but it could help to demonstrate sustainability of a program.
- Kevin felt that metric on what impact the innovation was believed to have on the current transportation budget in the district(s) would be helpful.
- Stephanie felt that wording on eligibility may be more effective if it focused on the type of innovations that would be possible as opposed to the populations impacted.
- Brenda was not opposed but wanted to keep language “including but not limited to” in the language to help ensure the spirit of innovation was maintained.
- Kate reviewed the minimum requirements discussed by the group including who is eligible, who would be prioritized, how data and a rubric could be incorporated into the program, what additional requirements, such as sustainability, replicability, and scalability could be incorporated.
- Michelle asked if they finalized the recommendations would a bill drafter work with the group to draft actual language.
- Kate indicated that she believed the Task Force would simply make recommendations in the report but the bill would not be drafted until after it was approved by the legislature.
- VOTE: Should the Transportation Task Force move forward with the minimum requirements for an Innovation Grant Program discussed? Vote passed with all 3s, 4s, and 5s. (slide 19)

TWELVE MINUTE BREAK (11:48AM)

Discussion resumed at 12:00PM

Agenda Item #3-Transportation Collaboration Across State

- Kate reviewed the requirements of the SB23-094 bill with regards to the Transportation Collaboration Across the State (side 21).
- Kate reviewed the specifics of a case study shared with the Task Force members as a pre-read for the meeting (sides 22-31). She reviewed challenges, benefits, types of collaborations, considerations, and models which were covered in the case study.
- Kate reiterated to the group that the goal for this agenda item was to come away with a list of focus areas that they would like to receive additional information on when determining collaboration recommendations for the final report.
 - Susan mentioned to the group that different regulations exist for different parts of

state/jurisdiction and that would need to be taken into account when making recommendations.

- Daine mentioned that in New York private contractors could be used to supplement school based transportation.
- Michelle asked if drivers were subject to background checks in Colorado.
- Susan indicated that it depends on school district policies.
- Michell asked if there are any states that organize transportation regionally or state wide rather than by district.
- Susan explained that North Carolina purchases and owns all the buses used by the state.
- Morgan indicated that Hawaii is organized as a single district, so technically it is organized at the state level.
- Albert provided some additional information about collaboration options in the Denver area.
- Debra asked the group about zero cost public transit programs.
- Leighton mentioned that in his district there has been “Ride Free with ID” since 2018. The program enables any student within the Greeley Evans school district to ride a bus for free as long as they present a valid school ID. They have recently expanded service with Puter Express to other towns. Charter schools have also used them as field trip buses.
- Michelle mentioned that there are no RTD bus stops around her district, but she knew that several students utilize the flex ride program in the area.
- Albert mentioned there are also MOUs with Charter partners. The agreement shares sq footage in buildings, center programs, and helps set up routes.
- Jana mentioned that in their district they have a joint operations facility with Parker Fire Department that allows for cost savings and resource sharing. Along with allowing the Town of Castle Rock to use our fuel stations and pay for the used fuel.
- Susan mentioned that in Michigan transportation of Special Education students was coordinated in a regional manner over multiple districts. This helped save money because routes were more efficient.
- Brenda asked if more examples could be provided.
- Sarah mentioned that she knew of a district that partnered with a local auto dealership for vans which were used to transport students in career connected learning programs.
- Susan clarified that in Colorado a CDL license is required depending on weight of the vehicle and there were some restrictions on types of vehicles that could be used to transport students.
- Kate asked the group to consider what potential differences would need to be considered with regards to recommendations that would work in rural vs urban areas.
- Susan said that some consideration might need to be given to combining two local districts into a county however sport activities may get in the way of some collaborations. She noted that some districts are extremely small so it would be helpful to combine small districts that were close together.
- Michelle said that she felt there was a huge difference between combining small districts vs combining district transportation. She also felt that partnerships between large and nearby small districts could be viable solution for transportation
- Susan clarified that she was referring to combining district transportation.
- Chad mentioned that he thought it would be helpful to look into the possibility of

- shared services, such as insurance and administrative costs.
- Albert suggested regional partnership between large and small districts. Large districts could purchase buses and then after seven years of use sell them at a reduced cost to smaller districts so that they could use them for an additional seven years.
- Susan mentioned that two districts in Southern Colorado shared a Transportation Director, she said that this isn't ideal since the director isn't always at the district but it can work.
- Kevin said that he felt regional approaches to technological advance might also be helpful.
- Kate recapped the considerations covered during the regionalization of certain aspects of the transportation landscape. Areas included:
 - Advanced technologies
 - Administration (sharing transportation directors etc)
 - Cooperative training
 - Regionalize special education, pathways, and before and after (special student/circumstances)
 - Sharing insurance, requirements, and transportation costs
 - Regional approach to purchasing (larger and smaller sharing life of bus)
 - Athletics
- Michelle suggested that the state's sport's association could be contacted to address travel for sports from rural areas, boundaries, and opponents to help minimum drive distance and time.
- Kate asked the group if they wanted to include a focus area around utilizing Public transportation.
- Brenda mentioned that she was interested in knowing more about the co-op model for Sussex- physical transporting to and from school.
- Vote: Should the Transportation TF move forward with the min requirements for Transp Collaborations/Partnerships discussed? Vote passed with all 4s and 5s. (slide 33)

Agenda Item #4- Next Steps

- Kate indicated that the decisions from the meeting would be compiled and shared out with the group within the week.
- Kate reminded the group that the next meeting would be on Tuesday February 13th at 10AM and the topic would be the current transportation funding model and reimbursement process. Jennifer Okes would be presenting at the meeting.
- 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 to share any documents they felt would be relevant to the discussion with her ahead of time.
- Kate reminded the group that Susan Miller would be unavailable during the month of February so if members of the Task Force had questions they should email, herself, Jennifer Okes, or Amy Carman.
- Kate thanked the Task Force members for attending and closed the meeting at 12:59PM.