

Collaborating with Department of Transportation

Boulder Valley School District

Boulder, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Transportation routes and schedules present ongoing challenges both to school districts and to Colorado communities in general. Currently, some of the challenges that the Transportation Department faces are: budget, driver shortage, decreased ridership due to COVID, and inability to service all communities. While unpopular and underrecognized, transportation is a serious dilemma many families grapple with everyday. Forward thinking leadership and creativity have brought a variety of voices to the table to rethink and to brainstorm solutions to the issues mentioned above. As a result, Boulder Valley School District's (BVSD) transportation team has begun collaborating with the city's Regional Transportation District (RTD) team to explore creating a cohesive approach to transportation services throughout the county. The overall goal is to understand the needs of all community members and to better meet those needs, while working within the limitations of the transportation budget and district guidelines.

Shared concern for students and families sparked a deep conversation on how to best serve people who rely solely on school and public transportation to get to work and to school. The BVSD Equity and Partnerships team was able to offer insight on family needs and challenges to the transportation team. This partnership opened avenues of discussion and cast a bright light on the disparities apparent in the current transportation system. Eventually, a greater team was formed to include the voices of a wide variety of community members who shared their personal experiences around transportation and the role it played in their lives. These stakeholders were also invited to ask questions and to offer suggestions on how transportation might be modified and improved to meet the needs of the whole population.

This is a long-term project and one that is in progress. In order to include a focus on student outcomes, a close look at student and family needs must be considered. Questions to be considered include but are not limited to: Can students afford a bus pass? If not, are there reduced price passes available for FR/L approved families? Do the school district and the RTD teams work together to complement each other's schedules and services and to collaborate on how to meet the needs of the community? Is attention being paid to high school schedules? Are students able to stay after school for sports, clubs, or extracurricular activities and still have access to transportation to arrive back home afterwards? Do bus routes service all neighborhoods? What are families saying about the location of bus stops and the efficiency of routes they take to arrive at work?

Although on going, success can be measured by the conversations and considerations that are now taking place. Many transportation directors may not be aware of the needs and/or challenges students confront. It is utterly important for them to hear the voices and to learn the experiences of students and families. Otherwise, it is impossible to know how to improve the system, to become more equitable, and to better serve the community.

The BVSD team encourages other districts to take the time to learn from families about their experiences with transportation. Speak with the students. Ask questions about how the current system and schedule works for them and how it might be improved. Gather information, then build a working/collaborative relationship with your district's department of transportation. The importance of starting a meaningful conversation about an issue of equity can never be overstated. Transportation matters can truly make a difference in people's lives. Aside from addressing a disparity, it also builds a bridge within your school district and the community itself. This is a long-term project that is worth every minute it may take to shine that light on an integral part of the system that may have room for improvement.