

Hypothetical Regular Education Transportation Options for Discussions

Overview

The purpose of this document is to have some wide-ranging hypothetical options in order to facilitate discussions and provide some direction to the board work team. It is important to note that none of these options are expected to be the final approach. There are lots of variations and tweaks and opportunities to merge elements of other options to improve any of these hypothetical options, and well over a year to do so. However, there is a need to begin to narrow the options in order to have more focused discussion among the board, administration, parents, and community.

Scope – Regular Education Only – about \$500,000-\$600,000

The scope of these options is regular education only. This is because state laws mandate special education transportation, but do not mandate for District 97 transportation. In addition, state reimbursement is about 80% for special education and is less than 5% for regular education. Currently District 97 spends about \$500,000-\$600,000 per year; most of that coming from property taxes. Throughout this document any future reference to transportation or bussing is specifically referring to regular education transportation.

Status Quo

Since the fall of 1976, when the junior highs (now middle schools) were first created, District 97 has provided regular education transportation for junior high/middle school students more than approximately 1.5 miles, and elementary students more than approximately 0.75 to 1.00 miles. In the 2017-2018, there were about 500 middle school and 530 elementary school students bussed. About twenty years ago, the starting times of middle schools were made consistent and moved to 9AM, aligning with research showing improved outcomes with later start times. The elementary schools were standardized to have the same start times of 8AM. This also allows the bus company to make two runs with each bus; one elementary and one middle school.

Option A – No District 97 Supported or Facilitated Busing

This option is deceptively simple, but has very complex unintended consequences that will be hard to quantify. The primary driver of this option is to reduce the expenditures of District 97 in an effort to keep property taxes and parent fees as low as possible. In addition to the savings to the District 97 budget, the district would get logistical flexibility around start times and would no longer need to take bus schedules into consideration. However, the anticipatable, but impossible to quantify, costs of this option include:

- Health and safety concerns related to walking longer distances in Chicago-Area winters, and to crossing more and busier streets.
- Traffic and congestion concerns related to more parents choosing to drive their own students or carpool. This also would increase environmental harms.

- There are potentially increased attendance (tardy, absentee) issues without buses, and these are likely to disproportionately impact families with lower income and fewer family transportation options.
- There would be an increased burden placed on families, both financial and time.
- Potentially the more need to close schools more frequently for inclement weather.
- Families in the north part of town would be disproportionately burdened by not attending the middle school closest to their house.
- There would be a risk that the district, freed from busing costs and the logistics of busing schedules, would change start times with unintended impacts on families.

Option B – District 97 Facilitated Busing Covered with Parent Fees

This option is similar to the status quo in that District 97 would contract with a bus company and/or purchase/lease buses but with several changes to improve equity and efficiency and to reduce costs to property tax payers, including:

- Combining the costs all safety and transportation related costs (busing, crossing guards, playground supervisors) and split it evenly among all students.
- The fees would be assessed on a sliding scale that is based on Oak Park income distribution and not the federally set free and reduced lunch standards.
- Property taxes would be used to cover any amount waived from the sliding scale.
- Parents would sign students up by trimester (with the expectation that we would need fewer buses in spring and fall and more in winter).
- Sign-ups for before school and after schools runs would be done and when cost effective runs would be created.
- With families picking up the majority of costs for crossing guards, buses, and playground supervision, parent community input would be given significant input on the quantity and quality as long the levels and types of service comply with the district's equity policy.

Option C – Multi-Jurisdictional Comprehensive Youth Busing

This option would be similar to option B, but with expanded routes in cooperation with whichever jurisdictions want to participate. For instance, additional busing options for township, park districts, and library programs. The jurisdictions would negotiate a split of costs not covered by the sliding scale fees. Ideally the high school would be part of this comprehensive system, but it could be successful without the high school. The goal of this option would be to maximize opportunities for all students to access programs throughout the community regardless of family's ability to provide transportation.

Option D – Comprehensive Community-wide Shuttle Service

This approach would substitute school-coordinated buses, with a community-wide shuttle system. The goal of this system would to try to maximize ability of residents to travel throughout the community in the most cost-effective, timely, and energy-efficient manner possible. The cost would paid through a combination of rider fees, property taxes, grants, and fund-raised dollars